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“Racial and Imperial Thinking in International Theory and Politics: Truman, Attlee and the Korean War”

This article connects the *background ideas* of race and empire to world politics by looking at the operational codes/world views and actions of US President Truman and Britain’s Prime Minister Attlee in the Korean War. At the same time, the article argues that liberal-realist internationalists’¹ assumptions about the US-led rules-based postwar order obscure those background ideas, fail to consider the roles of periphery wars in European core order-building, and therefore to understand the sources of the so-called ‘long peace’ or the character of the postwar order. I consider two kinds of ‘background ideas’ – those that formed the views of policymakers themselves; and those that have become embedded in liberal-realist internationalism. Put together, this renders liberal-realist internationalism akin to a legitimating ideology rather than an explanatory theory. More broadly, and in the longer run, such failure to comprehend the character of the postwar order, and the roles of race, empire and periphery war in it, renders the theory inadequate to explain or prescribe ways for the US/West to manage the ‘rise of the rest’ today.

Background ideas may be considered part of an operational code, or world-view which, according to Alexander George, refers to *general* beliefs about history and politics that bear on the “problem of action”, a prism influencing perceptions and prescriptions. An operational code permits actors to develop a “ ‘definition of the situation’.... that will clarify.... the nature of the problem, relate it to his previous experience, and make it amenable to appropriate problem-solving activities.” However, an operational code does not “unilaterally determine” but only “influence” decision-making (George 1969, 200; emphasis added). Within a *broad* assessment of

decision-making, however, the actor's world view is vital, providing a guide to action (Lee 2014).

Both Truman and Attlee are celebrated by liberal internationalists as architects of international institutions after 1945 – the Bretton Woods system of IMF/ World Bank/GATT/Marshall Plan/NATO/United Nations (Anderson 2013, 113). Truman is regarded as a multilateralist, legitimate coalition-builder. Attlee helped lay the basis of 'the long peace'. A 'golden age' image persists, becoming 'background thinking' in the way US foreign policy and the rise of American power is frequently understood, taught and rationalized at universities.² That is, liberal-realist internationalism is not confined to the academy but is also the principal overt 'philosophy' or mythology of Anglo-American foreign policy elites.

That image of Truman and Attlee elides significant key 'background' ideas that informed their thinking. I focus on their racial and imperial ideas (Anglo-Saxonism), presumed right to intervene globally, and use disproportionate illegal military violence against 'lesser' peoples. The 'long peace' in Europe and North America was heavily militarized, distorted economic development and depended on linkages with the colonies and dependencies. In the case of the United States, the 'long peace' saw the rise of the military-industrial complex.³

The Korean War played a fundamental role in structuring the postwar order, providing an appropriate 'test' of liberal internationalist claims. It featured massive mechanized violence against ill-equipped peasant armies; violations of the laws of war; numerous massacres by US and South Korean forces; obliteration bombing of civilians; and the threat of atomic war (Jones 2010). The Korean war affected Europe, strengthened interconnections with the periphery as sources of raw materials and, hence, improved domestic class harmony. America adopted NSC-

68 (militarized containment) in the wake of the war's outbreak. The world's 'core' was deeply impacted by the 'periphery' (Barkawi and Laffey 2002). Yet, when we consider what liberal internationalists claim about the postwar order, there is a significant disconnect.

This article critiques liberal internationalists' claims about the Anglo-American postwar order, compares them with the underlying world views of British and American leaders, and actual practice in the Korean War. It concludes that the foundations of the postwar international order were infused with racialized and imperial ideas which remain significant today, though in subliminal form, and are influencing strategies that seek to manage the 'rise of the rest'.

Liberal Internationalism

Liberal internationalism is broadly associated with Woodrow Wilson's thinking,⁴ galvanized by the US' refusal to join League of Nations in 1920 and encompassed a belief in the free movement of people and capital and a faith in market democracy. Hence, they opposed domestic 'isolationism' and imperial protectionism, supported a broadly US-led international system (Divine 1967). Liberal internationalism developed in a 'state-spirited' private network context, therefore, and not just as an academic theory.⁵ It is a broad set of ideas embedded in the US state-political elite and forms its material 'epistemic' environment and has developed its organic intellectuals who are fundamentally agreed that the US is and should remain the world's military and moral leader, and is broadly indispensable (Anderson 2013; Parmar 2012; 2004).

It also developed at a time when 'international relations' was overtly understood as '*race relations*' and therefore is implicated in the management of racialised imperial power during the crisis of empires after WWI (Long and Schmidt, 2005; Vitalis, 2015, forthcoming). I argue that *subliminal elements of racialised thought remain significant to liberal internationalism* and

impact on its analyses of the politics of domestic demographic transformation and the dramatic global-demographic power shifts occurring today (Hobson 2012).

Although this critique is constructed mainly around the work of G. John Ikenberry, it is informed by analysis of other influential scholars (including Kupchan (2012), Nye (2004), Slaughter (2004), Mahbubhani (2013), Chin and Thakur (2010), Tharoor (2012), Deudney, Mead (2007)).⁶

The upshot of this body of work is to suggest ways to manage the maintenance of US (and western) power in the face of anxiety-inducing changes in the distribution of global power, embodied in the term “decline of the west and the rise of the rest”. Whether seen as inevitably leading to war or as an opportunity to transform challengers of the established world order into its pillars, there is a broad consensus around certain core ideas: that the post-1945 world order, whatever its weaknesses, served the world well by creating a rules-based institutional order that broadly spread prosperity and maintained peace. While it may not be able to continue unreformed, that US-led system draws on deep resources – economic, military, systemic, and ‘soft’ – that bestow upon it continuing strengths to contain, engage, manage, socialize emerging powers in a reformed order. Such voices among liberal internationalists are found in Asia as much as the USA – in the works of Mahbubhani (2013) and Tharoor (2012). Scholars of Asian origin in the West, such as Chin and Thakur (2010), approach the question of global power shifts in much the same vein. Charles Kupchan (2012), despite more radically departing from the complacent hopes of some liberals, nevertheless suggests some retrenchment of US power as a temporary measure only, and lists a range of problems requiring US leadership – rogue states, humanitarian intervention, restraining nuclear proliferation - that as Anderson argues, there is a broad consensus among US and other liberal elites, around the past benefits and future necessity

of the post-1945 system, suitably reformed to reflect “the real distribution of power” (Chin and Thakur, 2010, 119).

Within that broad context, Ikenberry – anointed by Anderson (2013, 128) as the ‘poet laureate’ of liberal internationalism - is among the most acute scholars with a sophisticated reading of American power’s historical development. He also advances an overt theory of the American state and links US foreign policy to domestic history, institutions and values. Ikenberry’s work is influential and widely cited: his book *After Victory* (2002), for example, from which his most recent major work develops (Ikenberry 2011), has been cited over 1200 times, according to Google Scholar. The influential TRIP Survey of the IR profession (Maliniak 2012)⁷, shows that Ikenberry is regarded as the 8th best producer of interesting scholarship and the 16th most influential scholar in the field of IR. Ecumenical and creative in approach, and willing to engage with a variety of perspectives, Ikenberry has borrowed ideas from Realist theory – especially an emphasis on power as the basis of America’s ability to establish a unique kind of ‘world’ order - as well as the neo-Gramscian Robert Cox (Ikenberry 2006, 55). He has also further innovated study of rising powers by considering the advantages to the extant liberal order of middle-income powers like Mexico, Turkey and Korea – who have a vested interest in system-maintenance (Ikenberry 2014).

Ikenberry’s approach consists of several taken-for-granted assumptions, undeveloped allusions to core powers’ violent and other connections with the periphery, and a number of significant silences. While claims are made as to the democratic character of the United States and UK, and hence of their foreign and national security policies, evidence is downplayed that casts doubt on such claims, especially on the power of racialised, class-based elites inside Anglo-America. The focus on claims about the sanctity of the rule of law occludes consideration of significant

violations in practice. The question of imperial power is rarely addressed and there is a general Eurocentric neglect of core-periphery linkages and the impacts in both directions of wars in the periphery (Parchami 2009, 128).

Pluralist theory and the openness of the American political system

There is a clear link between Ikenberry's overt theory of American democracy and its liberal-hegemonic world role (Ikenberry 2011, 1). The United States, and the Western order it built, is characterized throughout Ikenberry's major works – and in the works of other liberal internationalists such as Charles Kupchan and Joseph Nye - as a pluralistic, liberal, market democracy that is broadly inclusive, tolerant of ethnic diversity, and characterised by openness (Ikenberry 2006, 95; Kupchan 2012; Nye 2004). The US has built a unique “pluralistic security community” in which the US is bound by the rules-based order it has constructed (Ikenberry 2008, 6). Hence, the internal “character of the state... particularly the leading state” involved in international reconstruction is fundamental (Ikenberry 2006, 113). His underlying assumptions, shared with other leading proponents of this school, elide consideration of a very significant political and scholarly tradition critical of the main claims of American democracy and American political development (Mills 1956; Domhoff 1978; Dye 2013; Parmar et al 2016, forthcoming).

Western civilisation

Ikenberry and Deudney (1994, 41), Mead (2007), and Mandelbaum (2002), emphasize the West as a spectacularly successful “civilizational heritage”. The West, underpinned by New Deal liberalism, extended it to the world via Bretton Woods, the Marshall Plan and NATO. This vision predated the Cold War and shows that the United States (and Britain) led the way in

developing politico-economic concepts to defuse domestic class conflict and the threat of war through “activist government, political democracy, and international alliance.” That system is *in principle* capable of assimilating emerging powers due to the universalism of its values and tolerance of ethnic differences, although others joining this privileged grouping should conform to its rules and accept US leadership.⁸ Western order is exclusive also because special rules apply within its zone of peace. Beyond it, conversely, other rules apply – cruder, neo-imperial and violent (Parchami 2009; Ikenberry 2011, 16 fn 17). By drawing a line around the West, Ikenberry cuts off the rest of the world while addressing questions about the sources of world order (Barkawi and Laffey, 2006). Yet, even within the ‘greater’ West, Japan and S. Korea were not accorded the same treatment as Western Europe (Hemmer and Katzenstein 2002).

American empire?

Ikenberry argues that America’s privileged place at the top of the “hierarchical political order” does not make it an empire because its hegemony is built on “consent” and bounded by law (Ikenberry 2011, xi). Power was necessary at the creation of this order but recedes into the deeper background in the normal functioning of consensual hegemony. Also, America’s overwhelming military superiority is elided, warranting far greater attention. The militarization of the US (and re-militarization of and US expansion into Western Europe) after WWII may have been a matter of push and pull between the US and Europeans, but it remains a major factor in the cementing of the political order the US built, with Britain, after 1945. Beyond Europe, however, American hegemony remained hierarchical, Ikenberry asserts but does not develop, “with much fainter liberal characteristics” (2011, 27).⁹

That benign interpretation of the US-led order is read back into the 1939-45 activities of elite planners of the postwar order. Developing the “Grand Area” concept, State Department and Council on Foreign Relations planners identified the world zones the US “required” without having radically to reform its economy, an area encompassing practically the whole world (Ikenberry 2011, 173). The key point elided is that it was to cohere that ‘grand area’ that so much of the institutional architecture of Western power was built; and the inter-relations between the grand area’s regions were never envisaged as being in any sense equal – but with flows of raw materials towards Western reconstruction and social peace, and finished industrial goods in the other (Parmar 2004). And the West’s military capacity to police those flows of goods across the world was at the very least a part of the reason that the United States acquired “forward bases in Asia and Europe” (Ikenberry 2011, 173; Leffler 1984). As policy-makers such as Henry Stimson and John J. McCloy noted: American and Western well-being relied on ““open markets, access to raw materials, and the rehabilitation of much –if not all – of Eurasia along liberal capitalist lines”” (Ikenberry 2011, 174). And because so much of world politics is a zero-sum game, Ikenberry notes that “the [military] base systems were partly justified in terms of their impact on access to raw materials and the denial of such resources to an adversary.” Ikenberry concludes by explicitly linking the core West and periphery at this point: “Access to resources and markets, socioeconomic stability, political pluralism, and American security interests – all were inextricably linked,” (Ikenberry 2011, 174) and effectively ‘bringing the periphery back in’, though failing to recognize its significance to world-order production.

If Ikenberry’s Eurocentrism embeds an unconscious racialised world view, Walter Russell Mead’s work provides the ethno-cultural support for the architecture of Anglo-American power.

However, Mead's interpretation of Anglo-Saxonism is merely to make it benign, assimilative, and universal, adding to the picture of the world Ikenberry et al paint.

Anglo-Saxons Rule

In *God and Gold*, Mead celebrates the historical processes that made Anglo-Americans architects of world order: excellence at winning great power wars, institution-building, and creating a climate for capitalism (Mead 2007, 13, 5, 14). Masterful Anglo-American strategists, like Alfred T. Mahan, recognized that 'sea power' was the key to global power: "... one world composed of many theaters... linked by the sea, and whoever controls the sea... shapes the world." Indeed, Anglo-Saxons "*dominate the structure that shapes the conditions within which the actors in each of the world theaters live.*" [My italics] (Mead 2007, 95). Mead's formulation links air, naval, military, legal and global communications' power. It is through such global-institutional-structural power that Britain presided over a century of 'peace' from 1815-1914 and Anglo-America over peace in Europe from 1945 (Mead 2007, 125).

Affiliation with Anglo-Saxonism, to Mead, is cultural not biological (Mead 2007, 13), explaining the assimilation of Francis Fukuyama, Madeleine Albright, Colin Powell, and Condoleezza Rice. Assimilating minorities is not embracing diversity, however – learning from other cultures and creating something new; it is maintaining conformity to the cultures of the powerful, dominant group (Domhoff and Zweigenhaft 2006). Given the successes of Anglo-American power, "Waspophobes" interpret errors and excesses as "deliberate crimes... the inner dynamic of Anglo-American society..." (Mead 2007, 62). Mead thereby reinforces the general (elite) Anglo-American refusal to critique their application of double standards vis a vis the rule of law they claim to uphold.

Going forward, as new global powers emerge, Mead advises America to both embrace and contain them, retaining military superiority should 'rising' powers become "opponents" (Mead 2007, 360). Mead complements other liberal-realist internationalists' prescriptions - incorporate, assimilate, mobilise emerging powers to absorb difference and produce conformity.¹⁰

Applying Liberal Internationalism to Truman, Attlee and the Korean War

This article considers liberal internationalist claims against the leadership and worldviews of President Truman and Prime Minister Attlee during the Korean War. The war should appear limited, inconsequential in great power politics, and little affecting European affairs, especially the production of peace. Yet, East Asia, as part of the Western security order, should also exhibit the exercise of the more positive aspects of Western or Anglo-American value, especially the rule of law. Should historical evidence confound the precepts of liberal internationalism, we would expect to find that: Anglo-American foreign policy making is dominated by imperially-minded militaristic leaders; their leaders exhibit racialised thinking and policies; they wage war in the periphery mainly for 'core' power imperatives, with methods signifying little regard for local peoples or the rule of law; and those periphery wars impact significantly on core powers.

Truman and Attlee

Attlee and Truman had to build the edifice of Anglo-American power, within a new international system, in specific historical conditions and in 'response' to concrete events. After 1945, world power shifted from Europe to its periphery. The United States and the Soviet Union emerged as the principal superpowers, and Britain a distant third (Fox 1944). The prestige of European imperialism was in tatters: Japan's Asian military conquests caused a paradigm shift in colonial subjects' mind-sets who more vocally demanded independence while communist forces acquired

new prestige. Colonial powers, however, tried to preserve their positions by identifying their projects with the wider struggle against “communist expansionism” (Lawrence 2002).

It was in that environment that Attlee and Truman constructed a new world order making imperative an analysis of their world-views. As a former State Department official noted, the foreign policy of a nation is addressed not to the world as it is but to “ ‘the image of the external world’ ” in the leaders’ heads (George 1969, 191).

Attlee and Truman exhibited overtly racialised/Anglo-Saxonist and imperial identities which influenced their decisions to go to war, and on how to wage it, in Korea. They both developed dichotomous views of world problems, seeing themselves as vigorous liberal-internationalists upholding the rule of law. Material-strategic factors were important but not decisive in decision-making, undermining conventional neo-realist understandings of warfare (Jackson and Bramall 1992, 281; McLellan 1971, 67).¹¹ Indeed, Truman confided to journalist Arthur Krock that Korea was dispensable should another more significant conflict emerge, for example in Europe. The problem was symbolic, to Truman: “the weakest of the Communist satellites [North Korea] is licking hell out of us, which is very bad from the propaganda point of view of our position with the rest of the world and with the United Nations” (Krock 1968, 260).

Indirectly, however, material factors were significant – because Korea’s ‘fall’ would lead to a chain reaction across Asia and the world; and material factors were inseparable from racial-imperial attitudes that elevated Western European security to the top of the hierarchy of global regions, in defence of which loss of Asian life mattered little (Dower 2010). What really

mattered was to show that the West would take a robust stand against the communist East; and restore Western credibility.

Attlee (1883-1967), educated in Victorian nurseries of empire – public schools, Oxford University (Attlee 1954, 163) defended the Empire with due regard to the level of anti-colonial revolt and Britain's ability to suppress it (Attlee 1954, 198). In doing so, Attlee and his foreign secretary, Ernest Bevin, *adapted and refined* a number of traditional racist-imperial rationalisations: that colonial peoples had benefitted from imperialism and were wards of trust to be saved from indigenous capitalist elites (Bevin and Attlee 1946; Cooke 2003).

An underlying Anglo-Saxonist tendency is revealed by Attlee's desire for an imperial federation of the white Commonwealth "to show the way of advance to the world," especially "coloured peoples," adapting them "to Western conceptions."¹² Attlee's Anglo-Saxonism was displayed at a Thanksgiving Day speech in November 1944, where he argued that "the English-speaking races" were defending freedom against barbarism. In contrast to Nazi racial exclusivism, Anglo-Saxonism embraced *other* peoples, whether through the British empire or America's melting pot: It was "no cast iron racial ideology enforced by a master race...."¹³

Nevertheless, Attlee's analysis featured a racial-hierarchical view of the world's peoples "emerging from primitive barbarism" and incapable of self-rule while others were duty-bound to shoulder the "burden" of constructing world order. Attlee's racial view was more imperialistic than Nazi race theory, capable of assimilating every people of a particular level of civilisation. The English-speaking peoples, therefore, offered the world the most civilised and advanced

systems of law, justice, and freedom.¹⁴ This formulation ‘secularised’ the racial character of Anglo-Saxonism and publicly prevailed after 1945.¹⁵ Such thought was an act of constructing the world in particular ways that would justify and underpin a particular operational code and, ultimately, an imperial foreign policy.

Truman was a tepid liberal, a mid-western sympathiser with the South, a racist with a simplistic world-view in which the USA was “God’s own country” and the rest of the world little more than barbarians hammering at the gates of civilisation (Clifford 1991). He grew up in a small segregated town (McCullough 1992, 40); racist language was commonplace and the threat of white violence just below the surface. Truman routinely referred to minorities as “niggers”, “dagoes”, “chinks”, and “kikes”,(McCullough 1992, 53-54) believed in white superiority, opining that Africans belonged in Africa (McCullough 1992, 86).¹⁶ His English-Scots-Irish ancestors had migrated in the 1840s from Kentucky to Missouri, armed with guns, slaves and an abiding hatred of Roman Catholics (McCullough 1992, 16). Despite supporting the state of Israel, he remained anti-Semitic (McCullough 1992, 150), and despite supporting civil rights, he never fully embraced racial equality (McCullough 1992, 247; Krock 1968, 263).¹⁷ Truman’s ilk were egalitarian within the confines of their own racial-ethnic group.

Attlee’s and Truman’s racial analysis normally distilled to secular virtues of democracy and the rule of law. However, Anglo-Saxonism is constitutive of, arguably, ‘objective’ strategic interests. Attlee’s racialised views may be seen as the ‘primordial soup’ from which Eyre Crowe’s ‘classic’ “revealed doctrine” of British foreign policy, was penned in 1907: a country at the centre of an empire which sought protection through harmonising its policies with the ‘general’

(great power) interest and through preventing the rise of hostile challengers (Connell 1958, 11-13).¹⁸ The racial and strategic are separable but each also justifies the other's core argument.¹⁹

For Bevin and Attlee, the Empire/Commonwealth would play a key role in strengthening Britain's global position vis a vis the United States and Soviet Union (Haqqi 1960, 9). Britain did not need to be an intermediary between the two superpowers, however: "We have our own contribution to make to world peace....," Bevin noted (Bevin and Attlee 1946, 24), keener to expand than contract the Empire (Shaw 1996, 44; Kent 1989).

A bold decision-maker, Truman was hardly original in his foreign outlook. He demanded clarity and agreed with Acheson's formulation to make issues "*clearer than truth*" (Acheson 1969, 375). Truman had his own sense of America's mission and sought to shape the new world order along lines congenial to American interests. His reading, or mis-reading, of history, was a significant cause of the Cold War (Offner 2002, xii). Parochial and nationalistic in significant ways though he remained, Truman was convinced that America's failure to join the League of Nations had sowed the seeds of WWII and, consequently, he challenged 'isolationism' and promoted American leadership within a world organisation. Truman also believed that the world economy required the destruction of imperial protectionism. In his view, *an interdependent world system required actively restoring the linkages between the world's 'bread-baskets' and its industrial centres through trade flows*. He was fully cognizant of the realities of power politics and argued strongly for an international organisation with the military power to deter aggression (Miscamble 1977, 283).²⁰

That strong sense of global interdependence also chimed with Bevin's view that the problems of Europe were intricately linked with the resources of the colonial world (Bevin and Attlee 1946, 5). The Empire was of vital concern to workers' living standards (Dutt 1954, 337), not to mention securing imperial lines of communication. Such territories, Bevin argued, must not be allowed to "come under the control of any State which is potentially hostile [rogue states?] or incapable [failed states?] of providing for the maintenance of orderly conditions...." (Weiler 1993, 147) Bevin's analysis neatly illustrates how closely intertwined were strategic and economic factors with the idea of "order" and a racially-oriented British civilising mission.

Britain occupied a special place in American thinking, a major global power close to the US and militarily and diplomatically alongside it in Germany, Austria, Iran, the Middle East, and the Far East, making it a natural opponent of Soviet expansionism. Additionally, Anglo-American cooperation was at the heart of the Bretton Woods system, and security (Krock 1968, 435). The American loan to Britain, of \$3,500,000, was fundamental to British economic recovery after the War, helped ratify Bretton Woods, and prised open the empire to American penetration (Gardner 1970, 118).

The general tendency to view the world as interdependent was further boosted by the Clifford-Elsey Report on Soviet-American relations (Clifford 1991, viii). The 1946 Report laid the groundwork for the Truman Doctrine, Marshall Plan, NATO, and America's response to the Korean conflict (Krock 1968, 224; Clifford 1991) and represented a shared "definition.... of the problem" posed by the Soviet threat and the way forward in dealing with it.²¹ In line with Truman's own ideas, Clifford-Elsey urged the US to develop policies "global in scope" – the

world had to be seen in an interdependent way, and not as a set of “separate problems to be handled by experts in each field...” American action in relation to China or India or Europe “must be considered in the light of over-all Soviet objectives.” Clifford-Elsey also argued that the Soviet Union, a practitioner of ruthless “power politics”, understood one language only: force. The United States “must be prepared to wage atomic and biological warfare”, maintain military superiority and build a democratic bloc to resist Soviet “aggression” (Krock 1968).

It is instructive that anti-communist binaries morphed out of and synthesised with racial binaries associated with Anglo-Saxonism (Horne 1986). The communists – aggressive, fanatical – were the very antithesis of progressive and peaceful Anglo-Saxonism (Gardner 1970, 60). That the Russians and Chinese were partly/wholly Asiatic underlined the ‘fact’ that communism appealed to ‘lesser’ folk. Attlee’s rejection of the Nazis’ “Herrenvolk” concept as exclusivist stood alongside his championing the virtues of universalistic Anglo-Saxonism.

In relation to liberal-realist internationalist theory, the above is highly instructive on its omissions. Attlee and Bevin’s liberal internationalism was not only deeply racialised but also considered the ‘periphery’ fundamental to the well-being of the European core. The core needed to control the flow of goods, people, capital, minerals from and to the periphery; to protect it from rival powers and from periphery nationalism. But those fundamentals were sublimated in a *public rhetoric* of a free world order based on the rule of law. While liberal internationalist scholars agree with the rhetoric, they effectively obscure the fundamentally unequal and coercive character of the core-periphery relationship, let alone its necessity to a US-led world order (Burleigh 2013).

The Korean War

The outbreak of the Korean War brought to the surface the overt and covert elements of Attlee's and Truman's respective operational codes, locating the conflict in Cold War binaries. Their Eurocentrism was underlined by their disdain for the views of Koreans about the future of their own country, including their yearning for national unification. The Korean War is further rendered a good test of liberal internationalist thinking and the operational codes of Truman and Attlee as it occurred in the wake of multilateral institution building after 1945 and the making of a rules-based system in the wake of the Nuremberg and Tokyo war crimes' trials, greater attention to human rights, and the Geneva conventions of 1949 that focused on war crimes, crimes against peace, and the treatment of civilians and prisoners of war. It is also instructive in regard to the manner in which South Korea became incorporated more closely into the 'core' world order. At the centre of any test of liberal-realist internationalism is the rule of law which was said to animate and differentiate the US-led order from the rest of the world.

That the mainly-US military forces violated so many of the newly-minted order's principles, it could be argued, was due to the very novelty of the order which had hardly been embedded by the Korean War's outbreak. Against this, however, must be weighed Anglo-American condemnations against the Soviet Union for violating others' sovereignty, freedom and human rights. Also, such western violations as in Korea continued into the next several decades, notably in Vietnam and Cambodia when, arguably, the order was fully established. Finally, at home, it hardly requires lengthy argumentation that the rule of law was a founding principle of liberal America but was also selectively applied – witness the prolonged exploitation, domination, and

disfranchisement of African-Americans, and Native Americans' virtual extermination. This was hardly the failure to embed principles as much as it was part of an hierarchical world view featuring selective application of the rule of law.

The Korean War, however, is the subject of great controversy. When it started, whether it was an interstate or civil war, was directed by the Soviet Union and/or communist China, remain disputed (Halliday and Cumings 1988). Although it is frequently said to have started with North Korean aggression on June 25, 1950, it was the culmination of decades of anti-colonial resistance against Japan, a desire for national unity among all Koreans, Koreans' role in the Chinese resistance to Japanese aggression, and the revolutionary events of the immediate post-liberation period which saw people's committees formed and a national peoples' republic declared, despite the superpower division of the country at the 38th parallel.²² The US controlled the south, with two-thirds of the total population, the capital city of Seoul, and the best road and rail networks. Koreans rejected division but were never consulted. Hence, the period 1945-50 was one of turmoil, class conflict, violent repression, and the hardening of the lines of division between the pro-Soviet North and pro-US South. In that time, around 100,000 people in South Korea were killed in police repression, guerrilla warfare, and peasant rebellions, mainly focused around a desire for (re)unification against the US-installed Syngman Rhee administration and its pro-Japanese clique (Cumings 1981; Cumings 1991).

Rule of Law

As illustrated above, although the central narrative of Anglo-American superiority – among political leaders and liberal internationalists scholars alike -revolves around the rule of law, the

principle was practiced selectively (Dicey 1909, 72-73).²³ The United States violated its own UN Participation Act, 1945, by bypassing Congress when going to war in Korea (Fischer 1995). In addition, despite key declarations about the sanctity of the procedures of the fledgling United Nations, UN procedures were violated by Truman's order for US air and naval deployments before an authorising UN Security Council resolution was passed. At a later stage of the War, defined by Truman as a 'UN police action', when North Korean forces had been driven back to the 38th parallel, which was the aim of UNSC Resolution 83,²⁴ US and British forces violated UNSC 83 by continuing their offensive to "liberate all Korea" by crossing the 38th parallel. Had US forces stopped at the 38th parallel, in September 1950, it is possible that around 80% of all war casualties could have been avoided. But by taking control of Pyongyang, and threatening the Chinese border, Chinese intervention was almost guaranteed and the war prolonged until July 1953 (Halliday and Cumings 1988, 112).²⁵ The War was also misrepresented as multilateral in character and under "UN Command" even though the US commanding officer, General Douglas MacArthur, refused any oversight or consultation rights to the Security Council (Fischer 1995). To this day, US forces add legitimacy to their mission by operating under the banner of "UN Command" even though UNSC Resolution 84 only mentioned operations under "Unified Command". Indeed, US representatives thwarted attempts by UN Secretary General Lie and Britain and France to set up a coordinating committee to oversee military operations, thereby preventing the security council from carrying out its proper role, violating chapter 7 of the UN Charter.²⁶

The creation of a separate S. Korean state in 1948, recognised by a Western-dominated UN General Assembly, which precipitated the Soviet move to create a separate North Korean state,

itself violated international agreements the United States and Britain entered into through the Cairo Declaration and Potsdam agreements during the Second World War, and the US-Soviet Moscow agreement of 1945 which had authorised *national* elections by 1950 (Sharma 1978). The United States pressed the UN Temporary Committee on Korea, which observed elections at just 2% of polling stations, to declare free elections had been held to endorse the new Republic of Korea as a sovereign state. The elections had been opposed and boycotted by practically all but the extreme right-wing and National Police (Halliday and Cumings 1988, 29-30).

US commander in Korea, General Hodge, had largely adopted the governmental machinery and police forces of the Japanese era and, on Japanese military advice, declared Koreans a “semi-friendly” people and imposed military law (Halliday and Cumings 1988). International law related to military occupation was also violated in US backing for right-wing police and political forces in S. Korea, leading to mass killings in the region of 100,000 from 1945-50. Even before June 1950, massacres of around thirty thousand people occurred, one-fifth of the population, during anti-election protests on the Cheju islands. Thousands more were killed by South Korean police as suspected communists while undergoing ‘re-education’ in the National Guidance Association. On another occasion, US military officers photographed the killing of thousands of political prisoners at Taejon, reports initially denied by the Truman and Attlee administrations but later proven factually correct (Kim 2004).

According to the Korean Truth and Reconciliation Commission, set up in 2005, there were 138 separate massacres by US forces against *S. Korean* civilians during the War, leading to thousands of deaths, including by authorised strafing by the US Air Force.²⁷ This included the

notorious massacre of hundreds of men, women and children at No Gun Ri, July 1950, who had followed US military advice to move behind US lines but were classed as North Korean infiltrators. Over three days, US forces strafed from the air the bridge under which the unarmed people cowered while soldiers from the hillsides bombed and shot at them (Baek 2001; Conway-Lanz 2005).

There operated what some have called military orientalism (Barkawi and Stanski 2012; Porter 2009), racist attitudes about the character of Koreans and Chinese, the lower value of their lives, and their general inferiority. According to Bruce Cumings, Anglo-American atrocities ran up to 6:1 higher than those carried out by North Korean and Chinese troops.²⁸ Reginald Thompson, the *Daily Telegraph* correspondent in Korea, noted that US marines considered the Koreans apes, not humans, and rained death on them on an unprecedented scale. It was machines versus men, a new kind of warfare that was reminiscent of colonial wars. Now, there was liberal use of napalm, obliteration bombing by B-52s, that inflicted “holocausts of death”, obliterating distinctions between combatants and civilians (Thompson 1951).

General MacArthur ordered relentless bombing to create “ ‘a wilderness of scorched earth...’ ” North Korea was carpet bombed for 3 years, with 635,000 tons of bombs dropped (half that dropped on Germany in WWII, and more than in the entire Pacific theatre, 1941-45); 32,000 tons of napalm were used in that country. Hence, massive casualties resulted from indiscriminate military violence leading to between 2.5-4 million Korean deaths; 900,000-1 million Chinese; 54,000 US; and nearly 700 UK deaths (Halliday and Cumings 1988, 201; 115). Almost from the very beginning of the War, Truman and MacArthur threatened atomic warfare.²⁹ MacArthur

advocated dropping twenty small atomic bombs across Korea to create a no-man's land between South Korea and China. There was evident a general belief that Asians were weak and could not possibly stand up to hi-tech and relentless American firepower; but also a feeling of humiliation among military and civilian leaders that the weakest 'communist satellite' – North Korea – was beating the US. US military operations cost around \$70 billion. A small largely rural country saw between 40-90% of all urban areas destroyed; even after just a few months, North Korea had no targets of any worth to bomb.

Military orientalism – the belief in the innate inferiority of Asians and the superiority of Caucasians – prolonged the war and increased casualties (Cumings 2001).³⁰ It also created the main barrier to ending hostilities by preventing an agreement on the return of prisoners of war. As this was defined as a war between races and cultures as much as between freedom and slavery, barbarism and the rule of law, there was a desire from Truman to the military commanders to make Asians pay for their resistance. Hence, in violation of the Geneva Conventions on compulsory and swift return of enemy prisoners of war, the Anglo-Americans demanded all prisoners be 'screened' to see if they wished to return to North Korea or China (Burchett and Winnington 1953). By this means, the war was prolonged. Under the veil of 'voluntary repatriation', the Anglo-Americans allowed the torture and punishment of Chinese and North Koreans in prison camps run by Syngman Rhee and KMT forces, leading to thousands of killings, as reported by numerous press agencies, the International Commission of the Red Cross, and British, Canadian and US troops who had policed the PoW camps.³¹ Anglo-American allegations of torture of Western troops in Chinese and North Korean camps were undermined by

later US army studies of released US PoWs who reported generally good treatment rather than torture.³²

Impacts of the Korean War on the Core

Why should liberal internationalists be concerned about the above when their theory is focused on the North American-European core? There are four principal reasons.

First, the ‘core’ also came, in time, to include Japan and S. Korea. Hence, the manner of that region’s (violent) incorporation is significant. Too frequently, we project a society’s trajectory back from the present into the past and see in the two Koreas the making of the present – a prosperous South and an impoverished North. Yet, the manner of the South’s move to the core, or at least to an outer circle of the core, is important; it expresses the means and values of the forces that led that movement. It must be recalled that the S. Korean miracle did not begin until the 1970s and that the country was a repressive dictatorship and considered an economic disaster before then, at a time when N. Korea’s was the more rapidly developing economy (Halliday and Cumings 1988, 211).

Secondly, the War had major impacts on the core: NATO, for example, expanded to include Greece and Turkey as they contributed to the effort; NATO also became a militarised alliance as a result of the Korean war. It led to German rearmament and the stationing of thousands of US troops on European bases (Fox 1952). The US military budget trebled to ca \$650 billion (in 2010 dollars) and led directly to the rise of a military-industrial-academic complex about which President Eisenhower warned in 1961 (Sanders 1983).³³ It enabled NSC-68, the blueprint for

militarised containment, rejecting Kennan's (slightly) more cautious recommendations (Jervis 1980).³⁴ The United States developed a standing army for the first time and a worldwide military basing strategy. The War created new elite and attentive public consensus around the communist threat, fuelled McCarthyism, and the first stirrings of what later became neoconservatism (Sanders 1983, 85-114; Cash 2013). It crystallised 'domino theory' more than any other single previous event. Korea impacted strategy in the Vietnam War, and led to the rise of other regional security pacts – SEATO and CENTO, for example (Jervis 1980, 581). The 'police action' or sideshow or diversion in the 'periphery' had a massive impact on military developments in the core.

Thirdly, the evidence requires some reflection about claims of Truman's and Attlee's multilateralism, anti-colonialism, and attachment to a rule of law-based postwar order. And finally, the ultimate values demonstrated in Korea in practice require general critical reflection: the catalogue of documented violations in Korea may be instructive as to actual values as opposed to those stated, and require liberal internationalists to question the bases of their theorising about international politics in general but about the character of the 'rules-based' post-1945 order in particular.

Conclusion

This article has uncovered influential background ideas that worked at two levels and, arguably, continue to do so. Those ideas had lethal military effects that have gone the way of the Korean War in the popular and academic consciousness – almost completely forgotten. That historical amnesia has infused how IR scholars, in the main, have analysed the rise of the US-led liberal

postwar order, rendering some theories – especially liberal internationalism – less than adequate in explaining very much about the founding principles of that order or its subsequent general operation. This includes claims of its ability to embrace the increasing diversity of powerful states in world politics today and over coming decades.

At the level of senior policymakers, public declarations of a post-WWII international system based on the rule of law are shown to sublimate powerful overt ideas and assumptions that were racial and imperial, impacting on how, in this case, military violence in the Korean War was exercised. At a scholarly level, liberal internationalism's silences about the order's underlying racial and imperial character, and the role of military violence in the periphery that proved fundamental to the order's construction and, via later wars, recalibration, obscure core features of the international system. That is why the racial-imperial mindsets of Truman and Attlee are critical to the argument of this article about liberal internationalism. And, although Truman and Attlee's racialized thought was widely shared in elite political circles, there were more and more questioning voices – with some broadly opposed to racism per se, and others pragmatically concerned about the effect of overtly racialized thinking and policy during the war with Japan and later in cold war competition with the Soviet Union for 'third world' hearts and minds (Parmar 2012, 184; Furedi 1998). That climate of opinion not only provided choices; it also meant the choices taken were to sublimate racial thought rather than to eradicate it.

Of course, racialised thought was not a monopoly of Anglo-Saxonism – it prevailed across Europe's colonial powers. The point here is that such thought was a partially hidden but potent component of the Truman and Attlee's world views, the architects of the postwar system that laid claim to a range of principles but operated very differently, especially with reference to peoples

on the global periphery. It is necessary to provide details of such attitudes as they are significant and not particularly well known among political scientists and IR scholars.

Liberal internationalists' ideas and strategies more closely resemble a *legitimizing ideology* or rationale for (Anglo) US power than an explanatory theory; fail adequately to explain their foreign policy, the character of the state, its internal distribution of power, and leaders' mindsets, the roles of the 'periphery' in the world order in maintaining the 'long peace' in Europe and, therefore, fail to appreciate the role war played in its maintenance.³⁵ As a legitimating ideology, liberal-realist internationalism obscures the social, racial and political processes at home that maintain imperial-elite power and foreign policy and national security mindsets, despite apparent (minor) changes in class, gender and ethnic-racial composition of elites. And, unconsciously, as a legitimating ideology, its analysis of the rise, character and uniqueness of American power obscures its imperial and militarist character, while seeking to incorporate, assimilate or contain 'threatening' rising powers.³⁶ The background ideas of leaders are subliminally but surely embedded in the silences of liberal internationalism.

Notes

¹ I use liberal-realist internationalist because the theory features a key role for institutions and force in world politics and must be seen in that light even if its main proponents downplay the role of coercion in international affairs. Their self-concept is liberal internationalist though their overall understandings of the workings of world power are firmly founded in the exercise of a combination of force and material incentives; see, for example, Ikenberry (2006, 3; pp51-79).

² TRIP surveys over several years show that liberal internationalists such as Joseph Nye and John Ikenberry are among the most influential and significant scholars in the study of IR, as are liberal institutionalists such as Robert Keohane and John Ruggie (Maliniak et al 2012). Hence, the broadly benign view of America's rise is embedded in the discipline and especially in US foreign policy scholarship. More critical scholars such as Perry Anderson (2013), and Kees van der Pijl (forthcoming 2016), indicate in numerous writings the overall hegemony of liberal (benign) versions of US power's rise, as does Parmar (2012). A widely-used recent US foreign policy text book, Cox and Stokes (2008/2012) provides further evidence of the generally benign character of US' rise to globalism, even if there is a critical hue. Vitalis (forthcoming 2015) indicates that de-sanitising of history to exclude the more negative elements also extends back to the rise of the IR discipline itself, especially in its 'forgetting' of its racialised and imperial character after the First World War.

³ http://www.eisenhower.archives.gov/research/online_documents/farewell_address.html; accessed 17 March 2014.

⁴ There are a variety of liberal internationalisms; here I critique a particular variant; Tim Dunne and Matt McDonald, "The politics of liberal internationalism," *International Politics* 50:1, 2013, pp.1-17.

⁵ State spirit derives from Antonio Gramsci, describing private organisations viewing state/society problems as their own; (Hoare and Nowell-Smith 1971).

⁶ See also Jones (2014), Nye (2011, 2013); Gaddis (2004); Lipset (1996). Ikenberry's work, therefore, is immersed in a reservoir of liberal internationalist scholarship that broadly endorses similar assumptions about the benign character of post-1945 world order.

⁷ The TRIP survey is a cross national study of 3466 IR faculty members in twenty countries.

⁸ Kupchan (2012) is critical of Ikenberry in this regard but I am not persuaded that his prescriptions for a renegotiated world order, in a process led by the United States, differs much in practice from the current status quo.

⁹ In relation to America's practices beyond the Western order, footnote 35 on page 27 reinforces the above point: "This study focuses primarily on the international order created by the United States and the other great powers. It does not fully illuminate the wider features of the world order that include America's relations with weaker, less developed, and peripheral states." That one sentence speaks volumes as to embedded and only semi-conscious Eurocentrism.

¹⁰ Slaughter's (2009) ideas about networked power chime with Mead's.

¹¹ Only secretary of state, Dean Acheson, mentioned material-strategic factors among those influencing US intervention in Korea.

¹² Additionally, his correspondence with his brother Tom reveals Attlee's routine use of racist terms when referring to non-white races; Clement Attlee papers, University of Oxford.

¹³ "Speech made at the American Thanksgiving Day Luncheon," American Society, 23 November, 1944; Box 15, folios 222-234, Attlee papers.

¹⁴ Box 15, folios 222-234, Attlee papers.

¹⁵ This is reflected in the works of Attlee acquaintance, George Catlin (1941), and a key figure in the evolution of Anglo-Saxonism.

¹⁶ McCullough, p.86. Although broadly an internationalist, his was a nationalistic internationalism; Wilson Miscamble, "The Evolution of an Internationalist: Harry S. Truman and American Foreign Policy," *Australian Journal of Politics and History* 23 (August 1977), p.279.

¹⁷ McCullough, p.247. Krock (1968, 263). Clifford's (1991, 7) claim that Truman abhorred racial intolerance is undermined by McCullough's impeccable research.

¹⁸ Cited by Connell (1958, 11-13). Crowe, German-born, was a senior clerk in the Foreign Office.

¹⁹ Attlee's views are further illustrated by his associations with the America and British Commonwealth Association, founded in 1941 and aimed at building a stable "new world order"; letter, EFM Durbin to Attlee, 18 February, 1943; Box 7, folios 133-134, Attlee papers.

²⁰ Miscamble, p.283. Williams (1972, 78) argues that Truman, Acheson and others believed that "the American system" had to become a global system if it was to survive.

²¹ Letter, Clifford to Truman, September – 1946; in Krock, p.419; Clifford, p.124. Krock's memoir was the first to publicise the report; Truman sequestered all copies.

²² The Americans determined the division of Korea at the 38th parallel; the Soviets accepted it at a time when they could have taken control of the whole peninsula, undermining later claims of unfettered expansionist ambitions.

²³ Even the modern legal jurist, AV Dicey (1909), who helped codify the concept of the rule of law, considered African-Americans, and British women, at the dawn of the twentieth-century, as unready for full political rights; <https://archive.org/stream/letterstofriend00diceuoft#page/72/mode/2up>.

²⁴ The resolution called North Korea to withdraw behind the 38th parallel and to the UN to "repel the armed attack and to restore ROK sovereignty, peace and security"; the 'liberation' of all Korea was neither stated nor implied; at http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/RES/83%281950%29; accessed 13 November 2013. Dean Acheson, secretary of state, agreed there was, "in the usual sense of the word a war," in Korea; Fischer, p.34.

²⁵ Halliday and Cumings (1988, 112). The Anglo-Americans did not believe China would dare take on American power.

²⁶ The US joint chiefs of staff ordered US forces to appear multilateral while remaining US-controlled in practice. The UN was never a party to the 1953 armistice. Article 47, in particular, of Chapter 7 of the UN Charter places the direction of UN military operations in the hands of a Military Staff Committee; at <http://www.un.org/en/documents/charter/intro.shtml>; accessed 13 November 2013.

²⁷ *Korean Combat Action Reports for USS Valley Forge* (CV/CVA 45); at <http://www.history.navy.mil/branches/v-forge.html>; accessed 13 November 2013). Army ordered strafing any group of 8-10 Koreans as they were "considered troops, and were to be attacked" with napalm, etc.; see also, CJ Hanley and M. Mendoza, "1950 letter shows US approved of killing Korean war refugees," *The Independent*, 31 May 2006, citing a letter from John J. Muccio, US ambassador to Seoul, to Dean Rusk, assistant secretary of state, 25 July 1950.; for full details, see Suh (2010).

²⁸ Journalist James Cameron reported atrocities committed by South Korean troops at a concentration camp in Pusan: "I had seen Belsen, but this was worse. This terrible mob of men - convicted of nothing, un-tried, South Koreans in South Korea, suspected of being 'unreliable'" had been starved and chained while US officers took photographs. When Cameron took the report to UNTCOK, he was told: "Most disturbing, yes; but remember these are Asian people, with different standards of behavior" Halliday and Cumings (1988, 92, 146).

²⁹ Truman ordered Strategic Air Command to despatch atomic bombs to the Far East (November 30 1950); and authorised dummy runs from waters off North Korea; Halliday and Cumings (1988, 123-124).

³⁰ "As soon as those North Koreans see an American uniform...they'll run like hell," was the general belief; Gugeler (1970). Military historian, Walter Karig, called Korea an example of "Indian warfare" because the foe "scorns all rules of civilized warfare"; Cumings (2001).

³¹ "AP: U.S. Allowed Korean Massacre in 1950," <http://www.cbsnews.com/news/ap-us-allowed-korean-massacre-in-1950/>; accessed 15 November 2013.

³² Kincaid (1959). Over twenty Americans chose to live in China; not a single soldier tried to escape; large numbers collaborated with their captors.

³³ Sanders (1983). Winston Churchill claimed Korea was important only because it led to the re-arming of America; Halliday and Cumings (1988, 203).

³⁴ Jervis (1980). This is not to deny the importance of continuities from the pre-Korean war period, only to underline the war's catalytic character; LaFeber (1989).

³⁵ Jahn (2009). In this clinical dissection of Andrew Moravcsik's attempt to construct a liberal international theory, Jahn shows an almost inherent imperialism in Lockean liberalism's premises, and its unconsciously ideological character.

³⁶ The socialising potential of liberalism for those not yet deemed worthy of political freedom is recognized in Lockean liberalism; even those who did not own property, Jahn argues, could in principle be granted political rights once appropriately socialized; Jahn 2009, 426, fn 3).

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