



المركز العربي للأبحاث ودراسة السياسات
Arab Center for Research & Policy Studies

Case Analysis | 15 October 2024

Age of Danger?

A Domestically Unstable America Is at the
Centre of the Crisis of Liberal International Order

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Series: [Case Analysis](#)

15 October 2024

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If one was to only look at the rise and normalization of conflicts that are in violation of the UN charter and international law in the last few years alone, from Russia-Ukraine to Israel-Palestine, through to what is escalating into Israel-Lebanon-Yemen-Iran and even the wider Middle-East, then it may be argued that the rule-based Liberal International Order (LIO) is in decline. These events however, as vivid and disastrous as they are – and will continue to be - appear to most as only surface level symptoms of an order that looks to be in a period of crisis or turbulence. For example, while the Russia-Ukraine conflict caused significant regional instability and impacted global energy markets, especially in Europe, it has not triggered the kind of worldwide economic collapse some feared. Countries quickly adapted by diversifying energy supplies, accelerating shifts to renewable energy, and securing new partnerships, helping to stabilize global markets. Similarly, the Israel-Palestine conflict and recent escalations in the Middle East, while tragic, have largely remained regional in scope, and the broader global order appears relatively unaffected. Major economies have resumed growth, global trade flows have continued, and financial markets have remained stable, largely because these conflicts, while significant, have not deeply disrupted the core infrastructures of global trade, finance, or supply chains. Even US-China tensions, including trade tariffs, sanctions, and geopolitical rivalries, have not severely disrupted the order. While tariffs and tech restrictions create friction between the two largest economies, supply chains, global trade, and financial markets have remained resilient, with countries and companies adapting to new realities through diversification and regional agreements. Though tensions remain, the ability of nations and economies to adapt has maintained what could be called normality in most parts of the world.

However, as we examine the current geopolitical landscape and deeper, interconnected commonalities of what appears to be a decline, there are disturbing patterns worth examining. These patterns range from a clear decline of the LIO's institutions and their significance in global affairs, increased warfare, and including more diverse and multi-dimensional symptoms: the rise of sanctions, and the development of alternative infrastructure-based orders in the global south. In such a context, the disintegration and unravelling of the LIO is becoming increasingly clear.

Most worryingly, it is anticipated that there are bigger blows to come, which, given the above has even liberals reconsidering their positions. Consequently, it is worth exploring the effects of the upcoming US presidential election – and whether a victory for either candidate would make a significant difference to the turbulent trajectories of the LIO.

The LIO as an Order of Relative Stability, Peace, and Prosperity

The LIO has long been promoted by its Anglo-American architects and guardians as a pillar of global rules, institutions, and norms that emerged after World War II, designed to promote peace, security, economic cooperation, and political stability.¹ At its self-professed core were the principles of free

1 G. John Ikenberry, *A World Safe for Democracy: Liberal Internationalism and the Crises of Global Order* (New Haven/ London: Yale University Press, 2020).



trade, democratic governance, multilateralism, and the rule of law, promulgated and selectively upheld by Western powers, particularly the United States. Key institutions such as the United Nations, World Bank, International Monetary Fund (IMF), and later, the World Trade Organization (WTO), were created to foster international cooperation, manage economic growth, resolve disputes, and prevent conflicts. The LIO aimed to create a more open, interconnected, and rules-based world, encouraging economic interdependence and diplomatic dialogue to avoid war and instability. But its foundations were always firmly rooted in Western elite interests, colonial and racial mentalities, and centred on a settlement designed to restore a corporate-driven profit system.² The order was not, in its very essence truly international, particularly liberal, or very orderly. In addition, even its successes, the gradual integration into the order several major emerging or re-emerging economies like India and China, laid the groundwork for its current geostrategic challenges, while the domestic effects of globalisation have resulted in greater social and economic inequality, and a political system that is dysfunctional, polarised and factionalised.³ The US political system does not appear confidently able to deliver a peaceful transfer of power at the November 2024 election.

As we consider the various institutions at the heart of the so-called LIO, it is clear that major morbid symptoms have appeared because even its own core powers no longer feel able to achieve their interests through the order as it is, particularly as there are challenges from newly-confident emerging and re-emerging powers, combined with domestic resistance to neoliberal globalisation's devastating effects.⁴ International law, rules of warfare, Geneva conventions on war crimes, human rights, rules and laws barring the seizure of financial assets held in the West by official enemies – appear as mere scraps of paper, agreements written to be torn up if they fail to deliver preferred results.⁵

Institutional level – UN, ICJ

The UN Security Council, long considered the cornerstone of global peacekeeping, has historically been – and more recently – increasingly paralysed by the use of veto powers by its five permanent members (US, China, Russia, France, and the UK), hindering its ability to address major global conflicts.⁶ Whilst this is a long-standing issue, in current times the veto is becoming incredibly problematic. For example, Russia's invasion of Ukraine has repeatedly seen Russia wield its veto to block resolutions aimed at imposing sanctions or holding it accountable. Similarly, the US has consistently used its

2 Thomas M. Flaherty & Ronald Rogowski, "Rising Inequality as a Threat to the Liberal International Order," *International Organization*, vol. 75, no. 2: Challenges to the Liberal International Order: International Organization (Spring 2021), pp. 495- 523; Inderjeet Parmar, "The US-led liberal Order: Imperialism by Another Name?" *International Affairs*, vol. 94, no. 1 (2018).

3 G. John Ikenberry, "The End of Liberal International Order?" *International Affairs*, vol.94, no.1 (January 2018), pp. 7-23; Barbara F Walter, *How Civil Wars Start: And How to Stop Them* (New York: Crown, 2023).

4 Arman Azedi & Evan Schofer, "Assessing the Anti-Globalization Movement: Protest Against the WTO, IMF and World Bank in Cross-National Perspective," *The Sociological Quarterly*, vol. 46, no. 3 (2023).

5 Elena Chachko & J. Benton Heath, "A Watershed Moment for Sanctions? Russia, Ukraine, and the Economic Battlefield," *AJIL Unbound*, vol. 116 (2022), pp. 135 - 139.

6 Joy Gordon, "The United Nations Security Council and the Emerging Crisis of Legitimacy," *Yale Journal of International Affairs Volume*, vol. IX, no. 1 (Winter 2014), accessed on 14/10/2024, at: <https://acr.ps/1L9zOjo>

veto to block resolutions critical of Israel, particularly concerning Israel's occupation and settlement expansion in Palestinian territories. In 2016, the US vetoed a resolution demanding an immediate halt to Israeli settlement activity in the West Bank and East Jerusalem, a pattern that persisted through 2023 when the US blocked a resolution condemning ongoing settlement expansion and reaffirming the importance of a two-state solution. In 2024, the Security Council faced further deadlock over Israel, with the US vetoing resolutions condemning Israel's continued settlement expansion and military action in Gaza, including a draft resolution aimed at addressing the destabilizing impact of Israel's actions following escalations in violence with Palestinian groups. These repeated vetoes, particularly those employed by the US to shield Israel from international censure, have exacerbated the Council's inability to resolve long-standing conflicts like the Israel-Palestine issue, fuelling widespread criticism of the Council's effectiveness and fairness.⁷ Growing frustration with its inaction has intensified calls for reforms to limit veto powers or expand representation for non-Western countries, as the Council is increasingly seen as ineffective in addressing global crises.

Meanwhile, the International Court of Justice (ICJ) and the International Criminal Court (ICC), have become arenas for political conflict. These courts were formally designed to uphold international law and provide impartial justice, but they are increasingly, and more brazenly, being weaponized by states to pursue political agendas. Recently, American politicians, including former Senate Republican leader Mitch McConnell, threatened the ICC with sanctions if it issued arrest warrants for Israeli leaders over alleged war crimes.⁸ This is while there is a plausible case – endorsed by the ICJ – which South Africa presented that firmly places Israel in the frame of genocidal war on the people of Gaza.

WTO, IMF, WHO

The WTO, once a key pillar of global economic governance has been around for almost 30 years. Yet it has been largely inactive for more than five years, primarily due to US disengagement and active blocking of the appointment of new judges to the WTO's appellate body, effectively paralyzing its dispute resolution mechanism. As a result, the organization has lost much of its credibility, with global trade disputes becoming more increasingly handled through bilateral or regional negotiations, undermining the multilateral trading system that the WTO was designed to protect – but clearly only so long as it could deliver Western interests in opening up the economies of the global South without restraint. With the emergence of the BRICS, however, the 'Rest' have struck back.

Similarly, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) is facing its own challenges.⁹ Originally established to ensure financial stability by providing loans to countries in economic distress, the IMF is now grappling with the challenge of balancing its traditional mandate with the growing demands of a green agenda. As climate change becomes a central global issue, the IMF has been pressured to

⁷ Susan M. Akram "The Failures of the UN in the Israel-Palestine Conflict," *Open Global Rights*, 22/1/2024, accessed on 14/10/2024, at: <https://acr.ps/1L9zOkT>

⁸ Nick Robertson, "GOP Conservatives Threaten ICC with Sanctions if they Seek Netanyahu's Arrest," *The Hill*, 5/6/2024, accessed on 14/10/2024, at: <https://acr.ps/1L9zOFn>

⁹ Tana Johnson, "The World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, and the World Trade Organization: Reform Challenges," *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, 24/7/2024, accessed on 14/10/2024, at: <https://acr.ps/1L9zPc4>

incorporate sustainability and environmental concerns into its financial assistance programs. This has created tension within the organization, as it struggles to reconcile environmental goals with the need to maintain economic stability in countries reliant on carbon-heavy industries.

One cannot ignore how the World Health Organization (WHO), UN, and WTO, proved largely ineffective during the COVID-19 global pandemic.¹⁰ WHO, despite its central role in global health governance, faced criticism for its slow response and lack of coordination, as well as for being overly influenced by geopolitical tensions between major powers like the US and China. Similarly, the WTO failed to ensure equitable access to medical supplies and vaccines as nations resorted to vaccine nationalism, hoarding doses and restricting exports. The UN struggled to provide a coordinated global response, highlighting the limitations of these multilateral frameworks. In the absence of strong, unified action from these global institutions, individual states turned to nationalistic and bilateral approaches. Countries imposed strict border controls, developed their own strategies for lockdowns and quarantines, and secured vaccine supplies through direct deals with pharmaceutical companies, often bypassing global frameworks like COVAX. This fragmentation during the pandemic showcased the limits of the LIO, as states prioritized their national interests over multilateral cooperation, revealing the inefficacy of global governance during a global health crisis.¹¹

Secondary Sanctions to Supplement Increased Use of Sanctions

In following the patterns above, the dramatic rise in the use of sanctions is no surprise. Today, sanctions are used almost four times as much as they were in the 1990s, when they were applied relatively sparingly, mostly targeting “rogue states” or specific individuals involved in illegal activities such as human rights abuses or terrorism. In the 1990s, fewer than 10 major countries were subject to significant sanctions, with around 60 distinct sanctions programs globally. Today, sanctions have quadrupled, with over 30 countries targeted by a complex web of more than 200 active sanctions’ regimes. At the apex of sanctions’ use is the US, which alone imposes three times as many sanctions as any other international institution or country, with targeted campaigns reaching a staggering third of all nation states.¹² But it does not stop there as the US has expanded its use of “secondary” sanctions,¹³ which not only target countries like Russia, Iran, and North Korea, but also penalize foreign entities that do business with them. The recent sanctions against companies aiding Russia’s military efforts in Ukraine exemplify how sanctions have evolved into a powerful tool of economic warfare, further fragmenting global relations. Of course, there are concerns at how sanctions may be used against some occupiers and not others, but the point here is the overall increase.

¹⁰ Lee Jones & Shahar Hameiri, “Explaining the Failure of Global Health Governance during COVID-19,” *International Affairs*, vol. 98, no. 6 (November 2022), pp. 2057–2076.

¹¹ A. Papamichail, “Reinscribing Global Hierarchies: Covid-19, Racial Capitalism, and the Liberal International Order,” *International Affairs*, vol. 99, no. 4 (July 2023).

¹² Jeff Stein & Federica Cocco, “How Four U.S. Presidents Unleashed Economic Warfare Across the Globe” *The Washington Post*, 25/7/2024, accessed on 14/10/2024, at: <https://acr.ps/1L9zOR9>

¹³ Tom Ruys & Cedric Ryngaert, “Secondary Sanctions: A Weapon out of Control? The International Legality of, and European Responses to, US Secondary Sanctions,” *British Yearbook of International Law* (2020).

In addition to sanctions, a global subsidy race has emerged, as nations compete to boost their domestic industries in response to climate change and the need for sustainable energy.¹⁴ China has long provided massive state support to its green technology and manufacturing sectors, helping it dominate solar panel production and electric vehicle supply chains. In response, the US has rolled out its Inflation Reduction Act (IRA), committing over \$370 billion in subsidies and tax credits for clean energy.¹⁵ The European Union (EU), alarmed by this new competition, has also launched its own green industrial policies to avoid being left behind.¹⁶ This race to subsidize key sectors has led to increasing economic nationalism, with countries seeking to protect their industries rather than fostering the global cooperation that once defined trade relationships.

The Global South and the LIO

Countries in the Global South, including China, have a complex and ambivalent relationship with the LIO. While many of these nations have benefited significantly from the order, particularly through economic globalization, trade, and access to international institutions, there are also elements they reject due to perceived power imbalances. For example, China's integration into the global economy during the 1990s and 2000s, driven by the principles of free trade, enabled the country to lift hundreds of millions of people out of poverty. Likewise, nations such as India and Indonesia have experienced rapid economic growth by participating in global trade, benefiting from the rules of the international trading system. These countries, along with others in the Global South, have used platforms like the WTO and the IMF to secure better economic terms and financial support, particularly during crises. In many cases, these countries support the LIO's economic frameworks because they facilitate trade, capital access, and growth opportunities. Their participation in global governance institutions has increased as they seek to leverage growing influence to shape the system in their favour.

However, Global South countries also harbour significant reservations about the LIO, particularly the perception that it disproportionately serves the interests of the West, particularly the US.¹⁷ The Washington Consensus, with its emphasis on market liberalization, privatization, and fiscal austerity, has been criticized for imposing policies that do not always align with the developmental needs of poorer nations. Many in the Global South view these policies as a way for Western powers to exert control over their economies, often prioritizing international capital flows over domestic welfare. China, while benefiting from global trade, has frequently challenged the political and security dimensions of the order, viewing the emphasis on human rights, democratic governance, and rule of law as tools of

¹⁴ Anabel González, "Five Reasons to Fear a Global Subsidy Race and what to do about it," *World Trade Organization*, 27/6/2023, accessed on 14/10/2024, at: <https://acr.ps/1L9zOpP>

¹⁵ Alice C. Hill, "What the Historic U.S. Climate Bill Gets Right and Gets Wrong" Council on Foreign Relations, 17/8/2022, accessed on 14/10/2024, at: <https://acr.ps/1L9zOnj>

¹⁶ Susi Dennison & Mats Engström, "Eco-nomics: A Green Industrial Policy for the next European Commission" European Council on Foreign Relations, 9/7/2024, accessed on 14/10/2024, at: <https://acr.ps/1L9zP66>

¹⁷ J. Luis Rodríguez & Christy Thornton, "The Liberal International Order and the Global South: A View from Latin America," *Cambridge Review of International Affairs*, vol. 35, no. 5 (2022), pp. 626–638.

Western influence that undermine its own governance model.¹⁸ China's assertiveness on the global stage, through initiatives like the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), reflects an alternative vision for global cooperation, distinct from liberal ideals of open societies.¹⁹ Similarly, countries in Africa and Latin America have expressed dissatisfaction with the Western dominance of institutions like the UN Security Council and the IMF, calling for reforms to increase their representation and better align policies with their specific economic and social needs.²⁰ This tension illustrates the challenge of reforming the LIO to be more inclusive while maintaining the benefits of global cooperation and stability.

Although the US dollar remains the dominant global currency, and many emerging economies have demonstrated resilience, global capital flows are starting to fragment. In the 1990s, the world experienced rapid financial globalization, with cross-border investments booming, particularly in developing countries. However, as tensions rise between major powers – namely the US and China – this trend is reversing. China, for example, has been increasingly shut out of Western capital markets,²¹ and in response, it has strengthened ties with non-Western financial systems through the growing BRI. This division in financial systems has profound implications for global economic stability, as capital flows become increasingly regionalized.

Where May the Order Be Headed?

The cracks in the global order are widening. Trade growth is slowing, economic nationalism is on the rise, and doing business across increasingly fragmented markets is becoming more difficult. History has shown that these fractures could lead to sudden, severe collapses. Examples include the First World War that abruptly ended what was considered the golden age of globalization that many had thought would last forever.²² Similarly, in the early 1930s, the Great Depression and the protectionist Smoot-Hawley tariffs led to a 40% collapse in American imports in just two years, worsening the global economic misery of the time.²³ Autarchic British and French colonial trade blocs, at least in part, paved the path to the Second World War.²⁴ In 1971, US President Richard Nixon's decision to suspend the dollar's convertibility to gold brought down the Bretton Woods system of fixed exchange rates in less than 19 months, shaking the foundations of the international financial system.²⁵

18 Ruonan Liu & Songpo Yang, "China and the Liberal International Order: a Pragmatic and Dynamic Approach," *International Affairs*, vol. 99, no. 4 (July 2023), pp. 1383–1400.

19 Alfred Gerstl & Ute Wallenböck, (eds.), *China's Belt and Road Initiative: Strategic and Economic Impacts on Central Asia, Southeast Asia and Central Eastern Europe* (New York: Routledge, 2021).

20 Stewart Patrick et al., "UN Security Council Reform: What the World Thinks," Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 28/6/2023, accessed on 14/10/2024, at: <https://acr.ps/1L9zOpU>

21 Katie Martin, "China out in the Cold for Foreign Investors," *Financial Times*, 13/9/2024, accessed on 14/10/2024, at: <https://acr.ps/1L9zOGD>

22 Stefanie Prezioso, "Globalisation, internationalism and the Great War," *Labor History*, vol. 63, no. 4 (2022), pp. 492–502.

23 Douglas A. Irwin, "The Smoot-Hawley Tariff: A Quantitative Assessment," *The Review of Economics and Statistics*, vol. 80, no. 2 (1998), pp. 326–334.

24 David S. Jacks & Dennis Novy "Trade Blocs and Trade Wars during the Interwar Period," *Asian Economic Policy Review* (2020), pp. 119 - 136.

25 Catherine Schenk & Creon Butler, "Policymakers Can Learn from Nixon's 'Dollar Shock,'" Chatham House, 2/3/2022, accessed on 14/10/2024, at: <https://acr.ps/1L9zOjp>

The 2008 global financial crisis offers another reminder of the fragility of the global economy. The sudden collapse of Lehman Brothers triggered shockwaves that reverberated through financial systems around the world, erasing trillions of dollars in value and plunging economies into deep recessions.²⁶ Europe's subsequent sovereign debt crisis exposed the vulnerability of global integration, as countries like Greece teetered on the edge of default, threatening to bring down the Eurozone. The current Israel-Gaza conflict and rising tensions between Israel and Iran, and across the broader Middle East, further strain this fragile global system. While much of the conflict remains regional, the risk of escalation between Israel and Iran and its allies (Hezbollah, and factions in Gaza in particular) has the potential to destabilize the wider Middle East. As energy markets and regional alliances hang in the balance, these tensions could spill over, impacting global trade and energy security, particularly if major oil producers are drawn into the conflict. These historical and present-day events serve as stark reminders that even the current fragmentation of the global system – though it may seem manageable – can unleash far more destructive forces than anticipated.

Rising Risks of a Global Rupture

The 21st century has already seen a significant shift in US foreign policy, with the resurgence of Jacksonian populism and Jeffersonian isolationism, ideologies that had faded after the Cold War, but which reflect alternative imperial visions.²⁷ These schools of thought gained renewed prominence after 9/11 and the 2003 invasion of Iraq, challenging the liberal internationalist consensus that had long defined US foreign policy. Under Barack Obama, the US retreated, or rather recalibrated its interventionist strategies, exemplified by the limited but disastrous involvement in the Libya conflict and the relatively restrained response to Russian aggression in Ukraine. Donald Trump's rise in 2016 marked a more explicit rejection of neoconservatism and a shift towards restraint and protectionism in the face of growing global competition, particularly with China and Russia.

This shift in focus towards economic protectionism and national security concerns has exacerbated global tensions. The potential return of Donald Trump, with his zero-sum approach, could deepen these divisions, accelerating the decline of global institutions and norms. Meanwhile, renewed fears of reduced-rate Chinese imports further strain the global economic balance, while ongoing geopolitical flashpoints – whether the US-China rivalry over Taiwan, Israel-Iran tensions, or conflicts between Russia and the West – highlight the ever-present risk of outright conflict. A direct war between Israel and Iran, for instance, could destabilize global energy markets, while a Taiwan Strait conflict could disrupt critical supply chains, particularly in semiconductors.

In response to these escalating challenges, some American scholars advocate a return to Hamiltonian pragmatism, which emphasizes economic strength, national security, and a more realist approach to foreign policy. As corporate interests, especially in the tech sector, become

²⁶ Barry J Eichengreen, *Hall of Mirrors: The Great Depression, the Great Recession, and the Uses-and Misuses-of History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015).

²⁷ Walter Russell Mead "The Return of Hamiltonian Statecraft: A Grand Strategy for a Turbulent World," *Foreign Affairs*, vol. 52 (2024).



increasingly intertwined with national security, this approach stresses the importance of economic strategy as a tool for maintaining US global leadership. The growing US-China tech rivalry, along with the shifting geopolitical landscape, underscores the need for a more pragmatic and balanced approach to navigating global challenges, where both economic power and diplomatic engagement are crucial.

In these scenarios, the resulting losses would be far more profound than most might anticipate. There is no doubt that globalization bears responsibility for many of today's ills – rising inequality, environmental neglect, and the 2008 financial crisis. However, the achievements of the 1990s and 2000s, during the peak of liberal capitalism, remain unmatched. China's integration into the global economy lifted hundreds of millions of people out of poverty. There were great trajectories as global infant mortality rate had fallen to less than half of what it was in 1990. By 2005, state-based conflicts claimed fewer lives than at any time in recent memory, with just 0.0002% of the global population dying in wars, nearly 40 times lower than in 1972.²⁸ Moreover, the era of the Washington Consensus, which today's leaders are moving away from, helped developing countries catch up with richer nations, narrowing the gap between the Global South and the developed world. However, the picture today is much more alarming. As Lenin once argued, the global market is now saturated with goods and services, and competitors for market share etc. Is the world now approaching a time when the major powers re-divide the world – through war?

Conclusion: The Fragile Future of Global Cooperation

The potential collapse of the current global order threatens to not only stall but also reverse decades of progress. If the existing system breaks down, it is unlikely that a new, coherent set of rules will easily replace it. Instead, global affairs may descend into a state of anarchy that favours disorder and opportunistic violence. Without trust, and in the absence of a reliable framework for cooperation, countries would struggle to confront the 21st century's most pressing challenges – whether containing an artificial intelligence arms race, managing escalating conflicts like the Israel-Iran confrontation, or maintaining peace in space exploration. Problems may be addressed by coalitions of like-minded nations, but such groupings often breed resentment and coercion, as seen with Europe's carbon border tariffs or China's clashes with the IMF. When cooperation is replaced by force, the incentive to preserve peace dwindles.

In this context, authoritarian regimes like China and Russia see nothing new. For them, a system where might makes right aligns more closely with their worldview. They have long seen the liberal order as less about noble ideals and more about American hegemony – power that they believe is now in decline. The gradual erosion of the post-war order – slow at first, then sudden – could lead to a world dominated not by cooperative institutions, but by raw power plays. And the consequences, while not immediately visible, could be disastrous for all.

²⁸ Our World in Data, Peace Research Institute Oslo, *Data from the Uppsala Conflict Data Program (2024)* (2017), accessed on 14/10/2024, at: <https://acr.ps/1L9zOoH>

Proponents of the LIO are grappling with how to sustain it amid growing global challenges. While figures like John Ikenberry, Joseph Nye,²⁹ Anne-Marie Slaughter,³⁰ Michael Doyle,³¹ and Robert Keohane³² remain committed to the order's principles—such as multilateralism, free trade, and democratic governance—they acknowledge the need for reform in a world increasingly shaped by power struggles, nationalism, and rising authoritarianism. Ikenberry argues for adapting the LIO to include emerging powers like China, to build a more multipolar world, while still promoting a rules-based order.³³ Similarly, Nye calls for a balance between soft power engagement and hard power deterrence, recognizing that a more pragmatic approach is necessary in today's geopolitical climate.³⁴ But they appear to be mere bystanders – ideological stalwarts for liberal internationalism – while the pragmatists of the US imperial state drive a coach and horses through the so-called LIO. In that regard, the differences between a Trump or Harris presidency – for the LIO, may not differ so much as is claimed.

Hence, many LIO proponents have shifted toward a more realist outlook, accepting that power politics and national interests are central to preserving global stability. In response to rising tensions with Russia, China, and ongoing conflicts in the Middle East, they now emphasize the importance of strategic alliances and military deterrence. Scholars like Slaughter advocate for reforming international institutions, such as the United Nations and IMF, to better reflect today's multipolar world, while still upholding liberal values.³⁵ The emerging consensus is that while the LIO must adapt to survive, its core principles remain essential for maintaining global peace and cooperation in a more fragmented global landscape, but this adaptation also involves legitimacy and trust building because trust has been lost.

While the liberal order established after World War II successfully married US strategic interests with its internationalist principles, the benefits extended far beyond the America. Between 1948-73, the American dream became a reality for millions of Americans, nestled in a New Deal for the world, but which excluded African Americans and other minorities, including women. The poorest countries today are already suffering due to the IMF's inability to resolve the sovereign debt crises that followed the COVID-19 pandemic. Middle-income nations like India and Indonesia, though capitalizing on the current fragmentation, still rely on global stability to fuel their growth. Meanwhile, the prosperity of much of the developed world, especially open economies like Britain and South Korea, remains deeply tied to trade.

Though America's strong economic growth may create a sense of resilience, the global economy would struggle to absorb the shock of a systemic collapse. Without urgent reform, the cracks in

29 Joseph S. Nye, "Will the Liberal Order Survive? The History of an Idea," *Foreign Affairs*, 12/12/2016, accessed on 14/10/2024, at: <https://acr.ps/1L9zOqS>

30 G. John Ikenberry & Anne-Marie Slaughter, "A World of Liberty Under Law," *Global Asia* (East Asia Foundation), vol. 2, no. 1 (2007), pp. 112–118.

31 Michael W. Doyle, "A More Perfect Union? The Liberal Peace and the Challenge of Globalization," *Review of International Studies*, vol. 26, no. 5 (2000), pp. 81–94.

32 Robert O. Keohane, "Twenty Years of Institutional Liberalism," *International Relations*, vol. 26, no. 2 (2012), pp. 125–138.

33 G. John Ikenberry, "The Future of the Liberal World Order: Internationalism After America," *Foreign Affairs*, vol. 90, no. 3 (May/ June 2011), pp. 56–68.

34 Joseph S. Nye, *Soft Power and Great-Power Competition: Shifting Sands in the Balance of Power between the United States and China* (Singapore: Springer, 2023); Joseph S. Nye, "Perspectives for a China Strategy," *PRISM*, vol. 8, no. 4 (2020), pp. 120–131.

35 Anne-Marie Slaughter "The Return of Anarchy?" *Journal of International Affairs* (2017), pp. 11–16.



the global order could widen – and history has shown that such cracks often precede deeper, more chaotic disruptions. The ongoing Israel-Gaza tensions, combined with the Israel-Iran rivalry and broader Middle East instability, further underscore how fragile this balance remains.

But if the very architects of the LIO have largely abandoned its self-professed principles, who will drive change and reform? Antonio Gramsci referred to such periods when the old is dying but the new cannot be born as an “interregnum”: the age of morbid symptoms, violent solutions, charismatic leaders claiming to restore lost glories and greatness.

An age of danger.

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