Liberal modernity and the classical realist critique of the (present) international order

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This article is situated in two debates: first, in the growing body of literature on classical realism, particularly its critique of liberal modernity in the twenty-first century;[1] second, in existing debates, covered in two special issues of *International Affairs* and elsewhere,[2] on the crisis of the present international order. Nothing exemplifies the sense of this crisis better than the opening question in *International Affairs*' special issue on the centenary of the Paris peace conference: 'Are we in danger of a repeat in some form of the 1910s or the 1930s?'[3] This article asks not *whether* but *why* we are talking about this danger today. Despite Joe Biden's victory in the US presidential election and his avowed intention to restore US leadership in the international order, this 'why' question remains relevant today. While Trump was defeated, Trumpism, a doctrine that sought to delegitimize American democracy and the US role in the present international order, and for which over 72 million Americans voted, remains a political force to be accounted for.[4] In proposing such an account, this article makes a contribution on classical realism by demonstrating

1 Vibeke Tjalve, *Realist strategies of republican peace* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2008); Daniel Bessner and Nicholas Guilhot, 'How realism waltzed off: liberalism and decision-making in Kenneth Waltz's neorealism', *International Security* 40: 2, 2015, pp. 87–118; Nicholas Guilhot, *After the Enlightenment: political realism and international relations in the mid-twentieth century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017); Udi Greenberg, *The Weimar century: German émigrés and the ideological foundations of the Cold War* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015); Jonathan Kirshner, 'The tragedy of offensive realism: classical realism and the rise of China', *European Journal of International Relations* 18: 1, 2012, pp. 53–75.

2 Markus Kornprobst and T. V. Paul, 'Globalization, deglobalization and the liberal international order', *International Affairs* 97: 5, 2021, pp. 1305–16; Margaret MacMillan, Anand Menon and Patrick Brown, 'Introduction: world politics 100 years after the Paris peace conference', *International Affairs* 95: 1, 2019, pp. 1–5; David Lake, Lisa Martin and Thomas Risse, 'Challenges to the liberal order: reflections on international organization', *International Organization* 75: 1, 2021, pp. 225–57; John Ikenberry and Daniel Nexon, 'Hegemony Studies 3.0: the dynamics of hegemonic orders', *Security Studies* 28: 3, 2019, pp. 395–421.

3 MacMillan et al., 'Introduction', p. 5.

4 Kristen Hopewell, 'When the hegemon goes rogue: leadership amid the US assault on the liberal trading order', *International Affairs* 97: 4, 2021, pp. 1025–43; Carla Norrlof, 'Is COVID-19 the end of US hegemony? Public bads, leadership failures and monetary hegemony', *International Affairs* 96: 5, 2020, pp. 1281–303.

its relevance to explaining the crisis of the present international order. The significance of this contribution lies in the lacuna that classical realism identifies in contemporary debates on this crisis: namely, their misunderstanding of its nature and, in turn, their recommendation of policy proposals that are unlikely to resolve it.

Central to the classical realist explanation of the crisis of the international order in the twenty-first century is the context of liberal modernity. This context left a vacuum in meaning that heightened the individual's sense of insecurity and powerlessness on the one hand, while, on the other, intensifying the individual's identification with extreme forms of nationalism and violence. This became the challenge posed by liberal modernity in the post-1945 international order. This article argues that the present international order is an extension of the post-1945 order that never resolved this challenge. While the 'embedded' form of liberalism that lasted until the early 1970s made social compromises, such as welfare provision and regulated employment, that mitigated the socio-economic insecurities of the individual in liberal modernity, it did not resolve this challenge; and the later advancement of neo-liberalism only further intensified it. The article thus criticizes existing debates for omitting the challenge of liberal modernity from their analyses of the crisis of the present international order. It concludes that if the present international order is to be put on a more stable and peaceful footing, it requires a more radical break from its post-1945 and post-Bretton Woods past: a break that addresses the psycho-social needs of the individual in liberal modernity.

To develop this argument, the article is divided into three sections. The first presents an overview of the classical realist critique of liberal modernity. The second contextualizes this critique in an analysis of the crisis of the international order since 1945. The third outlines classical realist policy proposals to mitigate this crisis.

Extreme nationalism and violence: a classical realist critique of liberal modernity

Central to the classical realist analysis of nationalism and violence in the twentieth century is the context of liberal modernity. The process of secularization from the eighteenth century onwards led to the breakdown of traditional religious values, leaving a vacuum in meaning that heightened the individual's sense of insecurity and powerlessness in the twentieth century. The classical realists drew a link between this heightened sense of insecurity and powerlessness and the individual's quest for security and power through identification with extreme forms of nationalism and violence. This link can be found across various classical realist contributions, although most explicitly in the work of Morgenthau, Niebuhr and Carr, who are covered in this section to illustrate the classical realist critique of liberal modernity.

The classical realist critique of liberal modernity emerges in the twentieth-century context of total wars, economic depression and totalitarian ideologies.[5]

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[5] Guilhot, *After the Enlightenment*, pp. 76–7; Duncan Bell, 'Introduction: under an empty sky', in Duncan Bell,

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This context, according to the classical realists, repudiated the rationalist premises of liberal modernity—namely, the victory of reason over superstition, the achievement of mastery over politics and society through the rationalist means of science and technology, and the harmony of interests in the free market. The classical realists here shared Marx's critique of liberal rationalism as the ideology of the dominant class concealing its own vested interests, while also rejecting alternative—including Marxist—forms of rationalism.[6] They argued that rationalism, in both its liberal and its Marxist manifestations, failed to recognize that the lust for power and self-deception are endemic in politics.[7] In attempting to transcend power through reason, rationalism advanced pseudo-scientific dogmas in the form of political ideologies that liberated power from the moral restraints of religion. The classical realists thus situated the critique of rationalism in the broader context of post-eighteenth-century secularism. Secularism meant that the 'science of politics' in the modern age, in the form of political ideologies, was freed from the moral limitations of religious nature. Morgenthau's first book in America, *Scientific man vs power politics*,[8] took on the task of refuting this science, a task to which he returned in his last book, *Science: servant or master?*. 'Science', Morgenthau argued,

has not only lost its relation to a transcendent value from which it could receive its meaning, but, more importantly, it has also lost the awareness of the need for such a transcendent orientation ... the moral crisis of science is concomitant with the disintegration of the value systems of a religious nature.[9]

As Nicholas Guilhot argues, therefore, 'the founding fathers of IR theory located in the process of secularisation the root cause of the moral abstractions that had led international politics into the disasters of the twentieth century'.[10] The classical realists' critique of secularism, however, did not mean that they were nostalgic for anti-democratic and 'unaccountable forms of decision-making'.[11] Rather, their critique aimed to foster the values of tolerance and humility in order to defend pluralism and salvage liberal democracy from the threat of 'secular religions'.[12] The classical realists argued that the ubiquity of these secular religions in the form of political ideologies lay in a crucial implication of secularism: the vacuum in meaning it created that heightened the individual's sense of insecurity and powerlessness

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ed., *Political thought and international relations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), p. 7.

[6] Reinhold Niebuhr, *The nature and destiny of man*, vol. 1: *Human nature* (London: Nisbet, 1943), p. 37; Hans J. Morgenthau, 'Fragment of an intellectual autobiography', in Kenneth Thompson and Robert Myers, eds, *Truth and tragedy: a tribute to Hans Morgenthau* (Washington DC: New Republic, 1977), p. 14; E. H. Carr, 'An autobiography', in Michael Cox, ed., *E. H. Carr: a critical appraisal* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2000), pp. xxi–xxii.

[7] Christoph Frei, *Hans J. Morgenthau: an intellectual biography* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2001).

[8] Hans J. Morgenthau, *Scientific man vs power politics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1946).

[9] Hans J. Morgenthau, *Science: servant or master?* (New York: New American Library, 1972), p. 13.

[10] Guilhot, *After the Enlightenment*, p. 113.

[11] Guilhot, *After the Enlightenment*, p. 15.

[12] Felix Rösch, 'Policing intellectual boundaries? Émigré scholars, the Council on Foreign Relations Study Group on International Theory, and American international relations in the 1950s', *International History Review* 42: 3, 2020, pp. 607–24; Haro Karkour and Dominik Giese, 'Bringing Morgenthau's ethics in: pluralism, incommensurability and the turn from fragmentation to dialogue in IR', *European Journal of International Relations* 26: 4, 2020, pp. 1106–28.

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on the one hand, and on the other led the individual to seek security and power through identification with extreme forms of nationalism and violence.

Individual insecurity and powerlessness in classical realism are rooted in the contingency of existence and human finitude, and constitute a key driver in the quest for the absolute, for example in the love of partner or God, or, in corrupt form, absolute power. For example, in his essay on 'Love and power', Morgenthau argued that the pursuit of love—of partner or God—and of power are both rooted in the human quest for the absolute in a reality of contingency and finitude. In the attempt to escape finitude, to 'become what he is destined to be', man becomes aware of his need of others, of his loneliness. Loneliness, therefore, is the existential feeling of insecurity and powerlessness; and the more intensely it is felt, the stronger the desire to escape it in the absolute—love or power. 'It is that striving to escape his loneliness which gives the impetus to both the lust for power and the longing for love.'[13] The nineteenth and twentieth centuries stand out in witnessing the heightened sense of insecurity and powerlessness of the lonely individual as a result of 'the emancipation of the individual from the ties of tradition, especially in the form of religion, of the increased rationalisation of life and work, and of cyclical economic crises'.[14] This 'emancipation', according to Morgenthau, was implicated in the individual's identification with extreme forms of nationalism and violence, since 'the insecurity of the groups affected by these factors found an emotional outlet in fixed and emotionally accentuated nationalistic identification'.[15] This 'nationalistic identification' provided a sense of security and power to the now increasingly insecure and powerless individual in liberal modernity.

Morgenthau's textbook case for this dynamic under liberal modernity was Nazi Germany. 'This relation between social integration, personal insecurity, and the ferocity of modern nationalistic power drives can be studied to particular advantage in German fascism,' Morgenthau wrote, arguing that it made Germany an 'easy prey for National Socialism'.[16] Specifically, German society in the wake of the First World War faced two key challenges that heightened individual insecurity and powerlessness: the loss of traditional values and the 'proletarization' of the middle class through inflation and economic crisis, bringing 'all the different groups of the German people in different ways face to face with the actual or threatened loss of social status and intellectual, moral and economic insecurity'.[17] In this context, National Socialism took the opportunity to 'identify in a truly totalitarian fashion the aspirations of the individual German with the power objectives of the German nation'.[18] Germany was not unique in following this dynamic under liberal modernity: 'The German variety of modern nationalism differs in degree rather than in kind from the nationalism of other great powers, such as that of the Soviet

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[13] Hans J. Morgenthau, 'Love and power', in *Politics in the twentieth century*, vol. 3 (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1962), p. 8.
[14] Hans J. Morgenthau, *Politics among nations: the struggle for power and peace*, 5th edn (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1978), p. 113.
[15] Morgenthau, *Politics among nations*, p. 113.
[16] Morgenthau, *Politics among nations*, p. 113.
[17] Morgenthau, *Politics among nations*, p. 114.
[18] Morgenthau, *Politics among nations*, p. 114.

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Union or of the United States.'[19] Thus in the USSR, since 'the great mass of the population has no opportunity to satisfy its power drives within domestic society … a totalitarian regime projects these frustrations, insecurities, and fears onto the international scene where the individual Russian finds … vicarious satisfaction for his aspirations for power'.[20] Similarly in the US context, the 'atomisation' of US society through excessive individualism, along with the fear of international communism, led Morgenthau to prophesy that if the trend

toward ever increasing domestic frustration and international instability is not reversed, the United States is likely to partake to a growing extent in those tendencies in modern culture which have found their most extreme manifestations in Soviet Russia and National Socialist Germany.[21]

The link between extreme nationalism and violence on the one hand and the context of liberal modernity and the insecurity and powerlessness of the 'average man' on the other was also articulated in Niebuhr's works. Like Morgenthau, Niebuhr rooted the will to power in the individual's psycho-social state of insecurity, and the consequent need to reground a being that is threatened by contingency and insignificance. 'The ambition of man to be something', as Niebuhr put it, 'is always partly prompted by the fear of meaninglessness which threatens him by reason of the contingent character of his existence.'[22] This threat to existence creates a sense of insecurity that the quest for power seeks to secure: 'The ego does not feel secure and therefore grasps for more power in order to make itself secure.'[23] 'Power', in this case, 'seeks a security beyond the limits of human finiteness.'[24] Extreme nationalism and violence secure this sense of self beyond finiteness. Thus, while differing from Morgenthau in his 'Augustinian-styled Christian realist assumptions about Man', as Schuett maintains, like Morgenthau 'Niebuhr argues that Man's will to power, will to assert himself, and feelings of impotence lead to problematic group-behavioural patterns on the national and, consequently, international sphere'.[25] 'The frustrations of the average man, who can never realize the power and the glory which his imagination sets as the ideal', as Niebuhr put it plainly in *Moral man and immoral society*, 'makes him the more willing tool and victim of the imperial ambitions of his group. His frustrated individual ambitions gain a measure of satisfaction in the power and aggrandisement of his nation.'[26] Niebuhr repeated his argument in *The nature and destiny of man*:

It may be that such group pride represents a particular temptation to individuals who suffer from specific forms of the sense of inferiority. The relation of modern fascist nationalism to the insecurity and sense of inferiority of the lower middle classes is therefore significant.[27]

[19] Morgenthau, *Politics among nations*, p. 114.
[20] Morgenthau, *Politics among nations*, p. 115.
[21] Morgenthau, *Politics among nations*, p. 115.
[22] Niebuhr, *Nature and destiny of man*, p. 198.
[23] Niebuhr, *Nature and destiny of man*, p. 201.
[24] Niebuhr, *Nature and destiny of man*, p. 204.
[25] Robert Schuett, *Political realism, Freud and human nature in International Relations* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), p. 50.
[26] Reinhold Niebuhr, *Moral man and immoral society* (New York: Scribner, 1932), p. 18.
[27] Niebuhr, *Nature and destiny of man*, p. 226.

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In a modern secular age, the nation replaces God in providing a sense of security and power to the individual. 'The nation', in Niebuhr's words,

[claims] that it is the instrument of a value more universal than its contingent self … The significance of this claim is that through it human pride and self-assertion reach their ultimate form and seek to break all bounds of finiteness. The nation pretends to be God.[28]

Individual insecurity and powerlessness in the face of finitude find the absolute in the new powerful God: the nation. This explains why 'the individual' in Niebuhr's view, 'who emancipates himself from the social solidarities of agrarian feudalism and the religious authoritarianism of medievalism is, within a brief span of history, subjected to the mechanical solidarities of industrial collectivism'.[29] The more intensely the individual 'suffer[s] from specific forms of the sense of inferiority' in liberal modernity, the higher the emotional need for identification with the 'mechanical solidarities' of modern nationalism. The modern nation becomes the medium through which individual insecurity is released to the international and 'not easily brought under rational control'.[30]

No classical realist thinker contextualized the link between extreme nationalism and violence on the one hand and the context of liberal modernity in the twentieth century on the other more systematically than E. H. Carr. This link is made not only in *The twenty years' crisis* but also across Carr's wartime and early postwar writings such as *Conditions of peace*, *Nationalism and after* and *The new society*. As in the work of Morgenthau and Niebuhr, in Carr's analysis the individual's identification with the powerful nation is rooted not in economic well-being *per se*—nor in poverty for that matter, since Carr acknowledged that the twentieth century was wealthier and more prosperous than previous epochs[31]—but in the psycho-social consequences of liberal modernity for the individual. Carr concurred with Morgenthau and Niebuhr that 'the individual seeks strength through combination with others in the group', and that the human psycho-social condition dictates that 'if we cannot win ourselves, we want our side to win'.[32] And while Carr praised the condition of full employment that war offered, he argued that the function of war was far from being only economic: 'Apart from the emotional excitement associated with war, it provides a sense of meaning and purpose widely felt to be lacking in modern life.'[33] 'Hence,' Carr continued, 'war has become the most powerful known instrument of social solidarity.'[34] Thus, he argued, 'the new faith' after the war 'must solve the unemployment problem by providing a moral purpose as potent as was religion in the Middle Ages'.[35]

[28] Niebuhr, *Nature and destiny of man*, p. 225.
[29] Niebuhr, *Nature and destiny of man*, p. 97.
[30] Reinhold Niebuhr, *The irony of American history* (New York: Scribner, 1952), p. 18.
[31] Edward H. Carr, *Conditions of peace* (London: Macmillan, 1943), p. 114.
[32] Edward H. Carr, *The twenty years' crisis, 1919–1939* (London: Macmillan, 1984; first publ. 1939), p. 159.
[33] Carr, *Conditions of peace*, p. 115.
[34] Carr, *Conditions of peace*, p. 115.
[35] Carr, *Conditions of peace*, p. 120.

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The psycho-social aspect is undertheorized in the literature on Carr's analysis of nationalism.[36] In his view, liberal modernity itself presented challenges that need to be overcome, and these challenges were not, strictly speaking, socio-economic but psycho-social; that is to say, they entailed restoring meaning and social solidarity in a modern secular age. This distinction in Carr's work is crucial because, on the one hand, it shows that Carr, along with Niebuhr and Morgenthau, rejected the economically reductionist explanations of extreme nationalism and violence;[37] and, on the other hand, it shows that the classical realists, Carr included, located what is currently known as the 'cultural backlash' thesis against globalization in the historical context of liberal modernity.[38] This context is important because it highlights a vacuum in meaning that is peculiar to the age and can be instrumentalized by demagogues who may promise a 'restoration' of traditional moral values and solidarities. This explains why, for classical realists, the solution to the horrors of the twentieth century lay in nothing less than the renewal of moral purpose to salvage liberal democracy.[39] While Niebuhr and Morgenthau advocated transcendental moral standards to guide this purpose, the absence of such standards in Carr's work led IR scholars to suggest that, unlike Niebuhr and Morgenthau, he was a moral relativist—a charge levelled by Morgenthau himself in a 1948 *World Politics* review.[40] Carr's relativism, however, can be contested, not only with reference to his emphasis on the ethical principle of 'fairness',[41] but also because, like Morgenthau and Niebuhr, he was concerned with the moral crisis of democracy: democracy could no longer bring consensus on fairness between the haves and have-nots.

The context of liberal modernity was, therefore, central to the classical realist explanation of the horrors of the twentieth century. This context left a vacuum in meaning that heightened the individual's sense of insecurity and powerlessness, and intensified the individual's identification with extreme forms of nationalism and violence. Did the post-1945 order address the challenge of the insecurity and powerlessness of the individual highlighted by classical realists in the context of liberal modernity?

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[36] Ernest Gellner, 'Nationalism reconsidered and E. H. Carr', *Review of International Studies* 18: 4, 1992, pp. 285–93; Randall Germain, 'E. H. Carr and IPE: an essay in retrieval', *International Studies Quarterly* 63: 4, 2019, pp. 952–62; Daniel Kenealy and Konstantinos Kostagiannis, 'Realist visions of European union: E. H. Carr and integration', *Millennium* 41: 2, 2013, pp. 221–46; Andrew Linklater, 'E. H. Carr, nationalism and the future of the sovereign state', in Cox, ed., *E. H. Carr*, pp. 234–57; Jan Pettman, 'Nationalism and after', *Review of International Studies* 24: 5, 1998, pp. 149–64.

[37] A recent example is Dany Rodrik, 'The fatal flaw of neoliberalism: it's bad economics', *Guardian*, 14 Nov. 2017.

[38] For accounts of the 'cultural backlash', see Pippa Norris and Ronald Inglehart, *Cultural backlash: Trump, Brexit and the rise of authoritarian populism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), ch. 10; Eric Kaufman, *Whiteshift: populism, immigration and the future of white majorities* (London: Penguin, 2018), p. 129.

[39] On Morgenthau and Niebuhr, see Vibeke Tjalve, 'Realism and the politics of (dis)enchantment', in Bell, ed., *Political thought and international relations*, pp. 177–94. On Carr, see Haro Karkour, 'Debating global justice with Carr: the crisis of laissez faire and the legitimacy problem in the twentieth century', *Journal of International Political Theory* 17: 1, 2021, pp. 81–98.

[40] Sean Molloy, 'Hans J. Morgenthau versus E. H. Carr: conflicting conceptions of ethics in realism' in Bell, ed., *Political thought and international relations*, p. 83; see also Morgenthau's critique in 'The political science of E. H. Carr', *World Politics* 1: 1, 1948, pp. 127–34.

[41] Arash Pashakhanlou, 'The ethics of Carr and Wendt: fairness and peace', *Journal of International Political Theory* 14: 3, 2018, pp. 314–30.

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The challenge of liberal modernity in the post-1945 and present international order

The present international order is an extension of the post-1945 order, which never resolved the challenge of the insecurity and powerlessness of the individual that classical realists highlighted in the context of liberal modernity. While the 'embedded' form of liberalism that lasted until the early 1970s made social compromises that mitigated the socio-economic insecurities of the individual, it did not resolve this challenge; and the later promotion of neo-liberalism only further intensified it.

What Karl Polanyi referred to as the 'great transformation' was the transformation to a post-industrial society that thinned the social bond among individuals through rendering market principles, particularly the principle of 'gain', dominant in all aspects of social life. In times of crisis, such a society threatened the very subsistence of the individual, who could rely neither on the market nor on the safety net of the group. 'The stupendous industrial achievements of market economy', Polanyi concluded, 'had been bought at the price of great harm to the substance of society.'[42] Fascism in this context rose out of 'the conflict between the market and the elementary requirements of an organised social life'.[43] It replaced market freedom with social security, which the individual reclaimed in the community bond of the group.[44] Following the collapse of the international order in total war, the post-1945 order was designed precisely to address the challenge posed by the free market to social stability. A factor distinguishing the post-1945 order from the post-1918 order, therefore, was that it took a 'very different approach to [economic and social] planning'.[45] Indeed, in his seminal paper on 'embedded liberalism', John Ruggie argued that 'efforts to construct international economic regimes in the interwar period … stood in contradiction to the transformation in the mediating role of the state between market and society, which altered fundamentally the social purpose of domestic and international authority' after 1945.[46] This role of the state came in the form of an 'embedded liberalism', whose aim was 'to devise a form of multilateralism that is compatible with the requirements of domestic stability', evident in phenomena such as full employment and socio-economic stability.[47] In his 1982 article, Ruggie argued that this 'compromise' of embedded liberalism was threatened by the resurgence of neo-liberalism. More recently, Ruggie reiterated that concern, arguing that 'our current era of globalisation and its neoliberal paradigm have reached the point themselves of suffering from a profound crisis of legitimacy'.[48] Ruggie thus called for policy-makers to

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[42] Karl Polanyi, *The great transformation: the political and economic origins of our time* (Boston: Beacon, 2001; first publ. 1944), p. 195.

[43] Polanyi, *The great transformation*, p. 257.

[44] Polanyi, *The great transformation*, p. 263.

[45] Barry Eichengreen, 'Versailles: the economic legacy', *International Affairs* 95: 1, 2019, p. 18.

[46] John Ruggie, 'International regimes, transactions, and change: embedded liberalism in the postwar economic order', *International Organization* 36: 2, 1982, p. 392.

[47] Ruggie, 'International regimes', p. 399.

[48] Rawi Abdelal and John Ruggie, 'The principles of embedded liberalism: social legitimacy and global capitalism', in D. Moss and J. Cisternino, eds, *New perspectives on regulation* (Cambridge, MA: Tobin Project, 2009), p. 153.

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'revisit the principles of embedded liberalism' and 'legitimise international markets by reconciling them to social values and shared institutional practices'.[49] 'During the 1920s and 1930s,' Ruggie argued, 'the West learned to mistrust unregulated financial markets. And then we forgot. Today, we are relearning that lesson.'[50] But what exactly was this 'lesson' that the classical realists learned from the 1920s and 1930s? Did the embedded form of liberalism that lasted until the early 1970s address the challenge of liberal modernity? To answer this question, I turn to Morgenthau's analysis of this period, with a particular focus on Vietnam and McCarthyism.

Morgenthau criticized US policy-makers for not distinguishing Vietnam, 'an independent national Communism after the model of Yugoslavia', where containment was desirable, from Cuba, 'a military and political outpost of the Soviet Union', where containment was essential.[51] The attempt to 'stop Communism everywhere' not only blurred the line between the essential and the desirable from the standpoint of US interests, Morgenthau argued, but also made the use of military force seem like the only viable strategy in Vietnam, irrespective of the reality on the ground. The reality in Vietnam was that the United States waged a war on a popular revolution, and the only way to win that war was 'by killing so many of the enemy that there is nobody left to resist'.[52] 'The '"body count"' therefore became 'the sole measure of success'.[53] In the 1960s, Morgenthau became occupied with the question of why the US government engaged in such an excessively aggressive policy in Vietnam. Cold War historians presented various answers to this question. John Gaddis argued that US officials in Vietnam believed 'that the defence of Southeast Asia was crucial to the maintenance of world order … and that success would enhance American power, prestige, and credibility in the world'.[54] But why was US credibility relevant in Vietnam? As Craig and Logevall note,

America's NATO partners were not questioning Washington's commitment to the Western alliance in the key months of decision on Vietnam. Beijing and Moscow were not indicating a readiness to embark upon a Cold War offensive should the United States opt against large-scale war.[55]

Despite this, US officials exaggerated the threat of communism in Vietnam. To those officials, 'the security of the United States, indeed of the entire non-communist world, was imperilled *wherever* communist challenges came up against American guarantees'.[56] The expansive misapplication of the 'domino theory' was

[49] Abdelal and Ruggie, 'The principles of embedded liberalism', p. 153.
[50] Abdelal and Ruggie, 'The principles of embedded liberalism', p. 159.
[51] Hans Morgenthau, *A new foreign policy for the United States* (London: Pall Mall, 1969), p. 10.
[52] Morgenthau, *A new foreign policy*, p. 137.
[53] Morgenthau, *A new foreign policy*, p. 137.
[54] John Gaddis, *Strategies of containment: a critical appraisal of America's national security policy during the Cold War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005; first publ. 2005), p. 236.
[55] Campbell Craig and Friedrich Logevall, *America's Cold War: the politics of insecurity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009), p. 239.
[56] Gaddis, *Strategies of containment*, p. 238 (emphasis in original).

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not a cause but an effect of such an exaggeration.[57] Others presented an economic explanation for the war: 'The money pumped into the military build-up brought a rosy glow to the American economy.'[58] This argument supports William Appleman Williams's thesis that America's militarism during the Cold War lay in 'the fear that America's economic system would suffer a serious depression if it did not continue to expand overseas'.[59] It is not evident, however, that Vietnam was economically lucrative, particularly after 1967 as it began to weaken the American economy. Furthermore, neither Lafeber nor Williams rejected the argument that US officials exaggerated the threat in Vietnam.[60]

What accounts for US officials' exaggeration of the threat in Vietnam? The answer lay in domestic politics. While public opinion ultimately turned against the war,

the president had strong public support from 1964 to 1966. In December 1965, as he rapidly escalated the conflict, public opinion polls indicated that 58 percent of the American people believed that increased bombing was the way to peace, and 82 percent agreed that US troops would have to remain in Vietnam until the communists agreed to terms. One-third of those having an opinion thought nuclear weapons should be used if they would shorten the war.[61]

The exaggeration of the threat came to respond to domestic opinion and protect the officials' political reputation, lest they appeared weak at home. While public support dissipated after 1966, Johnson's fear of admitting failure meant that the war continued. US credibility in Vietnam was thus relevant to the extent that 'credibility' meant Johnson's 'own personal reputation and historical legacy'.[62] This explains why Morgenthau's account of Vietnam's legacy returned not to the failure of policy, but rather to the dynamics of liberal modernity, and the failure of Johnson's character, particularly his ego, and of American democracy to mitigate them. The failure of American democracy was due to the government's failure to communicate the reality of the great issues of the day—the threat of international revolution, the prospect of nuclear war and, finally, Vietnam—and present policies for society to deliberate on and give their consent to. Unable to deliberate on or influence the great issues of the day, the individual in America became increasingly apathetic and powerless in the face of existential threats such as international revolution and the prospect of nuclear war. This condition, on the one hand, reflected the individual's state of insecurity and powerlessness in liberal modernity, while on the other, it gave the individual the opportunity to seek security and power by identifying with excessive violence in Vietnam. In paragraphs added to the fifth edition of *Politics among nations*, Morgenthau argued

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[57] Melvyn Leffler, *For the soul of mankind: America, the Soviet Union and the Cold War* (New York: Hill & Wang, 2007), pp. 514–15.
[58] Walter Lafeber, Richard Rolenberg and Nancy Woloch, *The American century: a history of the United States since 1890* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2013), pp. 941–2.
[59] William Appleman Williams, *The tragedy of American diplomacy* (London: Norton, 1962), p. 362.
[60] Williams, *The tragedy of American diplomacy*, p. 373.
[61] Lafeber et al., *The American century*, p. 943.
[62] Craig and Logevall, *America's Cold War*, p. 240.

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that Vietnam represented a 'coherent system of irrationality' that is likely to persist in US foreign policy.[63] What Morgenthau meant by an irrational foreign policy was one that reinterpreted reality to inflate threats, and confuse vital and desirable interests in a manner that ultimately rendered excessive violence the end of policy. Violence as an end of policy served not only the policy-makers' egos, but also the individual in American society, by momentarily offering them the illusion of power and security. Such an illusion, on one hand, highlighted the government's failure to communicate the reality in Vietnam and policies on which the public could deliberate and to which they could give their consent. On the other hand, it revealed that Johnson catered to public emotions to maintain his own reputation, through deception. Once public support dissipated, Johnson was left with a failed decision, and his ego would not let him change course. Johnson's policy, Morgenthau concluded, moved 'in a wonderland' of his own 'creation'; and 'the invulnerability of that creation [was] vitally important' to his 'ego'. A change of course 'threatened with destruction the very world within which he moved and put into doubt his competence to understand and act upon it'.[64]

This dynamic, where insecurity and powerlessness feed into nationalism and excessive violence in US foreign policy, predates Vietnam. In his earlier analysis of McCarthyism, for instance, Morgenthau rejected the argument that 'McCarthy was a bad man who managed to deceive the American people'. Instead, Morgenthau argued that 'the American people were no more victimised by McCarthy than were the German people by Hitler … They were delighted to be seduced.'[65] 'The answer' for the success of McCarthyism, Morgenthau wrote,

must be found in the very nature of American society … [McCarthyism] sprang from … the primordial anxiety about [American society's] ability to survive, the fear of losing its reason for being, its identity, itself … McCarthyism [was American society's] defence against alienation.[66]

'The defence that McCarthyism put up against alienation was typically American,' Morgenthau continued, in that it did not target a specific group for suspicion of treason, like the Jews in Nazi Germany, but applied 'to all members of American society without distinction—that is, to America itself'.[67] McCarthyism was xenophobia with American characteristics. It upheld the equality of all citizens before 'the suspicion of being traitors'.[68] McCarthyism thus revealed in American society a sense of 'insecurity repressed. And it took little … to cause that security of the surface to be swallowed up by a tidal wave of insecurity from deep within.'[69]

Given this context, Ikenberry's call to 'restore' American leadership, through pragmatic policies such as re-embedding the markets in domestic social

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[63] Morgenthau, *Politics among nations*, p. 7.
[64] Morgenthau, *A new foreign policy*, p. 156.
[65] Hans Morgenthau, *The purpose of American politics* (New York: Knopf, 1960), p. 145.
[66] Morgenthau, *The purpose of American politics*, p. 146.
[67] Morgenthau, *The purpose of American politics*, p. 148.
[68] Morgenthau, *The purpose of American politics*, p. 149.
[69] Morgenthau, *The purpose of American politics*, p. 236.

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provision of employment and welfare and rebuilding economic multilateralism, fails to account for the fact that the present crisis is rooted in psycho-social dynamics that predate the neo-liberal period.[70] The argument that 'rising trade' in the neo-liberal era 'contributed to the rise of economic anxiety, while migration led to cultural anxiety', is true only to the extent that neo-liberalism intensified (as argued below), rather than caused, the dynamics of liberal modernity.[71] For the 'anxiety', the common theme, is neither economic nor cultural but existential and psycho-social. It predates the neo-liberal era and only manifests itself under neo-liberalism in economic and cultural terms. Nor is the rise of nationalism in the United States the result of the illiberal nature of the rising contender on domestic coalitions;[72] for that argument would also assume, contrary to the empirical record, that US foreign policy was somehow 'liberal' between 1945 and 1989. Aside from Morgenthau's analysis of McCarthyism and Vietnam, however, the evidence from the broader context of US rejection of multilateralism[73] suggests that *illiberalism* dominated US domestic and foreign policy *prior* to the recent 'backlash'.

The rise of neo-liberalism in the years following Morgenthau's writing did not cause but rather further intensified the dynamics of liberal modernity already present in the period of embedded liberalism.

Neo-liberalism and the dynamics of liberal modernity in the present

The consequences of neo-liberalism for the intensification of the dynamics of liberal modernity in US society can be observed in the rising levels of anxiety and death of despair[74] in recent years. The context of these conditions is the social transformations of the 1960s and 1970s, which liberated the individual from traditional mores, and the social impact of neo-liberalism since the late 1970s.[75] The social impact of these phenomena is rendering the individual, particularly among the working classes, increasingly powerless to perform basic social functions such as having a family and/or living as part of a community.[76] In this context, references in Donald Trump's speeches to 'the forgotten men and women of our country [who] will be forgotten no longer' represent a last resort for social support, a 'we feeling' in a society where no one can be trusted any more.[77] The plural is signifi-

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[70] John Ikenberry, *A world safe for democracy: liberal internationalism and the crises of global order* (London: Yale University Press, 2020), pp. 308–309.

[71] Benjamin Miller, 'How making the world in its own liberal image made the West less liberal', *International Affairs* 97: 5, 2021, pp. 1353–75.

[72] Steven Lobell and Jordan Ernstsen, 'The liberal international trading order (LITO) in an era of shifting capabilities', *International Affairs* 97: 5, 2021, pp. 1489–504.

[73] Steve Chan, 'Challenging the liberal order: the US hegemon as a revisionist power', *International Affairs* 97: 5, 2021, pp. 1335–52.

[74] The term 'deaths of despair' was coined by Anne Case and Angus Deaton in the article 'Rising morbidity and mortality in midlife among white non-Hispanic Americans in the 21st century', *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 112 : 49, 2015, pp. 15078–83.

[75] Robert Putnam, *The upswing: how America came together a century ago and how we can do it again* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2020), p. 102.

[76] Anne Case and Angus Deaton, 'The epidemic of despair: will America's mortality crisis spread to the rest of the world?', *Foreign Affairs* 99: 2, 2020, p. 96.

[77] Donald Trump, inauguration speech, Washington DC, 17 Jan. 2017.

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cant, referring not just to Trump's singular success, but to a common 'we': 'We are going to win four more years in the White House.'[78] Trump's supporters are thus no longer finite individuals, but feel a sense of oneness with their God—the nation.[79] Trumpism in this context fills a spiritual void left by liberal modernity, conferring a sense of warmth in a society that has been frozen by individualism and social atomism. The neo-liberal vision of a society of individualized and atomized people ultimately provides a thin ideological platform for meaning and the sense of solidarity that sustains social life. What renders the Trumpian movement a variant of fascism here pertains to the family resemblance it shares with other fascist movements. This resemblance, according to Robert Paxton, is perceptible in characteristics such as the belief in group victimhood, the dread of the decadence of liberal cosmopolitanism, the dynamic by which the 'grandeur' of the group reinforces individual self-esteem, and the appraisal of 'violence … devoted to the group's success in a Darwinian struggle'.[80] Trumpism does not only dread 'unrooted' liberals and celebrate 'punching hecklers in the face';[81] it is also an ideology of group victimhood, which offers a narrative of betrayal by those (such as China and traditional allies) who are cheating on trade, by Mexico and Muslim countries who are sending criminals and terrorists, by NATO allies who are free-riding, and by multilateral institutions, such as the WTO and WHO, that are treating the nation unfairly.[82] Many of these concerns about China, immigration and NATO of course predate Trump. Classical realists also accept that free trade creates winners and losers, and that states pursue (neo-)mercantilist policies to protect their industries for economic and geopolitical reasons.[83] 'About 1840,' Carr wrote in his critique of free trade in *The twenty years' crisis*,

> Friedrich List … began to preach to a German audience the doctrine that, while free trade was the right policy for an industrially dominant nation like Great Britain, only protection could enable weaker nations to break the British stranglehold.[84]

It is, however, one thing to acknowledge the reality that free trade creates winners and losers, particularly when national industries are not ready to compete—as in nineteenth-century America and Germany—and quite another to begin economically and geopolitically unsound trade wars against allies and foes alike to assuage the nation's sense of victimhood.[85] What distinguishes

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[78] Donald Trump, rally speech at Tampa, Florida, 29 Oct. 2020.

[79] Charlotte Epstein, 'The productive force of the negative and the desire for recognition: lessons from Hegel and Lacan', *Review of International Studies* 44: 5, 2018, p. 826.

[80] Robert Paxton, 'The five stages of fascism', *Journal of Modern History* 70: 1, 1998, pp. 6–7.

[81] Ruth Ben-Ghiat, *Strongmen: Mussolini to the present* (New York: Norton, 2020), p. 300.

[82] The challenge facing the WTO thus runs deeper than the tension between representativeness and effectiveness identified by Sinha. The tension on the organizational level does not explain America's anxiety about China's rise (which Sinha also identifies): Aseema Sinha, 'Understanding the "crisis of the institution" in the liberal trade order at the WTO', *International Affairs* 97: 5, 2021, p. 1534.

[83] Edward Earle, 'Adam Smith, Alexander Hamilton, Friedrich List: the economic foundations of military power', in Peter Paret, Gordon A. Craig and Felix Gilbert, eds, *Makers of modern strategy from Machiavelli to the nuclear age* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986); Jacob Viner, 'Power versus plenty as objectives of foreign policy in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries', *World Politics* 1: 1, 1948, pp. 1–29.

[84] Carr, *The twenty years' crisis*, pp. 46–7.

[85] For an analysis of Trump's unsound policies, see e.g. Phil Levy, 'The verdict on Trump trade policy, part 1: fixing NAFTA', *Forbes*, 9 Aug. 2020.

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Trumpism is the incorporation of relevant concerns in US foreign policy in a narrative of national victimhood that sacralizes the group and seeks the rebirth of the 'authentic' American nation, whose rejection of liberalism's 'decadence' aims ultimately to eliminate the body politic, that is, the rule of law, on the basis of which it operates.[86] Liberal institutions, the rule of law, civil society, independent media: all, in the Trumpian narrative of victimhood, become obstacles that stand in the way of the nation's salvation.[87]

Trumpism must be distinguished from Nazism and other variants of interwar fascism. As Paxton notes, 'each national variant of fascism draws its legitimacy … not from some universal scripture but from what it considers the most authentic elements of its own community identity'.[88] The Trumpian variant of fascism entails characteristics that are peculiar to the spatio-temporal conditionalities of the US socio-political context. For example, the importance of religion is more specific to the United States compared to fascist movements in western Europe.[89] The emphasis on 'God' in Trump's speeches should not be seen as a defence of religion *per se*, however, but rather as a defence of unity, stability and continuity that is threatened by contingency, change and existential anxiety.[90] The degree of success of fascist movements also varies from case to case. Despite his attempt to delegitimate liberal democracy, Trump's incompetence was as much a blessing as a curse to America. Americans 'simply got lucky', as Ayse Zarakol acutely observes: 'they faced the most incompetent, least internationally supported version of the strongman threat'.[91]

How did Trump reach the seat of power despite such incompetence? The answer lies in the political context that scholars of fascism identified as condu-cive to fascist rule, namely the help of conservatives or, in the case of the United States, the Republican party.[92] Once in power, the consequence of Trumpism was not only extreme religio-nationalist rhetoric, but also a heightened need to demonstrate the nation's military power in what Morgenthau labelled in Vietnam as an 'irrational' foreign policy that misinterprets reality to inflate threats, and confuses vital and desirable interests in a manner that ultimately renders excessive violence the end of policy.[93] Trump combined the nuclear threat from Iran with the threat from terrorism: 'The world's leading state sponsor of terror will be on

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[86] Roger Griffin and Matthew Feldman, *Fascism: critical concepts in political science*, vol. 3 (Abingdon: Routledge, 2004).
[87] Anders Wivel and Caroline Howard-Gron, 'Charismatic leadership in foreign policy', *International Affairs* 97: 2, 2021, pp. 365–83; Daniel W. Drezner, 'Immature leadership: Donald Trump and the American presidency', *International Affairs* 97: 2, 2021, pp. 383–400.
[88] Paxton, 'The five stages of fascism', p. 3; Roger Griffin and Mathew Feldman, *A fascist century* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), p. xvii.
[89] Paxton, 'The five stages of fascism'.
[90] Geva and Santos recently highlighted this marriage of religion and nationalism in the far right, but neither identified its paradox nor explained it: Dorit Geva and Felipe Santos, 'Europe's far-right educational projects and their vision for the international order', *International Affairs* 97: 5, 2021, pp. 1395–414.
[91] Ayse Zarakol, 'Biden's victory is no balm for American exceptionalism', *Foreign Policy*, 9 Nov. 2020.
[92] Timothy Snyder, 'The American abyss', *New York Times*, 9 Jan. 2021.
[93] This argument is more fully developed in Haro Karkour, 'Illiberal and irrational? Trump and the challenge of liberal modernity in US foreign policy', *International Relations* 35: 4, 2021, pp. 533–50.

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the cusp of acquiring the world's most dangerous weapons.'[94] Thus he amplified Iran's threat to the point where it posed a danger to American cities: 'We will not allow American cities to be threatened with destruction.'[95] Echoing Morgenthau's critique of the US government's inflation of the threat from Vietnam, Stephen Walt criticized Trump's inflation of Iran's ability to dominate the region, arguing instead that the combined force of the Sunni alliance and Israel contains Iran.[96] The Trump administration, however, had no more interest in Walt's rational analysis than Johnson had in Morgenthau's; rather, it saw power as an end in itself.[97] The aim was to demonstrate to Iran that: 'We are the biggest and by far the BEST in the World! If Iran attacks an American Base, or any American, we will be sending some of that brand new beautiful equipment their way … and without hesitation!'[98] Critics may argue that the drive behind Trump's Iran policy was the influence of the Israeli lobby.[99] In fact, this argument does not disprove, but rather bears out, Morgenthau's prophecy that in the absence of democratic control, foreign policy ultimately comes to be dominated by private interests and/or demagogic elites who manipulate popular emotions and psycho-social needs.[100] By exaggerating the threat from abroad, such elites make a peripheral interest seem vital, thus deceiving the public and rendering a rational evaluation of US foreign policy impossible. The argument on the role of the Israeli lobby meanwhile contradicts Mearsheimer's and Walt's later diagnosis of the flaw in US foreign policy as rooted in liberal idealism or 'liberal hegemony', since the Israeli lobby is far from liberally idealistic.[101] The continuity of US foreign policy under Trump's illiberalism shows that liberal idealism existed on the rhetorical level only, detached from the continuous practice of illiberal policy. The answer that this continuity lay in some 'establishment', the 'blob',[102] is thus not necessarily wrong; it simply omits the fact that this establishment is driven not by liberal idealism but by the dynamics of liberal modernity, which manifest themselves in emotional upheavals and the importance of not appearing weak before the electorate.[103] In highlighting the wrong cause, liberal idealism, neo-realists miss the role that the dynamics of liberal modernity play in hindering their own strategy, offshore balancing, from influ-

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[94] Donald Trump, 'Speech on the Iran nuclear deal', 8 May 2018.

[95] Trump, 'Speech on the Iran nuclear deal'.

[96] Stephen M. Walt, 'The Islamic Republic of hysteria', *Foreign Policy*, 16 Jan. 2018.

[97] On Iraq, this argument was recently made in Ahsan L. Butt, 'Why did the United States invade Iraq in 2003?', *Security Studies* 28: 2, 2019, pp. 250–85.

[98] Donald Trump, tweet, 5 Jan. 2020, https://twitter.com/realdonaldtrump/status/1213689342272659456?lang=en (no longer accessible).

[99] John Mearsheimer and Stephen M. Walt, *The Israeli lobby and US foreign policy* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 2007).

[100] Morgenthau, *The purpose of American politics*, p. 264.

[101] John Mearsheimer, *The great delusion: liberal dreams and international realities* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2018); Stephen M. Walt, *The hell of good intentions: America's foreign policy elites and the decline of US primacy* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2018).

[102] For example, see Walt, *Hell of good intentions*, pp. 91–136; Patrick Porter, 'Why America's grand strategy has not changed: power, habit, and the US foreign policy establishment', *International Security* 42: 4, 2018, pp. 9–46; Christopher Layne, 'The US foreign policy establishment and grand strategy: how American elites obstruct strategic adjustment', *International Politics* 54: 3, 2017, pp. 260–75.

[103] Nick Danforth, 'Americans got the foreign-policy blob they asked for', *Foreign Policy*, 14 Oct. 2021.

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encing foreign policy decisions in the Middle East.[104] As Schmidt and Williams argued early on,[105] neo-realism, with its 'narrowly strategic material calculation', could not win the debate against neo-conservatism in the light of the 2003 Iraq War.

In this context, that is, a context in which the post-1945 order has not addressed the challenge of liberal modernity, it is significant that theoretical debates on the crisis of the international order are largely silent on its dynamics. Consequently, these debates call for strategies such as 'leadership' and 'offshore balancing' that are bound to fail. If the present international order is to be put on a more stable and peaceful footing, it requires a more radical break from its post-1945 condition: a break that addresses the psycho-social needs of the individual in liberal modernity. How can these needs be addressed?

Classical realist policy proposals to mitigate the present crisis

The classical realist argument to address the present crisis is at once more pessimistic and more ambitious than other approaches in IR. It is more pessimistic in that it acknowledges the limits of policy-making in resolving the present crisis: policy-makers need to learn to live with the precariousness of a liberal international order in the context of liberal modernity. It is more ambitious in that it seeks a more radical break from the post-Bretton Woods past, namely a break that seeks neither the revitalization of the alliance of democracies under US leadership nor the neo-realist alternative that calls for 'offshore balancing'. Instead, to mitigate the present crisis, policy-makers should begin by empowering the individual domestically and, by doing so, enabling foreign policy to find consensus on the national interest. This argument can be found in Morgenthau's analysis of US foreign policy in *The purpose of American politics* and remains applicable today.

In *The purpose of American politics*, Morgenthau argued that 'there is apathy all around' on the part of the US public, disillusioned and resigned to private happiness in lieu of debating the great issues of the day. 'This lack of interest in public issues', he noted, 'results in the cessation of genuine political activity by the citizen, the encroachment of private interests upon the public sphere, and the relative shrinkage of national resources.'[106] Importantly, Morgenthau did not see this as a purely domestic problem; rather, it was related to America's inability to define its national interest. The threat of 'private interests' encroaching upon the public sphere ultimately led to its steering of foreign policy away from the national interest. With the use of the instruments of propaganda, such private interests may have garnered popular support for excessively nationalistic and violent policies that offered the illusion of security and power to the individual. The constant

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[104] On China, Mearsheimer and Walt are more hawkish. See Walt, *Hell of good intentions*; Mearsheimer, *Great delusion*. The argument, however, also applies to less hawkish positions: see e.g. Christopher Layne, 'From preponderance to offshore balancing: America's future grand strategy', *International Security* 22: 1, 1997, pp. 86–124.

[105] Brian Schmidt and Michael Williams, 'The Bush Doctrine and the Iraq War: neoconservatives versus realists', *Security Studies* 17: 2, 2008, p. 212.

[106] Morgenthau, *The purpose of American politics*, p. 203.

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failure of such policies, however, increased the individual's mistrust of government and sense of alienation in the long term. For Morgenthau, the solution lay in the 'restoration of democratic government' domestically by re-empowering the individual and enabling him/her to re-engage in the great political issues of the day. Empowering the individual today means opening new avenues for political engagement beyond the echo chambers of social media. The presence of such avenues has precedent in US history prior to the Second World War. As Daniel Bessner and Stephen Wertheim have noted, 'it was not until the Cold War that Lippmanite elitism decisively triumphed'.[107] Prior to the Second World War, 'far from cloistering themselves in Boston, New York, and Washington, DC, American foreign policy experts formed local branches throughout the country to host discussions of pressing geopolitical issues'. For instance, the Foreign Policy Association 'estimated that public meetings in its 19 branches had drawn 726,138 attendees', while the Council on Foreign Relations 'formed regional councils based in cities such as Des Moines, Houston, and Louisville'.[108] Public hearings outside Washington and local branches for think tanks can provide similar platforms for citizens to engage politically today.

Individual empowerment is not only a domestic matter, but rather is fundamental to America's conceptualization of its national interest. Only through an inclusive public debate can America come to a decision on what constitutes its 'vital interests', which may require the use of military force to defend them, and distinguish those from its desirable interests, where accommodation is possible. The confusion of vital and desirable interests was central to Morgenthau's critique of US foreign policy in Vietnam.[109] A similar critique can be presented of US military adventures from Kosovo to Iraq.[110] The distinction between vital and desirable interests cannot be arrived at without genuine public debate and engagement in foreign policy, or what Bessner and Wertheim refer to as 'democratising US foreign policy'.[111] It is a common misconception that Morgenthau was cynical about democratic control of foreign policy and called for the deception of the public.[112] In fact, he rejected such deception because it 'endangers democratic government itself' and undermines the government's 'prestige at home and abroad … in the long run'.[113] Morgenthau argued for a balance between the 'rational requirements of good policy' and the need for democratic control. To bring about this balance, the role of the government is to present the alternative policies and the consequences they entail before public opinion, to enable the public to deliberate on them and provide their consent, for 'public opinion does not exist before

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[107] Daniel Bessner and Stephen Wertheim, 'Democratising US foreign policy', *Foreign Affairs*, 5 April 2017, available at: https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/united-states/2017-04-05/democratizing-us-foreign-policy (last accessed 5 Jan. 2022).

[108] Bessner and Wertheim, 'Democratising US foreign policy', para. 8.

[109] Morgenthau, *A new foreign policy*.

[110] Haro L. Karkour, 'Unipolarity's unpeacefulness and US foreign policy: consequences of a "coherent system of irrationality"', *International Relations* 32: 1, 2018, pp. 60–79.

[111] Bessner and Wertheim, 'Democratising US foreign policy'.

[112] Norrin M. Ripsman, *Peacemaking by democracies: the effect of state autonomy on post-world war settlements* (Philadelphia: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2002), p. 34.

[113] Hans Morgenthau, *Dilemmas of politics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958), p. 332.

a policy, except perhaps as a vague, inchoate, and inarticulate disposition'.[114] When government fails to play this role, the leadership vacuum will be filled by 'someone else, more likely than not a demagogue or demagogic elite catering to popular emotions and prejudices who will create a public opinion in support of a certain policy more likely than not to be unsound and dangerous'.[115] If the government decides to pursue such unsound (but popular) policy, it 'is compelled by its subservience to public opinion to cater to it through concealment and misrepresentation'.[116] Appearance becomes a substitute for substance, and deception a substitute for democratic consent. Democratizing US foreign policy thus means restoring the government's role in presenting alternative policies on the great issues of the day and enabling the public to deliberate on and provide their consent to them. The democratization of US foreign policy is essential, on the one hand to empower the individual through enabling political engagement, and on the other to divert foreign policy from demagoguery and popular prejudices. Democratizing US foreign policy does not mean that those in government will relinquish power; in fact, it means the opposite—those in power stand to benefit from democratizing US foreign policy, since in presenting policy alternatives and seeking popular consent they avoid governing by deception, undermining the democratic process and ultimately falling victims to power themselves.[117]

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[114] Morgenthau, *The purpose of American politics*, p. 263.
[115] Morgenthau, *The purpose of American politics*, p. 264.
[116] Morgenthau, *The purpose of American politics*, p. 265.
[117] The 'wise men' fell victim to power themselves, as seen, for example, in the case of Kennan, Acheson and others in Vietnam. See Walter Isaacson and Evan Thomas, *The wise men* (London: Simon & Schuster, 2013).

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