Competing Visions for International Order

Challenges for a Shared Direction in an Age of Global Contestation

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Envisioning International Order in an Age of Global Contestation

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1 Introduction

Envisioning International Order in an Age of Global Contestation

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Introduction: Visions for a Troubled World

Questions of international order are arguably more relevant today than at any point in the post-Cold War era. The global power hierarchy is shifting with the United States' preponderant position challenged by China's rise (and eventually the rise of other powers like India and Brazil). The world is also beset by increasingly tense relations between the great powers of the day, and the so-called liberal international order (also termed the liberal rules-based order and sometimes the rules-based order) is coming apart at the seams. To make matters worse, this old order – very much a Western creation in the post–World War II era – is fraying at a time when cooperative solutions are paramount to answering global challenges, which range from climate, energy, food, and migration crises to potentially disruptive technological developments. Taken together, this constellation of calamities may add up to a multipronged "polycrisis". Meanwhile, Russia's war of aggression in Ukraine and the Gaza war between Israel and Hamas are exposing increasing divisions between the "West" and the "Global South" as well as within the Western "core" of the liberal international order.

Traditionally great powers have had an outsized role in reordering international relations (IR) during profound ruptures. However, as this volume seeks to illustrate, such reordering requires not only material capabilities but also the willingness to articulate and ultimately put into practice a *vision* of order that other states as well as relevant stakeholders domestically find legitimate and even authoritative. For this reason, ruptures are conducive to the emergence of different and potentially competing visions of ordering, which are articulated by actors to deal with profound uncertainty. However, despite the abundant literature on international ordering dynamics, a comparative study of the ordering visions being currently put forth by the most important actors, the key global and regional powers in the international system, is missing. This volume explores such visions, placing particular emphasis on the recent past (a period of roughly ten years from 2014 to 2024), focusing predominantly on the relevant political elites in the states or actors in question. More specifically, it proposes a fourfold analytical framework based on distributional, normative, institutional, and temporal dimensions for making sense of the said ordering visions.

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This substantive introduction lays out the analytical framework and conceptual underpinnings of the volume. It is followed by three parts, the first comprising chapters on the United States, the hitherto leading power, and China, its only near-peer challenger. The second part encompasses studies on powers that have by and large supported the liberal international order, including the European Union (EU) (a power in its own right), as well as its most influential member states, France and Germany, followed by the United Kingdom and Japan. The third part contains powers that – each in their own way – challenge at least certain parameters of the post-Cold War order, namely India, Brazil, South Africa, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Iran, and Russia. In the concluding chapter, the contributions of this volume allow us to address perhaps the ultimate question in IR for the coming decades: To what extent can the visions promoted by the leading powers of the world be reconciled to arrive at a shared direction for international order writ large?

Conceptual Underpinnings: Visions, Order, and Ordering Visions

According to the *Oxford Dictionary of English* (3rd ed., emphasis added), "a vision is the ability to think about or plan the future with imagination or wisdom, or a *mental image of what the future will or could be like*". The future is always uncertain, so this kind of visionary thinking is integral to the human condition as an "anxiety controlling mechanism", one that ultimately fathoms "the Self in an imagined future order" (Berenskoetter 2011, 654). This search for certitude and stable parameters can be extended to relationships between political communities. Even E. H. Carr (1964, 118; emphasis added), no friend to visionary thinking, once lamented that people "will continue to seek an escape from the logical consequences of realism in the shape of an *international order*".

In its simplest form, a political vision can be defined as "a *proactive* response to the historical dimension of . . . empirical challenges" (Beardsworth 2012, 542, emphasis in original). In this sense, the visions we are concerned with in this volume are fundamentally *political* and pertain to how specific political communities (or their leaderships) envisage a future world and, importantly, the place of their community in that world. The articulation of such a vision is not only a way of steering and delineating future political action, given the current historical conditions, but it is also a device for asserting *political leadership* in the present and effectively casting it into the future. The relationship between the utterer of a vision vis-à-vis both the world as we currently perceive it and towards the audience of said vision is therefore "performative" in nature (Beardsworth 2012). The *audience* or constituency to which vision-makers articulate and ultimately legitimise their respective visions is both domestic and international in scope (Reus-Smit 2007). Ultimately, asserting political leadership on the international arena through appealing visions "is effective and sustainable when foreign elites acknowledge the leader's vision of international order and internalise it as their own" (Nabers 2010, 932; cf. Ikenberry and Kupchan 1990).

Given that visions are future-oriented devices, they invariably possess a *utopian* (or sometimes even dystopian) element. Actors articulating visions paint a picture

of an imagined and desirable future that is deemed normatively superior for both the actor and the relevant audiences (Brincat 2009). The ultimate aim of visionary constructs – especially ones that pertain to international order or some subset thereof – is to become accepted as legitimate within a specific constituency, or even to achieve a hegemonic status. Political elites articulating visions are thus engaged in a recurring cycle of "hegemonic contestation" (Koskenniemi 2004, 199). The articulated visions remain eternally "disputed and constituted by shared ideas about self, other, and the world" (Nabers 2010, 932). These contests, again, play out both in the domestic politics of states and on the international arena.

Visions as we define them can also be understood as subsets of narratives, namely political narratives about (un)desirable futures. At its most basic, "a narrative is . . . a dialogue or a relation between the narrator and the reader or listener, or even the outside 'world'" (Vogt 2005, 12). While narratives make selective claims of the past to produce a story, they, simultaneously, contain various futures (Deudney et al. 2023, 8). Political narratives, in turn, seek to "purchase or compel others' assent to specific policies" as well as "shape the linguistic axes that define the scope and substance of political debate" (Krebs 2015, 9). Therefore, seeing as they function as legitimising devices that also define the parameters of the acceptable, the visions with which our authors are concerned rely on the productive power of language (Barnett and Duvall 2005).

Our volume looks at a particular manifestation of visions, namely *ordering visions* by states or state-like actors that pertain to the international arena. As a concept, order has both a descriptive and normative dimension: it denotes *stability*, a relative lack of chaos or a specific distribution of power, and *legitimacy*, grounded on norms, values, and institutional forms (Acharya 2018a, 4–12). In Hedley Bull's (1977, 8) famous definition, international order is "a pattern of activity that sustains the elementary or primary goals of the society of states". Other definitions emphasise a "stable distribution of power" (Haass 2019, 22). According to Christopher Layne (2006, 4), in conditions of unipolarity, the hegemon, as the most powerful state in the international system, "acts self-interestedly to create a stable international order", but even in a bipolar or multipolar system international order implies both stability and hierarchy (cf. Waltz 1993, 45; Lake 2009). For G. John Ikenberry (2012, 47), "settled rules and arrangements that guide the relations among states" are the most important component of international order. In Alexander Cooley and Daniel Nexon's (2020) more recent formulation, an international order is a "goods ecology" that consists of an "architecture" of rules, norms, and values, and an "infrastructure" of different relationships between actors, mediated by institutions.

International orders do not necessarily span the entirety of the international system. Even in the era of the liberal international order, certain states and actors have remained outside its remit – think of North Korea – and this has been the case for the order's historical forebears as well (Kupchan 2014). Therefore, it is possible to speak of global, regional, and even subregional international orders, and their scope, not to mention their interrelations, can ebb and flow over time (Flockhart 2016; Katzenstein 2005; Lake 2009; Acharya 2018b; Ayoob 1999). This is a key insight: international orders are not static, they evolve as dynamic, temporally

contingent and spatially bounded constructs. This means that while states, especially great powers, play a prominent role in constructing international order they too are ultimately constrained by the order they themselves create. Their identities and interests are thus, in part, constituted by the international order in which they partake (Ikenberry and Nexon 2019).

It is hardly a novel claim that international orders tend to reflect the geopolitical and ideational proclivities of the most powerful actor or actors (Carr 1964, 93; Gilpin 1981, 9; Kupchan 2014; Layne 2006). However, material capabilities do not directly reflect influence in the politics of ordering. Intangibles, like the attractiveness of ideas harboured by an actor that is captured by terms of art like soft, civilian, and normative power, can mean that even states with limited material resources may put forth ordering visions that resonate widely in the international arena (cf. Duchêne 1973; Manners 2002; Nye 2011).

In light of the above we can arrive at a useful fourfold categorisation of international order:

1 An international order has a relatively stable *distribution of capabilities*, which has implications on the nature of the order by creating potential hierarchies that are tied to but not predetermined by material attributes of power.
2 An international order is socially constituted by *norms*, rules, and values that partaking states by and large agree to abide by.
3 An international order possesses accepted *institutional fora*, wherein these norms rules and values are embedded, and wherein actors interact, cooperate, converse, and even compete.
4 An international order is *temporally contingent* and can be spatially variable.

These dimensions of order also comprise the analytical framework of the book and will be further elaborated upon later in this introduction.

Finally, a note about whose ordering visions we are concerned with in our volume. First off, we are obviously interested in states or actors (namely the EU) that can, for all intents and purposes, be regarded as having state-like agency in international politics (cf. Gstöhl 2020; Helwig and Sinkkonen 2022). Moreover, what sets our *key powers* apart is that they possess significant roles either globally or in their respective regions. This category thus contains the superpower contenders (i.e. the United States and China) with "broad-spectrum capabilities exercised across the whole of the international system" (Buzan and Wæver 2003, 34), along with the more fluid categories of great powers, which "are responded to by others on the basis of system level calculations about the present and near-future distribution of power" (Buzan and Wæver 2003, 35) and regional powers, which "loom large in their regions, but do not register much in a broad-spectrum way at the global level" (although they may do so in specific domains or issue areas) (Buzan and Wæver 2003, 37).

One could debate *ad infinitum* over which of our chosen powers belongs to which of these categories and based on what collection of capabilities (cf. Nolte 2010; Stewart-Ingersoll and Frazier 2012; Cui and Buzan 2016). Where does one,

for instance, place the likes of Germany and Japan with their economic clout, France and the United Kingdom with their global networks grounded on imperial pasts, or even Russia with its massive nuclear arsenal yet relatively small economy? However, this debate is beside the point for current purposes. Our key powers play a significant role *at least* in the ordering practices of their respective regional constellation (in this sense they are "great" regionally) and oftentimes further afield. In addition, they have sufficient bearing on the future of international ordering, if not separately then at least as parties to different coalitions, to warrant inclusion in our analysis.

Motivation: Ordering Visions for a Turbulent World

But why are ordering visions, as we understand them, a relevant topic for concerted study? First, *ordering visions are central to how key actors in international politics construct a great power role for themselves* concomitant with their material capabilities or, as John Mearsheimer (2001, 60) has termed them, "latent power". As Christopher S. Layne (2006, 4; see also Schake 2017, 26) points out, innate ideational drivers like *will* and *ambition*, alongside material capabilities, are necessary attributes of great-power pursuits. Manjari Miller (2021) has similarly argued that the stories great powers (or their political elites) tell themselves about their place in the world have bearing on whether states assume a great-power role that corresponds with their material endowments and the expectations of others in the international arena. Therefore, the ordering vision of a great power says much about that power's self-perception and its relationships with others in international society.

Second, and relatedly, *ordering visions are intimately tied to the politics of international ordering in which great powers habitually partake*. Seeing as orders have a normative component (Knutsen 1999), it is logical that they should also have a social structure and purpose that cannot be dissociated from the social interactions of those actors that make up the said order (Reus-Smit 2017). This social purpose is also open to contestation, reinterpretation, and reimagining by those partaking in an order (Goh 2019). Hence, the articulation of appealing ordering visions and their justification to relevant audiences creates legitimacy for those visions, which, in turn breeds authority, influence, and ultimately rightful rule (Acharya 2018a; Lake 2009; Hurd 1999). The question of status and recognition is also relevant here. In his work, Rohan Mukherjee (2022) has illustrated how the choice of rising powers to contest an existing international order hinges on status, the extent to which the existing order – particularly its constituent institutions – recognises these states as possessing a great-power role. The role that states envisage for significant others in the international order is therefore a pertinent question, one that can also have bearing upon the resonance of an ordering vision. Credible visions of international order should, therefore, contain "visions of the good life" (Flockhart 2020, 2024), but these must transcend the boundary between the domestic and international arenas, mindful of the fears, anxieties, and convictions of others. Ordering visions thus present a central theme of great-power cooperation and contestation.

Third, and perhaps most importantly, *there is surprisingly broad agreement in the research and policy analyst community that we stand on the precipice of an ordering moment*. The IR literature is inundated with studies professing the crisis, decline, or even end of the liberal international order (see, e.g. Maull 2018; Ikenberry 2018; Lehti, Pennanen, and Jouhki 2020; Cooley and Nexon 2020; Acharya 2018b; Mearsheimer 2019; Mahbubani 2018). This crossroads has various dimensions.

It is by now uncontroversial to posit that power (in military, economic, technological, or even demographic terms) is transitioning from the United States and the West to China and other rising powers, like India and Brazil. This process has gradually rejiggered the *material foundations* of the order from the starting point of US unipolarity in the 1990s and early 2000s. However, there is contention over whether this is a shift towards a less pronounced version of unipolarity with two pivotal players of which one (the United States) remains more powerful than the other (China) (Brooks and Wohlforth 2016, 2023), a re-emergence of bipolarity (Tunsjø 2018; Maher 2018) or a novel multipolar or even "multiplex" constellation (Acharya 2018b; Layne 2006; Ashford and Cooper 2023). However, writing already in the Obama era, Adam Quinn (2011, 808, emphasis added) argued that such "disagreement . . . may relate not to the fundamental question of the *direction* in which the United States' level of relative power is headed, but rather to the *pace* of its decline". In any case, the key question for our volume is not to empirically ascertain the validity of such descriptions of the international system, but how key powers perceive the present and thus envision these dynamics unfolding in the future.

To illustrate, in the United States and the broader West, protestations regarding the end of American unipolarity only began to proliferate as the United States' global War on Terror started to erode the legitimacy (and gradually the material foundations) of American global leadership, and this discourse picked up pace in the aftermath of the global financial crisis of 2007/8 (see, e.g. Zakaria 2008; Kupchan 2012; Posen 2009). In China, the multipolarisation of the international order has been seen as an irreversible historical trend since the end of the Cold War, currently hastened by a perceived rapid decline of US hegemony and – as described by President Xi Jinping – "changes unseen in a hundred years" (百年未有之大变局). Similarly, in Russia, discussions of multipolarity have unfolded since the Yeltsin era in the late 1990s and the so-called Primakov doctrine (Stronski and Sokolsky 2020).

At the same time, the *international order is actively contested*, through rhetorical means and policy agency, by key powers that are in different ways disillusioned with its current state. To complicate matters, often the challenge is not couched in counter-order, but counter-polar language (cf. Cooley and Nexon 2020, 81; Zala 2021), leading to conceptual confusion. China views the emerging "multipolar order" not only as inevitable but also as a preferable outcome, a central objective of its grand-strategic ambitions (Ye 2004; Xi 2017; Doshi 2021). Similarly, the idea of constructing a multipolar world has become Russia's official foreign policy doctrine since Vladimir Putin's accession to power (Chebankova 2021, 94).

In their policy parlance, other states, including Brazil, South Africa, and Turkey (see Chapters 10, 11, and 12, respectively), exhibit a similar blurring of polarity as a capabilities-based construct and as a description of a more equitable international order. It is evident that these actors – not to mention Iran and North Korea as the so-called spoilers of the international order in Western discourse – possess varying intensities of grievance vis-à-vis different components of what they regard as a Western-dominated international order (Chapter 14; cf. Johnston 2019; Kendall Taylor and Fontaine 2024).

Revisionism and the weddedness to the status quo, therefore, are hardly simple categories. There are leading states that defend the order, and secondary states – still in the rank of great powers – that want to uphold the order but may do so by bandwagoning with the leader. Revisionist states, in turn, can try to overturn the current order actively and aggressively, or feasibly tag along to achieve more limited aims (Schweller 1994). For Cooley, Nexon, and Ward (2019), the essence of status quo powers is that they support both the present international order and balance of power, while revisionists differ in terms of their relationship to the order and power balance: some states are content with neither, while some merely wish to change the material or socio-institutional foundations of the order, but not both.

Another complicating factor is that alongside the posited struggle between a "liberal" and "illiberal" vision of international order – one further heightened by Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine – there is a third alternative, or rather set of alternatives, being embraced by the so-called Global South. Albeit a contested term, it captures the existence of a real-world phenomenon. There is indeed an "amorphous and diverse coalition of states with a wide range of ideologies and agendas . . . outside the inner circle of leading great powers . . . defined by its collective aspirations for development, voice and status", which is hedging its bets between the "Global West" and "Global East" (i.e. China and Russia and states aligned with them) with the ability to confer legitimacy upon their policies or visions (Ikenberry 2024, 131). However, given that many states in this category are not great powers or possess region-spanning or global visions, for our purposes a more useful notion might be that of swing states. Borrowed from US domestic politics, it illustrates the fluidity with which countries like Brazil, South Africa, Turkey, India, and Saudi Arabia approach international ordering; they do not want to be forced into a binary choice (see, e.g. Fontaine and Kliman 2013; Weber 2023). The extent to which such powers are open to hedging moves – or "goods substitution" (Nexon, Cooley, and Andersen 2021) – may ultimately prove significant for the future of international order writ large, as states reconsider their alignments in a changing world.

Moreover, the foundations of the liberal international order are eroding within the broader "West". The sentiment that the order is no longer delivering benefits for the populations of the United States, Europe, and the rest of the "developed world" has been noted by scholars of variegated theoretical persuasions (see, e.g. Acharya 2018b; Adler-Nissen and Zarakol 2021; Ikenberry 2018; Kupchan and Trubowitz 2010; Mearsheimer 2019). The standard story goes as follows: After the end of the Cold War, the liberal international order became *the* global order. However, in

the midst of galloping globalisation fuelled by neoliberal economic prescriptions, the order lost its moorings. It no longer catered to the populations of its "core", as the gap between the haves and the have-nots grew and negative externalities for affected communities became more visible (Ikenberry 2018; Schweller 2018). In this reading, the ascendancy of populist politics in established democracies is more a symptom than a cause of the liberal order's malaise, a "crisis of faith" with respect to its values and institutional foundations (Traub 2017). This phenomenon thus has a globe-spanning dimension through illiberal transnational movements, the most pertinent of which currently hail from the right of the political spectrum (Cooley and Nexon 2020, ch. 6). To further muddy the picture, the challenges emanating from inside the core of the liberal order and from the outskirts create a "merger of discontents" (Adler-Nissen and Zarakol 2021), where strategies employed by authoritarian challengers from outwith and the aggrieved from within effectively converge (Dukalskis 2021; Wigell 2019). This constitutes a multipronged challenge for established democracies.

A final and related complicating factor has been visible (at least with the benefit of hindsight) since the George W. Bush era, but has come to a head after Donald Trump won the US presidency for the first time in 2016. Namely, the long-term US commitment to the international order it helped found and uphold has become uncertain. Trump has been highly critical of US alliances, free trade, and international institutions for decades and views the international arena as a zero-sum game where great powers call the shots and the United States should strive for maximum gains at the expense of others (see, e.g. Norrlof 2018; Hill 2021; Daalder and Lindsay 2018; Rachman 2022; Simms and Laderman 2017). He never ascribed to the notion that buttressing the liberal international order was in the interests of the United States, or, more insidiously, of Trump and his inner circle. During his first term, Trump thus served as an accelerant of the isolationist and illiberal undercurrents in American politics (Heinkelman-Wild, Kruck, and Daßler 2021). Yet the damage to the liberal international order, while far from trivial, was less than what Trump's peculiar political inclinations would have suggested. Stymied by a mixture of incompetence, institutional inertia, courageous people, and the global pandemic, the first Trump term strained but did not break the sinews of American commitment to the order it helped found and foster (cf. Hult 2021; Baker and Glasser 2022). However, Trump did sow seeds of mistrust that could, in his second term, blossom into a multipronged challenge to America's global engagement and, in the process, to the international order *in toto* (Pesu and Sinkkonen 2023).

Past Research: Filling the Vision Gap

In many of the recent studies on international order there is at least an unwritten assumption that the views of key powers are insufficiently congruent to produce a new *modus vivendi* – a harrowing proposition in the current environment of polycrisis (Lawrence et al. 2024; Tooze 2022). It is in vogue to discuss the state of the world through the lenses of "great-power competition", a "Thucydides trap", a "new Cold War", or a "jungle" fixing to "grow back" (e.g. Allison 2017; Kroenig

2020; Leoni 2024; Fong and Chong 2025; Kagan 2018; Wyne 2022). However, despite ubiquitous pessimism regarding the future of international order, the literature is lacking a wide-ranging analysis that zeroes in upon the different *ordering visions* that key powers harbour in the here and now, assesses where such visions are in conflict and analyses what aspects of those visions are actually congruent. This is particularly pertinent, as crises create space for ideational contestation, where old orthodoxies become questioned, new ideas are debated, and discarded notions may re-emerge (cf. Mühlberger and Alaranta 2020).

There is, of course, a robust body of work that our volume draws inspiration from and develops further. To illustrate, a recent collection by Daniel Deudney, G. John Ikenberry, and Karoline Postel-Vinay (2023) focuses on narratives that have come to challenge the hitherto ascendant narrative of the West. However, the narratives with which they are concerned either transcend the boundaries of traditional actor categories in international politics (e.g. pan-Islamic, Conservative, Anglo-world, and Greenpeace narratives) or take a *longue-durée* view when they discuss distinct political communities (e.g. China, India, and the Soviet Union). Our focus is more granular and recent, while the visions our authors are concerned with build upon these conceptual and historical foundations. A collection by Lehti, Pennanen, and Jouhki (2020) focuses on various manifestations of contestation vis-à-vis the liberal international order that arise from within the "West" and even visions (broadly conceived) of other players (namely Turkey, Russia, and China) but does not propose an analytical framework that would allow for a comparison of the different narratives that contributors analyse. There are, of course, various works that also pinpoint how key powers, like China (e.g. Doshi 2021; Xuetong 2019), Russia (e.g. Tsygankov 2022), and the United States (e.g. Wyne 2022; Kupchan 2020; Brooks and Wohlforth 2016) relate to other states, international order, and the institutional edifices that comprise it. Other works zoom in on stories or narratives that relevant states, like India (Miller 2021) or Turkey (Alaranta 2022), engage in when considering their place in the international order, or within a regional subset of that order, such as the Middle East (Mühlberger and Alaranta 2020). All of these studies provide relevant starting points for the analysis in which our contributors ultimately engage.

Recent research also looks at the specific policies – as opposed to visions – that key powers and other actors carry out when challenging the liberal international order (or American hegemony), or take stock of how certain dimensions of the international order (e.g. the trading system, the financial system, or the US-led alliance system) are being eroded (see, e.g. Böller 2021; Cooley and Nexon 2020). A collection edited by Hanns Maull (2018) presents a holistic analysis of regimes, regional orders, and "ordering powers" of the post-Cold War "liberal international order 2.0.", seeking to understand what has happened to this order since 1990, what kinds of longer-term trends have ensued, and what strategies and policies key powers have followed. Evidently, despite their theoretical and empirical richness, none of these contributions focuses strictly on what key powers – those wedded to the old order and those seeking alterations or to create something new altogether – en*vision* in the current moment of uncertainty. Finally, two works that

come thematically close to our volume, namely Graeme P. Herd's (2010) volume on great powers' visions for dealing with strategic threats and Henry R. Nau and Deepa Ollapally's (2012) study on the world views of great powers based on competing schools of foreign policy thought, are already outdated for understanding the present international constellation and its predicaments.

To fill the identified research gap, our volume focuses on three overarching questions with respect to the ordering visions of our chosen powers:

- *What are the distributional, normative, institutional, and temporal parameters of the visions put forth by our key powers?*
- *To what extent do the ordering visions of our key powers overlap or are in conflict?*
- *What are the implications for the future of international order?*

The ordering visions we are looking for are not (necessarily) articulated in a single source document by the states and actors under scrutiny. Much like states' grand strategies, international roles or identities, ordering visions can be studied through empirical work from relevant authoritative sources: national security strategies, white papers, as well as speeches and other public appearances of leaders and key officials. Moreover, the authoritativeness of one vision over another is not always immediately clear. Distinguishing between the influences of competing visions (domestically) requires knowledge and analysis of the relevant power relations, coalitional dynamics, and political contests within the political communities under scrutiny. Seeing as ordering visions are by their very definition utopian in nature; they also have a complex relationship with foreign policy action. However, it is feasible that a large gap between the articulated vision and policy action (i.e. hypocrisy) should limit the resonance of said vision both internally and externally (Reus-Smit 2007; Finnemore 2009).

Analytical Framework, Sources, and Methods: Searching for Visions

The analytical framework of our volume can be distilled from the above discussion. The chapters approach ordering visions of the great powers through four analytical dimensions: (1) the distribution of capabilities within the envisaged order, (2) the normative parameters of the envisaged order, (3) the institutional structure of the envisaged order, and (4) the temporal aspects of the envisaged order.

Seen through the first *distributional dimension*, the chapters of the book aim to analyse what kinds of power balances or hierarchies the powers in question envision to be maintained or advanced based on their ordering visions. Should an ideal order, for example, consist of a benevolent liberal-hegemonic centre, as (at least until very recently) envisioned by the United States (Chapter 2), or a cordial balance of recognised civilisational great powers, as suggested by the Russian vision (Chapter 15)? Perhaps it should represent a flat and equal multipolarity promoted by China, in which great powers would not enjoy any special privileges over other members of the order (Chapter 3)? Moreover, depending on the scope of

the chapter, this dimension may also explore the distribution of capabilities envisioned in more regionally limited orders. This could be the case in Turkey's vision of establishing itself as a regional "centre state" (*merkez ülke*) in the Middle East or in the "free and open Indo-Pacific" (FOIP) concept endorsed by Japan (Chapters 8 and 12).

The distributional dimension as understood here extends beyond material building blocks, such as military capabilities or economic, technological, geographical, and demographic resources, within an order – although capabilities obviously do matter. However, the distribution of capabilities encompasses a social dimension, since material resources acquire differing meanings within different social contexts (Reus-Smit 2004, 55–63; Nye 2021; Zala 2021). Consequently, this dimension encourages the authors to focus on these meanings and ask, for example, how or by which standards should great-power status be determined within the international order, or what kinds of privileges and obligations do the great powers have regarding the order and its stability (cf. Miller 2021; Mukherjee 2022). Central to this is the question of who is responsible for the provision of public, club, and private goods within the order (cf. Gilpin 1981; Kindleberger 1981; Nexon, Cooley, and Andersen 2021).

The second analytical category, the *normative dimension*, guides the attention of the authors towards values and norms embedded in the ordering visions. Within this dimension, the chapters will analyse what kinds of values, norms, and ideas are the great powers promoting to serve as a moral compass for the international order. The dimension examines how the proposed normative visions relate to the established liberal values that underlie the current fraying order, or how they compare to the core principles of international law, broadly understood. Normative visions discussed in the book range from those supporting the *status quo* to forms of normative revisionism. However, both come in different shades. The former contains Japan's almost reflexive weddedness to the liberal international order (Chapter 8) and France's attempt to frame a distinct European normative conception within that constellation (Chapter 5). The latter ranges from India's subtle "post-Western" identity as a bridge between the West and the Global South (Chapter 9) to Russia's illiberal and conservative vision (Chapter 15).

Besides comparing different normative parameters proposed by the great powers, the normative dimension also encourages authors to examine the relationship between the domestic normative order of the great power and its global vision. Are the normative visions merely outward extensions of culturally grounded value sets (Kupchan 2014), something we could perhaps expect of powers wedded to maintaining the current order, or perhaps secondary to a strong domestic agenda (cf. Chapter 13 on Saudi Arabia). Or is the relationship between actor and order actually more complex and systemic, in which the great powers themselves, along with their visions, are being shaped by the order, as G. John Ikenberry and Daniel Nexon (2019) have suggested?

The third *institutional dimension* focuses on the role that institutions play in the ordering visions. To make a distinction to the normative dimension, by institutions we primarily refer to "secondary institutions" as defined in the English School

literature, namely international organisations, forums, and minilateral groupings, which provide venues for international exchanges (Buzan 2004). From the perspective of great powers, international institutions are both legitimising and stabilising cornerstones of the order as well as instruments for power projection. For other states, institutions provide vital platforms for cooperation and information sharing, while also occasionally establishing curbs for arbitrary exercises of power by the great powers (Ikenberry 2012; Krisch 2005).

The institutional analytical dimension thus focuses on the structures of interaction that the great powers are promoting in their ordering visions. Key questions within this dimension include whether the great powers are committed to the established structure of institutions (centred on the United Nations), and whether, despite this commitment, they seek to establish new, alternative structures and forums for advancing their interests. Of course, it is also important to consider what roles the powers envisage for different actors in the institutions of the order, whether the powers look to global, regional, or even subregional institutions in their vision, and what are the most important areas (e.g. security, economic, technological) for institutional innovation. The institutional dimension, along with the normative one, obviously allows us to also consider what constitutes legitimate international leadership beyond mere recognition of raw material factors in an international order as a social arena (Reus-Smit 2007).

Finally, the fourth analytical dimension explores the temporal aspects of the ordering visions. This dimension aims to shed light on the historical evolution of the visions and their envisioned future trajectories. From the temporal perspective the chapters may ask, for example, how a particular vision has evolved within the suggested time frame of the book (2014–2024), encompassing events from the Russian occupation of Crimea through the global pandemic to the ongoing war in Ukraine. Going further, the chapters may assess to what extent the visions draw on established foreign policy conventions and thought patterns, or whether they also incorporate elements from a nostalgised past. China's vision, for instance, builds on the traditional foreign policy vocabulary of the People's Republic of China (PRC), at the same time engaging with the idea of reviving the ancient East Asian *tianxia* order (Chapter 3), while the French vision has not shaken off the country's Gaullo-Mitterrandian baggage (Chapter 5), and the idea of Global Britain certainly plays with Britain's imperial history (Chapter 7). Finally, temporality also encompasses the future: When, if ascertainable at all, are the visions expected to materialise, and how utopian are their ultimate goals?

The four analytical dimensions serve as broadly overlapping and flexible conceptual tools rather than a rigid framework to be strictly adhered to. They constitute a sufficiently wieldy analytical framework for guiding analysis of cases that also require attention to specificities, given the different histories and political cultures of the powers we analyse. The framework can also be presented in terms of guiding example questions to the authors (see Table 1.1). Furthermore, it provides a conceptual thread that binds the chapters into a cohesive narrative, facilitating the comparison of the visions in the concluding chapter. Given that none of the chapters aim to explain the totality of its corresponding vision, authors were encouraged

Table 1.1 Four dimensions for the analysis of key states'/actors' order(ing) visions

Distributional dimension • What is the desired distribution of capabilities in the international system that the state/actor envisions? • What are the relevant foundations for international influence according to the state/actor? • What defines status hierarchies in the international order (i.e. what defines "great" vs. "other" powers in the order)? • Which actor/groups of actors should have the responsibility for producing public/club/private goods in the desired order?	**Normative dimension** • What are the key values, ideas (or sets of ideas), and accepted practices that should undergird international order? • How should the international legal foundations of the order be organised? • To what extent should the internal mode of governance of states/actors have bearing upon their participation in and relationship with the desired international order?
Institutional dimension • What kinds of institutions should be utilised to govern/maintain/develop international order? • What should the role of great/middle/small powers and other (i.e. non-state) actors be in the key institutions of the order? • What is the desired scope of key institutions (e.g. global, regional, subregional)? • Which domains should institutional cooperation extend to/prioritise (security, economic, technological etc.)?	**Temporal dimension** • How has the state's/actor's ordering vision evolved across time (i.e. from 2014 onwards)? • When should the state's/actor's desired order be achieved and how future-oriented is the ordering vision? • What are the real-world prospects of the ordering vision?

to apply the framework in various differing ways. A chapter could emphasise one or two of the dimensions (e.g. how does a state X vision an optimal balance of power in an order) and highlight certain, more narrow aspects of an envisioned order. Furthermore, as the scope of the chapters varies from visions of a global scale (e.g. United States, China, or India) to more regionally focused "sub-order" visions of middle powers (e.g. Saudi Arabia or Turkey), the framework can be applied at different levels of analysis as well.

As the focus of the book is on official ordering visions, the chapters primarily utilised official and authoritative documents and statements produced in the past ten years or so – although some authors opted for a longer-term view – as primary research material. However, due to the diversity of actors, which vary greatly in political systems and strategic cultures, the source materials also come in different forms, languages, and cultural nuances. Not all the powers discussed in the chapters publish official security strategies, let alone clearly stated ordering vision documents. The vision, in some cases, needs to be discerned implicitly from speeches and statements of senior state leaders or from other publications, which do not directly or manifestly engage in ordering. The diversity of actors and sources necessitates methodological diversity and an emphasis on the authors' expertise on their respective powers, regions, and their cultural and political characteristics.

Plan of the Volume: 14 Ordering Visions for a Turbulent World

The individual chapters of the volume are divided into three parts, the *Superpower Contenders*, *Status Quo Powers* and *Revisionists and Post-Westernisers*, each of the parts analysing the visions of key powers. These categories are naturally ideal types, and we are fully aware of the different ways in which a status quo or revisionist inclinations of our powers are multidimensional and can be problematised (see earlier). In a concluding chapter, we will draw the main conclusions from the comparative perspective and suggest ideas for further research.

In the first part, Ville Sinkkonen (Chapter 2) unpacks the ordering vision of the United States during the Obama, first Trump, and Biden presidencies. He argues that there no longer exists a shared vision of international order and the United States' ideal place in the world. Profound political divisions have emerged over the level of global engagement, core values, and especially to what extent those should be tied to defending liberal democracy. This ideational competition creates profound unpredictability in policy conduct and opens space for disruptive agency, which is already being utilised by the second Trump administration. However, even in the current environment of fluctuation, it is clear that the prominence of China as a great-power competitor will remain a key concern for American leaders in the future. In Chapter 3, Matti Puranen and Julie Yu-Wen Chen explore the Chinese ordering vision. Since the creation of the People's Republic in 1949, the Chinese position on the international order has been contradictory, but during Xi Jinping's era, the attitude towards the status quo order has become clearly assertive, manifest in China's anti-Western posture. By studying China's three key policy initiatives from 2021 to 2023 – particularly on the "Global Security Initiative" – the authors analyse the security dimensions of China's ordering vision. The endgame of China's recent initiatives, the authors suggest, is to reshape the liberal international order by stripping it of its liberal underpinnings and to establish China as its unofficial centre.

In the second part, we turn to "status quo powers", the defenders of the liberal international order, or what is left of it. These powers' political imaginations, in particular in Europe, have been heavily affected by Russia's aggression against Ukraine since 2014. In the EU, France, and especially Germany, the change has been rather fundamental. In Chapter 4, Niklas Helwig, Marco Siddi, and Ville Sinkkonen show how the EU's vision of the international order has evolved towards "effective multilateralism" and "strategic partnerships", reflecting a global shift towards multipolarity. In addition, since Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022, the EU has begun to restore its military capabilities while seeking stronger strategic autonomy, processes which aim at greater international influence but also challenge the internal cohesion of the Union and its credibility in the eyes of others, especially partners in the so-called Global South. France, analysed in Chapter 5, has for long followed a "Gaullo-Mitterrandist" path marked by independence, universal values, and a balancing role. As Garrett Martin shows, France's renewed approach to the European security architecture, where Russia is seen as having no place, is a deviation from this tradition, and suggests that France's long-held vision

of international order could be shifting. Chapter 6 focuses on the *Zeitenwende* that followed Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022, upending the German post-war and post-unification foreign and security policy posture. Before, Germany's vision rested upon an ideational-normative framework, where the Western liberal international order had succeeded in replacing the law of the powerful with the power of international law, as Antti Seppo puts it. However, *Zeitenwende* has since led to a profound rethinking of the vision of international order and Germany's desired role in it – with warfare-capable armed forces to create deterrence and therefore guarantee peace in the future.

In Chapter 7, Juha Jokela elaborates on the consequences of Brexit for the United Kingdom's international ordering vision. After the decision to withdraw from the EU, a vision of Global Britain – harkening back to Britain's old role as a global great power and empire – has been introduced, debated, and bolstered. The United Kingdom has had to recalibrate its approach to defending the liberal international order in the new institutional setting and build its credibility and status anew. This has occurred amidst fundamental changes in the European security environment. Japan, another defender of the liberal international order, stands out with its ambitious vision of the future international order. In Chapter 8, Pekka Korhonen analyses Japan's regional and global significance as a peculiar status quo power that continues to support the United States as a security provider as well as the liberal hegemon, but seems not fully dependent on it as Tokyo's ideas of "FOIP" develop further.

In the third part of the book, the perspective shifts to the "post-Westernisers" and revisionists of the status quo order. India, analysed by Bart Gaens in Chapter 9, is an ascending great power and a "pivotal state" with an ambitious vision of a more balanced and inclusive international order. India's vision is marked by its multi-alignment policy, self-perception as the voice of the so-called Global South, and a strong future orientation. Similarly, Brazil and South Africa are strong ascending regional powers with young and growing populations. In Chapter 10, Nuppu Pelevina unpacks Brazil's visions of the international order under the consecutive administrations of Lula da Silva and Jair Bolsonaro, both of whom have focused on challenging the liberal international order and advocating for just, multipolar order, but each in their own way. Justice and multipolarity are important signifiers also for South Africa, analysed by Liisa Laakso and Iina Soiri in Chapter 11. The authors show how the country has developed into a global actor seeking to advance peace, just economic development, and the interests of the whole continent – or "African Renaissance" – globally. Moreover, adherence to justice as a core principle shows in South Africa's appeals to the International Court of Justice, illustrating the state's (contested) emphasis on human rights in its ordering vision.

Turkey, analysed by Toni Alaranta in Chapter 12, envisions and aims to actively shape a post-Western international order. Since President Erdogan's rise to power and the formation of the AKP regime – influenced also by the US invasion of Iraq in 2003 and the regional dynamics it unleashed – Turkey has taken a proactive role in rebuilding the normative order from neo-Ottoman, civilisational assumptions that seem to resonate also outside Turkey in other Muslim-majority countries. In

Chapter 13, Olli Ruohomäki analyses Saudi Arabia's "Vision 2030" document, which focuses on the domestic development of the country, but simultaneously illustrates Saudi Arabia's future-oriented, optimistic stance vis-à-vis the international arena. The Kingdom has also sensed that the best way to ensure the regional stability necessary for the realisation of its ambitions is to bet on diverse relationships in an increasingly multipolar world.

Moving from the "non-Western" challengers towards the "anti-Western" ones, Iran and Russia – having also deepened their mutual relationship in recent years – draw on the grievances they have regarding the status quo international order. Iran, as Majid Imani and Zahra Edalati explain in Chapter 14, envisions an international "post-polar" order, where it, as a leading Islamic and revisionist anti-imperialist state, would find its own influential role as a regional military power. However, Iran's domestic and structural problems as well as its hostile rhetoric towards the West, and towards the United States in particular, restrict its prospects of succeeding in realising the vision. Finally, Chapter 15 focuses on Russia's vision of the international order that embraces a constant great-power struggle, military might, and spheres of influence as its core assumptions. Mikhail Komin and Veera Laine show how the Kremlin has, during the past two decades – and especially since 2022 – interlinked concepts of sovereignty, state-civilisation, multipolarity, and anti-colonialism into a counter-hegemonic vision of the international order, which it now pursues through war in Ukraine.

Finally, the conclusion pulls together the key threads of the chapters in terms of the four-dimensional analytical framework. In the end, it is possible to consider how (in)congruent the various ordering visions are and fathom the implications of our findings for the future trajectory of international order. To what extent is there space left for shared solutions and mutually beneficial world-making in an era marked by both contested modernities and a pressing need for collective solutions to complex global problems, which transcend borders, space, and time?

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