

Survival

Global Politics and Strategy

ISSN: 0039-6338 (Print) 1468-2699 (Online) Journal homepage: <https://www.tandfonline.com/loi/tsur20>

Europe and the Liberal Order

Bart M.J. Szewczyk

To cite this article: Bart M.J. Szewczyk (2019) Europe and the Liberal Order, *Survival*, 61:2, 33-52, DOI: [10.1080/00396338.2019.1589077](https://doi.org/10.1080/00396338.2019.1589077)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/00396338.2019.1589077>



Published online: 19 Mar 2019.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



View Crossmark data [↗](#)

Europe and the Liberal Order

Bart M.J. Szewczyk

Current debates on world order and its liberal subset largely elide the role of Europe, treating it as a bystander, a battleground or a source of problems.¹ Insofar as Europe is cast as a global player, some have advocated retrenchment and narrowly defined interests, others neutrality and accommodation.² Yet, as the liberal order is fraying, Europe has a vital interest in defending it, and can muster the political will and resources to do so – with like-minded allies if possible and alone if necessary. The liberal order is under attack both outside and within the West. For the first time since 1989, authoritarianism – primarily in China and Russia, but also in parts of the West – has been proffered as an attractive alternative to democracy, human rights and a social market economy. The disruptiveness of the Trump administration’s foreign policy has further shaken the foundations of the West. The new US National Security Strategy conspicuously excludes the liberal order as a core US interest, departing from a tradition that dates back to NSC-68, the foundational blueprint for Cold War national security adopted by the Truman administration in 1950. At the last G7 summit, the US sought to delete any references to the rules-based international order.

These developments have challenged Europe – through the European Union and its member states – to develop a strategy for preserving liberal

Bart M.J. Szewczyk serves as Adviser on Global Affairs at the European Political Strategy Centre, the European Commission’s in-house think tank; teaches at Sciences Po in Paris; and was on the Policy Planning Staff at the US Department of State. The views expressed herein are personal, and do not necessarily reflect the position of the European Commission.

values against illiberal forces, particularly in front-line states such as Ukraine. Above all, European decision-makers need to take a broader view of the core interests at stake and devote greater time and resources to serving them in the cause of saving the liberal order.

The liberal order's fabric

The liberal order, like any other order, is a complex quilt, with various layers and threads incorporated over time, and with varying coverage and protection. Often referred to as the 'rules-based global order' or 'free world', the liberal order was a new vision for organising international politics after the devastation of the Second World War.³ It sought to transcend balance-of-power politics and eschew concepts of spheres of influence, yet its underlying theory was based more on hope than experience. The 20 years preceding 1939 did not inspire confidence that an order revolving around democracy, human rights and the market economy could succeed in generating peace and prosperity over the long haul. But the ensuing six years of destruction appeared to leave no alternative but to reconstruct a stronger and more durable order.

'Order' meant a set of rules and norms to govern state and non-state behaviour, through international law based on the UN Charter, multilateral treaties and political standards arising from state practice. Its primary objective was to minimise violence and provide stability. Its opposite was 'disorder', characterised by war, conflict and uncertainty. 'Liberal' meant a specific set of rules and norms, based primarily on democracy, human rights, the rule of law, market economies and fair trade. Its primary objective was to promote these values, which were deemed universal in aspiration though partial and incomplete in actuality. In tension with liberal norms were illiberal ones, marked by authoritarianism, arbitrariness and non-market economies.

The overarching interest of the liberal order was peace. Both the European Community (EC) and NATO were conceived and constructed as peace projects to prevent conflict from within and deter aggression from without. An integrally related interest was prosperity. Economic well-being was good in itself, but also helped sustain peace, by reducing causes for conflict and by

providing the liberal order with material resources to protect itself from external threats. Over time, economic security became synonymous with national security. The final core interest was political inclusion, through democratic processes, the rule of law and protection of human rights. Whereas other orders could provide peace (as, for example, the bipolar balance of power did during the Cold War) and perhaps even prosperity (as in China), only the liberal order considered the individual a central actor with inalienable rights. Like prosperity, liberal democracy was an end in itself, but also served the broader cause of peace, as democracies were considered less likely to go to war with one another, and their quiescence was seen as more genuine and sustainable than what prior balance-of-power models could yield.

The liberal order has broadly delivered on all three interests, particularly for the West. Despite some setbacks, it has substantially validated the hopes of 1945. Within the order, genuine peace has emerged, whereby war among its members is practically unthinkable. Prosperity has steadily grown, and democracies have gradually expanded in number. Western citizens have become wealthier, as average annual growth in GDP per capita in the EU and the United States exceeded global growth. To be sure, some countries outside of the liberal order, such as China and India, have grown even faster, but they were outliers. Economic growth in the Soviet Union was difficult to assess, but available figures for Russia from 1989–2016 show a meagre 0.50% growth in GDP per capita – effectively, stagnation (see Table 1).

Table 1: **Average annual growth in GDP per capita**

Country/region	1960–2016	1960–1989	1989–2016
Sub-Saharan Africa	0.74%	0.52%	0.99%
Latin America & Caribbean	1.68%	2.03%	1.31%
Middle East & North Africa	1.78%	1.48%	2.01%
East Asia & Pacific	3.65%	4.03%	3.25%
European Community/Union	2.29%	3.06%	1.47%
United States	2.03%	2.62%	1.39%
Russia	N/A	N/A	0.50%
China	6.61%	4.64%	8.76%
India	3.29%	1.86%	4.85%
World	1.87%	2.27%	1.44%

Source: World Bank

During the Cold War, the liberal order roughly encompassed and benefited the so-called West – that is, Western Europe, the United States, Canada, Japan, Australia and New Zealand – but clearly not the whole world. Its primary institutions were NATO, the EC, the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT). Its language was keyed to law and values, while fully cognisant of power realities and interest calculations. In opposition, the Soviet Union established an illiberal order, anchored by the Warsaw Pact and the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (Comecon). Its structures reflected naked

*Soviet structures
reflected naked
power*

power, as secret police implemented coercive policies and the Soviets and their proxies unleashed military power to crush any significant resistance, as in Hungary in 1956, Czechoslovakia in 1968 and Poland in 1981.

The two orders coexisted uneasily within the United Nations, which was set up to make the world safe for democracy by safeguarding human rights and political freedoms, while also providing stability for authoritarian as well as liberal governments through its protection of sovereignty and political independence.⁴ During the Cold War, for Western Europe in particular, the liberal order provided the structural conditions necessary to establish the supranational institutions of the EC, as well as to nurture democratic governance in countries such as Germany, Italy, Spain, Portugal and Greece. NATO's Article V guarantee and the presence of US troops in Western Europe answered historical security concerns among the European states. Similarly, the daily habits of political and economic integration through the EC transformed European politics and began to frame national interests for EC member states from a Europe-wide perspective, especially for West Germany.⁵

After the fall of communism in 1989 and the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, the liberal order began enlarging rapidly. The general organising principle for US national-security strategies between 1989 and 2016, European strategies in 2003 and 2016, and NATO strategic concepts in

1991, 1999 and 2010 was the expansion of democracy, human rights and the market economy around the world – potentially to encompass the whole globe – as foundations for international peace and prosperity.

At the dawn of a new order, the George H.W. Bush administration's 1991 National Security Strategy noted that there was 'an extraordinary possibility that few generations have enjoyed – to build a new international system in accordance with our own values and ideals, as old patterns and certainties crumble around us'. It observed that 'democracy was gaining ground as were the principles of human rights and political and economic freedom'. And it determined that US 'interests are best served in a world in which democracy and its ideals are widespread and secure'.⁶ The Clinton administration elevated democracy-promotion as one of the three pillars of its 1996 National Security Strategy, noting that 'all of America's strategic interests – from promoting prosperity at home to checking global threats abroad before they threaten our territory – are served by enlarging the community of democratic and free market nations'. It even set out as a long-term goal 'a world in which each of the major powers is democratic, with many other nations joining the community of market democracies as well', implicitly including China and Russia.⁷

The George W. Bush administration, although organising its strategy around countering terrorism in light of 9/11, maintained the prior emphasis on defending and expanding the liberal order, noting in 2002 that 'the great struggles of the twentieth century between liberty and totalitarianism ended with a decisive victory for the forces of freedom – and a single sustainable model for national success: freedom, democracy, and free enterprise'. It sought 'to create a balance of power that favors human freedom: conditions in which all nations and all societies can choose for themselves the rewards and challenges of political and economic liberty'.⁸

During this period, the EC transformed into the European Union, doubling in membership and geographic size in the 1990s and 2000s. The EU's first security strategy in 2003 opened triumphantly, stating that 'Europe has never been so prosperous, so secure nor so free', with the EU's creation as 'central to this development' and the US playing a 'critical role in European integration and European security, in particular through NATO'.

It argued that the EU's 'security and prosperity' depend on an 'effective multilateral system'. Therefore, it set out as the EU's strategic objective the 'development of a stronger international society, well functioning international institutions and a rule-based international order'.⁹

Alongside EU enlargement, NATO expanded across Central and Eastern Europe, and there was some discussion, albeit brief, of including Russia. The GATT became the World Trade Organisation (WTO) in 1995, and welcomed more than 20 new non-GATT members, including China, Saudi Arabia, Ukraine and Russia. During this period, the number of democracies nearly doubled and freedom was on the rise. Peace among the great powers continued with an eye to facilitating the integration of China, Russia and other states into the liberal order by encouraging their adoption of the same model of democracy, human rights, rule of law and the market economy.

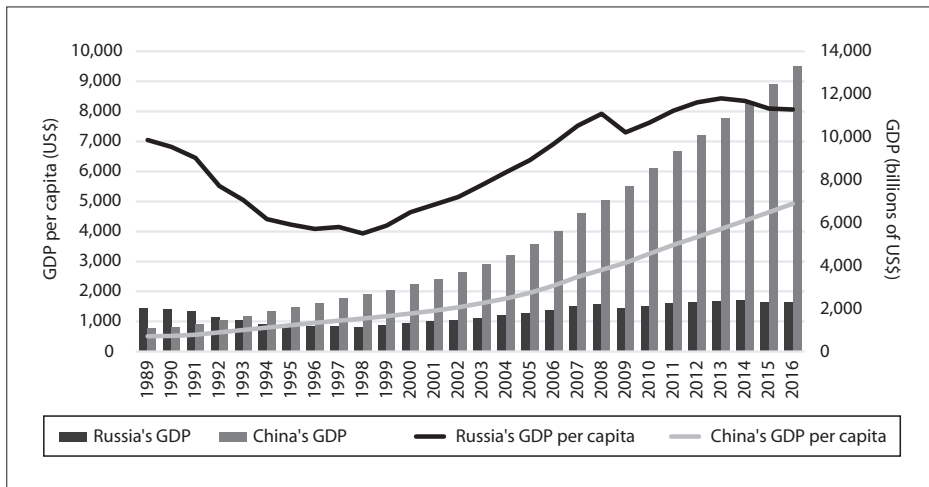
In many respects, the 1990s were the golden age of the liberal order. That decade witnessed the order's internal confidence and external enlargement, and there was a sense of convergence around a common vision for global success. But the liberal order's growth and overall attractiveness also obscured emerging critiques.

External challengers

Hope for a near-universal consensus behind democracy, human rights, the rule of law and the market economy was short-lived. Instead of global buy-in, the liberal consensus started to get pushback from Russia and China. Rather than democratising, both countries became more authoritarian, while embracing some capitalist principles to expand their material base. As the two have grown economically, both have started to pose structural challenges to the liberal order, but in divergent ways due to the vastly different scale and scope of their influence (see Figure 1).

Over the medium term, Russia is likely to act as a spoiler to the liberal order's objectives and policies. First in Georgia in 2008 and then in Ukraine in 2014, Russia has sought to forestall EU and NATO engagement in the region, infiltrating both countries and supporting separatist movements. Moscow's most recent national-security strategy, published in December 2015, explicitly blamed NATO's expansion for 'creating a threat to [Russia's] national

Figure 1: Russia's stagnation and China's surge



Source: World Bank (2016)

security'. It also sought to defend 'traditional Russian religious and moral values' against 'external expansion of ideologies and values'. Yet Russia's limited economic base of only 2% of global GDP (less than South Korea and comparable to Australia), and meagre economic performance over the past quarter-century, severely constrains its ability to attract new adherents to its model. Substantial military power still enables Russia to play the role of a spoiler in destabilising the liberal order, as it has in Ukraine and, to a lesser extent, Syria. But given its relatively sparse material resources, it stands little chance of overturning the order.

Longer term, China presents a transformational challenge to the liberal order owing to its economic heft, extraordinary prosperity gains and rapidly expanding military. President Xi Jinping's outline of the 'Chinese Dream' in speeches during 2017 emphasised the role of Communist 'Party leadership', 'consultative democracy' and 'democratic dictatorship' in driving China's economic success.¹⁰ Xi's elimination of term limits, enabling him to remain in power for life, further cements China's authoritarian model. China's leadership certainly appears to believe that it has the potential to create a new global order that is rules-based and predictable, but not liberal – that is, without any ingrained protection of human rights, respect for the rule of law, promotion of democracy or preservation of market capitalism. In the

near term, it will be difficult for China to reshape the liberal order given that order's institutional resilience.¹¹ Over time, however, China could conceivably promote authoritarianism and illiberal values around the world, just as the West promoted democracy and liberal values.

The Obama administration recognised these emerging trends, and elevated the promotion of a 'just and sustainable international order' as one of four enduring US national interests (in addition to security, prosperity and values).¹² It stressed the centrality of international institutions such as NATO and the UN to the success of the international order, and the relationship with Europe as 'the cornerstone for US engagement with the world, and a catalyst for international action'.¹³ In 2015, in the aftermath of Russia's activities in Ukraine, the administration doubled-down on its commitment to the international order and, in particular, to its liberal character. It argued that it had 'an opportunity – and obligation – to lead the way in reinforcing, shaping, and where appropriate, creating the rules, norms, and institutions that are the foundation for peace, security, prosperity, and the protection of human rights in the 21st century'.¹⁴ The administration stressed that it sought 'a rules-based international order that promotes global security and prosperity as well as the dignity and human rights of all peoples'.¹⁵

In the same vein, the 2016 EU Global Strategy set out that Europe has 'an interest in promoting agreed rules to provide global public goods and contribute to a peaceful and sustainable world'.¹⁶ It determined that the EU would promote a 'rules-based global order with multilateralism as its key principle and the United Nations at its core'.¹⁷ 'Peace and security, prosperity, democracy and a rules-based global order', it concluded, 'are the vital interests underpinning [the EU's] external action'.¹⁸ It listed three 'core partners' in this endeavour: the United States, NATO and the UN.¹⁹ Indeed, in developing its strategy, the European External Action Service consulted extensively with the US Department of State, and incorporated several of State's suggestions into the final version.

The Trump administration's 2017 National Security Strategy avoids any mention of a rules-based international order, let alone a liberal one, focusing its analysis instead on great-power competition, putting 'America first' and seeking 'national greatness'.²⁰ In fact, at the 2018 G7 summit in Canada, the

US sought to delete any references to the rules-based international order, and Trump withdrew his consent to the final communiqué purportedly because it contained such a reference. Trump's volte-face and the weakening of the liberal order by one of its traditional pillars reflect an accumulation of internal grievances about the distribution of the order's benefits and burdens.

Internal discontents

The liberal order's success in delivering broad benefits to its members in terms of peace, prosperity and political inclusion obfuscates the diversity of outcomes experienced by various parts of society within the order. While globalisation has lifted millions out of poverty (primarily in China) and has enriched the global elite, it has also occurred concurrently with the squeezing and decline of the developed world's middle class. In particular, inequalities have built up in parts of Europe and especially in the United States, such that some have come to regard the basic bargain as fundamentally unfair. Of course, the criticisms often are not framed as debates about the rules-based global order or even merely economic interest, and may instead reference more particular and parochial local, regional or national concerns or issues governed by domestic politics. Furthermore, inequalities of income are not the only sources of critiques; migration, identity politics and sovereignty also feature prominently in various debates. But a general narrative has emerged that the current institutional structures – whatever they are labelled – are not delivering for various groups of people, who may prefer other alternatives. A change in one policy or another would not overturn the liberal order; but an accumulation of changes unravelling many long-established norms, rules and institutions would constitute a systemic challenge.

In Europe, income inequality has increased compared to the 1980s, but only slightly in aggregate terms. Indeed, it has gradually decreased since the 1990s, as Central and Eastern European states have grown quickly in terms of GDP per capita compared to Western European ones. Overall, there is greater income equality among EU member states than there is within the United States. Inequalities within the EU have fluctuated only marginally since the large-scale enlargement across Central and Eastern Europe in

2004, with marked deterioration only in the United Kingdom and Portugal, and significant improvements in some countries such as Poland.

In the United States, on the other hand, real wages have stagnated for most workers in recent decades, with significant gains only for the top earners.²¹ As a consequence, income inequality in the US, already high in the 1980s, has risen significantly. Growing economic gaps, particularly in the United States, became one of the central complaints of populists. They argued that the system was rigged in favour of elites, who were able to capture the benefits of economic growth at the expense of a hollowed-out middle class.²² Yet the stark differences between US and EU experiences indicate that economic discontent over inequality was more a consequence of domestic tax and spending policies than foreign policies or even trade policy. Nevertheless, foreign and trade policies have become easy scapegoats for flaws in domestic policies.

Expanding income inequality was not, of course, the only reason for the rise of populism and extremism and the waning of support for the liberal order in the West. Other factors include a wider sense of a loss of sovereignty and national identity, and worries about a potential loss of control as globalisation has seemed to overpower individual initiative. It is difficult to assess fully the impact of these trends, as concepts such as identity and culture are notoriously difficult to measure. Yet the psychological need for simplicity and clarity in place of technocratic complexity and ambiguity is plainly a salient feature of modern politics that needs to be empathetically acknowledged and addressed.

Spurred by the likes of Stephen Bannon, Nigel Farage and Marine Le Pen, critics have conflated a wide range of concerns as grounds for revisiting fundamental commitments to the liberal order and its underlying norms. The basic political fault lines have diverged from traditional distinctions between right and left to divisions between those favouring open and liberal societies and those who support closed and illiberal ones. For the critics, the argument seems simple: if the order has not increased our prosperity and our political inclusion, why should we support it? Most importantly, why should taxpayer funding be devoted to global efforts when there are so many urgent problems at home?

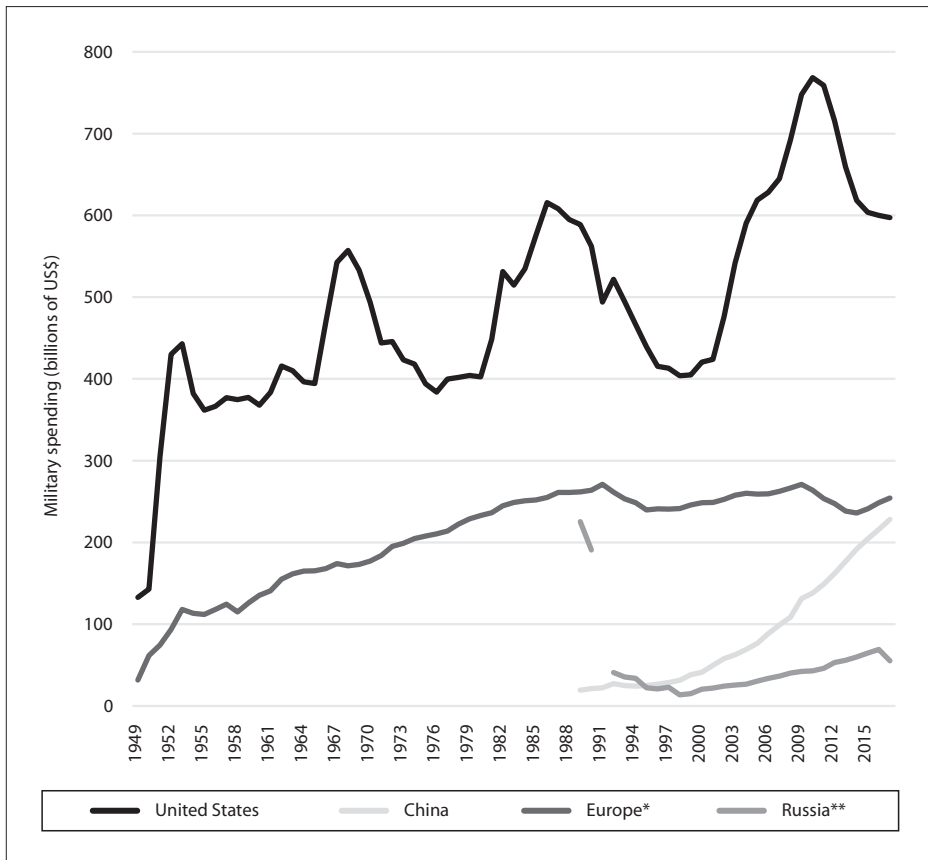
Burden sharing

Among elites and governments, a debate is burgeoning as to the distribution of costs in upholding the liberal order, particularly with respect to defence and development. The Trump administration has attempted to tamp down the American public's discontent about income inequality by diverting its attention to a supposed lack of burden sharing on the part of US allies in terms of defence spending.²³ This claim, introduced in the Obama administration by Robert Gates, then the US secretary of defense, has some superficial credibility given the general downward trend in European defence spending since 1990. But Trump has used this bare fact, devoid of any nuanced understanding of US alliance relationships, as a rhetorical cudgel against European and other allies.

According to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), in 2017 aggregate defence-expenditure levels in Europe were nearly 10% below 1991 levels and stood in stark contrast to the steady increase of over 100% during the Cold War (see Figure 2). Among the top six spenders in Europe, the states with the biggest decreases between 1990 and 2016 were Germany (down 33%) and the United Kingdom (down 20%), with the biggest increase in Poland (up 60%). Some European countries have drastically increased their defence spending in real terms within two-year periods. They include Lithuania (up 32% between 2014 and 2015, then another 34% between 2015 and 2016), Latvia (up 44% between 2015 and 2016, then another 26% between 2016 and 2017) and Romania (up 26% between 2016 and 2017, then another 17% between 2017 and 2018). Thus, the narrative of wholesale European free-riding on US defence spending and security provision is inaccurate; it fails to acknowledge the significant aggregate increases in European spending throughout the Cold War, and does not account for the variation of spending growth across the EU. Those advancing the free-rider storyline assiduously ignore such subtleties. Germany's spending in 2016 may have been lower than in each of the years between 1969 and 2000 – a period spanning Ostpolitik, detente, reunification and globalisation. Some of the spikes in US defence spending, however, were due to policy choices later deemed to be mistakes, such as the Vietnam War or the 2003 Iraq War.

In any case, European defence spending has increased steadily over the past four years, since Russia’s illegal annexation of Crimea, such that it has added the near-equivalent of Italy’s or Spain’s contribution. European countries have still managed to deploy their troops on numerous missions and operations, and in significant numbers, throughout the Middle East and Africa. Collectively, Europe fielded around 34,000 troops in more than 20 countries in 2017, including on missions with high degrees of risk in combat zones including Iraq, Afghanistan and the Sahel. Although the disparity in defence and power-projection capabilities between Europe and the United States remains significant, Europe already has a substantial base of resources and combat experience that it can expand and build on.

Figure 2: **Military spending in the world**



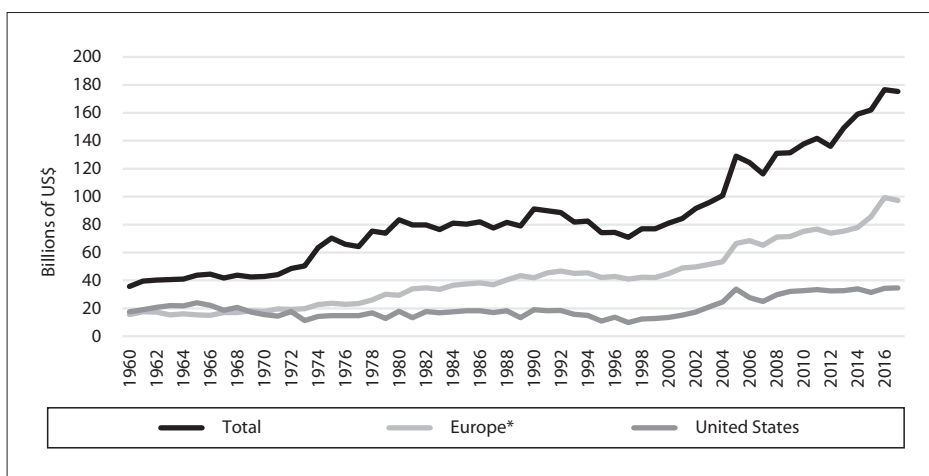
Source: SIPRI *Europe consists of Western European countries before 1990 and includes Central European countries after 1990. **Russia includes USSR data for 1989–90 for the sake of comparison.

Moreover, defending the liberal order consists of much more than defence spending, and encompasses all instruments of power, including development aid. Inequalities between the United States and Europe in terms of official development assistance cut in Europe's favour (see Figure 3). Since the 1970s, the gap has widened significantly. The EU and its member states now annually spend over \$50 billion more than the US on development.

While development burden sharing has not yet become as prominent an issue as defence burden sharing in public debates, it should. Each is a form of material resources allocated in part to secure the benefits of the liberal order, with development assistance often a more effective way to prevent problems from arising in the first place. Indeed, development aid was central to the US approach in constructing the post-war liberal order through the Marshall Plan, the Bretton Woods institutions and the Organisation for European Economic Co-operation (and later its successor, the OECD).

The fact remains that several imbalances have emerged over time within the liberal order that fuel challenges to its basic fairness in distributing benefits and burdens. Redressing these imbalances is crucial for restoring the sense of solidarity and common destiny that underpinned the liberal order and ensured its success and sustainability. Even if the United States got closer to equality in terms of income distribution and

Figure 3: **Official development assistance**



Source: OECD *Europe consists of the EU members of the Development Assistance Committee plus the European Commission.

development aid, and Europe spent more on defence, populist grievances would undoubtedly persist. But several politically feasible steps would go a long way towards restoring transatlantic solidarity so as to energise and preserve the liberal order.

Europe's strategic opportunities

Strobe Talbott has called the EU the 'greatest experiment in regional cooperation the world has ever known'.²⁴ It was a product of the liberal order and thus has an existential stake in preserving it. The EU's continued strength and vitality rely in part on a wider network of institutions and norms committed to the corresponding values of democracy, human rights, the rule of law and market capitalism. On the view that the vibrancy of democracy is contingent on international as well as domestic factors, the EU Global Strategy emphasises the liberal order as a core interest for Europe. In turn, EU member states, including France and Germany, recognise preserving it as a vital national interest. It follows that forging a more cohesive Union – as well as managing the UK's prospective exit from the EU – requires addressing the challenges of sustaining the liberal order.

Reciprocally, keeping the European house in liberal order will be one of the EU's key contributions to sustaining the liberal order.²⁵ This goal calls for internal review mechanisms on the rule of law to ensure the independence and reliability of judicial systems, and to address political extremism at the highest level. More broadly, appropriate resource allocations, particularly for defence and security, will need to match rhetorical European support for the liberal order. Such allocations appear to be gradually materialising. In launching the Permanent Structured Cooperation process in November 2017, EU member states recommitted to 'regularly increasing defence budgets in real terms'. Here, the role of Germany, France and Italy in substantially reversing post-Cold War declines in defence spending is the priority, as they have the capacity to shift significantly overall European spending levels.²⁶ Already the aggregate increases in European defence spending between 2014 and 2017 of 2–3% per year have been important reversals of the decreases between 2009 and 2014. Moreover, the proposed Multiannual Financial Framework

sets out a new budget item for security and defence, with over \$20bn allocated over seven years, to fund areas in which the EU can add value such as defence research and procurement, and to galvanise significant increases in defence spending by EU member states.

Europe could also lead efforts to reform the institutional underpinnings of the liberal order to make it fit for purpose in the twenty-first century. The EU's core institutional partners continue to be the United Nations and NATO, as set out by the EU Global Strategy. Both organisations have been adaptable, but the UN should be made more effective in its core mission of conflict prevention and preserving international peace and security, particularly by ensuring that available resources match the vast demands for them. To similar effect, the EU should continue to collaborate closely with NATO to address common challenges, such as hybrid warfare, terrorism and the rise of new powers, with as much emphasis on coordination – as opposed to competition – as possible.

Europe's global economic heft also affords it the leverage to set standards in many areas. Brussels might consider developing new rules of the road in trade and investment, including through reform of the WTO, that continue to promote not only prosperity but also political inclusion through democracy, human rights and the rule of law.²⁷ The European Council set out extensive guidelines for WTO reform at its June 2018 meeting. The EU maintains both its position as a top trading region and its fair income distribution, showing that globalisation and free and fair trade, on the one hand, and inclusive prosperity, on the other, are not inherently incompatible.²⁸ Indeed, as a recent European Commission report argued, open and liberal societies are equipped to master twenty-first-century challenges without having to become illiberal and build walls.²⁹ Whether in extending development aid in Africa or supporting infrastructure projects in the Balkans, the EU should maintain the link between economic well-being and political freedom. The EU's free-trade agreement with Mercosur (Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay and Uruguay), currently being negotiated, is a good example of the EU's utilising economic liberalisation to support political progress. A number of multinational companies quickly adopted the EU's General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR). In a similar vein, 54 countries (including all

28 EU member states), as well as hundreds of companies and organisations, signed the recent Paris Call for Trust and Security in Cyberspace.

Arguably, Europe's most potent strategic opportunity is to lead like-minded allies, such as Canada, Japan and Australia, in defending liberal values, and to persuade emerging powers, such as India, Brazil, Indonesia and South Africa, to do so. Its most persuasive argument is its own performance: the liberal order has indisputably delivered substantial benefits to European populations. Europe has a long tradition of building political orders, from Cardinal Richelieu to Otto von Bismarck, from which it can draw inspiration and lessons for dealing with current challenges. Its main source of power, beyond the material resources potentially within its disposal, is its extended network of influence. The task is to clarify the ways in which the liberal order should be reformed to mitigate the income, defence and development inequities that its detractors have tried to instrumentalise to effect its demise.

* * *

Grand strategy is developed in the abstract, but needs to be demonstrated in concrete cases. Consider the NSC-68's call for the United States' military build-up for the Cold War and containment of the Soviet Union: it provided an intellectual structure for decades of US foreign policy, but its vitality became evident immediately with the Korean War, only two months after the document was presented to Harry Truman, then the US president. In the current geopolitical context, continued EU support for democratic transitions in Ukraine and Georgia, outreach to Eastern Partnership countries and increased engagement in the Western Balkans could all help promote liberal values in these areas and encourage their consolidation and proliferation.³⁰

Europe's defence of the liberal order will face a stiff test in Ukraine, where the clash between liberal and illiberal values is particularly stark. Thus far, Europe's facilitation of Ukraine's political and economic reforms and sanctions against Russia have weathered numerous storms. At the last EU-Ukraine Association Council in December 2018, the EU pledged an

impressive €13.8bn support package over the next few years to continue to support the reform process. This year will be especially trying in Ukraine in light of upcoming presidential elections and the recent flare-up of violence, and its liberal progress and Western trajectory over the past five years are at risk of flattening. However daunting the challenge, the EU should regard this moment of reckoning as an opportunity to showcase its determination to preserve and expand the liberal order.

Success in foreign policy often relies more on steady, incremental progress than on headline-grabbing victories. During his presidency, Barack Obama articulated the appropriate benchmark:

If you look at the results of what we've done over the last five years, it is fair to say that our alliances are stronger, our partnerships are stronger ... And that may not always be sexy. That may not always attract a lot of attention, and it doesn't make for good argument on Sunday morning shows. But it avoids errors. You hit singles, you hit doubles; every once in a while we may be able to hit a home run. But we steadily advance the interests of the American people and our partnership with folks around the world.³¹

Viewed from this perspective, the EU's track record is impressive. It has helped sustain the Paris climate agreement, forge and preserve the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) – that is, the Iran nuclear deal – and maintain a friendly relationship with the United States, notwithstanding numerous occasions when the situation could have deteriorated in any of these areas. Moreover, its energetic trade policy through deals with Japan, Canada, Singapore and Vietnam (and ongoing negotiations with Australia, New Zealand and Mercosur) means that free and fair trade rules are expanding and modernising; indeed, the EU has included within its new trade agreements protections for fundamental values, such as democracy, human rights and the rule of law. It has kept true to the spirit of liberal order and parried assaults from within and without, while maintaining a multilateral and open approach, and seeking like-minded allies. And it has remained receptive to working jointly with the Trump administration on

areas of common interest in support of liberal values, such as addressing the rise of China, protecting democracies from foreign interference, confronting Russia and managing the crisis in Venezuela.

If the liberal order is a European strategic interest, it behoves Europe to marshal the resources and the will required to defend it. In this regard, the EU Global Strategy is salutary. It adopts an approach of principled pragmatism, with the rules-based global order as one of its core interests and a realistic sense of the underlying context, key global trends, and ongoing crises, threats and challenges. But if strategic organising principles like the liberal order are essential to set objectives, priorities and approaches, they cannot dictate a granular course of action for every important policy. For instance, some policies worth pursuing, such as preserving the Iran nuclear deal, may be pro-order but not necessarily pro-liberal.³² Others, such as supporting democratic dissidents, may be pro-liberal but not immediately pro-order. Reasonable observers can disagree about whether a particular policy will on balance strengthen or weaken the liberal order, and global aspirations for the liberal order may not be realistic at present. Even so, Europe still has an essential interest in delivering peace, prosperity and political inclusion, and the capacity to do it. Following through can help sustain the liberal order's viability and, indeed, its predominance.³³

Acknowledgements

The author would like to thank Chatham House, the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace and Perry World House for organising invaluable roundtables on this essay in November and December 2018.

Notes

¹ See generally Gideon Rose, 'The Fourth Founding: The United States and the Liberal Order', *Foreign Affairs*, vol. 98, no. 1, January/February 2019, pp. 10–21; and Thomas Wright, 'The Return to Great-Power Rivalry Was Inevitable', *Atlantic*, 12 September 2018. Notable exceptions include Ivo

H. Daalder and James M. Lindsay, 'The Committee to Save the World Order: America's Allies Must Step Up as America Steps Down', *Foreign Affairs*, vol. 97, no. 6, November/December 2018, pp. 72–83.

² Compare, for example, Anthony Dworkin and Mark Leonard, 'Can

- Europe Save the World Order?', *ECFR Policy Brief*, May 2018, with Sven Biscop, *European Strategy in the 21st Century* (London: Routledge, 2018).
- 3 See G. John Ikenberry, 'The End of Liberal International Order?', *International Affairs*, vol. 94, no. 1, January 2018, pp. 7–23; and Joseph S. Nye, Jr, 'Will the Liberal Order Survive? The History of an Idea', *Foreign Affairs*, vol. 96, no. 1, January/February 2017, pp. 10–16.
 - 4 See Guido Calabresi and Philip Bobbitt, *Tragic Choices* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1978).
 - 5 Thomas Bagger, 'The World According to Germany: Reassessing 1989', *Washington Quarterly*, vol. 41, no. 4, Winter 2019, pp. 53–63.
 - 6 White House, 'National Security Strategy of the United States', August 1991, pp. v, 2, 6, available at <https://history.defense.gov/historical-sources/national-security-strategy/>.
 - 7 White House, 'A National Security Strategy of Engagement and Enlargement', February 1996, pp. ii, 33, available at <https://history.defense.gov/historical-sources/national-security-strategy/>.
 - 8 White House, 'The National Security Strategy of the United States of America', September 2002, p. 1, available at <https://history.defense.gov/historical-sources/national-security-strategy/>.
 - 9 Council of the European Union, 'A Secure Europe in a Better World: European Security Strategy', 12 December 2003, pp. 1, 9, available at <https://europa.eu/globalstrategy/en/european-security-strategy-secure-europe-better-world>.
 - 10 Xi Jinping, Speech at the 19th Communist Party Congress, 18 October 2017.
 - 11 See Daniel Deudney and G. John Ikenberry, 'Liberal World: The Resilient Order', *Foreign Affairs*, vol. 96, no. 4, July/August 2018, pp. 16–24; Jake Sullivan, 'The World After Trump: How the System Can Endure', *Foreign Affairs*, vol. 97, no. 2, March/April 2018, pp. 10–19; Joseph Nye, Jr, 'How Sharp Power Threatens Soft Power', *Foreign Affairs Snapshot*, 24 January 2018; and Ikenberry, 'The End of Liberal International Order?'.
 - 12 White House, 'National Security Strategy', May 2010, p. 12, available at <http://nssarchive.us/national-security-strategy-2010/>.
 - 13 *Ibid.*, p. 41.
 - 14 White House, 'National Security Strategy', February 2015, p. 23, available at <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov>.
 - 15 *Ibid.*, p. i.
 - 16 'Shared Vision, Common Action: A Stronger Europe', June 2016, p. 8.
 - 17 *Ibid.*
 - 18 *Ibid.*, p. 13.
 - 19 *Ibid.*, pp. 22, 37, 43.
 - 20 White House, 'National Security Strategy of the United States of America', December 2017, pp. 1–2.
 - 21 See Congressional Research Service, 'Real Wage Trends, 1979 to 2017', 15 March 2018; European Commission, 'European Semester Thematic Factsheet: Addressing Inequalities', November 2017.
 - 22 See Jeff D. Colgan and Robert O. Keohane, 'The Liberal Order Is Rigged: Fix It Now or Watch It

- Wither', *Foreign Affairs*, vol. 96, no. 3, May/June 2017, pp. 36–44.
- ²³ John Peterson, 'Present at the Destruction? The Liberal Order in the Trump Era', *International Spectator: Italian Journal of International Affairs*, vol. 53, no. 1, March 2018, pp. 28–44.
- ³⁴ Strobe Talbott, 'What Would Jean Monnet Have Done?', *New York Times*, 7 February 2014.
- ²⁵ See Dworkin and Leonard, 'Can Europe Save the World Order?'.
²⁶ See Mark Leonard, 'What Liberal World Order?', *ECFR Policy Brief*, March 2017.
²⁷ See Michael H. Smith and Richard Youngs, 'The EU and the Global Order: Contingent Liberalism', *International Spectator: Italian Journal of International Affairs*, vol. 53, no. 1, March 2018, pp. 45–56.
- ²⁸ See Jennifer Lind, 'Saving the Liberal Order from Itself', *Politique Étrangère*, vol. 82, no. 4, Winter 2017–18, pp. 1–13.
- ²⁹ European Commission, 'Reflection Paper on Harnessing Globalisation', 10 May 2017.
- ³⁰ See European Political Strategy Centre, 'Engaging with the Western Balkans: An Investment in Europe's Security', May 2018.
- ³¹ Josh Gerstein, 'Obama Fed Up with Foreign Policy Critics', *Politico*, 28 April 2014.
- ³² See Erik Brattberg and Michael Kimmage, 'Trump and the (Liberal) International Order', *National Interest*, 26 February 2018.
- ³³ See generally Lawrence Freedman, *Strategy: A History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013).