

Future of Liberal World Order Can Liberal World Order Prevail in the World without American Hegemony?

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Abstract

Recently, there are many considerations of what will be the future of liberal world order after the end of unilateral hegemony of the United States resulted in the decreasing of its role and increasing of the role and importance of non-liberal powers; whether the current world order based on Western values will sustain or finally become a part of history in the so-called post-American era. The present article is intended to demonstrate how liberal world order will keep functioning on the world arena regardless of toughening non-liberal forces by pleading its ability to accommodate the interests of the rising forces. The present article also discusses the US role in preserving and steady developing of liberal world order in the future.

Keywords: liberal institutionalism, liberal world order, rising powers, transformation of liberal institutionalism

Recently, there are many considerations of what will be the future of the liberal world order after the end of unilateral hegemony of the United States which resulted in the decreasing of its role and increasing of the role and importance of non-liberal powers; whether the current world order based on Western values will sustain or finally become a part of history in the so-called post-American era. It should be noted that despite the skeptical views about its future, major virtue of the liberal world order lies in its flexibility to accommodate the interests of newly emerged powers on the international arena.

First, it should be mentioned that post WW2 liberal world order is not merely the US hegemonic order. It represents a rule-based, open system creating the mechanisms for stability and peaceful coexistence of the states in the face of anarchy. Liberal world order not only provides the regulatory means for economic relations, which virtually conditioned the steady development of present rising powers by enabling all players to get involved in the rule-based international economic relations, but also the mechanisms for collective security, dispute settlement, conflict resolution and collective action. Thus, the present world order offers the countries a set of game rules and mechanisms, the commitment of which is in everyone's interest, as they can create the conditions for stable international relations by reducing negative effects of international anarchy.

American scholar, John Ikenberry¹ names three particular features of the Western order that have been critical to its success and longevity. First, unlike the imperial systems of the past, the Western order is built around rules and norms of non-discrimination and market openness, creating conditions for rising states to advance their expanding economic and political goals within it. Second is the coalition-based character of its leadership unlike the past orders that have tended to be dominated by one state. The leading states of the current Western

order, most of them advanced liberal democracies, do not always agree, but they are engaged in a continuous process of give-and-take over economics, politics, and security. Power transitions are typically seen as being played out between two countries, a rising state and a declining hegemon, and the order falls as soon as the power balance shifts. But in the current order, the larger aggregation of democratic capitalist states - and the resulting accumulation of geopolitical power - shifts the balance in the order's favor. Third, the postwar Western order has an unusually dense, encompassing, and broadly endorsed system of rules and institutions. It is more open and rule-based than any previous order. The overall system is dense with multilateral rules and institutions - global and regional, economic, political, and security related. They have laid the basis for unprecedented levels of cooperation and shared authority over the global system. (Ikenberry John, 2008)

The key factor in stability and viability of Western world order in post-American epoch lies in its flexibility and ability to accommodate new actors. In fact, the so-called rising powers managed to reinforce inside this system and as a result of using wisely its institutes, so their future prosperity and development depend on the involvement in this system. Despite the existence of conflict of interests between the US and the rising powers in a number of areas, it is important to acknowledge that none of these states will try to overthrow the open, rule-based liberal world order. This is natural, as the existing system has created favorable conditions for their development. They will only fight for the expansion of their rights within this system through increasing of their participation in international institutions (and therefore, increasing their participation in the decision-making process). If we, for example, look at China, which as many believe is the main competitor of the United States in the 21st century, we will see that its development totally de-

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depends on the existence of the open, liberal system. China, more than any other states needs an open world, where it will buy raw materials and export its production later. The existence of stable, rule-based and open world order is vitally important for China's development.

Another source of flexibility of present world order is its nature to enable strong states to become not only a part of the system but decision-makers as well. Emergence of new strong states on the international arena casts a growing importance over the G-20 format uniting all global powers of the current world. As for China, whose impressive progress is perceived as a major threat to maintaining liberal world order, is a member of UN Security Council – the central institute of the very order, leading Ikenberry to believe that it gives China the same authority and advantages of “great-power exceptionalism” as the other permanent members.... As China sheds its status as a developing country (and therefore as a client of these institutions), it will increasingly be able to act as a patron and stakeholder instead. (Ikenberry, 2008) The thing is, that the more powerful the states get, the more advantages they are given by the system in terms of increasing their bargaining power in important decision-making process, making them stakeholders of the system.

The above-mentioned depreciates the threat posed by non-liberal and non-Western China, as some believe, against liberal world order. On the contrary, as noted earlier, Chinese development was achieved through the game rules and mechanisms of the present order and its future heavily depends on them as well. Thus, the end of American hegemony as the founder of this liberal order does not mean the end of the system itself. A relatively real threat against liberal order by China is not much its overturn but a formation of satellite mini-orders within the very system which may leave the West outside the game (Naazneen Barma, 2008). However, such a course of things implies an unrealistic assumption that relations with the West will become uninteresting for China and for other growing countries, many of which will transfer in a mini-order created by China. The thing is that the West does not mean only the United States. China may outpace economically the United States in the near future but the Chinese achievements still seem less impressive compared to that of the West as a whole including European states together with the US. China's influence will fade further if compared to Western military strength. Moreover, as a result of introduction of the the alternative (however, also liberal) mini-order by China, the existing universal world order, as Ikenberry maintains, could give way to a more contested and fragmented system of blocs, spheres of influence, mercantilist networks, and regional rivalries. It would be less open and rule-based, and it would be dominated by an array of state-to-state ties. But on a global scale, such a system would not advance the interests of any of the major states, including China (Ikenberry John, 2011). The scale of possibilities provided by such a divided system would not match the one provided by the existing liberal order to its members serving as an additional example of why rising powers would refuse to join China's limited system excluding the West, making even China itself go back to the old game rules.

Dissolution of liberal world order into mini orders is heavily dependent on the stimuli of newly emerging rising powers caring for their interests. In the international relations theory it is known that the process of hegemony decreasing and new state enhancing is characterised with the transitional period turmoil:

“Rising states want to translate their newly acquired power into greater authority in the global system--to reshape the rules and institutions in accordance with their own interests. Declining states, in turn, fear their loss of control and worry about the security implications of their weakened position.” (Ikenberry John, 2008) The future of liberal world order also rests on the actions of today's strongest state. As mentioned above, the rising powers will not attempt to topple the existing liberal order but they will only fight for the expansion of their rights within this system through increasing of their participation in international institutions, and therefore, increasing their participation in the decision-making process in order to gain more authority within the system. The rising forces often criticize the modern world order's institutions (mostly it refers to the UN Security Council) for absence of representativeness that would reflect the current distribution of power in the world. Thus, if the United States will compromise some of its present power for the sake of harmonious functioning of liberal order and let other states get more involved in world affairs, the latter are set to pose less destabilization risks.

America's care for preserving liberal order means caring for its place and role within the system as well. If the United States will try not to give in privileged positions in favor of new players in the system, both the liberal order and american role and influence in international relations are bound to be seriously jeopardized. However, if the United States follows the natural flows in international relations, which lead to the reconstruction of existing international institutions and acts not as a dominant but as *primus inter pares*, it will be able to ensure the maintenance of liberal world order by its transformation in such a way that the interests of rising states will be taken into account. Reinforcing and strengthening the institutions of current world order will simultaneously allow the United States to maintain its leadership position.

Thus, if the United States wants to maintain its leadership in the frames that the current world order allows, it has to subordinate to the new requirements of the order that it once created. US leadership in post-hegemonic era should be expressed in forming the agenda of international relations and that is the role that the US will have to play for quite a long time. Through the observations of the latest developments in the world (e.g. the Arab Spring), it became obvious that the so called rising powers are not ready to take responsibility for the events that take place outside their borders unless their vital interests are endangered. This reality is not supposed to change in the coming decade as well. Therefore, the world needs flexible leadership from the United States that should be expressed in the formation of agenda and subsequently, in convincing the major players to cooperate in its implementation.

In the given circumstances, the most important challenge for the United States in the 21st century will be the reforming of the liberal institutionalism, as a form of the world order, on the bases of the natural flows towards its evolution. In this way America will, for the third time in its existence, continue to lead in the formation of an international order that will be an open, rule-based, evolutionary form of the liberal institutionalism, where the newly emerging powers will manage to pursue their vital interests and this fact, together with American leadership will be the guarantor for the stability of the new international order.

Conclusion

As a conclusion it can be said that threats that non-liberal forces will harm the liberal world order after the end of American hegemony are exaggerated. First of all, the existing order is and has never been just under American hegemony - instead it represents an open, rule-based system that can advance the interests of each participant, and the one that offers the states a set of game rules and mechanisms serving their best interests, as it can reduce the negative effects of anarchy and provide peaceful cohabitation of states on the international arena. Rising powers should not be oriented on fighting against liberal world order since their consolidation took place within the very system through applying its instruments and unimpeded functioning of this system is vitally depended on their future progress. The rising powers are set to merely extend the scope of their involvement in decision-making process within the system, so their major claim to the existing system is and will be its reconstruction in a way to recognize and reflect the current distribution of power in the world.

For the future stability of liberal world order actions of the United States are important as well. As mentioned above, if the United States will try not to give in privileged positions in favor of new players in the system, both the liberal order and American role and influence in international relations are bound to be seriously jeopardized. However, if the United States follows the natural flows in international relations, which lead to the reconstruction of existing international institutions and acts not as a dominant but as *primus inter pares*, it will be able to ensure the maintenance of liberal institutionalism by its transformation in such a way that the interests of rising states will be taken into account. In this way America will, for the third time in its existence, continue to lead in the formation of an international order that will be an open, rule-based, evolutionary form of the liberal institutionalism, where the newly emerging powers will manage to pursue their vital interests and this fact, together with American leadership will be the guarantor for the stability of the new international order.

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