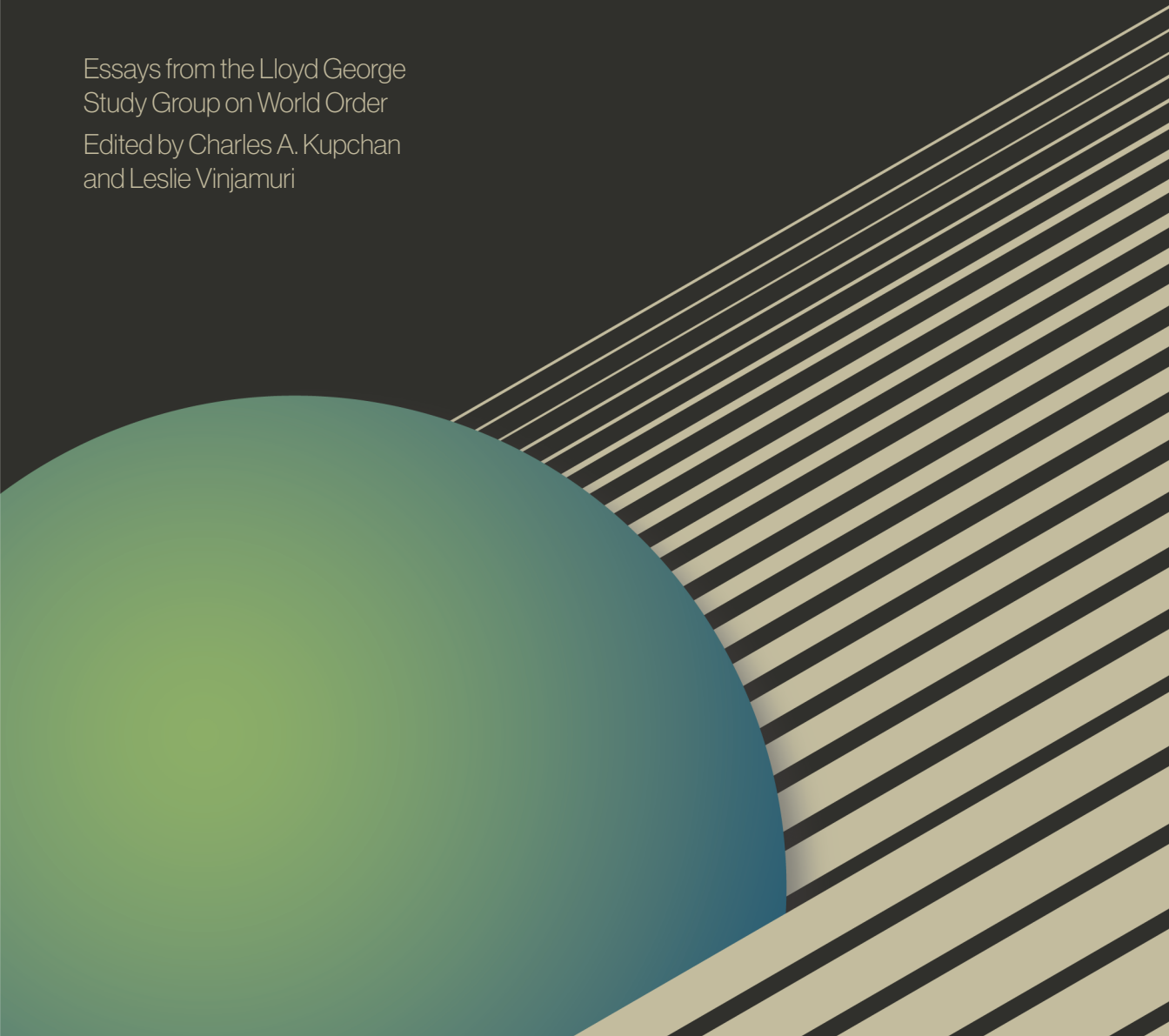


ANCHORING THE WORLD

INTERNATIONAL ORDER IN
THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

Essays from the Lloyd George
Study Group on World Order

Edited by Charles A. Kupchan
and Leslie Vinjamuri



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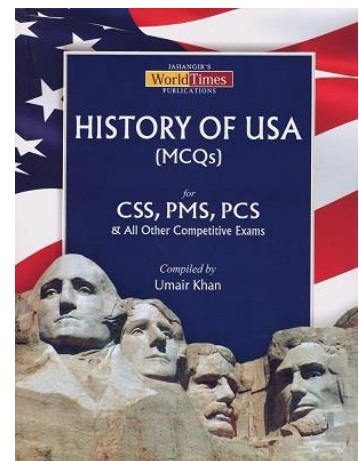
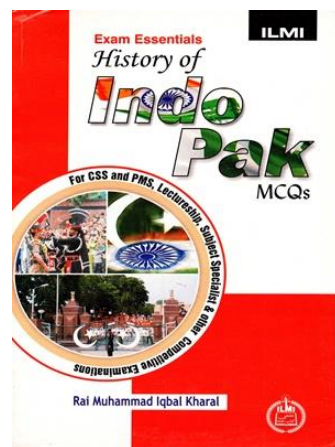
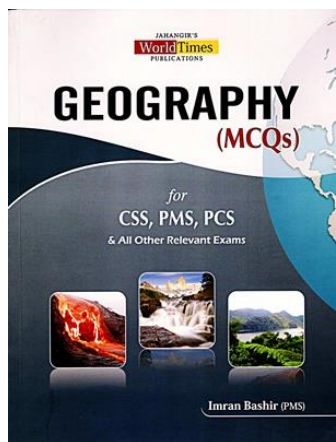
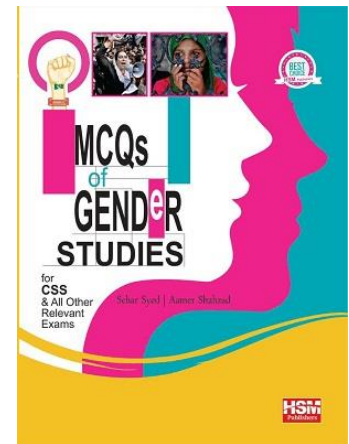
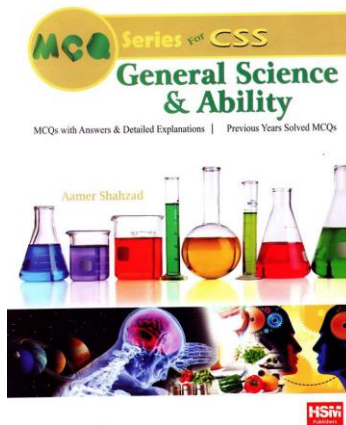
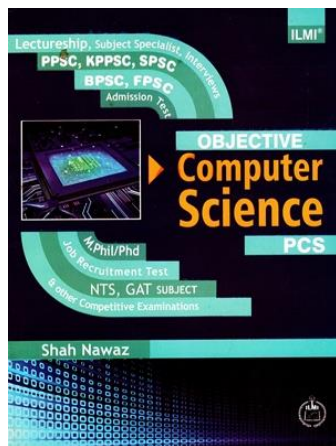
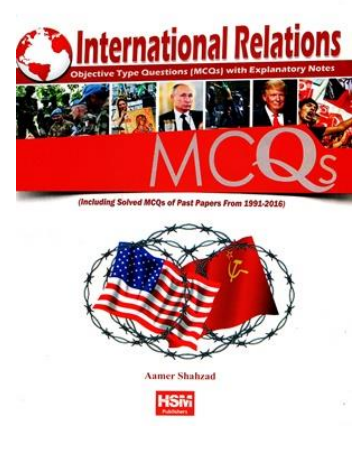
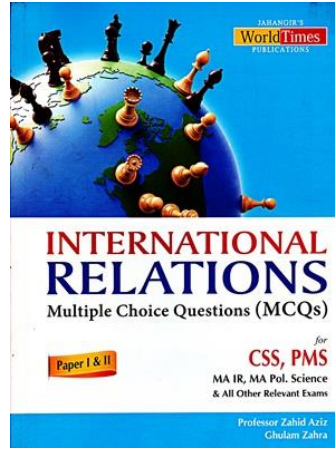
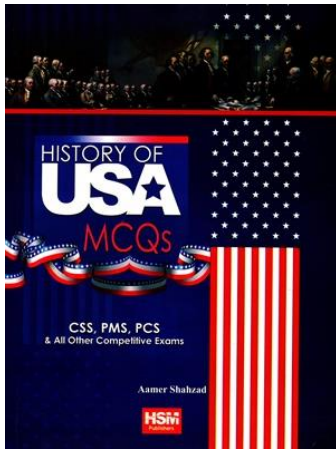
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Essays from the Lloyd George Study Group on World Order

A joint project marking the centennials of Georgetown University's Walsh School of Foreign Service, Chatham House, and the Council on Foreign Relations.

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Anchoring the World

International Order in the Twenty-first Century

Edited by Charles A. Kupchan
and Leslie Vinjamuri

Introduction	1
How to Build an Order <i>Charles A. Kupchan and Leslie Vinjamuri</i>	
<hr/>	
The Liberal Order Begins at Home	10
How Democratic Revival Can Reboot the International System <i>Robin Niblett and Leslie Vinjamuri</i>	
<hr/>	
Opening Up the Order	24
A More Inclusive International System <i>Anne-Marie Slaughter and Gordon LaForge</i>	
<hr/>	
The World Still Needs the UN	33
Building Global Governance From Scratch Is a Fool's Errand <i>Suzanne Nossel</i>	
<hr/>	
The Illiberal Tide	51
Why the International Order Is Tilting Toward Autocracy <i>Alexander Cooley and Daniel H. Nexon</i>	

The Case for a New Engagement Consensus	67
A Chinese Vision of Global Order	
<i>Wang Dong</i>	

The World China Wants	76
How Power Will—and Won't—Reshape Chinese Ambitions	
<i>Rana Mitter</i>	

The New Concert of Powers	89
How to Prevent Catastrophe and Promote Stability in a Multipolar World	
<i>Richard N. Haass and Charles A. Kupchan</i>	

Acknowledgments	104
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Introduction

How to Build an Order

Charles A. Kupchan and Leslie Vinjamuri

APRIL 15, 2021

The close of World War I was accompanied by great political and intellectual ferment over how to build a more peaceful and democratic postwar world. U.S. President Woodrow Wilson spent the first half of 1919 in Europe, working closely with British Prime Minister David Lloyd George, French Prime Minister Georges Clemenceau, and other leaders. Together, they concluded the Treaty of Versailles and brought to life the League of Nations.

The league was a radical innovation, a bold attempt to build an assembly of nations committed to peace, open diplomacy, and international law. Some 60 countries joined, cooperating to mediate territorial disputes, reduce armaments, set up an international court of justice, protect ethnic minorities, and create a health section to contain disease (the league took shape amid the influenza pandemic of 1918–1919). The league was, however, dealt an early blow when the U.S. Senate rejected U.S. membership, refusing to allow participation in a rules-based international order that it deemed would encroach on the nation's sovereignty. The league's failure to organize an effective response to the nationalism and militarism in both Europe and Asia during the 1930s further damaged its credibility.

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Yet the innovative burst of order building that took place at the close of World War I left an imprint on global affairs and would go on to shape the United Nations and the broader postwar architecture that emerged after the next global war. In effect, 1919 was a dry run for 1945.

The intellectual ferment of the post–World War I era took place not only among diplomats and political leaders. Societies at large were jolted and brought together by the Great War. Educators, members of the business community, journalists, and average citizens became more internationalist and more interested in statecraft. In 1919, Georgetown University founded the School of Foreign Service to educate students in international commerce and diplomacy. In 1920, the British Institute of International Affairs—soon to be known as Chatham House—opened its doors. Ever since, Chatham House has fostered mutual understanding among nations and their peoples through debate, dialogue, and independent analysis. The Council on Foreign Relations was founded in 1921 and became the go-to venue for private-sector representatives, politicians, diplomats, military leaders, journalists, and academics to debate U.S. foreign policy.

To mark and celebrate their centennials, Georgetown’s School of Foreign Service, Chatham House, and the Council on Foreign Relations have teamed up to produce this compilation of essays. This volume is the product of the Lloyd George Study Group on World Order, a joint effort of these three institutions, made possible by the generosity of the family of Robert Lloyd George, the great-grandson of David Lloyd George. We hope the essays in this volume duly honor Prime Minister Lloyd George and his role in guiding World War I to a close and crafting a new postwar order. We also aspire to honor the contributions that the School of Foreign Service, Chatham House, and the Council on Foreign Relations have made to the study and practice of international affairs over the past century.

A NEW ORDER-BUILDING MOMENT: EXPLORING OPTIONS

The world has arrived at a new order-building moment—one not unlike the post–World War I era. The global balance of power is shifting; the unipolarity of the early post–Cold War era is giving way to a multipolar international system. Joe Biden’s victory in the 2020 U.S. presidential election represents a marked reprieve from the angry populism, nativism, and illiberalism that have of late taken hold on both sides of the Atlantic. But given the continuing pull of the politics of grievance, it

remains unclear whether the democracies that built the liberal international order after World War II will, over the longer term, continue to support and defend it. The COVID-19 pandemic and the economic debacle it produced have ensured that global health has risen to the top of the international agenda. Public health joins a host of other issues—including climate change, cybersecurity, artificial intelligence, and disinformation—that make clear the need to both broaden traditional conceptions of security and explore new pathways toward international cooperation.

This collection of essays explores alternative conceptions of how best to promote international order and stability in the twenty-first century. Attempting to follow in the footsteps of David Lloyd George and his contemporaries, the Lloyd George Study Group charged this volume's authors with thinking creatively and provocatively about the emerging international system and options to tame geopolitical rivalry and advance international cooperation and peace. The conceptions of order examined in the essays that follow hardly represent an exhaustive list of potential options. Rather, the project seeks to offer thoughtful consideration of a selection of alternative approaches to promoting order amid a changing world.

The first three essays in this volume call for reviving, restoring, and expanding the liberal international order. Each makes a strong case that the current order's foundations are essentially the right ones, but the order is no longer delivering on its original promises and is therefore in need of reform.

Robin Niblett and Leslie Vinjamuri argue that reviving the liberal international order must begin with revitalizing democracy and liberal values at home. Much of the liberal international order's original appeal was its beneficial domestic effects—prosperity, social cohesion, representation, and voice. But many democracies are now beset by inequality, polarization, and diminishing trust in the political establishment and its institutions. The pandemic has only intensified pre-existing sources of disaffection. Democracies need to get their houses in order, in part by ensuring that the economic and social benefits of globalization are more widely shared. The failure to do so has created a groundswell of support for populist leaders who portray multilateralism and globalization as antithetical to democracy. Through public investment in infrastructure and education, tax reform, and changes to trade and immigration policy, governments in the United States and Europe can breathe new life into their democratic institutions

and rebuild the foundations of a renewed multilateralism that begins with transatlantic cooperation. The liberal order can be revived—but only if it is based on a new social bargain.

Anne-Marie Slaughter and Gordon LaForge’s essay proposes expanding the liberal order by deepening linkages among private, civic, educational, scientific, and other networks; they want to extend the order not *out* but *down*. Connective nodes among global networks would form impact hubs that strengthen the order by making it more inclusive and widening its reach beyond states. Especially because the state-based liberal order is falling short when it comes to addressing global problems, the extensive array of nonstate networks must be effectively tapped and integrated into governance structures. Set up properly, networks can transform the liberal international order by drawing on a swath of talent that already exists within societies. Slaughter and LaForge call for a mapping exercise to identify existing networks and their functions and to designate impact hubs that can be connected to each of the Sustainable Development Goals. Developing impact metrics to assess the success of these hubs would provide public and private investors the information they need to measure progress and maximize their investments.

Suzanne Nossel argues that strengthening the United Nations is the best and most inclusive means to increase international cooperation and defend liberal values. She maintains that the UN remains the closest thing the world has to a comprehensive system of global governance and that it has the potential to anchor the international system. Despite the UN’s failure to live up to its expectations when it comes to providing collective security, the UN has succeeded on a wide range of global governance fronts—from responding to humanitarian emergencies to combating climate change. The chief barriers to the UN’s success today stem in no small part from the failure of its indispensable nation, the United States, to be its chief advocate. China, meanwhile, has continued to assert its agenda and influence at the UN, eroding the liberal values on which the body was founded. In addition to calling on the United States to reclaim its leading role at the UN, Nossel argues that essential reforms include empowering the Secretariat; holding Security Council members who exercise the veto to account; increasing peacekeeping’s effectiveness by adapting strategies to better provide civilian protection and counterterrorism; and empowering the General Assembly to act when the Security Council fails to do so.

Alexander Cooley and Daniel Nexon offer a more pessimistic take on the liberal order. They argue that illiberal practices have already made significant inroads not only beyond but also within the liberal order—a trend that is likely to persist and intensify. They foresee not a complete collapse of the liberal order but instead important mutations in world politics that favor illiberal and autocratic forms of governance. As a consequence of reactionary populism and the increasing assertiveness of autocratic powers, the international order overall is veering away from traditional liberal priorities, including advancing human, political, and civil rights. In similar fashion, liberal economic arrangements may increasingly give way to oligarchic and kleptocratic alternatives. Cooley and Nexon are skeptical that these trends can be completely reversed. They argue that democratic states should focus their efforts on protecting their own values and systems of government from an international system in which illiberalism is ascendant.

Wang Dong's and Rana Mitter's essays focus on China and U.S.-Chinese relations. Both see U.S.-Chinese rivalry as a major impediment to global stability but offer different diagnoses of the principal source of tension. Wang argues that the United States mistakenly attributes malign intentions to Beijing and should instead approach China as a responsible stakeholder and emerging partner. He argues that China and the United States should form a "new engagement consensus" and that rapprochement between the two countries should serve as the foundation of a new global order. He contends that China and the United States are currently headed toward a conflictual cold war but that they can manage their differences and compete constructively, thereby leading the world as two responsible stakeholders. A new G-2 would be based on a core bargain: Washington would learn to live with China's political system and accept it as a coequal in East Asia. In return, Beijing would accept an ongoing U.S. presence in the Asia-Pacific, U.S. global primacy, and the legitimacy of the existing international order.

Mitter perceives deeper incompatibilities between Beijing and Washington. Although U.S. policy may be contributing to growing rivalry, he focuses primarily on the course corrections that China needs to embrace if it is to peacefully attain its regional and global ambitions. Mitter argues that the "nucleotides" that make up China's political DNA are authoritarianism, consumerism, globalization, and technology. China is drawing on this political model to pursue three

main foreign policy objectives: Beijing insists on a central role in shaping the regional order in Asia; it is adhering to a model of Chinese economic investment and influence that draws on communitarian ideas of economic development rather than liberal norms that stress the rights of the individual; and it is driven by a strong realist desire to maintain Chinese economic and political interests. China is hewing to its authoritarian vocation, but Mitter believes that its tight grip stands in the way of its potential appeal as a regional and global leader, thereby blocking Beijing from realizing its rising geopolitical ambitions. If China is to contribute to reshaping international order, it needs to embrace a brand of governance that rests on self-restraint and compromise rather than intimidation.

In the seventh and final essay, Richard Haass and Charles Kupchan propose the establishment of a global concert of major powers, arguing that such a steering group represents the most realistic and pragmatic means of taming the twenty-first century's inescapable ideological and geopolitical rivalry. Concerts exhibit political inclusivity; they bring to the table powerful states that wield geopolitical influence, regardless of their regime type. Concerts also exhibit procedural informality; they eschew binding agreements and public diplomacy in favor of private deliberation and consensus building. A global concert would be consultative, not decisional, readying decisions that would be taken and implemented by existing institutions. It would thus backstop, not supplant, the current international architecture by sustaining a strategic dialogue that does not now exist. A global concert would aim to build consensus around a core set of understandings to guide statecraft, manage crises, promote stability, and discuss how best to adapt international norms and institutions to a changing world.

THE COMMON GROUND

The essays in this volume do not present mutually exclusive visions for how to advance international order in the twenty-first century. Indeed, there is considerable common ground. Nearly all of the authors agree that the Atlantic democracies will remain a vital anchor of international order. For Haass and Kupchan, the transatlantic community's centrality is a function of its collective wealth and military capability as well as democratic solidarity. Others focus more on the Atlantic democracies' role as an anchor for securing a world order in-

fused with liberal values and institutions. The impact hubs proposed by Slaughter and LaForge are grounded in open societies' values and practices that allow them to thrive. In contrast, autocratic states are likely to clamp down on independent networks that threaten their grip on power. For Nossel, a leading U.S. role at the UN is crucial if the body is to continue advancing liberal values. Niblett and Vinjamuri also argue for the centrality of liberal democratic values and strong connections between the Atlantic democracies in securing world order. Cooley and Nexon, although they see potentially irreversible illiberal inroads into global governance, make a compelling case that liberal states should continue to champion democratic values, if only to protect their own systems of government. Mitter and Wang differ as to China's intentions and their assessments of China's foreign policy. Nonetheless, they both foresee an order in which the United States remains an anchor.

There is also an overwhelming consensus among the authors that policymakers and analysts alike must broaden the international agenda and directly take on issues such as climate change, infectious disease and public health, cybersecurity, and technological change. Such non-traditional issues were once deemed of little relevance to national security but are now front and center. Indeed, the COVID-19 pandemic and its economic impact have revealed not just the gravity of non-traditional threats to security but also the degree to which countries have become irreversibly interdependent.

In this respect, the seven essays in this volume all recognize the damage done by the Trump administration's unilateral turn in U.S. foreign policy. As Washington retreated from its traditional role as the catalyst for both formal multilateral institutions and coalitions of the willing, international cooperation decayed, and illiberal powers filled the political vacuum left behind. How successful the Biden administration will be in repairing the damage remains to be seen.

All the essays in this volume recognize that shifts in the international distribution of power are making global governance harder to come by; multiple centers of power amid ideological diversity make for a competitive and contentious international landscape. At the same time, the authors agree that questions of order and stability are not solely a function of structural change in the international system. On the contrary, political outcomes, policy choice, and leadership matter. The British electorate's decision to leave the European Union, Donald Trump's

election and his “America first” approach to statecraft, Russia’s interference in Western elections, Chinese President Xi Jinping’s more ambitious and nationalistic foreign policy—these contingent developments illuminate the potential for political choice to speed change in the international system and its ordering norms. By contrast, Joe Biden’s election, the ongoing strength of Europe’s political center, the EU’s commitment to liberal norms, and the continuing allure of liberal democracy and open trade in much of the world—these political outcomes suggest the durability of the liberal order that emerged after World War II. Choice matters.

To be sure, structural change—in particular, the rise of China and the shift of power to Asia—is a central issue of our time. But so, too, are Atlantic democracies’ capacity to revitalize the West and its liberal values and institutions. The 2020 elections in the United States represented one of the most important moments in the nation’s history. The same goes for upcoming elections in Europe, which will determine the European Union’s trajectory. Contingent choices will also determine the impact of China’s rise on the international system. Will Beijing try to remake the international order or, as Wang Dong suggests, accept the current order as long as the United States treats it as a coequal in the Asia-Pacific? Can China be peacefully integrated into the existing order, perhaps requiring the shifts in policy that Rana Mitter suggests for Beijing? Or are Haass and Kupchan right that significant innovation—such as a global concert—will provide the best chance of securing meaningful cooperation on the most consequential global challenges?

Another key choice that policymakers will need to make is how much priority to give democracy. Should the world’s leading democracies learn to live comfortably alongside China, Russia, and other nondemocracies, as Cooley and Nexon, Wang, and Haass and Kupchan recommend, or should they continue to predicate cooperative order on liberal convergence, as other authors maintain? The networks that Slaughter and LaForge identify and seek to incorporate into the order depend on open societies, and Niblett and Vinjamuri advocate for stronger ties between democracies and even advocate for new institutional mechanisms that would be open only to democracies. They see such forums as bulwarks against China’s and Russia’s increasing assertiveness, instruments for defending liberal societies, and vehicles for policy coordination among like-minded states. Whether the benefits of order-building initiatives

open only to democracies outweigh the potential costs of increasing great-power competition across political dividing lines remains unclear.

Finally, policymakers will need to think carefully about how best to integrate nonstate actors and networks into the order-building effort. Are Slaughter and LaForge right that complex societies and global interdependence require much greater engagement of civil society and nonstate actors? Or are Haass and Kupchan right that the order must remain primarily state based, even as civil society becomes more integrated into deliberations and decision-making? Close integration between public and private actors could be the missing ingredient that would provide the international cooperation and public goods currently in such short supply. On the other hand, such integration could inadvertently lead to even greater political contestation within and among states or increased state efforts to control private networks.

The world has again entered an order-building moment. We hope that this compilation of essays provides food for thought and informs the debate essential to managing our era of global change and interdependence. 🌐

The Liberal Order Begins at Home

How Democratic Revival Can Reboot the International System

Robin Niblett and Leslie Vinjamuri

MARCH 30, 2021

For more than seven decades, the twin commitments by the United States and its allies to democracy at home and internationalism abroad animated the so-called liberal order. In recent years, however, the system has faced a growing crisis. Transitions toward democracy in Russia, Turkey, and southeast Asia stalled. The states caught in the rush of the Arab Spring failed to democratize as their citizens hoped.

Now, this crisis of democracy is penetrating the core of the liberal order. Growing economic inequality and a backlash against political liberalism have left the United States and the United Kingdom internally divided. In democracies across Asia, Europe, and Latin America, social and political divisions are rife, public trust in institutions is low, and the role of science and facts in shaping public policy is under attack.

The inauguration of U.S. President Joe Biden provides an opportunity to restore democratic norms in the United States and salvage a liberal order abroad. But the question remains whether that basic idea

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is still fit for the purpose. Some leading voices argue that Western democracies and liberal values neither can nor should anchor a world order. The rise of an authoritarian China threatens to shift the balance of global values away from democracies and toward authoritarian regimes.

But the specter of a world order whose dominant institutions are, at best, neutral toward individual freedoms and democracy is not compelling. Nor is it a vision that the Biden administration and its allies would readily accept. The liberal order was designed to create “a world safe for democracy,” in the words of the political scientist G. John Ikenberry. The challenge lies in delivering on this vision.

Reviving the liberal order means accepting first that the crisis has come from within. Its problems are rooted in the deep economic inequalities in Western states themselves. As the Biden administration appears to recognize, it will be possible to restore that order and the global influence of liberal democratic values only if democracies first rebuild at home. Above all, these states must adopt a new domestic social contract that meets the demands for inclusion that are the hallmark of the twenty-first century.

The ability of Western democracies to shape the international order has always been inextricably linked to their economic success and to their commitment to individual freedoms at home. If they can no longer deliver these benefits, then populist leaders in the West and authoritarians abroad will remain appealing for a long time to come.

This project of strengthening democracies is especially urgent in today’s geopolitical environment. The COVID-19 pandemic has intensified growing tensions between China and the United States. If Washington and its democratic partners fail to reassert their political and moral authority by example, there will be little left to prevent the rapid spread of a more illiberal and ultimately unstable international system.

SELF-INFLICTED WOUNDS

Liberal democracies’ failings are mostly homegrown. For decades after the end of World War II, the United States’ allies in Europe and Asia carefully managed the process of economic globalization, calibrating their trade and domestic policies to prioritize social welfare and full employment. The United Kingdom formed the National Health Service in 1948, and in 1965, the U.S. Congress created Medicare and Medicaid.

Beginning in the mid-1980s, however, in their enthusiasm to secure a share of the benefits of globalization, democratic governments opened their economies to allow freer flows of finance, trade, investment, and technology. Today, it is clear that the benefits of globalization have come at a cost. Although open markets created new opportunities for some, they led to stagnant wages for others. Growth in real median household income in the United States stagnated starting in the mid-1970s, and educational achievement, especially in math and science, fell compared with similar nations. Social mobility, the hallmark of the American Dream, also stalled, even among Americans with college degrees. By 1984, only half of all children earned more than their parents (the comparable figure in the 1940s was 92 percent).

As those who engaged in arbitraging globalization prospered, those anchored to local markets grew increasingly marginalized. The advantages that social welfare programs once provided for the average citizen also began to erode, and many people now attribute their growing sense of personal insecurity to the international liberal economic order itself.

Against this backdrop, rising immigration into the United States and Europe increased fears of cultural and economic dislocation. In Europe, this sentiment intensified during the 2014–15 refugee crisis, leading to the emergence of far-right and far-left populist parties, both of which exploited the growing resentment against the liberal economic order. In the United States, populist politicians on both sides of the political spectrum shared an antiglobalization agenda, despite different philosophical origins. The United Kingdom's surprise decision in June 2016 to leave the EU and, just a few months later, Donald Trump's election in the United States cemented this rejection of liberalism within the two founders of the liberal international order.

Now, COVID-19 has upended this already fragile situation, bringing with it the worst public health crisis since the Spanish flu pandemic of 1918–19 and one of the worst economic recessions of modern times. It has also exposed the persistence of inequality: in the United States and Europe, the wealthy have been largely shielded from the pandemic's economic effects. Meanwhile, the virus has disproportionately affected the lives and livelihoods of citizens in poorer neighborhoods; magnified racial divides; destroyed low-income jobs; and spread through care homes, meatpacking plants, prisons, and immigrant populations.

contributions of the United States, the United Kingdom, and the EU to global GDP is expected to decline from over 40 percent in 2016 to around 21 percent.

China is also using its rising international economic clout to build up its influence at the United Nations. Of the UN's 15 specialized agencies, Chinese nationals now head four. China is using its new access to define multilateralism according to its own illiberal norms and strategic priorities, demanding noninterference in the internal politics of states even if these contravene established commitments to human rights protections. Beijing is also weaponizing interdependence—threatening to deny access to its vast domestic market to countries that investigate the origins of the COVID-19 pandemic or call out China's human rights abuses at home.

Russia, for its part, has integrated social media manipulation into its statecraft—sowing disinformation, sharpening cultural divides, and destroying trust in democratic institutions. In late 2020, it was likely the source of one of the largest cyberattacks ever launched against U.S. government agencies and corporations.

A NEW SOCIAL CONTRACT

Never have liberal democracies looked so vulnerable at home and so insecure abroad. If these states are to reemerge as influential forces, they will need to demonstrate that they can again nurture their citizens' economic productivity and personal liberty. Doing so will require a new social contract between each state and its citizens—creating a twenty-first-century state with a new social purpose that emphasizes inclusion over growth.

The COVID-19 pandemic has opened the political space for a novel cross-party consensus to achieve this goal. In Japan, the United Kingdom, the United States, and the EU, parties on the right and the left united as the economic crisis escalated to support macroeconomic responses that would have been unimaginable just a few months earlier. In the United States, Congress moved swiftly to pass a series of stimulus packages including the CARES Act, a \$2.2 trillion relief plan to support individuals, households, and businesses—the largest economic stimulus package in U.S. history.

Short-term fiscal packages now need to be transformed into sustained interventions. But rallying bipartisan support for large-scale, long-term public investment will be fraught, and as the pandemic

Young people, although relatively insulated from the worst effects of the disease, are among those hit hardest by the resulting disruption to their education and employment opportunities.

FRAYING MULTILATERALISM

Since 1945, multilateral institutions have provided stability in times of crisis and helped maintain an open economy that spread economic prosperity to hundreds of millions of people around the world. The Trump administration, however, attacked organizations such as the World Trade Organization (WTO) for doing precisely the opposite—abetting the rise of China and undermining the economic security of the American middle class.

Leaders across Europe have welcomed Biden's election because of his commitment to restore U.S. engagement with established institutions and to reintegrate Washington into more recent multilateral frameworks, such as the Paris climate accord and the Open Skies Treaty. But U.S. allies are wary of the United States' staying power. There is little to reassure Europeans that the United States' international role has permanently returned to the status quo ante. Many fear that U.S. foreign relations will continue to be defined by dramatic swings from conditional multilateralism to assertive unilateralism. The EU's decision to complete a bilateral investment agreement with China just three weeks before Biden's inauguration revealed the extent to which European governments believe they will occasionally need to prioritize their own tactical interests over loyalty to the transatlantic alliance.

To make matters worse, transatlantic ties are under stress in a global context that is increasingly hostile to democratic values. A growing number of democratic governments, from those in central Europe to Southeast Asia, are elevating the power of the state at the expense of other institutions, such as the judiciary, the press, and civil society. According to Freedom House, a nongovernmental organization that tracks democratic rights, political and civil liberties have been declining for 14 consecutive years.

In addition, the globalization that liberal democracies once championed is now turning against them, delivering benefits to new champions that don't share the same commitment to the liberal order on which the democracies depend. By 2028, China is expected to overtake the United States as the largest global economy. By 2050, the

drags on, the willingness to contemplate higher levels of government spending is likely to fade—especially in the United States. Polarization and entrenched divisions are already creating significant barriers for the Biden administration despite Democratic control of both houses of Congress and the White House. Biden’s decision to move forward with the \$1.9 trillion American Rescue Plan without significant bipartisan support may be necessary in the short term but could further entrench partisan division.

To avoid gridlock, leaders should prioritize policies that have wide cross-party appeal. That should include public investment in infrastructure and in health, education, and affordable housing. New infrastructure can reconnect divided societies by modernizing roads, rail systems, and energy grids and extending access to broadband networks. These improvements can break down inequalities in educational and economic opportunities between peripheral and core cities, forgotten rural areas and creative urban hubs, low- and high-income families, and depressed and resilient regions. Government stimulus that emphasizes green energy would also create urgently needed new jobs.

Renewed focus on these issues will help all sectors of society—especially young people—participate in the workforce. The next generation will shoulder the long-term burden of climate risks, slowed growth, and rising debt. The ability to integrate this generation is all the more important in European states with aging economies and declining population growth rates.

To see results quickly, however, Western democracies also need to protect their economies from unfettered globalization. New rules to regulate investment by foreign companies that benefit unfairly from government support or that may hollow out local technological competitiveness make sense in the novel geoeconomic environment. In the United States and Europe, leaders are already moving to screen out hostile foreign takeovers of sensitive firms.

The challenge will be for democracies to coordinate these policies to ensure that one state’s actions do not undercut others. Aggressive interventions can undermine markets and threaten consumers. Far better to help entrepreneurs build new companies and scale them up quickly. Tax incentives for basic research, remodeled bankruptcy laws, and new patent protections would align more closely with Western values and produce better results.

Liberal democracies should also use the current fiscal stress and unprecedented government borrowing during the pandemic as an opportunity to rethink outdated national tax structures. Tax systems designed to attract foreign investment have created a dangerous imbalance between income and corporate rates on the one hand and public spending requirements on the other. This puts pressure on governments to levy indirect taxes on consumption and limit access to health care, among other austerity measures. To address these inequities, several European governments, including France and the United Kingdom, have already pledged to raise more revenue from personal property, gains on investments, and the revenues that global tech firms such as Facebook and Google earn in their countries.

REIMAGINING IMMIGRATION

Along with these policies, the United States and countries in Europe need to rethink their immigration systems. Democratic leaders must balance the obvious economic benefits of immigration against the social and cultural insecurity that it can generate. Getting this mixture right is crucial in the midst of an economic recession and rising unemployment.

The battle over immigration has become one of the most divisive issues for modern democracies. During his term as U.S. president, Donald Trump cut legal immigration by 49 percent, politicized border controls, and adopted brutal tactics including separating children from their parents. Many tolerated these repressive measures because Trump hammered home the message that immigrants were criminals who stole jobs and benefits that rightfully belonged to ordinary working Americans. Forging bipartisan support for reform efforts in the United States will now require leaders to adopt humane but tough measures targeting illegal immigration while highlighting the positive role immigrants play in the country's economic growth, capacity for innovation, and national identity.

The optimal approach for the United States and European countries alike would include economic investment in places with high levels of emigration, such as Afghanistan, Iraq, Central America, and the Sahel; transparent and accessible pathways for both unskilled and highly skilled immigrants; strong border controls and the capacity to expel undocumented migrants rapidly but humanely; and protection for the children of undocumented residents. Biden addressed some of these imperatives in his first two weeks in office, signing three execu-

tive orders to review Trump's immigration policies, including barriers to naturalization, family separation, and the so-called Remain in Mexico policy that has forced tens of thousands of asylum seekers to wait in Mexico until they are called to court in the United States. Biden has also proposed an eight-year path to citizenship for the 11 million undocumented immigrants living in the United States. This latter issue is one of the most difficult challenges in transitioning to a comprehensive approach, not only in the United States but in all liberal democracies. Countries should adopt a clear and realistic path to citizenship so that these immigrants can also contribute as citizens.

This more coherent immigration policy must be based on the liberal democratic values of openness, tolerance, and inclusivity. Its success depends on the ability of government leaders to make the case for a pragmatic, values-based immigration system that is sensitive to both migration's disruptive effects and its inherent potential. Mainstream politicians must counter populist efforts to mobilize anti-immigrant sentiment based on ethnic or sectarian differences. Instead, leaders need to ground the idea of national identity not on their citizens' race, ethnicity, or religion but on their shared commitment to liberal democratic values.

STRENGTH IN NUMBERS

A supportive international environment is a prerequisite for fixing democracy at home. At a time when Western democracies' share of global GDP is declining, their economic competitiveness will require reliable access to international markets and new technologies. Working with trusted allies will be essential for multiplying influence and access.

The transatlantic partnership between Europe and North America must be a central element of this renewed multilateralism. The United States and Europe still enjoy the most interwoven political and economic relations of any group of states. Along with Canada, they comprise nearly one billion people, slightly below 15 percent of the world's population but over 50 percent of global GDP. Together, their military budgets are equivalent to 57 percent of the global total, and they contribute 85 percent of international development assistance. NATO remains the world's most powerful military alliance, and the EU is the largest and most integrated single market.

U.S. and European leaders should seize the momentum from Biden's inauguration to renew the transatlantic partnership. In doing

so, however, they also need to reach out to democracies in Africa, Asia, and Latin America. More inclusive cooperation will be essential to addressing pressing global challenges, such as public health crises, climate change, technological competition, cybersecurity concerns, debt forgiveness, and humanitarian relief.

Democratic states should first tackle these issues through existing multilateral organizations. But, where gridlock and antiquated institutions threaten to derail progress, they should rely on smaller groupings of like-minded countries with shared values and overlapping interests. By creating a core group of democracies, liberal states could boost their voices within large, multilateral bodies, such as the G-20 and the UN.

Biden, for instance, has already proposed a so-called Democracy Summit to strengthen democracy worldwide. This approach might include adopting common regulatory approaches to social media companies and surveillance technologies and efforts to prevent the spread of misinformation among voters—one of the biggest internal threats to liberal democracy.

For its part, the British government has recommended creating a “D-10” of democratic states by adding Australia, India, and South Korea to the existing G-7. This initiative is driven in part by the national security risks associated with societies’ ever-growing reliance on interconnected digital technologies. One proposed goal for this group is to coordinate its members’ domestic and foreign policies to reduce their dependence on Chinese firms for 5G telecommunications technologies and other important supply chains.

This approach is not without its challenges, however. Maintaining ideological cohesion among liberal democracies that sometimes have distinct interests is a difficult prospect. The EU, for instance, is struggling to manage democratic backsliding in Hungary and Poland. And although the G-7 is sufficiently small and like-minded, its experience with the Trump administration shows that consensus-based bodies can easily be disrupted when their leaders’ interests diverge.

These experiences warn against formally transforming the G-7 into a D-10—especially when it comes to including India. India will soon be the world’s most populous nation and its fifth- or sixth-largest economy. Its democratic constitution and strategic location, moreover, make it a logical partner. Still, India is riven by domestic divisions and inequalities. Its market size coexists with persistent levels of poverty and a fractious political system. As a result, Indian govern-

ments have long been reluctant to fully liberalize the economy. The country's development, moreover, is now overseen by a prime minister, Narendra Modi, who uses authoritarian tactics to limit freedoms and elevate Hindu nationalism while repressing Muslim minorities.

Enlarging groups such as the G-7 to include states such as India will likely expose the original members to internal differences on important democratic values and economic policies. Membership in these organizations, whatever their purpose, should therefore be based on commitments to a carefully defined set of criteria, such as judicial independence, a free press, individual rights in the digital realm, and protections for minorities.

A separate challenge is that solving global problems ultimately depends on liberal democracies working with states outside their democratic circle. There are, however, successful precedents for progress. Since its establishment in 2003, the Proliferation Security Initiative, designed after 9/11 to limit access to materials for weapons of mass destruction, has grown from 11 to 105 members—including Afghanistan and Saudi Arabia.

This tradition has a long history. In 1947, a small group of democracies came together to establish the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT), the precursor to the WTO. In the future, a cross-regional agreement between the diverse Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) countries and the EU could serve, as the GATT before it, to raise standards on fair and sustainable trade and investment. Regular coordination within a cross-regional group of this sort might also help address the current impasse in reforming the WTO.

This type of inclusive coordination will require treading a careful line between sovereignty and effective cooperation. Multilateralism that grants too much authority to consensus or great-power consent creates barriers to action and a tendency to produce lowest-common-denominator outcomes. If adhering to the WHO's International Health Regulations were an entirely voluntary process, for example, the danger of new pandemics would increase exponentially.

The principle behind the 2015 Paris climate accord offers a way past this dilemma. The agreement relied on national alignment with an international agreement instead of delegating national sovereignty to an international body. It utilized the concept of so-called Nationally Determined Contributions, whereby governments made individual commitments to establish and meet specific carbon reduction

targets. Transparency and public shaming are the agreement's principal tools. Alongside growing public awareness, these new mechanisms are driving real change in national and corporate policies.

MAKING COMMON CAUSE

To revive the liberal international order, democratic states need to develop a common strategy toward China. Concerns about Beijing's behavior have grown steadily as Chinese President Xi Jinping has tightened Communist Party control over Chinese society—removing presidential term limits and cracking down on domestic political dissent. Among other moves, China has incarcerated up to one million Uyghur Muslims in reeducation camps in Xinjiang and introduced a draconian national security law in Hong Kong.

In addition to the Chinese government's secretive handling of the COVID-19 pandemic, Beijing has annexed and militarized reefs and islands in the South China Sea. An independent UN tribunal ruled the campaign illegal in 2016. China has also escalated its threats against Taiwan and engaged in a lethal military confrontation with Indian soldiers along the line of control between China and India. This all points to a more belligerent China that is unwilling to concede to other countries' concerns.

These developments, combined with new leadership in the United States, have opened the door to a more unified China strategy among Western democracies. In the United States, China's rise was once perceived principally as a threat to international security and U.S. economic and technological dominance. Now, Xi's domestic policies and the crackdown on Hong Kong have galvanized U.S. concern about human rights abuses across the political spectrum.

European countries have long struggled to agree on a common position toward China. The degree of economic exposure to the Chinese market varies greatly across EU member states, making cooperation difficult. But Beijing is now seen as a threat not only to the long-term competitiveness of certain high-value economic sectors but also to human rights. The European Parliament has threatened to reject the recently finalized EU-Chinese investment agreement, for instance, unless it includes a stronger commitment from China to meet International Labor Organization standards on workers' rights.

Coordinating a joint transatlantic strategy toward China, however, will be difficult in the years ahead. This reflects not only the concern in Europe about the long-term political reliability of the United States

but also an awareness of the economic opportunity that access to China's market presents. Democratic states in the Asia-Pacific—Australia, Japan, and South Korea, whose economies are even more dependent on access to the Chinese market than are the economies of European countries—face a similar conundrum. They joined China and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations in concluding the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership, a free-trade agreement that excludes the United States and India, in November of last year, even after Joe Biden's election.

How then can liberal democracies credibly demonstrate to China that they can uphold the liberal order's values? Contesting Chinese attempts to export its surveillance state is a good starting point. Without clear protections for individuals, the spread of digital tools such as facial recognition, machine learning, credit rating, and health monitoring threatens human rights around the world and would entrench state power at the expense of ordinary people.

The United States, European countries, and other allies should call out efforts by China and countries such as Russia that promote or adopt these tools without the necessary safeguards. A coordinated response to Chinese investment in sensitive technologies, however, would work best if democracies pooled their resources to develop their own options. Whether in an expanded G-7 or some other grouping, liberal states will need to join forces to offer effective alternatives in Western markets and beyond. In addition to 5G technologies, developing shared platforms to monitor disease outbreaks without compromising liberal democratic protections would lay important groundwork for countering the rapid spread of Chinese-inspired alternatives.

Cooperation on technology should be part of a larger framework designed to prevent China's influence from growing in sectors central to liberal democracies' national security, such as quantum computing, artificial intelligence, and outer space. NATO could serve as a forum for coordinating responses to these new security challenges. On this issue, it could mirror the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue, a partnership including Australia, India, Japan, and the United States that serves as a forum for Asian democracies to manage China's regional influence.

Liberal democracies should also develop new ways of financing infrastructure projects in Africa, Asia, and Latin America. By using their collective financial and technical strengths, democracies can of-

for a viable alternative to the Chinese-led energy, transportation, and logistical hubs that are expanding across the developing world via the Belt and Road Initiative. In parallel, Washington could also demand that BRI projects involving the United States' partners be carried out in collaboration with more transparent institutions, such as the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank, or with the newer Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank.

THE WORLD'S BEST HOPE

The United States needs to pair its recommitment to multilateral cooperation with a concrete strategy designed to make multilateralism work again. Otherwise, any effort to revive a liberal international order is bound to fail. Geopolitical competition will grow in an increasingly value-free international context.

The pandemic has revealed the gravity of the challenge. The question now is how democratic governments will respond. Some with high deficits, especially in Europe, may struggle to focus on necessary, long-term domestic structural changes. Public pressure could drive them toward expedient but ultimately ineffective solutions. The pandemic might also give populist parties a new boost, just as their luster was fading in the wake of a series of electoral setbacks. And in the United States, a divided Republican Party could exacerbate polarization, impeding legislative action.

Still, there are signs that Western governments are starting to align around a set of targeted domestic policies and a new social contract that could deliver more sustainable and inclusive growth. COVID-19 has also served as a reminder that the rule of law and a vibrant civil society can be a source of strength in times of crisis. When democratic governments fail, opposition parties, a free press, and civil society ensure that their failures do not go unnoticed. Contrast this with the secretive Chinese system that refuses to discuss the origins of the virus.

The COVID-19 pandemic is also opening new opportunities for cooperation among a wider and more inclusive group of liberal democracies. If these governments can use the pandemic recovery to strengthen cooperation, address domestic inequalities, and heal social divisions, states will draw some of the poison out of the current transatlantic and transpacific divisions. If they can make progress at home, liberal democracies will remain the most credible source of global governance norms deemed legitimate by the broadest segment of the world's population.

Ultimately, an international system led by liberal democracies and infused with liberal democratic values offers the best hope for securing widespread peace and prosperity, including among those who do not share these values. The remaining challenge is this: Can liberal democracies define and lead a world order that embodies their values even if the transatlantic community and its main global partners are not globally dominant? This would be difficult. It is therefore essential that the community of liberal democracies not only prospers but begins to grow once again. 🌐

Opening Up the Order

A More Inclusive International System

Anne-Marie Slaughter and Gordon LaForge

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When the world looks back on the response to the COVID-19 pandemic, one lesson it will draw is the value of competent national governments—the kind that imposed social-distancing restrictions, delivered clear public health messaging, and implemented testing and contact tracing. It will also, however, recall the importance of the CEOs, philanthropists, epidemiologists, doctors, investors, civic leaders, mayors, and governors who stepped in when national leaders failed.

Early in the pandemic, as the U.S. and Chinese governments cast research into the new coronavirus as a jingoistic imperative, the world's scientists were sharing viral genome sequences and launching hundreds of clinical trials—what *The New York Times* called a “global collaboration unlike any in history.” The vaccine race involved transnational networks of researchers, foundations, and businesses, all motivated by different incentives yet working together for a common cause.

Still, with the rise of China, the fraying of the postwar liberal international order, and the drawbridge-up mentality accelerated by the pandemic, realpolitik is back in vogue, leading some to propose recen-

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tering international relations on a small group of powerful states. Although it is easy to caricature proposals for a world run by a handful of great powers as the national security establishment pining for a long-gone world of cozy backroom dealing, the idea is not entirely unreasonable. Network science has demonstrated the essential value of both strong and weak ties: small groups to get things done and large ones to maximize the flow of information, innovation, and participation.

Even if states could create a modern-day version of the nineteenth-century Concert of Europe, however, it would not be enough to tackle the hydra-headed problems of the twenty-first century. Threats such as climate change and pandemics transcend national jurisdictions. In the absence of a true global government, the best bet for guaranteeing the world's security and prosperity is not to limit the liberal order to democracies but to expand it deeper into liberal societies. There, civic, educational, corporate, and scientific actors can work with one another—and with governments—in ways that enhance transparency, accountability, and problem-solving capacity.

Leaders do not face a binary choice between the state and society. Global problem solving is a both/and enterprise. The task is thus to figure out how best to integrate those two worlds. One promising approach would be to identify the many actors working on a specific problem (say, infectious disease) and then connect the most effective participants and help them accomplish clear goals. “We do not need new bureaucracies,” UN Secretary-General António Guterres has written. “But we do need a networked multilateralism that links global and regional institutions. We also need an inclusive multilateralism that engages businesses, cities, universities and movements.”

It is a dark time for global politics. States are adapting to a world of multiple power centers and complex issues that require coordination at every level of society. Four years of erratic, personality-driven leadership in the United States under President Donald Trump, moreover, have left the liberal order in tatters. To repair it, leaders need to tap the talent and resources outside the state. Humanity cannot afford to go back to a world in which only states matter.

THE CASE FOR EXPANSION

States create international orders to, well, establish order—that is, to fight chaos, solve problems, and govern. The liberal international order is a subset of this idea, a set of institutions, laws, rules, procedures, and

practices that shaped international cooperation after World War II. Its purpose was to facilitate collective action by regularizing decision-making processes, developing shared norms, and increasing the reputational costs of renegeing on commitments. The institutions that form part of that order—the UN system, the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, NATO, and the precursor to the EU, the European Economic Community—served that purpose reasonably well for decades.

But the world cannot successfully address twenty-first-century threats and challenges, such as climate change, pandemic disease, cyber-conflict, and inequality, without mobilizing a new set of actors. Existing institutions, although valuable, were built for a world of concentrated power, in which a handful of states called the shots. Today, power is much more diffuse, with nonstate actors strong enough to both create international problems and help solve them. Accordingly, the current order needs to expand not by differentiating between various kinds of states but by making room for new categories of nonstate actors.

Take the response to the pandemic. Unilateral action by national governments was often decisive in curbing the disease. Implementing social restrictions, closing borders, and providing emergency economic relief saved lives. Despite all the criticism they have received, international organizations were also essential. The World Health Organization was the first body to officially report the outbreak of a deadly novel coronavirus; it issued technical guidance on how to detect, test for, and manage COVID-19; and it shipped tests and millions of pieces of protective gear to more than 100 countries.

Also critical, however, were many other actors outside the state. As many governments promulgated false or politically biased information about the new coronavirus and its spread, universities and independent public health experts provided reliable data and actionable models. Philanthropies injected massive amounts of money into the fight; by the end of 2020, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation had donated \$1.75 billion to the global COVID-19 response. The Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations, a global vaccine-development partnership of public, private, and civil society organizations, raised \$1.3 billion for COVID-19 vaccine candidates, two of which, the Moderna vaccine and the Oxford-AstraZeneca vaccine, are already being administered to the public.

Officials below the national level also played a vital role. In the United States, where the federal government's response was indecisive and

shambolic, governors convened regional task forces and together procured supplies of ventilators and protective equipment. Michael Bloomberg, the billionaire philanthropist and former New York City mayor, provided funding and organizational and technical assistance to create a contact-tracing army in the city. Apple and Google partnered to develop tools that could notify smartphone users if they came into contact with people infected by the virus. Serious planning on when and how to reopen the U.S. economy was first done not in the White House but by governors and a CEO task force convened by the nonprofit the Business Roundtable. The first large-scale antibody study to determine the prevalence of the virus in the United States was conducted not by the National Institutes of Health or the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention but by California universities, an anti-doping research group, and 10,000 employees and players of Major League Baseball.

The response to the COVID-19 pandemic is only one example of how global actors, not states alone, drive solutions to complex problems. Although it would have been preferable had efficient central governments organized a coherent response to the pandemic, the distributed response on the part of others demonstrated just how much problem-solving talent exists outside the state. Moreover, as some countries become more nationalist, parochial, and captured by special interests, opening up the international order to global actors is the best way to reform the order in the absence of a major state-led initiative.

GROWING NETWORKS

The activity of global actors working on a given problem, such as COVID-19, is difficult to map, much less manage. But it is also here to stay. As the scholar Jessica Mathews first noted in *Foreign Affairs* in 1997, powers once reserved for national governments have shifted substantially and inexorably to businesses, international organizations, and nongovernmental organizations. Later that same year, one of us (Anne-Marie Slaughter) noted, also in these pages, the emerging “disaggregation of the state” into its component executive, legislative, judicial, and subnational parts. Regulators, judges, mayors, and governors were already working together in “government networks” that provided a parallel infrastructure to formal international institutions. This phenomenon has only grown more pronounced in the intervening two decades.

Still, nation-states will not disappear, nor even diminish in importance. Many governments possess political legitimacy that global actors

often lack. Populist leaders have also demonstrated both the capacity to reassert traditional conceptions of sovereignty and the appeal of that strategy to many of their citizens. Trump single-handedly dismantled many of the signature foreign policy achievements of the Obama administration: he withdrew from the Paris climate agreement, torpedoed the Iran nuclear deal, and reversed the opening to Cuba. Autocrats in China, the Philippines, Russia, and Turkey have consolidated power and control, leading observers to bemoan a return to the era of the strongman. Where democracy is retrenching, however, it is often mayors, governors, businesspeople, and civic leaders who offer the strongest resistance. These actors prize and benefit from an open, democratic society.

The geography of global economic power, moreover, is also shifting in favor of nonstate actors. Five giant technology companies—Amazon, Apple, Facebook, Google, and Microsoft—have a combined market capitalization of roughly \$7 trillion, greater than the GDP of every country except China and the United States. Even if governments reined in or broke up those five, scores of other companies would have more economic resources than many states. A similar shift is evident when it comes to security. As 9/11 made clear, some of the most potent national security threats emanate from organizations unaffiliated with any state. Even public service delivery is no longer the sole remit of governments. Since 2000, Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance, has helped immunize more than 822 million children in the developing world.

This transformation is partly the product of global connectivity. Never before has it been so easy to communicate, organize, and conduct business across national borders. In 1995, 16 million people used the Internet; in 2020, 4.8 billion did. Nearly 1.8 billion people log on to Facebook every day, a population larger than that of any single country. World trade as a percentage of global GDP is double what it was in 1975. According to one estimate, the number of treaties deposited with the UN grew from fewer than 4,500 in 1959 to more than 45,000 50 years later. In 1909, there were 37 international organizations; in 2009, there were nearly 2,000.

MAPPING THE NETWORKED WORLD

The world of global networks is a messy and contested space. International networks committed to ending climate change, promoting human rights, and fighting corruption exist alongside those bent on

perpetrating terrorist attacks or laundering money. But COVID-19 has shown that successfully responding to contemporary challenges requires mobilizing global actors.

One way to marshal these forces is to expand the liberal order down. The goal should be a horizontal and open system that harnesses the power and efficacy of both governments and global actors. The pillars of this order might be called “impact hubs”: issue-specific organizations that sit at the center of a set of important actors working on a particular problem—coordinating their collective work toward common, clearly measurable goals and outcomes. A hub could be an existing international or regional organization, a coalition of nongovernmental organizations, or a new secretariat within the UN system specifically created for the purpose.

Gavi is the clearest example of this hub-based approach. The Gates Foundation helped found Gavi in 2000 as an alliance of governments, international organizations, businesses, and nongovernmental organizations. Its small secretariat is charged with a wide array of vaccine-related functions, from research to distribution, all under the eye of a 28-person board of public, private, and civic representatives. The founders of Gavi designed it as a new type of international organization, one that sought to be representative, nimble, and effective all at the same time. The result is far from perfect, but it has enormous advantages. Purely governmental organizations are often paralyzed by politics, and purely private or civic networks are invariably interested in pursuing their own interests.

In most areas of global problem solving, however, the challenge is not too few actors but too many. The goal is to identify the most effective and legitimate organizations in a particular area and link them to a hub that has both the funds and the authority to make a difference. Too much connection can be as bad as too little: the bigger the meeting, the harder it is to reach consensus and take action. Moreover, formal inclusion often means informal exclusion: when nothing gets done in the meeting, lots of action takes place among smaller groups in the lobby.

To avoid that outcome, would-be architects of a new global order should begin by mapping the networked world. A good place to start would be to look at the actors working on each of the UN’s 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)—targets the world has agreed must be met by 2030 to achieve global peace and prosperity. The relevant actors include UN special agencies and affiliates; regional groups such as the

European Union and the Organization of American States; corporations such as Coca-Cola, Siemens, and Tata; large philanthropies such as the Gates Foundation, the Ford Foundation, and the Aga Khan Foundation; and research centers, private institutes, think tanks, and civic and faith groups. Mapping these actors and the connections between them would reveal the most important centers of activity and provide a starting point for figuring out where to locate or support a hub.

HUBS AND SPOKES

With networks mapped, leaders would then need to offer incentives to spur the designation or creation of the hubs. One way to do this would be to use challenges issued by international organizations, philanthropies, or groups of governments. The MacArthur Foundation's 100&Change challenge, for instance, offers a \$100 million grant to fund a single proposal that "promises real and measurable progress in solving a critical problem of our time."

A properly designed challenge could encourage the formation of powerful hubs by triggering a natural growth process that network science calls "preferential attachment." In all sorts of networks—biological, social, economic, political—the nodes that already have the most connections attract the greatest number of new connections. Within international relations, the UN is a useful example of this phenomenon. Initiatives and institutions often grow out of the UN because nearly all countries are already a part of its structure and because it has a record of credibility and expertise.

The UN should, however, pursue a more deliberate strategy to ensure that its many programs, commissions, and sub-organizations become problem-solving hubs. The secretary-general could, for example, connect a global network of mayors and governors to the UN Refugee Agency to help with refugee resettlement. Or, to combat climate change, the UN Environment Program could work with the Global Covenant of Mayors for Climate and Energy, a partnership between Bloomberg Philanthropies and the European Union that has brought together more than 7,000 local executives.

For those issues on which actors view the UN as too big, bureaucratic, or divided for effective action, regional organizations, informal groups, or existing public-private coalitions could serve a similar purpose. The point, however, is not simply to create partnerships and coalitions—the world is awash in them already. It is to create a stronger

and more participatory order. Over time, the messy spaghetti bowl of global networks could evolve from a distributed structure with no hubs, or countless small hubs, into a more rationalized structure, one that has fewer but bigger hubs.

An effective global order also needs to be judged by its practical results, with clear metrics that incentivize competition and investment. Here, impact hubs offer an enormous opportunity to compare progress across different organizations, alliances, coalitions, and networks. Some organizations are already developing standardized metrics of progress. Impact investing—whereby investors seek not just financial returns but also environmental, social, and governance returns—is an enormous and fast-growing field. Just as traditional investors look to economic indicators such as profit margins, impact investors rely on concrete indicators to guide their choices, such as carbon emissions or school enrollment.

Leaders can and should apply similar metrics to the work of international institutions. Imagine a global impact metrics organization, comparable to the International Organization for Standardization, that rated global impact hubs in terms of the progress they were making toward achieving a particular SDG. However they were organized, reliable metrics would create a uniform way of assessing the actual contributions of different groups and hubs. In challenge competitions, the networks that were measurably more effective would prevail, which would then put them in a position to attract more people, funds, and connections, creating a virtuous circle.

The broader result would be a flexible, ever-changing system, one that would be more responsive and effective than the current order. It could meet the planet's challenges while allowing for important variation at the local and national levels.

A NEW LIBERAL ORDER

As children pore over maps and globes, they learn to see a world neatly divided into geographic containers, brightly colored shapes separated by stark black lines. Later, they come to understand that although those borders are real, guarded by fences, walls, and officials, they are only one way of visualizing the international system. Satellite pictures of the world at night show clusters and ribbons of light, depicting the riotous interconnectedness of humanity in some places and the distant isolation of others.

Both of these images signify something relevant and important. The former portrays the state-based international order—visible, organized, demarcated. The latter illustrates the tangled webs of businesses, civil society organizations, foundations, universities, and other actors—an evolving, complex system that, although harder to conceptualize, is no less important to world affairs. The two exist side by side or, more precisely, on top of each other. The great advantage of the state-based order is that it has the legitimacy of formal pedigree and sovereign representation, even if it is often paralyzed and ineffective at solving important problems. The global order, by contrast, has the potential to be far more participatory, nimble, innovative, and effective. But it can also be shadowy and unaccountable.

If leaders bring together parts of both systems in a more coherent vision of a liberal order, the United States and its allies could build the capacity necessary to meet today's global challenges. An expanded liberal order could harness networks of people, organizations, and resources from every sector of society. The existing institutions of the liberal, state-based order could become impact hubs. The result would be a messy, redundant, and ever-changing system that would never be centrally controlled. But it would be aligned in the service of peace and prosperity. 🌍

The World Still Needs the UN

Building Global Governance From Scratch Is a Fool's Errand

Suzanne Nossel

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Imagine a system of global governance fit for the twenty-first century. All nations would be bound to codified precepts restraining the use of force, fostering peaceful conflict resolution, upholding the rule of law, and enshrining respect for human rights. Grand-scale negotiating forums would shape new rules to avert crises and foster cooperation on issues including climate change, pandemics, and migration. Great powers would wield influence but be held in check by one another and a rotating cast of middle powers from every region. Countries big and small, rich and poor would participate, guaranteeing their stake in the system. Civil society organizations, businesses, and popular movements would have channels to influence decision-making. The convening body would include an array of specialized arms capable of providing technical assistance, overseeing cooperation, measuring progress toward priorities, meeting humanitarian needs, and quelling conflicts. Expenses would be shouldered based on each government's size and wealth.

Creating such a system afresh in the 2020s would be impossible. Major countries would never agree on objectives or values, much less

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concede to being legally bound by them. Human rights principles would be disputed and rebuffed. Beyond the United States and China, it would be impossible to agree on which powers deserved special prerogatives. Power-hungry sovereigns would insist on cutting out civil society entirely. Treasuries would refuse to pay the bills for activities their governments did not fully control.

The United Nations remains the closest thing to a system of global governance that the world has ever known and may ever achieve. And yet, as the COVID-19 pandemic makes painfully clear, the system can be paralyzed, distracted, and dysfunctional just when it is needed most. The paradox of the UN—an organization only as good as the collective will of its member states—is that it embodies so much potential alongside so much disappointment.

No single country, organization, or institution can dictate the future of global governance. The world is too complex, diverse, and fractured to allow for that. Cooperation between the United States and China is essential but not sufficient. Neither countries nor peoples around the world want to submit to the whims of the world's two most powerful players. To lead, Washington and Beijing need forums to rally support and reckon with opposition. A strengthened system of global governance, if it is to be, will involve overlapping forums, institutions, and coalitions that collectively shoulder the world's challenges. The UN has a central role to play within such a system. Any effort to reinvent global governance should focus on reinvigorating the body invented to serve as its linchpin.

The UN stands at a crossroads, with an increasingly assertive China and Russia testing the organization's founding ideals of human rights and the rule of law. There is an ambitious effort underway to remake the United Nations into a body in which powerful governments can work their will free of the normative constraints embedded in the UN's founding purpose. To preserve the United Nations as it was intended—as a forum for transnational problem solving and a force for the rights, freedoms, and well-being of all people—countries committed to those core precepts will have to overcome their entrenched ambivalence toward the organization and shore up its relevance. If they fail to rise to the challenge, they will find themselves seated in a world body emptied of principle and reshaped to serve authoritarian agendas.

Reinventing the UN will require member states to renew their original vows to the ideals of international cooperation. Wistfulness over

an elusive, utopian system of global governance that never was must not be the enemy of the United Nations that is or that could be. Instead, energetic diplomacy should reanimate the UN's high-minded foundation and repudiate those who seek to hollow out its principled pillars and leave behind a brittle shell for interest-based realpolitik. UN personnel and leaders will need more freedom from political influence to make sound decisions and get things done. The UN will also need visible achievements that reposition it in the eyes of skeptical governments and peoples. Ultimately, reviving the UN will require subordinating narrow national interests to the task of protecting the world's best hope for solving grave global threats.

SPECIAL FROM THE START

The UN has been unique since its inception. Founded after World War II, when the United States was morally ascendant and accounted for over half the global economy, the UN represented U.S. President Woodrow Wilson's vision of a global system that reflected U.S. ideals. The trauma of the war and the power disparities left in its wake subsumed what might have otherwise been mortal disagreements over control, values, and rights. For adherents to progressive precepts, including individual freedom and justice, the UN system is uniquely aligned, a global edifice enshrining those principles. The UN's universal membership; broad foundation of shared, legally grounded liberal principles; and expert capabilities would be nearly impossible to replicate in a new global body. If the UN did not exist, it could not be created today. COVID-19, however, may lead to a moment when the struts and joints of the global order can suddenly be reconfigured. The ideological and politically intractable problems of the twenty-first century dictate that, rather than trying to build from scratch, nations capitalize on the UN's singularities and seize the opening to remedy its flaws.

To Western policymakers and the media, however, the UN seems to register most often for its shortcomings. Witnessing the UN Security Council seize up amid the COVID-19 pandemic and fail to agree on so much as a statement in response to the most catastrophic health crisis of modern times, they had reason to despair. Yet that frustration can obscure the essence of the UN's dysfunction: leading states' recalcitrance, indifference, and abdication. Focusing on the UN as a locus of discontent distracts from the great powers' failures and obscures the many things the UN does well.

Ritual exasperation and even dismissiveness toward the UN are hardly baseless. The organization has fulfilled its founding vision only episodically. Many of its limitations, however, are grounded in the nature of global governance itself and its uneasy cohabitation alongside national sovereignty. Global governance can only be as good as those doing the governing. The Security Council's notorious paralysis during the Cold War mirrored the standoff between the globe's two superpowers. The deadlock over COVID-19 reflected the campaigns by the United States and China to deflect blame for the crisis. The tensions that impair cooperation intensify when the stakes are high, often rendering the Security Council useless when it is needed most, such as during the grinding conflict in Syria over the last decade. On climate change, the UN has performed a vital convening function but cannot force the consensus necessary to protect the planet. The meticulous preparation, dogged diplomacy, and creative problem solving of UN Secretariat officials can only go so far. The fate of contentious negotiations hinges on the leading countries' willingness to compromise.

The UN's worst recent scandals related to the very same dependence on member states. Infected Nepalese peacekeeping battalions spread cholera in post-earthquake Haiti, a catastrophe compounded by substandard sanitation on their base. The UN refused to accept responsibility and, even worse, wealthier member states refused to establish a trust fund for the victims. Sexual abuse by UN peacekeepers in the Central African Republic, Haiti, and elsewhere is a function of lax preparation and low standards among national militaries contributing troops for UN operations. The UN has now taken forceful steps and built a potent administrative infrastructure to better train and vet troops and hold them accountable for violations. Yet contributing governments have been inconsistent in their vigilance and follow-through.

Although some of the UN's most infamous scandals have faded into the distant past in some policy circles, contemptuousness toward the UN remains an article of faith. Certain governments with the most to gain from the organization are among the most cynical. The UN Charter, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and other instruments embody precepts of democracy, freedom, the rule of law, and respect for human rights treasured by liberal democracies. Recognizing these ideas as universal, rather than Western, is at the heart of the UN. This notion has new urgency as competing, illiberal ideas gain currency globally. Yet for decades, U.S. politicians on both sides of

the aisle have derided the UN as a forum for Lilliputians bent on tamping down the superpower Gulliver. The United States has long complained about its bills as the organization's largest contributor, refusing to pay on time, in full, or sometimes at all. Washington also blames the UN for treating Israel unfairly, although criticism of the Jewish state is driven by member states, not the organization itself.

Despite its entrenched ambivalence, the United States has always been the UN's indispensable nation: it is the host country in New York, the UN's largest contributor, the driving force behind countless UN initiatives and resolutions, and the determinant of whether such initiatives succeed. At its best, Washington is diplomatically agile and assertive at the UN, marshaling support behind vital efforts to, for example, tackle conflicts in Africa, curb North Korea's nuclear program through sanctions, and invigorate human rights mechanisms. Only in the last few years under the Trump administration has the United States' derision toward the UN subsumed any potential for diplomatic efficacy.

Sometimes, despite its members, the UN has accomplished an immense amount, usually in areas where no other government or organization could have possibly achieved the same. Yet the UN is not measured by the many tests that it meets. The flawed accounting results partly from the distinction between the UN itself, centered on the organization's political bodies such as the General Assembly and the Security Council, and the UN system, which includes dozens of specialized technical agencies from the World Health Organization to the International Civil Aviation Organization. The UN system's achievements include feeding more than 100 million people in over 80 countries, vaccinating almost half the world's children, saving the ozone layer, shepherding more than 500 treaties into existence, curbing the spread of nuclear weapons, deploying more than 70 peacekeeping missions, helping end colonization, and assisting nearly 60 million refugees and displaced persons. UN Special Political Missions have curbed chemical and nuclear weapons proliferation and kept volatile regions from boiling over into conflict. Other vital accomplishments include curtailing the 2014 Ebola outbreak and strengthening LGBTQ rights. The Security Council's stasis in the face of COVID-19 does not negate the World Health Organization's work to coordinate an imperfect but essential pandemic response, advance progress toward a vaccine, and assist UN agencies in providing critical pandemic relief efforts. The UN has saved tens of millions if not hun-

dreds of millions of lives and made the world safer, healthier, better fed, more sustainable, more equal, and more just.

Despite all that, the UN's perceived limitations have led to an eroding public image. Each successive secretary-general seems to hold a lower profile than his predecessor. The last time a U.S. president mentioned the United Nations in an inaugural address was in 1960. Still, the UN's contributions should not be taken for granted.

A UN IN FLUX

The UN is no more static than the world it inhabits. A series of significant changes now underway will likely determine whether the world body endures in a recognizable form. The UN faces four interrelated challenges, each heightened in recent years: a new geopolitical system premised on an uneasy balance of power among nations with sharply divergent values and goals; the rise of governments and leaders who reject the UN's liberal framework; the collapse of liberal influence around the world due to the Trump administration's diplomatic misfires coupled with the rise of authoritarian populism in important democracies; and finally, the organization's own sclerosis in central areas, including peacekeeping.

China's diplomatic ascent is a through line across all four of these trends. Many governments historically looked to Washington for a steer on what positions to take on key UN issues, wanting to avoid being crosswise with their largest trading partner and the world's most influential country. Beijing has now moved into a position of equivalent sway on UN matters, such that delegations now assess their votes and statements against how the two capitals will react. China unabashedly uses its power and money—it is now the UN's second-largest contributor—to blunt criticism, thwart outcomes, shut out Taiwan, plug its Belt and Road Initiative, and dilute norms that might be used to hold it accountable. China's fast-growing involvement in UN peacekeeping as a troop contributor, funder, and source of Secretariat leadership also correlates with Beijing's substantial economic stake in Africa. The World Health Organization suffered a grave blow in credibility when it was criticized for succumbing to pressure from Beijing to downplay China's responsibility for the spread of COVID-19. Chinese nationals occupy a growing array of influential UN positions, including leadership slots at the and Food and Agriculture Organization and the Department of Economic and Social Affairs, which oversees accreditation for nongovernmental organizations (NGOs).

These shifts come at a moment when the imperatives of global governance are glaringly apparent: climate change, refugee flows, pandemics, natural disasters, technology, and trade-related dislocations. The world is becoming hotter, more connected, and more contagious. As UN Secretary-General António Guterres has said, “multilateralism is under fire precisely when we need it most.”

The UN and its member states stand at a fork in the road. The organization has always been a hybrid between a value-neutral forum that bolsters international cooperation and conflict resolution and a force that promotes liberal norms, such as democracy and human rights. As Adam Lupel of the International Peace Institute has noted, this hybridity helps explain some of the UN’s stark anomalies, including the presence of notoriously repressive governments, such as China and Russia, on the Human Rights Council. Both of those UN functions—its role as a neutral forum that catalyzes action and its power as a force that enshrines the values in its underlying treaties—are now under severe pressure, for related but distinct reasons.

COLLECTIVE ACTION IN CRISIS

As a forum to foster collective security, address conflicts, and encourage cooperation, the UN suffers from certain governments’ waning willingness to subordinate national interests and domestic politics to international norms and standards. The presence of three permanent Security Council members—China, Russia, and the United States—that are willing to block collective action in the service of their competing individual interests has the potential to cripple consensus building to a greater extent than the Cold War did. For Beijing, protecting China’s global image and avoiding domestic instability are existential objectives. Russian President Vladimir Putin has staked his leadership on building up Russia at the United States’ expense. For Trump’s United States, catering to a domestic political base overrode conventional foreign policy objectives. The Biden administration recognizes the United States’ stake in steadying teetering global norms. But it has also committed to promulgating a foreign policy that meets middle-class American voters’ interests and is more closely tied to domestic policy considerations. During the Trump years, the UN was dominated by three myopic and insecure global powers that lacked the will, the internationalist spirit, and the farsightedness to lead. The imperatives that motivated the UN’s founding 75 years ago took

a back seat to more mercenary goals. The result placed a growing set of issues—Crimea, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the South China Sea, Syria, and even COVID-19—outside the council’s reach. The Biden administration now faces the challenge of restoring U.S. influence within the world body and restoring the UN’s own efficacy and standing at the same time.

With major conflagrations largely off-limits for the council, collective security has lately operated nearer the margins. The council mainly addresses outbreaks in Africa, where the vast majority of peacekeepers are deployed. There, collective action faces a different set of constraints, stemming from the reluctance of member states to empower the UN to tailor its interventions for the conflicts it seeks to temper. UN peacekeeping operations were originally designed to help implement peace agreements after hostilities ceased. The guiding principles that underpin peacekeeping missions were reformulated in 2008, and they now emphasize that the UN should involve itself only with the consent of the warring parties, remain impartial, and not use force. These principles were developed based on decades of lessons learned and the political and operational constraints of nations contributing troops.

Yet recent missions in the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Mali, and South Sudan bear little resemblance to those envisaged in peacekeeping doctrine. When the UN is called upon to get involved, usually in the name of protecting civilians, the conflicts are still active. They involve armed militias, criminal syndicates, and ideological extremists who sow chaos across borders. Peace agreements are often nonexistent. Rogue actors stand aloof from negotiations. Foreign governments hold limited sway. UN peacekeepers risk being seen as partial to rulers who may themselves be fueling conflicts and atrocities. To stand a chance, peacekeeping operations must be intertwined with full-blown diplomatic efforts bearing the UN’s complete capabilities. Yet special envoys can face an overwhelming array of duties spanning intensive mediation to the daily management of sprawling field operations. Despite successive blueprints for peacekeeping reform, the UN has yet to reckon with the widening disconnect between the peacekeeping services it provides and the elusive peace it seeks to make and keep.

The peacekeeping budget is another vulnerability, linked to Washington. Despite a deal in 2000 that reduced its UN dues, the United States has routinely underpaid its share of the peacekeeping budget.

Washington's failure to pay it dues in full and its policy of paying up at the tail end of the UN's fiscal year have now spread to other nations, causing persistent cash flow problems.

The combination of a hamstrung Security Council and an ossified approach to UN peacekeeping undercuts the UN's role as a forum for collective security. In other areas of collective action and cooperation, however—especially in response to threats that don't derive from an aggressor nation, such as climate change and poverty—its record is better. Through eye-popping reports and aggressive facilitation, the organization has catalyzed global momentum behind emission limits that require genuine concessions from nearly every region. Despite valid critiques of the UN's Millennium Development Goals in 2000 and the Sustainable Development Goals in 2015, there is no denying that these efforts jump-started work toward alleviating global deprivation. Although these development initiatives get little play in security circles, research proves that socioeconomic advances helps prevent and ameliorate conflict. Successive decades of UN progress toward alleviating disadvantage worldwide may ultimately do more to prevent and resolve transnational conflict than the Security Council ever did.

AN ORDER UNDER FIRE

The liberal order has been both under attack and in voluntary retreat, a dangerous combination that has threatened to unravel the UN and set back rights, freedoms, and justice worldwide. The UN's founding was shaped by the belief that preventing future conflicts would hinge on a universal commitment to inalienable human rights. A geographically representative committee chaired by Eleanor Roosevelt drafted the Universal Declaration on Human Rights (UDHR). In her memoirs, Roosevelt recounted that the Chinese representative insisted that the document “reflect more than simply Western ideas” and integrate the principles of Confucianism. When the draft was adopted by the UN's then 58 member states, committee member Hernán Santa Cruz of Chile described “a truly significant historic event in which a consensus had been reached as to the supreme value of the human person, a value that did not originate in the decision of a worldly power, but rather in the fact of existing.”

Other instruments supplemented the UDHR, together forming an international bill of rights and spawning hundreds of global and regional human rights pacts. The tectonic shift toward global recogni-

tion and respect for human rights that Cruz trumpeted in 1948 is now in jeopardy. China's global rise and Russia's assertiveness are chipping away at the normative foundations of the international order. Liberal democracies have never fully complied with human rights precepts, and many are guilty of gross offenses themselves. Yet to varying degrees, these states have historically embraced those aspirations.

For authoritarian countries, by contrast, formal acceptance of universal human rights principles has been accompanied by a superficial and self-serving approach that upholds many rights in name only. Elections and criminal trials can provide a veneer of legitimacy to mask brute power and preordained results. Yet while the codification and universal adoption of human rights norms has failed to guarantee their protection, it has helped. The obligation to report to the UN's human rights bodies and reply to UN investigators creates incentives for good behavior and redress of abuses. The International Court of Justice and the International Criminal Court have reinforced those norms. The recognition of universal human rights has spawned a global movement of NGOs that hold their governments accountable and a culture of media call-outs that deters abuse and stigmatizes its perpetrators.

China's economic and geopolitical rise and, to a lesser extent, Russia's ambitiousness are now gradually remodeling the global order to match these nations' rights-defying worldviews. Never fitting into the liberal, rights-based paradigm, these governments see an opening to shake off their chafing constraints and reinvent a twenty-first-century order that fits their national aspirations. They seek to scale back, water down, defang, and invert the principled underpinnings of global governance. Examples abound. Both countries have used their veto power liberally and strategically, blocking repeated efforts to protect civilians in Syria, uphold democracy in Venezuela, and safeguard Muslims in Myanmar and denying human rights NGOs accreditation and access. Both countries interpret national sovereignty strictly, insisting that the principle of noninterference with internal affairs overrides human rights considerations. Although Russia's efforts in this regard are more fitful and opportunistic, China's military, economic, and diplomatic muscle must be taken far more seriously.

As China's global influence grows, human rights norms are eroding. The mass internment of a million Chinese Uyghurs is proceeding apace, with little international outcry. After 39 countries joined forces at the UN to call out Beijing's repression in Xinjiang and intensifying

authoritarianism in Hong Kong, 45 others joined a retort engineered by Beijing and fronted by Cuba. China is also utilizing its economic influence to curtail rights beyond its borders, including by kidnapping Chinese nationals and constraining Chinese students studying abroad. Governments, corporations, scholars, and analysts who resist Chinese tactics are punished. The worldwide adoption of Chinese communications technologies and social media platforms is globalizing Chinese norms, including its constraints on speech and license to surveil. China's highly visible prosperity through tight social controls serves as a model that is influencing others: democracies including Brazil, Hungary, India, Poland, and Turkey are backsliding.

China's growing challenge to liberal, rights-based norms at the UN has coincided with the implosion of global leadership that once supported those rights. U.S. human rights advocacy had already suffered major blows during the global war on terror initiated by President George W. Bush, damage that was partially undone during Barack Obama's presidency. The Trump administration's flouting of press freedom, praise of autocrats, denial of immigrants' and refugees' rights, backtracking on women's and LGBTQ rights, intolerance of political dissent, corruption, nepotism, and lies made a mockery of the United States' checkered but historic role as a global human rights standard-bearer. Washington's strained relations with its traditional allies also undercut its ability to push back against Beijing. While the Trump administration became increasingly exercised over Beijing's waxing influence at the UN, its scornful ineptitude in rallying support at the UN left its diplomats crying into the ether. During the same period, internal machinations over Brexit, the refugee crisis, and then the COVID-19 pandemic, coupled with pockets of repressive populist nationalism on the continent, left Europe ill equipped to fill the void of Western leadership at the UN. The Biden administration is determined to reverse these trends, a tall order that will depend upon prioritizing the resurrection of the United States' status at the UN even as other demands abound.

These realignments risk cracking the normative foundations of the United Nations. Recent secretaries-general, including António Guterres and Ban Ki-moon, have been unwilling to call out major rights abusers by name for fear of antagonizing key member states, especially China. When China's own rights record comes up for review by the UN Human Rights Council, Beijing engages in elaborate pageantry, with

government-controlled NGOs and friendly delegations enlisted to heap hollow praise. In 2018, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Prince Zeid Ra'ad al-Hussein of Jordan, declined to run for a second term, voicing despair at the system he led and scorning the UN's member states for thwarting attempts to hold abusers accountable.

THE UN THE WORLD NEEDS

Mounting pressure on the UN's central pillars—collective security and the commitment to human rights and the rule of law—may spell the organization's steepened and perhaps irreversible decline. Some analysts argue that the ship can be righted by casting the UN's normative infrastructure overboard, a weight too heavy to bear given the geopolitical shoals that must be navigated now. They believe that, given China's rise, a global order that sidelines universal rights in favor of sovereignty and value-neutral cooperation can achieve collective security. The premise is that forfeiting the facets of the UN that most rankle China—human rights resolutions, the protection of minorities, and the like—would unleash consensus on a breadth of global issues such as climate change and global health, in effect saving the global forum.

Deciding between saving the UN and protecting universal rights is a false choice and one that champions of global governance must reject. The UN's founding pillars—development, peace, security, and human rights—are interdependent. Most issues that have paralyzed the Security Council in recent years have hinged on human rights concerns: humanitarian access in Syria, the crisis in Venezuela, and the treatment of the Palestinians in Gaza. Sidestepping human rights and humanitarian concerns will not dissolve impasses over the Security Council veto; these problems are at the heart of what divides the council and outrages the world. Moreover, most of what the Security Council does agree on centrally implicates human rights concerns, including conflicts in the Central African Republic, Congo, Mali, and South Sudan. The UN Charter was a compact among peoples, as well as countries, to advance their interests and well-being. The UN's visionary founders recognized the human suffering caused by the wanton exercise of sovereign prerogative and aimed to constrain such impulses. Collective security and the protection of human rights are inseparable. To sideline human rights would be to betray the UN and drain away the organization's remaining moral and political authority.

The quest to revitalize the United Nations should proceed on multiple, parallel tracks. There is no magic bullet that will transform today's global governance system into a potent, fit-for-purpose successor. That will depend on boosting the stakeholders' buy-in, building on strengths, confronting weaknesses, and staying the course over time.

The first step to reviving the UN is to decide that the effort is worth it. Liberal governments need to recognize that the UN represents the best shot they will ever have to fortify globally what they regard as universal beliefs and values—and that time is running out. The United States in particular must renounce the self-defeating ambivalence, standoffishness, and periodic belligerence that have long characterized its relationship with the UN. Sophisticated analysts, including long-time U.S. Foreign Service officer and former UN Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs Jeffrey Feltman and former U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations and National Security Adviser Susan Rice, have spotlighted the UN's potential as a force multiplier for U.S. interests and pointed out that strategic, comprehensive, and dogged diplomacy can overcome many of the UN's most frustrating dynamics. Effective U.S. engagement is a prerequisite for the UN's vitality. Without U.S. leadership, vital reforms will be out of reach, divisions will deepen, and the UN will fail. The United States' abdication of leadership during the Trump administration became a self-fulfilling prophecy. When the United States does not exercise its influence, outcomes are unfavorable, and Washington's exasperation grows. Trump officials' fulminations over China's mounting sway at the UN fit this pattern; Beijing's voice got louder while Washington's was either silent or jarringly off key.

To halt this dynamic, the Biden administration, led by U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations Linda Thomas-Greenfield, will need to work with China on issues including climate change and COVID-19 while winning back diplomatic capital ceded to Beijing and countering Chinese and Russian efforts to weaken the UN. Playing this multi-dimensional chess game—involving a mix of cooperation, containment, and confrontation—will require U.S. embassies to center UN priorities within bilateral relations and diplomats in New York to play a sophisticated ground game to build relationships.

To ensure that they are backing rather than thwarting these efforts, members of the U.S. Senate and House of Representatives should form bipartisan caucuses to end decades of indifference at the UN.

With the backing of these supporters, the United States should fund its contributions in full and expand its voluntary donations. Washington should also nominate highly qualified, capable Americans, not limited to government officials, to top UN Secretariat posts. These modest investments will pay off by both expanding U.S. influence and creating a more effective world body. And Washington should cooperate visibly with UN human rights bodies, providing human rights rapporteurs with the information and access they request when investigating matters involving the United States. By exemplifying what it means to be a good member, the United States can rally others to be responsible stakeholders and stigmatize those that manipulate or pervert the system and its values.

KEEPING THE PEACE

The United States' diplomatic reengagement alone will not be enough to revive the UN. The UN should also reimagine its approach to peacekeeping. The rising disconnect between the UN's traditional operations and the violent conflicts it is charged with quelling have bred a crisis of confidence. An updated peacekeeping doctrine would reflect the reality that many current UN missions need greater leeway to use force, work amid nonconsenting parties, and protect civilians over the long term. An internal, informal group comprised of Secretariat leaders and committed member states should candidly inventory the factors that impede the success of peacekeeping operations and examine how to prevent some member states from hampering peacekeeping efficacy. The Secretariat must be empowered to resist imposing mandates that are incompatible with peacekeeping doctrine and to help craft approaches to meet needs—such as civilian protection and counterinsurgency—that do not fit neatly into existing categories. This will help strengthen peacekeeping and make it more widely relevant, fortifying the UN's capacity to guarantee peace and security.

Another major barrier to international cooperation and collective security is the Security Council's composition. A decades-long debate over how to update the Security Council's fossilized structure remains hopelessly deadlocked with, at present, no real prospect of sweeping change to improve representation and better reflect contemporary power relations. Despite that impasse, the UN's credibility depends on showing that the council is neither frozen in time nor impervious to demands for greater accountability.

The UN's vitality depends on the commitment of the council's permanent members to keeping the veto from spelling the end of global collective action. A first step would be adopting a practice whereby all vetoes are accompanied by a public, written explanation. That would form the basis of an open meeting of council members during which veto-wielding countries agree to answer questions and publicly discuss alternative measures to address the conflict at hand. Having to face the music after a veto could enhance accountability and disincentivize the veto on the grounds of national interest as opposed to collective security. Another way to press for greater accountability in the Security Council would be to rally the General Assembly to make use of the "Uniting for Peace" provisions that allow the body to act when the council will not. Even the threat of possible General Assembly intervention has occasionally catalyzed progressive movement in the council. If the council members come to worry that the forum's prerogatives may be supplanted, its members might be more open to the changes necessary to shore up their authority. Individual nations should also consider alternative global forums, including the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, the G-7, and NATO, as vehicles that can be activated to pressure the Security Council. The council's structure will change only if those who benefit from it come to believe that their prerogatives are being undermined from the outside. They must believe that they are better off reforming the body before it is supplanted by another entity in which they will enjoy less power.

A RAINY DAY FUND

When nonprofits seek to buffer themselves from downturns, they build rainy day funds that they then invest. Interest proceeds from the funds can pay for a portion of their annual operating expenses. After the pandemic-driven recession, the UN should explore approaching wealthy governments and philanthropists to support a fund that would insulate it from the perpetual threat of financial crisis. The endowment should not become a substitute for the annual contributions of member nations to the UN's regular and peacekeeping budgets, but it could fill gaps in the current funding system. Earnings could avert cash crunches and fund unexpected expenditures, such as the trust fund for victims of the Haiti cholera outbreak.

The UN needs more than funds, however. It also needs individual leaders who are unafraid to speak out, knock heads, and call out bad ac-

tors. The specter of UN secretaries-general and other top officials currying favor in top capitals to assure reelection has undercut the UN's influence and credibility. The terms of service for the secretary-general and the high commissioner for human rights should be shifted from the current system of two five-year terms to a single eight-year term. That would allow sufficient time to build relationships and carry out changes but avoid the pressures of reelection. Moreover, many senior UN leaders are effectively beholden to their bosses back in their capital of origin. These officials serve two masters—a formula for conflicts of interest that can disadvantage the UN. Those who serve in the top ranks of UN leadership should be required to resign from their national civil or foreign service ranks, ensuring that their only professional loyalty would be to the UN. Finally, the UN should end the practice of dual hatting its special envoys with the tasks of high-level, intensive mediation among warring parties and the management of complex field operations. Diplomatic troubleshooting amid a crisis is a full-time occupation. Special envoys imbued with the organization's authority to intervene should be assigned seasoned, empowered deputies who can handle the duties of managing to humanitarian and development programs aimed at fostering stability.

HUMAN RIGHTS UP FRONT

The anniversaries of UN treaties and agreements should become occasions for governments to recommit to their values and stanch further slippage. Every five or ten years, during meetings of heads of state in New York, the UN should convene summits to reaffirm core human rights instruments—including not only the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights but also the Convention Against Torture and many others. The UN could thus revive global commitments to these vital ideals.

Although renewed commitments to existing human rights norms are essential, shoring up the UN's value system cannot stop there. With authoritarian governments determined to undercut the system, liberal governments should go on the offensive, pushing new initiatives that extend and clarify rights, inspire rising generations, and demonstrate the vitality of the UN's human rights mechanisms. The Obama administration followed such a strategy, running for a seat on the UN Human Rights Council and using that platform to advance new UN resolutions on LGBTQ rights and free expression online. The

Biden administration has announced that it will run to retake the U.S. seat renounced during the Trump era. By setting the agenda and rallying allies, liberal governments can marginalize those paddling in the opposite direction. Specifically, a campaign for full LGBTQ and gender rights—including the right to marriage, to build families, and to be free from discrimination based on gender identity—could catalyze wider national protections. The UN has never fully elaborated protections for artistic freedom nor recognized the growing role that artists and cultural creators play in providing space for dissent and social change. There is also major work to be done to reconcile the broad international legal protections for free expression with the challenges of the digital age, including the dangers posed by some forms of on-line content, shadowy algorithms that can promote disinformation, and the rise of artificial intelligence and machine learning. Rights to privacy also demand further enumeration and protection amid new forms of intrusion and a fast-evolving social bargain whereby privacy is voluntarily traded for various social goods and conveniences.

Finally, for better or worse, in the 2020s, photos, social media, memes, and viral videos shape global discourse. The UN is remembered most for its theatrical moments—Nikita Khrushchev banging his shoe on the table, Colin Powell giving his fateful PowerPoint presentation before the Iraq war, Donald Trump eliciting laughter for tooting his own horn in his UN address, and young heroines such as the Nobel Peace Prize laureate Malala Yousafzai and the climate activist Greta Thunberg issuing bold challenges to heads of state. In considering how to constrain human rights abusers, the answer increasingly lies not in traditional diplomatic pressure but in public outrage. The prospect of tanks rolling through Hong Kong in a Tiananmen Square reprise is less viable in a world of cell phone videos. The UN should take advantage of this change, integrating video and imagery into human rights reports and presentations. The UN's history of negative press has rendered the organization cautious about the media. But the digital age demands that statecraft encompass stagecraft. The UN needs to recruit skilled media professionals to harness modern communication tools and elevate compelling voices, host historic encounters, stage major announcements, and otherwise position itself as the visible centerpiece of global diplomacy.

The denouement of the COVID-19 crisis will represent high noon for the UN and the world order writ large. Governments and peoples may

recapture the spirit of internationalism: a set of shared interests that coexist alongside parochial national concerns and—when necessary—override them. Major capitals may yet recognize that the UN represents a vital, vulnerable pillar of a liberal global system that is on the verge of collapse and needs intensive care. They may seize on the opening created by the pandemic to push through updates to the UN that position the organization for heightened relevance and efficacy. They may recognize that efforts to limit the UN to protecting narrow national interests must give way to accommodating the imperatives of the institution and the world as a whole.

If governments that are committed to the UN's original vision and values assert themselves and lead this process, they can strengthen the United Nations amid an unprecedented assault, pressing authoritarian states to heed human rights and the rule of law. On the other hand, continued scorn and neglect of the UN will pave the way for a fast-expanding illiberal influence within the institution, eroding the delicate balance of power that is at the heart of global governance. That will undermine the UN's normative underpinnings, fuel exasperation among liberal governments and civil society, and subject the UN to a relentless tug of war between hostile superpowers. Reconciling the UN's paradox—its vast capacity to achieve and to disappoint—requires a deliberate decision to recognize the world body's limitations and to unleash its potential despite them. 🌐

The Illiberal Tide

Why the International Order Is Tilting Toward Autocracy

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The “liberal international order” is under severe strain. Although its supporters welcomed the defeat of former U.S. President Donald Trump, the order still faces major challenges from both within and without. Populist politicians across the globe call for major changes in the norms and values of world politics. They attack liberal order as a so-called globalist project that serves the interests of sinister elites while trampling national sovereignty, traditional values, and local culture. Some with this view currently lead countries that belong to pillars of liberal order, such as NATO and the European Union. Others, including in the United States, are only an election away from taking the reins of foreign policy. Meanwhile, emboldened illiberal powers seek to make the world safe for authoritarianism, in the process undermining key elements of liberal order. China and Russia, in particular, have exercised diplomatic, economic, and even military power to put forward alternative visions.

But if the current liberal international order is in trouble, what kind of illiberal order might emerge in its wake? Does an illiberal order necessarily mean competition for naked power among increas-

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ingly nationalist great powers, rampant protectionism, and a world hostile to democratic governance?

Current trends suggest less a complete collapse of liberal order than important changes in the mix of illiberal and liberal elements that characterize world politics. Multilateral cooperation and global governance remain strong, but they display increasingly autocratic and illiberal characteristics. The growing strength of reactionary populism and assertiveness of autocratic powers are eroding the international order's ability to support human, political, and civil rights. Similar developments point toward a future where liberal economic arrangements are used for oligarchic and kleptocratic purposes.

These processes are already in motion. They stem not only from recent developments but also from forces that have been transforming international order since the start of the twenty-first century. Indeed, it would be naive to think that the liberal order can be frozen in any particular form. There are inherent tensions and tradeoffs that generate pressures for change. It may be impossible to completely reverse current trends in the evolution of international order. Democratic states should instead focus their efforts on shaping the changing order to better protect their values and systems of government.

LIBERAL AND ILLIBERAL INTERNATIONAL ORDERS

What makes an order illiberal? The vast majority of international orders—which were exclusively regional affairs before the nineteenth century—were illiberal. They came in many shapes and sizes, and other than being not liberal they did not share much in common. Attitudes toward warfare, economic exchange, and the conduct of diplomacy varied widely. Many past international orders took for granted the fundamental inequality of human beings, but they involved very different understandings of social stratification. Some were organized around universal empires that claimed, in theory, to exercise suzerainty over the entire world. Colonial empires were founded upon understandings of racial hierarchy and civilizing missions. Others were composed of city-states or anchored by large nomadic confederacies. In early modern Europe, dynastic composite states, formed through aristocratic marriage and inheritance, competed for territory and influence.

If we want to make sense of the evolution of contemporary international order, then, we are better off starting with a discussion of

liberalism. Although liberalism itself comes in different flavors—sometimes combining liberal and illiberal features—it generally involves three major domains:

Political liberalism concerns domestic political systems. In its weakest form, it holds that governments must respect some basic human and civil rights. The strongest forms contend that all states should be liberal democracies. This means that precursors of liberal order can exist in otherwise illiberal systems, including limited religious toleration in Europe after 1648 or broader norms of toleration in the Achaemenid Persian Empire.

Economic liberalism entails a commitment to market economies. What this means in practice can vary a great deal. New Deal liberalism associated with the post–World War II Bretton Woods system envisioned mixed economies with capital controls and robust welfare states. In contrast, the neoliberal order that achieved dominance in the 1990s prefers self-regulating markets, capital mobility, and the privatization of government functions.

Liberal intergovernmentalism concerns the means or form of international order. Strong forms of liberal intergovernmentalism favor multilateral treaties and agreements; international organizations; and institutions that make rules, resolve disputes, and provide for international goods. In general, liberal intergovernmentalism also involves bilateral agreements that reflect principles of sovereign equality—even between states that are significantly unequal. In contrast, illiberal forms of international governance range from the assertion of privileged spheres of influence to formal imperialism.

International order—and regional orders in places such as Europe, southern Africa, or East Asia—combines these domains in different ways. After the Cold War, however, U.S. policymakers convinced themselves that Washington could establish international liberal order as a relatively stable equilibrium—even as they carved out exemptions, such as from the International Criminal Court. U.S. leaders assumed that the world would converge around ordering principles of democratization, expanding markets, and institutionalizing multilateralism in global governance. They also believed that these principles would come to reinforce one another.

It was a plausible assumption. It did not take long for liberal institutions to enter the vacuum left by the Soviet order's demise. The Warsaw Pact's collapse in 1991 gave rise to the expansion of NATO.

Within a few years, the European Union embarked on an ambitious effort to incorporate postcommunist European states. The triumph of democracy seemed inevitable. Autocratic holdouts—such as Slobodan Milosevic in Yugoslavia and Vladimir Meciar in Slovakia—often faced military and economic punishment by Western powers or at the hands of broad domestic coalitions. Western-controlled international financial organizations and development agencies oversaw transitions to market economies supported by Western advisers and consultants. Principles such as private property, unrestricted foreign investment, open capital flows, and free trade were embedded in domestic law. The new so-called Washington Consensus dominated international economic governance, while multilateralism and intergovernmentalism became the standard mode for global economic cooperation through new institutions such as the World Trade Organization (WTO).

Nonetheless, these different domains need not coexist. They can even work at cross-purposes. Empires, for example, have promoted open markets and free trade, but no one would describe their other behavior as consistent with liberal intergovernmentalism. Neoconservatives have long stressed how sovereignty norms at multilateral institutions such as the UN can shield autocratic regimes from liberalization. Just consider the authoritarian states that sit on the UN Human Rights Council (UNHRC) or how Hungary and Poland have shielded each other from EU sanctions. Organizations such as the International Monetary Fund have faced accusations of overriding democratic principles by pushing structural adjustment programs on economically vulnerable states that disproportionately affect the poor, and the democratic deficit in the EU rightfully generates significant controversy.

The inevitable tension between these aspects of liberalism can become a source of transformation in international order. Such mutations may push international orders in uniformly illiberal directions or in ways that make one dimension more liberal and another less so. Consider the emergence and evolution of “responsibility to protect” principles that justify international intervention to prevent genocide, war crimes, and crimes against humanity. These pitted sovereignty norms and restrictions on the use of force against human rights norms. These dynamics ensure that the international liberal order mutates over time, producing different combinations of liberal and illiberal characteristics.

SHIFTING INTERGOVERNMENTALISM

To trace these mutations in international order, it is helpful to first understand how liberal intergovernmentalism has changed since its inception. Liberal intergovernmental practices date at least as far back as the middle of the nineteenth century. The International Telecommunication Union (then the International Telegraph Union), for instance, was established in 1865. A major milestone was the formation of the League of Nations in 1920. But the decisive shift toward liberal intergovernmentalism occurred after World War II. Since then, multilateral institutions and forums have increasingly become central sites for cooperation and diplomacy. The end of the Cold War only solidified this trend. It thus made sense for observers to conclude that emerging powers, most notably China, would have an incentive to uphold multilateral governance and to play by the rules that contributed to their rapid economic rise.

This does not mean that one should idealize the post–Cold War period. The United States regularly exercised its hegemonic position to exempt itself from international rules and norms. Washington bestowed favorable treatment on certain states for geopolitical reasons. The United States invaded Iraq on, to quote former U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry’s comments on Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, a “trumped up pretext.” But acting hypocritically and practicing double standards are an inevitable part of how dominant states reconcile coercive power with countervailing norms.

Still, liberal intergovernmentalism remains a crucial element of contemporary international order. The last 20 years have seen a striking increase in the number of regional organizations, although not in the way that liberal triumphalists envisioned. These organizations and forums do not generally involve advanced industrialized democracies. Led by China and Russia, they mimic the form of Western counterparts but embody illiberal and autocratic norms and promote their authoritarian founders’ regional agendas. In some cases, such as the BRICS (founded in 2009 by Brazil, Russia, India, and China—with South Africa joining in 2010), new organizations explicitly claim to represent important powers once excluded from the existing system of global governance. Moscow’s push to establish the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) in 2002 and the Eurasian Economic Union in 2014 aimed to demarcate a Russian sphere of influence in the Eurasian region. It did so within a framework based on Western counterparts

such as NATO and the EU. Similarly, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO)—founded in 2001 by China, Russia, and four Central Asian states—explicitly defined itself as countering U.S. hegemonic influence by helping to “democratize” international relations.

Other new international organizations challenge the existing multilateral system by governing similar issues or creating new geographic groupings that cut against the authority of liberal institutions. Many of these new groups are actively recognizing and networking with one another, in the process altering the balance between liberal and more illiberal international bodies. In short, the global intergovernmental fabric in 2021 looks increasingly multipolar and politically illiberal compared with the one that existed two decades before.

Powers such as China and Russia also make ample use of bilateral initiatives to influence the attitudes and voting behavior of other states within more venerable multilateral forums. All great powers leverage bilateral relations or provide side payments to achieve their policy preferences. The United States has long done so, as did the Soviet Union during the Cold War. But what’s striking is how such efforts are now altering the central institutions of the liberal order itself. China’s Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) partners appear increasingly sensitive to Beijing’s concerns on issues such as its Xinjiang policy or broader human rights record. For example, in June 2017, Greece—a Chinese BRI partner—blocked an EU statement at the UNHRC that would have criticized China’s human rights practices. A Greek foreign ministry official called the statement “unconstructive criticism.” This was the first time that the EU had failed to make a statement at the UN body. In 2019, following a letter by 22 UNHRC members criticizing China for its reeducation camps in Xinjiang, Beijing countermobilized a statement of support by 37 countries—reaching over 50 by the fall—that praised Beijing for its “remarkable achievements in the field of human rights.”

In December 2019, the Trump administration announced a new special envoy to counter Chinese influence in the UN—realizing, perhaps, that by withdrawing from UN bodies and treaties, Washington had needlessly abandoned important terrain to Beijing. But in July 2020, it notified Congress that it had withdrawn from the World Health Organization (WHO). In the previous months, Russia and China effectively overturned the Washington-backed Budapest convention on cyber-norms and Internet freedoms by passing a new reso-

lution at the UN that embedded state-backed Internet censorship and regulation in international law. The bill, which passed 88 to 58 (with 34 abstentions), demonstrates that intergovernmentalism can just as easily serve illiberal purposes as liberal ones.

President Joe Biden has halted the United States' withdrawal from the WHO and pledged greater U.S. engagement with multilateral institutions, but these trends in liberal intergovernmentalism are part of a broader decline of political liberalism in international order. Forms of international governance persist, but with a diminishing commitment to democratic values and liberal rights.

POLITICAL LIBERALISM IN DECLINE

Perhaps no dimension of international order is currently threatened more than political liberalism. Liberal democratic principles deeply informed the post-World War II order, which emphasized promoting and protecting individual rights and holding individuals accountable for their participation in crimes or corruption. Since the 1940s, of course, the application and enforcement of human rights, political liberties, antigenocide norms, and other dimensions of the order have remained patchy at best. But the importance of such liberal rights and principles is obvious when compared with the norms and practices of prior international orders.

Still, although sweeping generalizations about the decline of democracy require caution, it is clear that its advocates are on the defensive. The early 2000s were an important inflection point. In 2006, for the first time since the end of the Cold War, the nongovernmental organization Freedom House observed that the number of states with declining democracy scores outnumbered those with improved country scores (33 versus 18). This trend has continued every year since.

Why has political liberalism come under such sustained challenge? In retrospect, analysts should not underestimate the role of systemic backlash to the “color revolutions” in Eurasia, which occurred in the middle years of the first decade of this century and the Arab Spring movements in the early years of the second decade. During the color revolutions, street protests in a number of post-Soviet countries swept away regimes with close ties to Moscow and replaced them with more Western-oriented successors. In Georgia in 2003, Mikheil Saakashvili came to power pushing an agenda aimed at rapidly joining the West and NATO. In doing so, he effectively created a U.S. client state in the

post-Soviet Caucasus. The following year, Ukraine's Orange Revolution overturned the electoral victory of Moscow's preferred candidate, Viktor Yanukovich. Moscow, along with other autocratic regimes in the region, started to see democratic movements and their backers not as political nuisances but as urgent and potentially destabilizing security threats. Russia and countries across the post-Soviet region cracked down heavily on street protests, banned or restricted civil society organizations, and rebranded democratic activists as foreign-funded fifth columnists.

These revolutions, along with the Iraq war, helped recast the United States as a hegemonic power determined to overthrow authoritarian regimes. The Arab Spring further confirmed this image. Washington offered encouragement to protests across North Africa and the Middle East, greenlighted NATO intervention in Libya, and even leveraged its deep security ties with Egypt to force the ouster of the country's long-time ruler Hosni Mubarak. At the same time, the (often overplayed) role of social media in the Arab Spring convinced authoritarian regimes of the need to develop effective countermeasures. Autocratic and insecure governments across multiple regions also increasingly portrayed their domestic political opposition and independent media as somehow aligned with intrusive Western forces or with Washington's geopolitical agenda. Moscow's conspiratorial proclamations about U.S. meddling resonated across other authoritarian regimes.

Emerging powers also sought to promote new norms to counter the appeal of political liberalism. One of these, "civilizational diversity," frequently informs China's bilateral relations and engagement with international and regional organizations. The concept's emphasis on cultural relativism, sovereign noninterference, and respect for civilizational differences aims to undercut political liberalism. A different set of "counternorms," most often championed by Russia, emphasizes "traditional values." These update the venerable tradition of associating liberalism with decadence and decline. The Russian government has promoted, with support from some Middle Eastern states, the idea that state-organized religion should play a more prominent role in political life, "traditional" heterosexual family values, and restrictions on migration to safeguard national identities.

Indeed, in the 1990s, so-called transnational advocacy networks were overwhelmingly associated with liberal causes such as human rights, gender equality, and environmental protections. Now, illiberal

regimes utilize transnational actors for their own ends. Consider, for instance, the success of the World Congress of Families, a network that ties right-wing Christian organizations in the United States together with pro-family groups, religious representatives, and Russian oligarch patrons. The WCF has held annual meetings to promote the “traditional values” agenda and connect governments and social actors pushing reactionary cultural programs. Several of these annual conferences have been hosted by countries with self-styled illiberal rulers, including Moldova, Hungary, and, most recently, Verona, Italy, home to Lega head and then Deputy Prime Minister Matteo Salvini, who delivered celebratory remarks at the meeting. Although the WCF may or may not expand in influence, it showcases how transnational advocacy has become a far more contested arena than it was in the 1990s, with illiberal actors and movements often on the offensive.

The United States itself bears responsibility for promoting one of political liberalism’s most potent counternorms: the need to restrict civil liberties and human rights to combat terrorism. The U.S.-led global “war on terror” included a diplomatic effort aimed at eradicating and blacklisting terrorist and extremist movements worldwide. Taking advantage of this sudden normative shift, governments designated political opponents and groups as “terrorists” and “extremists.” As a result, regimes during the first decade of the 2000s used counterterrorism as an excuse to consolidate executive power, expand surveillance, reduce civil liberties, and increase informal cooperation among their security services.

Framing democracy as a threat to regime security also helped new regional organizations incorporate illiberal principles into their institutional platforms. The SCO, for example, adopted the so-called Shanghai Spirit, which advocates norms of noninterference, as well as mutual civilizational respect and understanding. The SCO also institutionalized blacklisting organizations and individuals regarded as terrorists, extremists, and separatists—with no clear criteria for those designations. It committed to extraterritorial procedures that allowed listed individuals, including political opponents, to be extradited from one another’s territories without any international legal protections. The Gulf Cooperation Council followed suit with a similar set of provisions in 2012. New regional organizations in Latin America—notably the Venezuelan- and Cuban-led Bolivarian Alternative for the Americas and the more recent Union of South American Nations and

Community of Latin American and Caribbean States—emphasized regional solidarity and anti-imperialism, while omitting safeguards for democratic norms and human rights. The new Chinese-led dialogue forums with Latin America, Africa, and Europe similarly leave out any references to support for political rights and, instead, invoke governing principles of noninterference and shared prosperity. International institutions and regional organizations now increasingly serve to shield their members from liberalizing pressures.

The mid-2000s also saw the co-optation of mechanisms once associated with political liberalism. Consider international election observation. During the 1990s, election monitoring was a relatively modest but specialized endeavor, confined to committed practitioners from the Carter Center or, internationally, the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe. By the mid- to late 2000s, however, many of these new regional organizations got into the business of election monitoring to stem the tide of international criticism. Unsurprisingly, their assessments invariably support obviously flawed elections by incumbent autocrats. In turn, the presence of these regime-friendly international observers muddies the waters and reduces the chance that rigged elections will become focal points for antigovernment mobilization. Authoritarian governments have repurposed international norms and practices designed to promote liberal values to strengthen the sovereign authority of autocrats.

RECONFIGURING ECONOMIC LIBERALISM

Discussions of the end of economic liberalism tend to focus on deglobalization: the return of protectionist policies designed to benefit specific sectors, the decoupling of economies to facilitate great-power competition, and related efforts to mitigate security threats posed by trade and financial interdependence. For instance, the Trump administration's strategy to confront Chinese market distortion—including government subsidies to Chinese state-operated companies and infringement of intellectual property rights—relied almost exclusively on imposing tariffs. At the same time, Trump jettisoned liberal strategies such as contesting Chinese practices at the WTO and negotiating, as part of the Trans-Pacific Partnership, an alternative zone of trade, commerce, and protection. Deglobalization and enduring trade wars remain a real possibility. Despite a more supportive overall disposi-

tion toward trade, Biden administration negotiators haven't challenged Trump's expansive invocation of "national security" to justify tariffs on products such as steel.

A more probable outcome, however, involves appropriating liberal economic arrangements for illiberal purposes. The most likely option is one that tracks with the trends identified in liberal intergovernmentalism and political liberalism: an order characterized by the elements of economic liberalism that autocratic leaders and populist politicians find most convivial and those that provide great and regional powers with tools to pursue international influence. These intersect with an increasingly kleptocratic and oligarchic international economy, one that further undermines political liberalism and democracy.

To understand why this is a likely future, consider a number of recent scandals, including the conviction of Paul Manafort and the impeachment of Donald Trump, that involve how ruling elites and despots take advantage of the legal institutions and hidden service providers of the global economic system.

Western accountants, shell companies, lawyers, lobbyists, bankers, and luxury real estate developers have all helped kleptocrats and crooked officials launder wealth pillaged from their home countries. The release of the Panama Papers in 2016, a leak of over 11 million documents from one of the world's largest providers of offshore companies, offered a particularly vivid picture of the liberal economic order's dark side. It showed how rulers, elites, and democratically elected officials around the world used the Panamanian law firm Mossack Fonseca to purchase complex assets designed to conceal the origins of their embezzled wealth.

The United States has done much to make economic liberalism friendly to corruption. In its 2020 Financial Secrecy Index, the anticorruption watchdog Tax Justice Network ranked the United States as the second "most complicit" country in the world, right behind the Cayman Islands, when it came to enabling money laundering by criminals and wealthy individuals. Combined with the rise of unregulated and opaque dark money flooding into the U.S. political system after the Citizens United Supreme Court decision, shell companies have become the primary vehicle through which corporations and wealthy individuals avoid taxation and directly influence the political system and campaigns.

The combination of extreme capital mobility and secrecy is just one of the features of the contemporary economic order that illiberal leaders find useful for extracting rents. Rentier states, many of which

are authoritarian, depend on international trade to sell commodities such as oil, gas, and precious metals. Foreign direct investment can provide additional opportunities for corruption by incentivizing investors to secure contracts through kickbacks.

Development assistance, a key part of the postwar liberal order, can also help illiberal leaders entrench their regimes. Like favorable trade and investment arrangements, development programs help governments generate legitimacy by providing material benefits to their citizens. For corrupt rulers, moreover, they create opportunities for rent seeking, both by enriching themselves and by greasing their domestic patronage networks. Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban famously depends on EU subsidies to reward his supporters for their loyalty. A previously embargoed World Bank study estimates that up to 7.5 percent of official development assistance sent to the poorest developing countries is siphoned off into offshore assets and secret jurisdictions.

Chinese assistance plays a central role in this process. Indeed, after the 2008 financial crisis, Beijing emerged—especially outside of Europe—as a *de facto* source of international goods. It provided loans and investment to countries unwilling or unable to access Western emergency lenders. Some studies estimate that between 2000 and 2014, Chinese lending approached the amount provided by Western institutions such as the World Bank. The announcement of China's BRI in 2013 and the establishment of the Chinese-led Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank the next year marked China's formal arrival as a heavyweight provider of investment and infrastructure financing. Despite initial claims that the BRI would provide “apolitical” infrastructure improvements and that it would complement existing sources of development assistance, Chinese economic actors involved in the BRI have interfered in numerous countries' domestic politics, including Sri Lanka, Pakistan, Tajikistan, and Cambodia. The global network of BRI projects focused on digital infrastructure and telecommunications will also allow Beijing to set global standards for technological and security protocols.

Here, the interests of illiberal leaders converge with those of great powers in seeking tools of economic influence. China's disinterest in enforcing liberal conditions (such as transparency requirements or environmental safeguards), along with its willingness to exploit corruption to lock down deals and political influence, has played a major role in pushing the liberal economic order in a more kleptocratic and oligarchic direction. But it is far from the only actor doing this.

Indeed, many of the forces driving these mutations in the liberal order are coming from inside the house—and not merely from right-wing populists. Policymakers who consider themselves champions of liberal economic order frequently pursue capital mobility, financial deregulation, and the excessive privatization of public services. Meanwhile, advanced industrial democracies often support corrupt foreign officials out of economic or geopolitical interest. The presence of competitors such as China that care even less for economic liberalism will further pressure liberal states to look the other way.

The initial economic collapse and political uncertainty that accompanied the COVID-19 pandemic will likely fuel many illiberal trends in the global economy. In the midst of global economic contraction, economic trade and investment have slowed and national borders are increasingly important. The WTO noted a strong rebound in the fourth quarter of 2020 but warns that this recovery is “unlikely to be sustained” in the first half of 2021. In the meantime, trade in global services remains depressed and international travel is down by 68 percent. China has publicly positioned itself as a provider of emergency medical supplies and vaccines, and the crisis has put renewed pressure on BRI debtors to service their loans. This raises the prospect of impending debt write-offs or other forms of loan restructuring that could enhance Beijing’s political influence in highly indebted countries. Skeptics of arguments about U.S. decline point to Washington’s enduring financial hegemony and the global demand for dollars, especially in a time of crisis. In March 2020, the U.S. Federal Reserve announced new temporary dollar liquidity swap lines (through which foreign countries can exchange their home currency for dollars at prevailing exchange rates), which brought its total for these arrangements up to 13 countries, in addition to an agreement with the European Central Bank. But although the Federal Reserve continues to function as a global backstop, the People’s Bank of China now maintains around 26 similar bilateral agreements. Three countries (Brazil, Singapore, and South Korea) in the U.S. orbit also maintain lines with China.

Emergency spending in the midst of the pandemic is exacerbating these trends, as elites and kleptocrats worldwide use crisis-induced borrowing to reward political allies. In the United States itself, watered-down oversight provisions in the \$2.2 trillion Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act fueled concern that the emergency package would lead the U.S. Treasury to ignore fraud

and reward political supporters. One preliminary investigation into the recipients of the CARES Act's Paycheck Protection Program, which allowed companies and small businesses with 500 or fewer employees to apply for \$10 million in forgivable loans, found that 100 companies owned and controlled by Trump political contributors were among the first to receive relief. Another analysis revealed that Trump's family and associates received \$21 million in funding. The Treasury Department provided no details about recipients of loans below \$150,000, which accounted for about 80 percent of the nearly five million recipients of the \$659 billion program. In early 2021, the international corruption watchdog Transparency International said that weak oversight "raised serious concerns" and found, overall, that levels of corruption in the United States were the highest in nine years.

THE SHAPE OF ILLIBERAL ORDER

If current trends continue, the emerging international order will likely still contain liberal characteristics. Liberal intergovernmentalism—in the form of multilateral organizations and interstate relations—will remain a major force in world politics. But this will be, to adapt a cliché, intergovernmentalism with autocratic characteristics. Authoritarian states will continue to chip away at political liberalism in older international institutions while constructing illiberal alternatives. Transnational civil society will likely remain a site of continuing ideological contention, with a variety of reactionary, populist, and pro-autocratic actors competing with liberal groups and one another. Such a world will more closely resemble that of the 1920s than the Cold War. Even a "return" to what the Trump administration's 2017 National Security Strategy called "great power competition" is just as likely to spur on illiberal tendencies—including animus directed at ethnic Chinese and pressure to expand domestic surveillance—as it is to reenergize liberal advocates, institutions, and networks.

Barring unexpected changes in the distribution of power or regime change within rising authoritarian states, defenders of international political liberalism should not expect more than intermittent success in holding the line. One important step, though, would be a coordinated effort by major democracies to engage with new regional organizations on common issues and norms and values—that is, concerns that usually get bracketed in the name of political pragmatism. Comprehensive engagement should become the standard

way for liberal states to interact with groups such as the SCO, the CSTO, and the Eurasian Economic Union.

Most of all, democratic powers need to show up and push for their values. Trump's withdrawal from the World Health Organization illustrates the risks of doing otherwise. After the Trump administration withheld its funding to protest Beijing's alleged undue influence, China announced that it would step in to bridge the subsequent funding gap. Rather than confront China's revisionism, such withdrawals concede new areas of global governance to Beijing and its illiberal clients. Here, the Biden administration's declared intention to embrace multilateralism is a welcome development.

The status of economic liberalism in such a future, however, is much more uncertain. The United States has already weaponized interdependence by leveraging its hold over global financial and technological networks to compel other countries to reject the spread of China's 5G technology. The more the United States trades away its influence in international organizations, deliberately undermines its diplomatic capital, and damages its vaunted soft power, the more it will depend on military instruments and economic coercion to get its way in world politics. Such a cycle would make it extremely difficult for Washington to become a force for international liberalism.

Although a major rollback of interdependence remains possible, the most likely outcome will not reflect either isolationism or hyper-capitalist authoritarianism. Instead, it will be a world in which transnational flows are increasingly oriented toward the needs of domestic kleptocrats and patronage networks. Proponents of liberal order should therefore focus on anticorruption efforts. The United States, United Kingdom, and EU should continue to develop new anticorruption measures with extraterritorial reach, such as extending the U.S. Foreign Corrupt Practices Act and enforcing the United Kingdom's new Unexplained Wealth Orders. The U.S. Corporate Transparency Act of 2021—which ends the anonymity of many shell corporations by 2022—is a major step in the right direction. But Washington, London, and Brussels should do much more to harmonize their efforts, including creating common and public registries of beneficial owners of companies and enacting coordinated sanctions on kleptocrats.

The good news is that there are few effective pro-corruption norms. Kleptocrats prefer to convince their citizens that everyone is equally corrupt and weaponize anticorruption measures against political op-

ponents. Thus, opposition to corruption remains politically relevant in illiberal powers such as Russia and China, even as these countries increasingly use corruption strategically to buy off and capture elites, bureaucrats, and regulators overseas.

The success of efforts to develop an illiberal order does not mean that liberal powers lack opportunities to shape norms and institutions. No international order is homogeneous. There is nothing unusual about variations in arrangements and values across different regions or policy domains. Some aspects of contemporary liberal order, however, particularly in the economic domain, require reform lest they continue to undermine the viability of domestic liberal democratic institutions.

Indeed, policymakers interested in resisting challenges to liberalism need to prioritize its political dimensions, both at home and in intergovernmental settings. This means defending political liberalism in word and deed. It also means affirming, rather than undermining, its current normative foundation. Projects, such as former U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo's attempt to redefine human rights, that require attacking those foundations will only backfire—making the task of authoritarian powers that much easier. 🌐

The Case for a New Engagement Consensus

A Chinese Vision of Global Order

Wang Dong

APRIL 15, 2021

In October 2014, I hosted an American friend who has extensive policy experience and is considered a leading China hand. Over dinner in Beijing, I asked him, “Do you think the ‘engagement consensus’ still holds in Washington?” My question was laced with a sense of hidden anxiety, given the rather animated debate surrounding China that was then unfolding in U.S. policy circles. “Of course!” he answered unequivocally. My friend’s assurance allayed the apprehensions I harbored about the U.S.-Chinese relationship. Neither of us would have thought at the time that in just a few years, the consensus that successive U.S. administrations adopted after normalization—the belief that as the United States engaged China comprehensively, China would liberalize not only economically but also politically—would vanish altogether. It turns out that we are not the only ones who were mistaken. In a visit to Peking University in November 2019, Henry Kissinger, one of the principal architects of U.S. engagement with China, acknowledged that he, too, was surprised by the precipitous deterioration in U.S.-Chinese relations.

Now, a new consensus has taken hold in the U.S. foreign policy establishment: U.S. analysts increasingly define the U.S.-Chinese re-

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lationship in terms of strategic competition. And as hawks in Washington vocally advocate economic and technological decoupling, hard-line voices in China believe Washington is bent on containing China and keeping it down at all costs—and that China must fight back. The COVID-19 pandemic has further exacerbated tensions.

But a new Cold War between China and the United States is not inevitable. Structural arguments about predetermined rivalry miss the fact that agency as much as structure accounts for the recent downturn in U.S.-Chinese relations. Addressing the agency factors—including some of the cognitive failures that drive them—might help policymakers avoid pitfalls ahead. To that end, it is essential to understand the Chinese perspective on the sources of U.S.-Chinese tensions—even if some elements of that perspective may be contested by American analysts. Only if the two sides better understand each other's perspectives can a new approach to engagement emerge.

Ultimately, a new engagement consensus should be built upon what might be called the “G2RS”: a vision of the United States and China as a G-2 of responsible stakeholders. In a G2RS world, China and the United States would continue to hedge against each other, but they would manage their differences and compete in a calibrated, constructive manner. Rather than engaging in a rivalry that divides the world, the two powers would lead the world as responsible stakeholders.

A NEW CONSENSUS

There is a long-standing debate about structure and agency in international relations. When it comes to U.S.-Chinese relations, most analysts seem to take the structural explanation for granted and therefore accept strategic competition as a given. However, there are at least two problems in the structural explanation. For one thing, it struggles to explain the recent precipitous shift in U.S. views of China. More important, it creates a sense of inevitability that can turn rivalry into a self-fulfilling prophecy: American hawks think that the United States must urgently preempt Chinese power, while Chinese nationalists believe that they must prepare for inevitable U.S. containment efforts.

Arguments that focus on individual agency, by contrast, can point to cognitive errors—*attribution bias*, for example—that reinforce rivalry. In the Cold War American officials pursued expansive measures for U.S. security with little mind to how such moves would be seen in Moscow and proceeded to attribute Soviet responses to ag-

gressive motives (and vice versa). The same dynamic holds in contemporary interactions between China and the United States. Consider it from a Chinese perspective. When Washington imposes sanctions on rivals, it considers such actions legitimate and rules based; when Beijing does, Washington accuses it of resorting to bullying and intimidation. When China follows the United States, its NATO allies, and Japan by establishing a base in Djibouti, Washington assumes Chinese expansionism but points to its own bases as pillars of peace. U.S. policymakers ascribe aggressive intentions to Chinese actions that are very similar to the United States' own actions, driven by its own security calculations.

In an influential speech in September 2005, U.S. Deputy Secretary of State Robert Zoellick urged China to become a "responsible stakeholder." Four years later, in the wake of the 2008 global financial crisis, former National Security Adviser Zbigniew Brzezinski went a step further and proposed an "informal G-2, or Group of Two" between China and the United States. Indeed, China's continuous rise since 2008 has transformed the international order. A number of leading strategic analysts both in China and elsewhere argue that a bipolar system, with Washington and Beijing as its two predominant powers, is emerging. A G2RS approach would amalgamate elements of Zoellick's and Brzezinski's concepts into a new engagement consensus. It would not indicate an exclusion of other stakeholders or, as some critics might suggest, the creation of a grand condominium of the world. Rather, it makes the United States and China the two pillars of a global effort to address shared challenges and uphold global stability. It could help bring about a new global order that is more stable and less conflictual than one defined by a new Cold War.

Just as the old engagement consensus provided an intellectual framework for U.S. policy toward China over four decades, G2RS would provide an overarching intellectual framework for U.S.-Chinese relations in the decades to come. It offers a basis for managing differences, pointing the way to the kind of "grand bargain" articulated by Wang Jisi, a prominent Chinese international relations scholar. Such a bargain would entail Washington's commitment to not subverting China's political system in exchange for Beijing's commitment to refrain from challenging U.S. primacy or toppling the existing international order. Sober-minded Chinese strategists regard this idea as reasonable.

A new engagement consensus would require both Washington and Beijing to abandon a zero-sum mentality and instead conceive of power as a positive-sum game. As the political scientist Joseph Nye notes, thinking in positive-sum terms means not thinking of one's power *over* others but thinking in terms of power shared *with* others to accomplish joint goals. Conceiving of power in positive-sum rather than zero-sum terms is crucial to arriving at global solutions to pressing global challenges such as pandemics or climate change.

The new consensus would also ensure that competition remains within some limits or is otherwise “managed,” as former Australian Prime Minister Kevin Rudd recently argued in *Foreign Affairs*, preventing competition from slipping into unbridled confrontation. In his speech at the World Economic Forum on January 25, 2021, five days after Joe Biden was sworn in as the 46th U.S. president, Chinese President Xi Jinping stated that China and the United States should engage in “fair competition,” or competition for “excellence in the racing field,” rather than “beating each other on the wrestling arena.” In his remarks at the Munich Security Conference on February 19, 2021, U.S. President Joe Biden declared that although competition with China will be “long term” and “stiff,” he categorically ruled out “pitting East against West” or returning to the “rigid blocs of the Cold War.” Indeed, a new engagement consensus would not view China as the “other” that must be transformed, integrated, and led into a U.S.-dominated order, thus rectifying a key fallacy of the old consensus. It would allow for an order in which the United States and China would coexist while continuing to compete in a constructive and positive-sum way, rather than in a confrontational, zero-sum manner.

THE REAL DANGER AHEAD

A new engagement consensus would not mean an end to hedging strategies. Hedging has always been an element of U.S.-Chinese engagement, offering a prudent insurance policy and a way to continue to shape the other side's behavior. The United States hedged against China through the 1990s, the first decade of the twenty-first century, and the early years of the second decade. (U.S. President Barack Obama's signature “pivot to Asia” was essentially a hedging strategy, as its key pillars included both cooperative elements such as engagement with China and competitive instruments such as alliance enhancement and balancing.) But the administration of U.S. President Donald Trump moved

much closer to neo-containment, a new Cold War strategy advocated by U.S. hawks. A new engagement consensus would allow a return to a more traditional hedging approach that also allows for cooperation.

Indeed, China is already pursuing a hedging strategy that aims to minimize strategic risks and shape U.S. policies. China's hedging strategy can be seen in its deepening relations with the Association of South-east Asian Nations (ASEAN), the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, and Russia. The relationship with Russia is especially illustrative. Despite calls by some Chinese strategists to form a Chinese-Russian alliance, Beijing has repeatedly and explicitly ruled out such an option. Indeed, Beijing has pursued the strategy of *jieban er bu jiemeng* (forging a partnership without forming an alliance) and insisted that the China-Russia comprehensive strategic partnership of coordination should be characterized as "not aligned, not confrontational, and not targeted at any third party." Beijing has strengthened bilateral ties with Moscow as part of its hedging portfolio. Unless Washington increases its strategic pressure on Beijing and Moscow to such an extreme that both states feel compelled to consolidate a formal alliance, China and Russia will continue to pursue a hedging strategy but avoid entering an outright alliance.

The strategy is also evident in Beijing's *daguo waijiao* (great-power diplomacy). In June 2014, Chinese President Xi first proposed that the two powers should build a new model of major-country relationship (*xinxing daguo guanxi*) defined by "no conflict, no confrontation, mutual respect, and win-win cooperation," an idea that the Obama administration temporarily welcomed and even the Trump administration briefly entertained. The concept, however, seems to have died out as tensions grew. Strategic restraint is in short supply in international politics, yet it is badly needed now.

Arriving at a G2RS world will require strategic reassurance to address Beijing's and Washington's burgeoning distrust. China, as the rising power, needs to credibly reassure the United States that it is neither pursuing a sphere of influence by pushing the United States out of East Asia nor aiming to end U.S. global primacy and replace the existing international order with a China-centric, tributary-like system. Meanwhile, the United States should resist pursuing a containment strategy against China and seeking to mobilize the U.S. public and its allies for a new Cold War. In any case, few if any U.S. allies or partners would be willing to choose sides should Washington try to force their hand.

In a G2RS world, Beijing and Washington would understand that the real danger does not come from revisionist impulses on either side. Rather, the peril lies in the security dilemma—a tragic scenario in which one player’s defensive efforts to bolster its own security are viewed as aggressive and threatening by the other, leading to growing tension and eventually even conflict. Within a G2RS framework, China and the United States would work together to reverse the security dilemma between the two, including in the maritime, nuclear, cyber, and space domains.

Taiwan is among the biggest potential flash points likely to drag Beijing and Washington into a large-scale military conflict. Washington is likely to continue to use Taiwan as leverage for hedging against Beijing, but to avoid a full confrontation over Taiwan, Washington should honor its commitment to the “one China” policy, a cornerstone of the bilateral relationship since 1979. For its part, Beijing should continue to seek reunification with Taiwan through peaceful means—that is, as long as Taiwan does not seek independence, there is no foreign interference that leads to Taiwan’s separation from China, and “possibilities for a peaceful reunification [are not] completely exhausted,” according to China’s 2005 Anti-Secession Law.

In areas such as the South China and East China Seas, Beijing and Washington might not fully agree yet, but they can still strengthen confidence-building measures (such as the Code for Unplanned Encounters at Sea) and crisis prevention and management mechanisms to avoid accidental escalation. Those efforts would position military relations as a truly stabilizing rather than destabilizing force. China and ASEAN countries are concluding a binding code of conduct in the South China Sea, a move the United States should welcome.

A G2RS world would also involve shared responsibilities between the United States and China. Those might include such tasks as non-proliferation, counterterrorism, and peace building in regional hot spots such as Afghanistan.

LOW-HANGING FRUIT

A new engagement consensus would also require creating a new trade relationship that can serve as ballast for U.S.-Chinese relations. Such a trade relationship would call for rectifying the problems in the narrative about China and the World Trade Organization. Nowadays, one of the most popular U.S. narratives about China views Beijing as

violating the WTO's rules, taking advantage of the system, and enriching itself by ripping off the United States. The narrative, perpetuated by politicians and the media, has almost become a widely accepted truth in the United States. Such a narrative, however, grew from a highly politically charged, distorted image of China. Critically reexamining such a narrative is crucial.

After joining the WTO in December 2001, China cut tariff and non-tariff measures, relaxed limits on foreign investments, and opened up domestic markets. WTO accession has led China to build a legal system that aligns with multilateral trade rules, contributing to the development of the rule of law in China. China also reviewed and amended thousands of laws and regulations at various levels of government. By 2015, China had cut its trade-weighted average tariff to 4.4 percent, a rate very close to the United States' 2.4 percent, the European Union's 3.0 percent, and Australia's 4.0 percent. Over the years, more than 40 cases have been filed against China at the WTO, and China has complied with all the rulings handed down by the WTO appellate body. Indeed, former WTO Director General Pascal Lamy has graded China an A+ for its fulfillment of WTO pledges, suggesting that it is unfair to paint China as a rule breaker at the WTO.

Whether China has fulfilled the WTO rules in letter but not in spirit may be debatable. One thing is clear, though: far from being a villain that broke the rules and abused the system, as the popular narrative in the United States suggests, China has largely fulfilled its WTO accession commitments. Many U.S. complaints related to subsidies and industrial policies are actually outside the WTO regime. Therefore, an important discussion involving the new engagement consensus would focus on reforming the multilateral trading system.

Beijing has acknowledged that the phase one trade deal reached between the world's two largest economies in January 2020 is in line with China's overall strategy of deepening reform and will help push forward domestic structural reforms in China. The phase one trade deal might help resolve several long-standing disputes between China and the United States, including those related to intellectual property rights protection, technology transfer, the opening up of the financial services sector, the exchange-rate regime, and transparency. Indeed, some Chinese analysts have even likened it to China's "second accession to the WTO," since the phase one trade deal might lead to the so-called *daobi gai*, which would help pressure Beijing to push

domestic reforms forward. The Biden administration is currently reviewing U.S. trade policy toward China. Should the agreements reached in the phase one trade deal be inherited in some form, they may lay the foundation for both sides to resolve remaining disputes on subsidies and industrial policies, thus paving the way for a healthy economic and trade relationship. Instead of pursuing a damaging, complete decoupling of the two economies, Washington and Beijing might be able to relink or recouple their economies on a new basis of reciprocity. Strictly adhering to rules will reinforce mutual benefits and restore the economic and trade relationship as a new basis for a stable U.S.-Chinese relationship.

U.S. policy circles repeatedly portray China's Belt and Road Initiative and the China-led Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) as initiatives that seek to consolidate spheres of influence at the expense of the U.S.-led liberal international order. The BRI, however, is also part and parcel of China's hedging portfolio. It is fundamentally based on China's unique understanding that informal interactions and non-structured relations among nations will help defuse the tension of the so-called leadership/hegemony dilemma. Therefore, rather than having a geostrategic design resembling a modern tributary system challenging U.S. primacy, the BRI aims to construct an interconnected regional and global network that is non-hierarchical, multi-centered, and inclusive. After a relatively short learning curve, the AIIB has quickly established itself as a high-standard multilateral international financial institution, embracing global standards for its governance structure and lending practices. Robert Zoellick suggested that the AIIB model of being "lean, clean, and green" should be applied to the BRI, an idea shared by many analysts in China. Also, Xi stated at the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation Summit in November 2020 that China would "favorably consider joining the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP)." In other words, the United States might join the AIIB one day, and both the United States and China might join the CPTPP at some point, decisions that could become the building blocks of a G2RS world.

CHANGING COURSE

It is far from certain that a new engagement consensus will emerge. Rather, the opposite might become a reality: extended strategic rivalry that eventually consumes the two great powers in a catastrophic new

Cold War. The COVID-19 pandemic has taken a toll on U.S.-Chinese relations, adding new flash points to an already fraught relationship.

Yet it is not too late for Washington and Beijing to set a new course, repair damaged trust, and restabilize the U.S.-Chinese relationship. The two sides can begin with low-hanging fruit such as easing visa restrictions for students and scholars. Moreover, both sides ought to cooperate on international climate governance and COVID-19 vaccination efforts in the developing world, in close coordination with the United Nations, the World Health Organization, and other international stakeholders. Indeed, cooperating on such issues can help point the way toward a new engagement consensus.

Competition between China and the United States should not be about how to contend for primacy or dominate the international system. Rather, the real competition should be about how each side can become a better self. Rather than blaming each other for problems or falling captive to fear, paranoia, misperception, or ideological prejudice, both the United States and China should address their domestic challenges, carry out needed reforms, improve domestic governance systems, and deliver better policy outcomes to their respective citizens.

Ultimately, both Americans and Chinese must ask themselves the same question: Do they want to let suspicion and antagonism define the years ahead or face competition with confidence and patience? If both choose the latter, a new engagement consensus and a new G2RS world are still possible—though far from certain. The stakes are too high for both sides not to try. 🌐

The World China Wants

How Power Will—and Won't—Reshape Chinese Ambitions

Rana Mitter

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Does China want to transform the global order to advance its own interests and to reflect its own image? That may be the most important question in geopolitics today, yet the answers it elicits tend to reveal more about modern biases than they do about what a future Chinese superpower would look like. Those who want to project forward to a malevolent, expansionist China point to evidence of aggression in Beijing's posture today. Those with a less apocalyptic view highlight more accommodating features in Chinese policy or note that China will face plenty of challenges that will keep it from reshaping the world even if it wants to. Many Western observers see a burgeoning new Cold War, with China serving as a twenty-first-century version of the Soviet Union.

Such projections are far too rigid and sweeping to usefully describe the complexity of China's rise—either to capture the inherent uncertainty in China's future aims or to recognize the essential elements that have shaped its aspirations. Chinese power today is a protean, dynamic force formed by the nexus of authoritarianism, consumerism, global ambitions, and technology. Call it the ACGT model: with the same initials as the nucleotides in DNA, these strands of Chinese power combine and recombine to form China's modern political identity and approach

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to the rest of the world. The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) wants to firm up its grip on Chinese society, encourage consumerism at home and abroad, expand its global influence, and develop and export China's own advanced technology. China's current standing and future prospects cannot be understood without seeing all four of those goals together.

The strongman leadership of Chinese President Xi Jinping is important in understanding China today and its likely trajectory, as is the country's response to the COVID-19 pandemic. But the four ACGT forces have a significance that extends beyond any one leader or crisis. They shape Beijing's idea of its place in a reconstituted world order, in which China would take a preeminent role in Asia and export its model of economic investment, which draws on communitarian ideas of development and is indifferent to liberal norms (although not always actively hostile to them). To legitimize its approach, China often turns to history, invoking its premodern past, for example, or reinterpreting the events of World War II. China's increasingly authoritarian direction under Xi offers only one possible future for the country. To understand where China could be headed, observers must pay attention to the major elements of Chinese power and the frameworks through which that power is both expressed and imagined.

THE NEXUS OF CHINESE POWER

Since the 2008 global financial crisis, China's leaders have explicitly presented their authoritarian system of governance as an end in and of itself, not a steppingstone to a liberal state. The CCP insists that it is a meritocracy: the benefit that Chinese society derives from the party's effective leaders more than makes up for the lack of popular participation in their selection. At least in the short term, the COVID-19 crisis has boosted authoritarianism at home. In early 2020, China touted its suppression of the virus as a function of its top-down, coercive system of government. (It has been less keen to concede that its initial poor response was due to the party-state's inability to process unwelcome information.) The CCP's newly confident and antagonistic character marks a significant departure from the more hesitant version of authoritarianism that preceded Xi, when Chinese leaders even looked at democracies such as Singapore—however imperfect and illiberal—as potential models. No longer.

Chinese leaders don't simply want to consolidate their rule at home. Their ambitions are global. This is not wholly new: the Nationalist leader Chiang Kai-shek and his Communist counterpart, Mao Zedong,

both had visions of a major international role for their country in the 1940s and 1960s, respectively. Xi's China, however, has combined international ambitions with economic, military, and technological power to achieve a genuinely global reach, from port facilities in Athens to a naval base in Djibouti to the rollout of 5G technology across the world. Xi declared in a 2017 speech to the 19th Party Congress that China would move unerringly closer to the "center stage" of world affairs.

To take that position, China has sought to boost the consumption of material goods at home. Since 1978, the CCP has worked to address one of the most notable flaws of the Soviet Union: the failure to cater to the needs and desires of domestic consumers. China's revolution has become a consumer revolution in the past four decades, building an increasingly cashless society where online purchasing inspires occasions such as the e-commerce platform Alibaba's Singles' Day—the biggest consumer event in the world, in which \$38 billion worth of goods were sold in 2019. Rising standards of living have fostered an expectation that the CCP will continue to deliver on its economic promises even after the Chinese economy contracted severely in early 2020 in the wake of the pandemic. Growing prosperity in China has also benefited countries in the West and in Asia that have welcomed millions of Chinese buyers of luxury goods, touristic services, and higher education.

It is in the realm of technology where China has truly taken a new direction in its global engagement. The combination of economic growth and massive spending on research in the past two decades has created one of the most innovative environments on earth. New Chinese-developed technologies boost the country's military and produce new goods for consumers, while also contributing to the establishment of a big-data surveillance state. China's impressive technological capacity forms the most potent and attractive part of its offer to the world.

PRESENT AT THE CREATION

The various strands of Chinese power emerged not from whole cloth but from a set of historical frameworks that continue to weigh heavily on all Chinese decision-making. Chinese leaders draw from the past in understanding the country's growing role in the world. They now make a revisionist claim to a founding role in the post-1945 international order, espouse traditional Chinese norms of governance, seek leadership of the global South, and make use of explicitly Marxist-Leninist language and symbols.

China sat on the sidelines for much of the Cold War after 1960, neither in the Western camp nor in the Soviet one. In the past two decades, however, China has cast itself not just as a participant in but also as a pivotal founder of the international order that emerged in the wake of World War II. At the 2020 Munich Security Conference, Foreign Minister Wang Yi reminded listeners that China was the first signatory of the UN Charter in 1945, a fact repeatedly mentioned in recent years by Chinese leaders. But to embrace that moment—when representatives of the ruling Nationalists (Kuomintang) dominated the delegation from China that helped establish the UN—the CCP had to reframe the very twentieth-century history that underpins its right to rule China. Since the 1980s, the party has acknowledged that its old enemies, the Nationalists and their Western allies, were crucial partners in winning the war against Japan between 1937 and 1945; previously, CCP leaders had taken sole credit for fending off the Japanese invasion of mainland China. That recognition has allowed the party to make a larger reinterpretation of Chinese history that sees the founding of modern China not just in the 1949 communist revolution—as originally imagined—but also in World War II itself.

This shift is not a matter of historical trivia; instead, it reflects how China imagines itself and wants to be understood. China now places itself centrally in the Allied victory and the creation of the post-1945 order. It played a crucial role in defending Asia and pinning down over half a million Japanese troops until the arrival of the Americans and the British after Pearl Harbor, at the cost of as many as 14 million Chinese lives.

This immense contribution underlies Beijing's insistence that China was "present at the creation" of the postwar world. Its expanding international role in the twenty-first century rests on this assumed centrality in the twentieth century. Under Xi, China is now the second-biggest financial contributor to the UN and is in the top ten of contributors of personnel to UN peacekeeping operations. U.S. President Donald Trump's perceived retreat from the obligations and norms of the liberal international order further bolstered China's position that it is now the most worthy inheritor of the legacy of 1945. Evocations of World War II continue to be central in Chinese public life. For instance, CCP officials have described China's supposed victory over the novel coronavirus last spring as the result of a "people's war," echoing the language Mao used during the war against Japan.

An even older history undergirds China's sense of its global role. In recent years, influential Chinese scholars, such as Yan Xuetong and Bai Tongdong, have argued for an understanding of international order informed by premodern, Confucian views. Western observers often interpret China's behavior in international relations as purely realist. But the use of rhetoric that draws on traditional thought suggests that China, like all states, would prefer its choices to be understood as moral and not just realist ones. When Chinese leaders use terms such as *ren* (meaning "benevolence"), they ground the state's interests and actions in ethical, idealistic language. These invocations of tradition will become more frequent as China's influence grows. Chinese leaders will expound a modernized form of Confucianism that fits with globalized values, stressing "morality" and "a common future" while playing down more illiberal Confucian values, such as the belief in social hierarchy.

That vision of a fundamentally moral China supports another ambition: China's wish to position itself as the leader of the global South. This aim is not original; during the Cold War, China sought to portray itself as a champion of what was then called the Third World, in contrast to a viciously capitalist West and a sclerotic Soviet Union. China regards itself not only as the new guardian of the post-1945 order but also as the inheritor of the non-Western anti-imperialism of the postcolonial world—an improbable double act that Beijing seems to be pulling off.

China today does not seek to spark revolutions across the global South. Instead, it sees poorer countries as proving grounds for a policy that emphasizes both economic development and the principle of national sovereignty. This form of Chinese engagement doesn't necessarily lead to outright authoritarianism; countries such as Ethiopia and Myanmar are examples of how ostensible democracies (albeit illiberal ones) can gain from the Chinese development model. But China's efforts overseas also dispense with any encouragement of liberalization or democratic reform. China's supporters argue that its model of fostering development is more flexible than any model that would enshrine liberal democracy. The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), China's vast, if inchoate, international infrastructure investment program, is the principal vehicle through which it seeks to project its leadership abroad.

As China spends capital abroad, it has more firmly embraced the rhetoric of Marxism-Leninism at home. Chinese officials don't yet use this language in statements tailored to an international audience, largely

because China is at pains to present itself as a nonrevolutionary state in the global order and wants to avoid recalling the ghosts of Maoism. But at home, the party peppers its communications with terms such as *douzhen* (struggle), which reflects the Hegelian notion that conflict has to precede an ultimate synthesis. The CCP also refers frequently to *maodun* (contradiction), the notion that tensions within society may produce constructive outcomes, an idea also frequently referenced by Mao and very much endorsed by Xi, who used the phrase in his 2017 speech to the 19th Party Congress to describe the new “contradiction between unbalanced and inadequate development and the people’s ever-growing needs for a better life.” This phrasing suggests that although many aspects of traditional Marxist-Leninist thought, including class struggle, are rarely heard in contemporary Chinese rhetoric, that ideology is not entirely absent. In the speech, Xi nodded to the fact that inequality between classes is still a reality in China and that the party sees that inequality as a blemish on the overall narrative of success it wishes to present.

AUTHORITARIAN DILEMMAS

How Chinese leaders frame their vision of China’s power and place in the world is, of course, no guide to how outsiders will perceive China. Under Xi, Beijing has made it more difficult for other countries to ignore the authoritarianism at the heart of the ACGT model. In 2013, for instance, Chinese leaders pitched the BRI in terms of the commercial and technological boon it would bring to recipient countries. Some Western observers even referred to the BRI approvingly as “China’s Marshall Plan” (to the chagrin of many Chinese commentators who did not want to be associated with an American Cold Warrior). Seven years later, however, China’s authoritarianism has come into fuller view thanks to both Beijing’s actions and its rhetoric. During the first phase of the COVID-19 pandemic, for example, Chinese officials pointed to their ability to mobilize resources and gather data faster than their counterparts in democratic governments and declared that China would create a vaccine for the world.

But whatever its potential benefits, Chinese authoritarianism will not easily win hearts and minds around the world. As BRI programs spread, so, too, will concerns about Chinese economic and political influence. In nondemocratic client states, such as Cambodia, China may meet less pushback, but resistance is more likely in countries such as Kenya and Zambia, where parliaments and the media can de-

bate Chinese involvement and where public attitudes toward China and its system are mixed or even overtly hostile.

That hostility may become all the more acute if the confrontational aspects of Chinese global power become more apparent. As China's overseas interests grow, Beijing will not be able to continue taking advantage of existing security umbrellas—as it did, for instance, in Afghanistan in the first decade of this century, when NATO in effect helped protect Chinese assets. China's growing range of economic and diplomatic interests increasingly demands an expanded global Chinese security presence. The Indian Ocean, in particular, may see greater Chinese activity, as China seeks to boost its trading interests in the geographic triangle formed by crucial ports in Greece, Djibouti, and Pakistan. Responding to this possibility, Australia, India, Japan, and the United States (collectively known as “the Quad”) held joint naval exercises in the Indian Ocean this past November.

Although many countries are content with Chinese investment, the arrival of People's Liberation Army troops would likely be a rather less welcome development. Chinese diplomacy can be very skilled, but its current often shrill and charmless tone is enough to put off many potential partners; China has an immensely long way to go to develop the necessary soft-power abilities to portray any future PLA expansion as providing common security rather than simply enforcing Beijing's desires.

China's handling of the COVID-19 crisis has irked many countries that had previously been courting Beijing. In the late 2010s, China achieved some success among wealthy countries in endowing its consumer products (such as the hugely popular TikTok app) with the kind of high-tech glamour previously associated with Japan. Yet China adopted a highly confrontational style of diplomacy after the outbreak of the COVID-19 epidemic and in the process shifted public attention in the West toward the authoritarian possibilities of Chinese technology. Western observers are alarmed by the use of surveillance technology to enable the repression of the Uighur minority group in Xinjiang and the potential use of this technology in Hong Kong to trace and prosecute nonviolent protesters.

The new global attention on China's authoritarianism will complicate the country's quest to project its model overseas. Consider, for example, China's struggle to get other major countries to firmly commit to adopting the 5G technology developed by the Chinese telecommunications

giant Huawei. Some countries in the global North—Australia, Germany, Japan, New Zealand, and the United States—have made it clear that they will not use Huawei’s 5G technology because of concerns about the security of the 5G equipment and about being associated with China’s authoritarian regime. The United Kingdom at first agreed to allow Huawei limited access to its 5G market but reversed that decision in July 2020. Shortly after the clash between Chinese and Indian troops in the Himalayan border area in June, the government of India announced that it would avoid the future use of Huawei products in its 5G network.

Still, countries in much of Africa, South America, and Southeast Asia have been more willing to accept Chinese 5G, and there remains a large group of countries that might still take it on because it is cheap and effective; for them, the economic advantages of embracing the technology outweigh any security concerns. This broad adoption of Chinese 5G would not usher in China’s global dominance, but it would form a vast footprint. The implications of such a 5G bloc are considerable, as Beijing would have the capacity to control a key element in the economic development of many major states, as well as potentially the ability to gain access to huge quantities of data.

CHINA’S WORLD

Achieving even that kind of partial hegemony may be difficult if Chinese leaders continue to ruffle the feathers of their counterparts elsewhere. Beijing’s initial response to the COVID-19 outbreak suggested that under pressure, China’s authoritarian tendencies trump its desire to engage with the world. Various countries, notably Australia, proposed that there should be an international inquiry into the origins of the virus. Rather than welcome that idea, as a nimble power would have done, China immediately boycotted barley sales from Australia. When the British government hinted that it might reverse its decision to allow Huawei into the United Kingdom’s 5G network, Chinese diplomats threatened “consequences,” sending a clear signal that investment from China was not simply a commercial transaction but also a political one—and bringing about exactly the ban they did not want. China’s cantankerous reactions in the wake of the outbreak have made it easier for its critics to highlight what they consider its untrustworthy behavior, including the militarization of the South China Sea, probable cyberattacks against countries including the United States, and the exploitation of loopholes in World Trade Organization rules.

But even as many Western countries seek to define the ways in which China's current behavior is illegitimate, they avoid a more difficult question. What are legitimate aims for China in its own region and the wider world? China is a large, powerful state that has the world's second-biggest economy. A state of that size cannot be expected to participate in the global order solely on the terms of its rivals—not least because some of China's recent success owes much to Western failure. Criticism of Huawei may well be justified, but Chinese 5G technology is attractive to many countries because there is no obvious Western alternative. It is entirely appropriate to criticize China for expanding its influence in the UN in ways that degrade the importance of individual human rights, but China did not force the United States to reduce its funding to UN agencies and thus weaken them.

At the moment, China is hurting itself by arguing that any criticism of its internal politics is out of bounds. The United States found itself at a similar juncture during the 1950s. Its appalling record of discrimination at home against its Black population tarnished its international image and offered its rivals an easy target; Mao's government invited Black intellectuals and activists, such as W. E. B. Du Bois and the Black Panther leader Huey Newton, to Beijing. U.S. politicians argued strongly that the rest of the world had no right to criticize the United States' internal race politics. This position was unsustainable, and domestic resistance combined with external shaming changed laws in the United States.

As a rising power, China now also faces external criticism of its domestic politics. Joining the global economy has made it more vulnerable to scrutiny of its authoritarianism at home. But it can do something more creative than complain about Western scorn: China can draw on its recent history of reinventing itself. After China under Mao had become economically and politically moribund, in the 1980s, Mao's successor, Deng Xiaoping, adapted an idea from former Premier Zhou Enlai termed "the Four Modernizations" (of agriculture, industry, defense, and science and technology) to reshape China. Deng allowed farmers to sell parts of their harvest on the free market, gave scholars academic freedoms that had disappeared under Mao, and set up "special economic zones," with governance and tax incentives designed to bring in foreign investment.

Much as Deng managed in the wake of Mao's passing, China will have to recalibrate in the coming decade to better incorporate—rather

than reject—criticism from abroad. Despite the country’s authoritarian reputation, internal debate has played an important part in China’s rise. Until recently, liberal political thinkers and writers had space within the Chinese system to offer constructive criticism of their more hard-line colleagues; engagement with some critics abroad also helped test China’s own ideas and policies. The shutting down of such debate in recent years may not have held the country back in the very short term, but is likely to do so in future years when the rigidity of political thought prevents Chinese political elites from reevaluating policies. Granting more space to disagreement would not necessarily require the democratization of China. It would, however, mean a commitment to letting civil society flourish (reversing the alarming number of dismissals and detentions of lawyers, activists, and scholars in recent years) and to creating genuine transparency of government both at home and abroad.

China will need to do better than reduce its many minority groups to quaint exemplars of folk tradition. Instead, it should seek to convince these groups—including the Uighurs of Xinjiang—that participation in the Chinese project would affirm their sense of dignity and identity. When it comes to dissent in Hong Kong—another test of the CCP’s ability to build an inclusive polity—the new security law that outlaws so-called hatred of the government suggests an inability to hear and learn from a governing tradition that is authentically Chinese but different from that of Beijing. The CCP also lacks the willingness to present Taiwan with any vision of a joint future that the island might find a reasonable starting point for discussion. China does not claim to be liberal, but it does purport to be a meritocracy that values the frank debate of differing views (*shi shi qiu shi*: “seek truth from facts”). The party’s current actions are failing to win over the Chinese who live at the country’s borders, never mind managing to set China as an exemplar of successful development for the wider world.

ITS OWN GREATEST ADVERSARY

The biggest obstacle China will face is not the hostility of the United States or other adversaries. It is instead China’s own authoritarian turn. Beijing’s commitment to that aspect of China’s core identity will make it far harder for the other three nucleotides—consumerism, global ambitions, and technology—of its DNA to recombine successfully, stoking hostility abroad and raising barriers between China and the world it strives to remake.

The increasing belligerence of Chinese foreign policy since the beginning of 2020 does not bode well. But it is not impossible to imagine a less antagonistic version of Chinese authoritarianism: in the first decade of this century, China boasted a burgeoning culture of investigative journalism, growing civil society, and very lively social media—together, an expanding public sphere even in the absence of full democracy. There may be no chance that the CCP will turn into a liberal democratic party, but that doesn't mean that it couldn't return to this earlier trajectory. The authoritarianism of a China of this variety—the China visible before 2012—would be less glaring to both domestic and foreign audiences.

Beijing is not seeking to impose a replica of its own system on other states. It is committed to burnishing its ideological prestige at home as a successful nationalist—and socialist—state, but it does not require other states to follow in its footsteps. China feels no obligation to maintain the liberal international order because of any principled belief in liberalism. Instead, an order based on Chinese preferences would likely contain the following elements: a commitment to very strong national sovereignty; economic development, quite possibly stressing renewable energy (a subject on which Chinese rhetoric currently outstrips Chinese action); the expansion and integration of a BRI system that would be strongly oriented toward Chinese economic needs; and a global technology landscape dominated by Chinese norms. This amalgam would have few attractions for committed democrats, to be sure, but it could form a sustainable alternative proposition to at least part of the existing liberal order.

China's growing stature in Asia might lead to the strengthening of the authoritarian tendencies among the region's democracies. With Chinese influence, the thumb would fall on the nondemocratic side of the scale in countries with fragile democratic structures, such as Myanmar and Thailand. Countries such as the Philippines have already become more vulnerable to Chinese norms as their politics have become more authoritarian; South Korea, much more liberal in its politics, would become vulnerable to a form of Cold War-era Finlandization—that is, the bending of a democracy to the influence of a powerful authoritarian neighbor—because of its proximity to China in the event of the retreat of the United States from East Asia.

China benefits from the fact that no other actor in the world can channel its unique ACGT nucleotide combination. India, Japan, Russia,

and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations cannot replace China's influence in Asia, let alone the world. China is by far the largest actor in the region, which gives it the heft to dominate. But the opacity of China's current system and its assertive, sometimes confrontational posture generate regional and global mistrust. The United States is tolerable to most in Asia (except China and North Korea) because its presence in countries such as Japan and South Korea has won democratic consent. In an era of largely democratic and highly nationalist states, China must make its international ambitions palatable to others, even if they will never be fully embraced. The states in South America dominated by the United States in the 1950s, or in Eastern Europe by the Soviet Union in the same period, were poor and undemocratic. It will be much harder for China, over time, to maintain popular acceptance of its growing involvement in wealthy Asian states with lively public spheres, even if it can use its military might to pressure its neighbors and try to influence their practices.

The political structures of China will also change considerably in the next few decades and will reveal the divergence between the open and closed elements of its society. The CCP has encouraged young Chinese professionals in academia, business, and law to study overseas. But in the ranks of the party itself, overseas experience has far less value and can even hurt one's prospects for advancement. Few among the next generation of China's political leaders seem to have significant international experience, although they are no doubt advised by people who do. China will likely develop a political elite that is inward-looking alongside a professional elite that is globally connected and outward-facing. That contrast will present a major challenge, because it suggests a contradiction, to use a Marxist term, between two key goals, internationalization and the maintenance of party power.

In addition, seismic demographic change is around the corner. Beginning in 2029, China's population will contract by around five million people per year, making China a much older society before it reaches high-income status. China will need to pay for the welfare of millions of older people without having the same resources of an aging rich society such as Japan. The unexpected economic shock of the coronavirus has made it more difficult for China to expand its commercial ties with neighbors in the region, although its control of the virus seems to be leading to a steady recovery. Chinese officials now speak of a "dual circulation" economy that is global in reach while maintaining a protected

domestic market. But this balancing act is unsustainable in the long term. A better approach would see China be much more sensitive to the needs and desires of its partners, displaying a tact that it has not exhibited in recent years in its relations with neighbors.

An ACGT-based bid to reshape the international order demands a more concerted Chinese diplomatic effort overall. Chinese officials now often invoke saccharine platitudes before veering at breakneck speed toward more coercive and confrontational broadsides. Instead, China needs to better understand that global leadership requires concessions, generosity, and a willingness to entertain criticism: a hard realization to achieve in a country where the domestic political culture encourages the suppression, rather than the celebration, of dissent. The major obstacle to China's rise on the international stage is not U.S. hostility or internal foes. Rather, it is the authoritarian strand of the CCP's core identity. That authoritarianism and at times confrontational expansionism has the effect of tarnishing the other components of China's model—the emphasis on consumerism and improvements in material lifestyles, the flawed but sincere commitment to global development and poverty reduction, and China's truly astonishing capacity for technological innovation.

The key elements of China's ideological mixture—Marxism-Leninism, traditional thought, historical analogy, and economic success—have largely eclipsed the always limited power of Western liberalism to influence how the CCP sees the world. But China's global future depends on how it can successfully recombine the other aspects of its ACGT model. At the moment, Chinese authoritarianism threatens to limit Beijing's ability to create a plausible new form of global order. 🌐

The New Concert of Powers

How to Prevent Catastrophe and Promote
Stability in a Multipolar World

Richard N. Haass and Charles A. Kupchan

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The international system is at a historical inflection point. As Asia continues its economic ascent, two centuries of Western domination of the world, first under Pax Britannica and then under Pax Americana, are coming to an end. The West is losing not only its material dominance but also its ideological sway. Around the world, democracies are falling prey to illiberalism and populist dissension while a rising China, assisted by a pugnacious Russia, seeks to challenge the West's authority and republican approaches to both domestic and international governance.

U.S. President Joe Biden is committed to refurbishing American democracy, restoring U.S. leadership in the world, and taming a pandemic that has had devastating human and economic consequences. But Biden's victory was a close call; on neither side of the Atlantic will angry populism or illiberal temptations readily abate. Moreover, even if Western democracies overcome polarization, beat back illiberalism,

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and pull off an economic rebound, they will not forestall the arrival of a world that is both multipolar and ideologically diverse.

History makes clear that such periods of tumultuous change come with great peril. Indeed, great-power contests over hierarchy and ideology regularly lead to major wars. Averting this outcome requires soberly acknowledging that the Western-led liberal order that emerged after World War II cannot anchor global stability in the twenty-first century. The search is on for a viable and effective way forward.

The best vehicle for promoting stability in the twenty-first century is a global concert of major powers. As the history of the nineteenth-century Concert of Europe demonstrated—its members were the United Kingdom, France, Russia, Prussia, and Austria—a steering group of leading countries can curb the geopolitical and ideological competition that usually accompanies multipolarity.

Concerts have two characteristics that make them well suited to the emerging global landscape: political inclusivity and procedural informality. A concert's inclusivity means that it puts at the table the geopolitically influential and powerful states that need to be there, regardless of their regime type. In so doing, it largely separates ideological differences over domestic governance from matters of international cooperation. A concert's informality means that it eschews binding and enforceable procedures and agreements, clearly distinguishing it from the UN Security Council. The UNSC serves too often as a public forum for grandstanding and is regularly paralyzed by disputes among its veto-wielding permanent members. In contrast, a concert offers a private venue that combines consensus building with cajoling and jockeying—a must since major powers will have both common and competing interests. By providing a vehicle for genuine and sustained strategic dialogue, a global concert can realistically mute and manage inescapable geopolitical and ideological differences.

A global concert would be a consultative, not a decision-making, body. It would address emerging crises yet ensure that urgent issues would not crowd out important ones, and it would deliberate on reforms to existing norms and institutions. This steering group would help fashion new rules of the road and build support for collective initiatives but leave operational matters, such as deploying peacekeeping missions, delivering pandemic relief, and concluding new climate deals, to the UN and other existing bodies. The concert would thus tee up decisions that could then be taken and implemented elsewhere. It

would sit atop and backstop, not supplant, the current international architecture by maintaining a dialogue that does not now exist. The UN is too big, too bureaucratic, and too formalistic. Fly-in, fly-out G-7 or G-20 summits can be useful but even at their best are woefully inadequate, in part because so much effort goes toward haggling over detailed, but often anodyne, communiqués. Phone calls between heads of state, foreign ministers, and national security advisers are too episodic and often narrow in scope.

Fashioning major-power consensus on the international norms that guide statecraft, accepting both liberal and illiberal governments as legitimate and authoritative, advancing shared approaches to crises—the Concert of Europe relied on these important innovations to preserve peace in a multipolar world. By drawing on lessons from its nineteenth-century forebearer, a twenty-first-century global concert can do the same. Concerts do lack the certitude, predictability, and enforceability of alliances and other formalized pacts. But in designing mechanisms to preserve peace amid geopolitical flux, policymakers should strive for the workable and the attainable, not the desirable but impossible.

A GLOBAL CONCERT FOR THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

A global concert would have six members: China, the European Union, India, Japan, Russia, and the United States. Democracies and nondemocracies would have equal standing, and inclusion would be a function of power and influence, not values or regime type. The concert's members would collectively represent roughly 70 percent of both global GDP and global military spending. Including these six heavyweights in the concert's ranks would give it geopolitical clout while preventing it from becoming an unwieldy talk shop.

Members would send permanent representatives of the highest diplomatic rank to the global concert's standing headquarters. Although they would not be formal members of the concert, four regional organizations—the African Union, Arab League, Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), and Organization of American States (OAS)—would maintain permanent delegations at the concert's headquarters. These organizations would provide their regions with representation and the ability to help shape the concert's agenda. When discussing issues affecting these regions, concert members would invite delegates from these bodies as well as select member states to join meetings. For example, were concert members to ad-

dress a dispute in the Middle East, they could request the participation of the Arab League, its relevant members, and other involved parties, such as Iran, Israel, and Turkey.

A global concert would shun codified rules, instead relying on dialogue to build consensus. Like the Concert of Europe, it would privilege the territorial status quo and a view of sovereignty that precludes, except in the case of international consensus, using military force or other coercive tools to alter existing borders or topple regimes. This relatively conservative baseline would encourage buy-in from all members. At the same time, the concert would provide an ideal venue for discussing globalization's impact on sovereignty and the potential need to deny sovereign immunity to nations that engage in certain egregious activities. Those activities might include committing genocide, harboring or sponsoring terrorists, or severely exacerbating climate change by destroying rainforests.

A global concert would thus put a premium on dialogue and consensus. The steering group would also acknowledge, however, that great powers in a multipolar world will be driven by realist concerns about hierarchy, security, and regime continuity, making discord inescapable. Members would reserve the right to take unilateral action, alone or through coalitions, when they deem their vital interests to be at stake. Direct strategic dialogue would, though, make surprise moves less common and, ideally, unilateral action less frequent. Regular and open consultation between Moscow and Washington, for example, might have produced less friction over NATO enlargement. China and the United States are better off directly communicating with each other over Taiwan than sidestepping the issue and risking a military mishap in the Taiwan Strait or provocations that could escalate tensions.

A global concert could also make unilateral moves less disruptive. Conflicts of interest would hardly disappear, but a new vehicle devoted exclusively to great-power diplomacy would help make those conflicts more manageable. Although members would, in principle, endorse a norm-governed international order, they would also embrace realistic expectations about the limits of cooperation and compartmentalize their differences. During the nineteenth-century concert, its members frequently confronted stubborn disagreements over, for instance, how to respond to liberal revolts in Greece, Naples, and Spain. But they kept their differences at bay through dialogue and compromise, re-

turning to the battlefield in the Crimean War in 1853 only after the revolutions of 1848 spawned destabilizing currents of nationalism.

A global concert would give its members wide leeway when it comes to domestic governance. They would effectively agree to disagree on questions of democracy and political rights, ensuring that such differences do not hinder international cooperation. The United States and its democratic allies would not cease criticizing illiberalism in China, Russia, or anywhere else, and neither would they abandon their effort to spread democratic values and practices. On the contrary, they would continue to raise their voices and wield their influence to defend universal political and human rights. At the same time, China and Russia would be free to criticize the domestic policies of the concert's democratic members and publicly promote their own vision of governance. But the concert would also work toward a shared understanding of what constitutes unacceptable interference in other countries' domestic affairs and, as a result, are to be avoided.

OUR BEST HOPE

Establishing a global concert would admittedly constitute a setback to the liberalizing project launched by the world's democracies after World War II. The proposed steering group's aspirations set a modest bar compared with the West's long-standing aim of spreading republican governance and globalizing a liberal international order. Nonetheless, this scaling back of expectations is unavoidable given the twenty-first century's geopolitical realities.

The international system, for one, will exhibit characteristics of both bipolarity and multipolarity. There will be two peer competitors—the United States and China. Unlike during the Cold War, however, ideological and geopolitical competition between them will not encompass the world. On the contrary, the EU, Russia, and India, as well as other large states such as Brazil, Indonesia, Nigeria, Turkey, and South Africa, will likely play the two superpowers off each other and seek to preserve a significant measure of autonomy. Both China and the United States will also likely limit their involvement in unstable zones of less strategic interest, leaving it to others—or no one—to manage potential conflicts. China has long been smart enough to keep its political distance from far-off conflict zones, while the United States, which is currently pulling back from the Middle East and Africa, has learned that the hard way.

The international system of the twenty-first century will therefore resemble that of nineteenth-century Europe, which had two major powers—the United Kingdom and Russia—and three powers of lesser rank—France, Prussia, and Austria. The Concert of Europe’s primary objective was to preserve peace among its members through a mutual commitment to upholding the territorial settlement reached at the Congress of Vienna in 1815. The pact rested on good faith and a shared sense of obligation, not contractual agreement. Any actions required to enforce their mutual commitments, according to a British memorandum, “have been deliberately left to arise out of the circumstances of the time and of the case.” Concert members recognized their competing interests, especially when it came to Europe’s periphery, but sought to manage their differences and prevent them from jeopardizing group solidarity. The United Kingdom, for example, opposed Austria’s proposed intervention to reverse a liberal revolt that took place in Naples in 1820. Nonetheless, British Foreign Secretary Lord Castlereagh eventually assented to Austria’s plans provided that “they were ready to give every reasonable assurance that their views were not directed to purposes of aggrandizement subversive of the Territorial System of Europe.”

A global concert, like the Concert of Europe, is well suited to promoting stability amid multipolarity. Concerts limit their membership to a manageable size. Their informality allows them to adapt to changing circumstances and prevents them from scaring off powers averse to binding commitments. Under conditions of rising populism and nationalism, widespread during the nineteenth century and again today, powerful countries prefer looser groupings and diplomatic flexibility to fixed formats and obligations. It is no accident that major states have already been turning to concert-like groupings or so-called contact groups to tackle tough challenges; examples include the six-party talks that addressed North Korea’s nuclear program, the P5+1 coalition that negotiated the 2015 Iran nuclear deal, and the Normandy grouping that has been seeking a diplomatic resolution to the conflict in eastern Ukraine. The concert can be understood as a standing contact group with a global purview.

Separately, the twenty-first century will be politically and ideologically diverse. Depending on the trajectory of the populist revolts afflicting the West, liberal democracies may well be able to hold their own. But so too will illiberal regimes. Moscow and Beijing are tight-

ening their grip at home, not opening up. Stable democracy is hard to find in the Middle East and Africa. Indeed, democracy is receding, not advancing, worldwide—a trend that could well continue. The international order that comes next must make room for ideological diversity. A concert has the necessary informality and flexibility to do so; it separates issues of domestic rule from those of international teamwork. During the nineteenth century, it was precisely this hands-off approach to regime type that enabled two liberalizing powers—the United Kingdom and France—to work with Russia, Prussia, and Austria, three countries determined to defend absolute monarchy.

Finally, the inadequacies of the current international architecture underscore the need for a global concert. The rivalry between the United States and China is heating up fast, the world is suffering through a devastating pandemic, climate change is advancing, and the evolution of cyberspace poses new threats. These and other challenges mean that clinging to the status quo and banking on existing international norms and institutions would be dangerously naive. The Concert of Europe was formed in 1815 owing to the years of devastation wrought by the Napoleonic Wars. But the lack of great-power war today should not be cause for complacency. And even though the world has passed through previous eras of multipolarity, the advance of globalization increases the demand for and importance of new approaches to global governance. Globalization unfolded during Pax Britannica, with London overseeing it until World War I. After a dark interwar hiatus, the United States took up the mantle of global leadership from World War II into the twenty-first century.

But Pax Americana is now running on fumes. The United States and its traditional democratic partners have neither the capability nor the will to anchor an interdependent international system and universalize the liberal order that they erected after World War II. The absence of U.S. leadership during the COVID-19 crisis was striking; each country was on its own. President Biden is guiding the United States back to being a team player, but the nation's pressing domestic priorities and the onset of multipolarity will deny Washington the outsize influence it once enjoyed. Allowing the world to slide toward regional blocs or a two-bloc structure similar to that of the Cold War is a non-starter. The United States, China, and the rest of the globe cannot fully uncouple when national economies, financial markets, and sup-

ply chains are irreversibly tethered together. A great-power steering group is the best option for managing an integrated world no longer overseen by a hegemon. A global concert fits the bill.

NO FALLBACKS

The alternatives to a global concert all have disqualifying weaknesses. Although the UN will remain an essential global forum, its track record illuminates the body's limitations. Veto-producing disagreements often render the Security Council helpless. Its permanent members reflect the world of 1945, not the world today. Expanding the membership of the UNSC might succeed in adapting it to a new distribution of power, but doing so would also make the body even more unwieldy and less effective than it already is. The UN should continue to fulfill its many useful functions, including providing humanitarian relief and peacekeeping, but it cannot and will not anchor global stability in the twenty-first century.

It is no longer realistic to aim for the globalization of the Western order and the emergence of a world populated primarily by democracies committed to upholding a liberal, rules-based international system. The unipolar moment is over, and in hindsight, talk of the "end of history" was triumphalist, even if sophisticated, nonsense. Indeed, the political coherence of the West can by no means be taken for granted. Even if Western democracies reclaim their commitments to republican ideals and to one another, they simply will not have the material strength or political wherewithal to universalize the liberal international order.

A U.S.-Chinese condominium—in effect a G-2 in which Washington and Beijing would together oversee a mutually acceptable international order—offers a similarly flawed alternative. Even if these two peer competitors could find a way to dampen their intensifying rivalry, much of the world will remain outside of their direct purview. Moreover, predicating global stability on cooperation between Washington and Beijing is hardly a safe bet. They will have enough trouble managing their relationship in the Asia-Pacific region. Farther afield, they will need considerable buy-in and support from others. A U.S.-Chinese condominium also smacks of a world of spheres of influence—one in which Washington and Beijing agree to divide their sway along geographic lines, perhaps apportioning rights and responsibilities to second-tier powers in their respective regions. To give China, Russia,

or other powers a free hand in their neighborhoods, however, is to encourage expansionist tendencies and to either reduce nearby countries' autonomy or prompt them to push back, resulting in more arms proliferation and regional conflict. Indeed, the precise purpose of thinking through how to provide order in the twenty-first century is to avoid a world more prone to coercion, rivalry, and economic division.

Pax Sinica is also a nonstarter. For the foreseeable future, China will have neither the capability nor the ambition to anchor a global order. At least for now, its primary geopolitical ambitions are confined to the Asia-Pacific. China is markedly expanding its commercial reach, in particular through the Belt and Road Initiative, a move that will significantly enhance its economic and political clout. But Beijing has not yet demonstrated a robust willingness to provide global public goods, instead taking a largely mercantilist approach to engagement in most quarters of the globe. Nor has it sought to export its views on domestic governance to others or to push out a new set of norms to anchor global stability. In addition, the United States, even if it continues down a path of strategic retrenchment, will remain a power of the first rank for decades to come. An illiberal and mercantilist Pax Sinica would hardly be acceptable to Americans or to many other peoples around the world still aspiring to uphold liberal principles.

When it comes to improving the current international architecture, a global concert wins not because of its perfection but rather by default; it is the most promising alternative. Other options are ineffective, unworkable, or unattainable. Should a great-power steering group fail to materialize, an unruly world managed by no one would lie ahead.

PUTTING IT IN MOTION

A global concert would promote international stability through sustained consultation and negotiation. Concert members' permanent representatives would meet regularly, supported by their staffs and a small but highly qualified secretariat. Members would dispatch their most accomplished diplomats as permanent representatives, who would be equal in rank, if not senior, to UN ambassadors. The concert would encourage the African Union, Arab League, ASEAN, and OAS to send equally authoritative figures. Concert summits would occur on a regular schedule. They would also take place as needed to address crises; one of the Concert of Europe's most effective practices was to gather leaders on short notice to manage emerging disputes. When relevant issues are under

discussion, the heads of the African Union, Arab League, ASEAN, and OAS, along with the leaders of states involved in the matter, would attend concert summits. The global concert's chair would rotate annually among its six members. The body's headquarters would not be located in any of its member states. Possible venues include Geneva and Singapore.

In contrast with the UNSC, where showboating often crowds out substantive initiative, the permanent members of the concert would not wield vetoes, take formal votes, or commit to binding agreements or obligations. Diplomacy would take place behind closed doors and aim to forge consensus. Members who break rank and act unilaterally would do so only after exploring alternative courses of action. If a member were to defect from consensus, other concert members would then coordinate their response.

This proposal presumes that none of the concert's members would be a revisionist power bent on aggression and conquest. The Concert of Europe functioned effectively in no small part because its members were, broadly speaking, satisfied powers seeking to preserve, not overturn, the territorial status quo. In today's world, Russian land grabs in Georgia and Ukraine are worrying developments, revealing the Kremlin's readiness to violate the territorial integrity of its neighbors. So are China's ongoing efforts to lay claim to and build military facilities on disputed islands in the South China Sea and Beijing's violation of its pledges to respect Hong Kong's autonomy. Nonetheless, neither Russia nor China has yet to become an implacably aggressive state committed to wholesale territorial expansion. A global concert also makes that outcome less likely by establishing a forum in which its members can make transparent their core security interests and strategic "redlines." Nonetheless, if an aggressor state that routinely threatened other members' interests were to emerge, it would be expelled from the group, and the remaining members of the concert would rally against it.

To advance great-power solidarity, the concert should focus on two priorities. One would be to encourage respect for existing borders and resist territorial changes through coercion or force. It would be prejudiced against claims of self-determination—but concert members would retain the option of recognizing new countries as they see fit. Although it would give all nations broad latitude on issues of domestic governance, the concert would deal on a case-by-case basis with failing states or those that systematically violate basic human rights and broadly accepted provisions of international law.

The concert's second priority would be to generate collective responses to global challenges. At times of crisis, the concert would advance diplomacy and galvanize joint initiative, then hand off implementation to the appropriate body—such as the UN for peacekeeping, the International Monetary Fund for emergency credit, or the World Health Organization (WHO) for public health. The concert would also invest in a longer-term effort to adapt existing norms and institutions to global change. Even while defending traditional sovereignty to reduce interstate conflict, it would also discuss how best to adjust international rules and practices to an interconnected world. When national policies have negative international consequences, those policies become the concert's business.

In this regard, the concert could help counter the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and address nuclear programs in North Korea and Iran. When it comes to diplomacy with Pyongyang and Tehran, enforcing sanctions against both regimes, and responding to potential provocations, the concert would have the right parties in the room. Indeed, as a standing body, the concert would significantly improve on the six-party and P5+1 formats that have historically handled negotiations with North Korea and Iran.

The concert could also serve as a venue for addressing climate change. The top greenhouse gas emitters are China, the United States, the EU, India, Russia, and Japan. Together, they produce roughly 65 percent of global emissions. With the world's leading emitters all around the table, the concert could help set new targets for reducing greenhouse gases and new standards for green development, before handing off implementation to other forums. Similarly, the COVID-19 pandemic exposed the WHO's inadequacies, and the concert would be the right place to fashion a consensus on reform. Forging rules of the road for managing technological innovation—digital regulation and taxation, cybersecurity, 5G networks, social media, virtual currencies, artificial intelligence—would also be on the concert's agenda. These important matters often fall between the institutional cracks, and the concert could provide a useful vehicle for international oversight.

Drawing on its nineteenth-century forebearer's experiences, a global concert should also recognize that great-power solidarity often entails inaction, neutrality, and restraint rather than intervention. The Concert of Europe relied on buffer zones, demilitarized areas, and neutral zones to dampen rivalries and head off potential conflicts.

Concert members objecting to initiatives backed by others simply opted out of participation rather than breaking rank and blocking the undertaking. The United Kingdom, for instance, opposed interventions to put down liberal rebellions in Naples and Spain in the 1820s but decided to sit out rather than prevent military action by other members. France did the same in 1839 and 1840 when other members intervened in Egypt to suppress a challenge to Ottoman rule.

How might a global concert usefully implement such measures today? In Syria, for example, a concert could have either coordinated a joint intervention to stop the civil war that erupted there in 2011 or worked to keep all the major powers out. More recently, it could have provided a venue for the diplomacy needed to introduce a buffer zone or demilitarized zone in Syria's north, averting the fighting and humanitarian suffering that followed the abrupt U.S. withdrawal and the regime's increasingly intense attacks on Idlib Province. Proxy wars in places such as Yemen, Libya, and Darfur might become less frequent and violent if a global concert were to succeed in fashioning a common stance among the major powers. Had a great-power steering group taken shape at the close of the Cold War, it might have been able to avert, or at least make far less bloody, the civil wars in Yugoslavia and Rwanda. A global concert would guarantee none of these outcomes—but it would make them all more likely.

MORE TROUBLE THAN IT'S WORTH?

This proposal to establish a global concert runs up against a number of objections. One involves the envisaged membership. Why not include Europe's most powerful states rather than the European Union, which is governed in an unwieldy and collective fashion by its commission and council? The answer is that Europe's geopolitical weight comes from its aggregate strength, not that of its individual member states. Germany's GDP is around \$4 trillion, and its defense budget is around \$40 billion, while the EU's collective GDP is roughly \$19 trillion and its aggregate defense spending is close to \$300 billion. Europe's most important leaders, moreover, need not be excluded from concert meetings. The heads of the EU—the presidents of the commission and council—could bring German, French, and other member states' leaders to concert summits. And even though the United Kingdom has quit the EU, it is still working out its future relationship with the union. EU membership in a global concert would give both

the United Kingdom and the EU a strong incentive to stay lashed together when it comes to foreign and security policies.

Some might question the inclusion of Russia, whose GDP is not even in the top ten and is behind those of Brazil and Canada. But Russia is a major nuclear power and punches well above its weight on the global stage. Russia's relationships with China, its EU neighbors, and the United States will have a major impact on twenty-first-century geopolitics. Moscow has also begun reasserting its influence in the Middle East and Africa. The Kremlin deserves a seat at the table.

Major portions of the world—Africa, the Middle East, Southeast Asia, and Latin America—would be represented by their main regional organizations, which would have regular input through their permanent presence at the concert's headquarters. Nonetheless, the diplomats representing these bodies, along with select leaders from their regions, would join meetings of concert members only when issues of direct relevance are under discussion. This format admittedly reinforces hierarchy and inequity in the international system. But the concert aims to facilitate cooperation by restricting membership to the most important and influential actors; it deliberately sacrifices broad representation in favor of efficacy. Other institutions provide wider access that the concert would not. Countries not included in the concert would still be able to wield their influence in the UN and other existing international forums. And the concert would have the flexibility to change its membership over time if there was a consensus to do so.

Another potential objection is that the global concert would effectively produce a world of great-power spheres of influence. After all, the Concert of Europe did grant its members a *droit de regard*—a right of overwatch—in their respective neighborhoods. A concert for the twenty-first century, however, would not encourage or sanction spheres of influence. On the contrary, it would promote regional integration and look to existing regional bodies to encourage restraint. Across regions, the body would foster great-power consultation on and joint management of contentious regional issues. The goal would be to facilitate global coordination while recognizing the authority and responsibility of regional bodies.

Critics might claim that the concert is too state-centric for today's world. The Concert of Europe may have been a good fit for the sovereign and authoritative nation-states of the nineteenth century. But social movements, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), corpora-

tions, cities, and other nonstate actors now have considerable political power and need to have seats at the table; empowering these social agents makes good sense. Nonetheless, states are still the main and most capable actors in the international system. Indeed, globalization and the populist backlash it has triggered, along with the COVID-19 pandemic, are strengthening sovereignty and compelling national governments to claw back power. Moreover, the concert could and should bring NGOs, corporations, and other nonstate actors into its deliberations when appropriate—for example, including the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and big pharmaceutical firms when discussing global health or Google when addressing digital governance. A great-power steering group would complement, not replace, non-state actors' contributions to global governance.

Finally, if the appeal and efficacy of a global concert stem from its flexibility and informality, then critics could justifiably ask why it should be institutionalized. Why not let ad hoc groupings of relevant states, such as the six-party talks and the P5+1, come and go as needed? Doesn't the existence of the G-7 and the G-20 make a global concert superfluous?

Establishing a concert headquarters and secretariat would endow it with greater standing and efficacy than other groupings that gather sporadically. Regular meetings among the concert's six representatives, the daily work of the secretariat, the presence of delegations from all major regions, scheduled as well as emergency summits—these defining features would give the global concert permanence, authority, and legitimacy. The continuous and sustained dialogue, personal relationships, and peer pressure that come with face-to-face diplomacy facilitate cooperation. Daily interaction is far preferable to episodic engagement.

The permanent secretariat would be particularly important in providing the expertise, sustained dialogue, and long-term perspective needed to address nontraditional issues such as cybersecurity and global health. A standing body also offers a ready vehicle for responding to unforeseen crises. The COVID-19 pandemic might have been better contained had the concert been able to help coordinate a global response from day one. The dissemination of critical information from China occurred too slowly, and it was not until the middle of March 2020—months into the crisis—that G-7 leaders held a video call to discuss the rapidly spreading disease.

The concert thus has the potential to supplant both the G-7 and the G-20. The United States, the EU, and Japan would likely focus their energies on the new body, possibly leaving the G-7 to atrophy. A better case can be made for preserving the G-20, given its broader membership. Countries such as Brazil, Indonesia, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, and Turkey would resent the loss of voice and stature should the G-20 wither away. Nonetheless, should a global concert fulfill its potential and emerge as the leading venue for policy coordination, both the G-7 and the G-20 may well lose their *raison d'être*.

NO PANACEA, BUT NO ALTERNATIVE

Establishing a global concert would not be a panacea. Bringing the world's heavyweights to the table hardly ensures a consensus among them. Indeed, although the Concert of Europe preserved peace for decades after it was formed, France and the United Kingdom ultimately faced off with Russia in the Crimean War. Russia is again at loggerheads with its European neighbors over the Crimean region, underscoring the elusive nature of great-power solidarity. A concert-like format—the Normandy grouping of France, Germany, Russia, and Ukraine—has so far failed to resolve the standoff over Crimea and the Donbas.

Nonetheless, a global concert offers the best and most realistic way to advance great-power coordination, maintain international stability, and promote a rules-based order. The United States and its democratic partners have every reason to revive the solidarity of the West. But they should stop pretending that the global triumph of the order they backed since World War II is within reach. They should also soberly confront the reality that abdicating leadership would likely lead to the return of a global system marred by disorder and unfettered competition. A global concert represents a pragmatic middle ground between idealistic but unrealistic aspirations and dangerous alternatives. 🌐

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—Charles A. Kupchan and Leslie Vinjamuri