

What is the Liberal International Order?

By Hans Kundnani

Although Western analysts and policymakers often refer to the “liberal international order,” the phrase is far from self-explanatory. In particular, it is not obvious in what sense the liberal international order is “liberal.” The lack of precision about what is meant by the liberal international order is a problem because it obscures the complexities of the concept and inhibits self-criticism by Western policymakers, especially Atlanticists and “pro-Europeans” who seek to defend the liberal international order.

The liberal international order has evolved since its creation after World War II and has different elements — some of which are in tension with each other. It is also perceived quite differently outside the geographic West than within it. Western analysts and policymakers need not just to defend the liberal international order but also to think about how to reform it — and perhaps even reverse elements of the evolution of it since the end of the Cold War — in order to save it.

In the last five years or so, U.S. and European foreign policy think tanks have become increasingly preoccupied with threats to the set of norms, rules, and institutions known as the liberal international order, especially from “revisionist” rising powers and above all authoritarian powers like China and Russia. But even more recently it has also become increasingly apparent that support for the liberal international order in Europe and the United States is declining as well. This has become particularly clear since the British vote to leave the European Union last June and the U.S. presidential election last November — not least because the United Kingdom and the United States are two of the countries historically most associated with liberalism and were generally thought to be most committed to it.

However, although the phrase “liberal international order” is widely used, it is far from self-explanatory. Theorists of the liberal international order understand it as an “open and rule-based international order” that is “enshrined in institutions such as the United Nations and norms such as multilateralism.”¹ But this still leaves big questions unanswered (in what sense it is “open” and what are the “rules”?) that tend to be glossed over. One particular ambiguity is around the sense that the liberal international order is “liberal.” Does this refer to *political* liberalism (in opposition to authoritarianism)? Or *economic* liberalism (in opposition to economic nationalism or mercantilism)? Or liberalism in the sense that international relations theorists use it (in opposition to realism and other theories of international relations)?

1 G. John Ikenberry, “The Future of the Liberal World Order.” *Foreign Affairs*, May/June 2011, pp. 56-68, here p. 56.



The easy answer is that it refers to all three — because they go hand in hand. But the relationship between the three senses of liberalism is not as straightforward as this implies. Though the history of each of these strands of liberalism is closely related, and they may have gone together seamlessly in the minds of thinkers in Victorian Britain, it is not clear that it is always and everywhere the case — as recent debates about authoritarian capitalism and the “Beijing Consensus” illustrate.² Moreover, there may also be tensions between the three senses of liberalism. For example, Dani Rodrik argues that “hyperglobalization” is undermining democracy — in other words, that the particular form of economic liberalism the West has pursued and promoted during the last thirty years or so is undermining political liberalism.³

This essay explores the tensions within the concept of the liberal international order. It argues that the lack of precision about what is meant by the liberal international order is a problem because it obscures the tensions within the concept and inhibits self-criticism by Western policymakers, especially Atlanticists and “pro-Europeans,” who as a result tend to become uncritical defenders of the status quo. The liberal international order has evolved since its creation after World War II and has different elements. Western analysts and policymakers need not just to defend the liberal international order but also to think about

“ **There was no document that laid out the basis for a specifically liberal international order that was agreed by all the world’s powers.** ”

2 The phrase “Beijing Consensus” was originally used by Joshua Cooper Ramo in a report published in 2004. See Joshua Cooper Ramo, “The Beijing Consensus, Foreign Policy Centre,” May 2004. See also Stefan Halper, *The Beijing Consensus: How China’s Authoritarian Model Will Dominate the Twenty-first Century*. New York: Basic Books, 2012. Halper writes that states outside the West are “learning to combine market economics with traditional autocratic or semiautocratic politics in a process that signals an intellectual rejection of the Western economic model.”

3 See Dani Rodrik, *The Globalization Paradox: Democracy and the Future of the World Economy*. New York: Norton, 2011.

how to reform it — and perhaps even reverse some elements of the evolution of it since the end of the Cold War — in order to save it.⁴

Evolution of Liberal International Order

As John Ikenberry has shown, the current international order is actually a kind of fusion of two distinct order-building projects: firstly the modern state system, a project dating back to the Peace of Westphalia in 1648; and secondly the liberal order, which over the last two centuries was led by the United Kingdom and the United States and which in the twentieth century was aided by the “liberal ascendancy” — that is, rise of liberal democratic states.⁵ The Westphalian order was based on the concept of the sovereignty of states. The “liberal vision” of Western democracies, on the other hand, included “open markets, international institutions, cooperative security democratic community, progressive change, collective problem solving, shared sovereignty, [and] the rule of law.”⁶

In other words, what we think of as the “liberalism” of the current international system is based on an older foundation of “order” — what might be called a “realist” rather than a “liberal” international order. The post-World War II liberal international order did not simply replace the previous order but rather developed on top of it. Thus, Ikenberry suggests, the liberal international order can be thought of in terms of a geological metaphor of layers or “strata”: the Westphalian system is a kind of “bedrock” on top of which various forms of order have developed that have become gradually more liberal over time.⁷ Moreover, within the liberal international order there is a tension between “liberalism” and “order,” which can be seen most clearly by examining the evolution of the liberal international order since the end of World War II.

4 For a similar argument about the need to reform the liberal international order in to save it, see Jeff D. Colgan and Robert E. Keohane, “The liberal order is rigged.” *Foreign Affairs*, May/June 2017.

5 G. John Ikenberry, *Liberal Leviathan: The Origins, Crisis, and Transformation of the American World Order*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011, here p. 1.

6 Ikenberry, *Liberal Leviathan*, p. 2.

7 Ikenberry, *Liberal Leviathan*, p. xii.

Western analysts sometimes see the Atlantic Charter — a joint declaration between President Franklin D. Roosevelt and Prime Minister Winston Churchill signed in August 1941 — as the founding document of the liberal international order.⁸ The principles set out in the charter included peace and security (including the right to self-defense and the preservation of the territorial status quo), self-governance (self-rule, open societies, the rule of law), economic prosperity (economic advancement, improved labor standards, social welfare), and free trade and the preservation of the global commons. The Atlantic Charter drew on the “four freedoms” — freedom of speech, freedom of worship, freedom from want, and freedom from fear — that Roosevelt had outlined in his State of the Union Address earlier in 1941.⁹ It in turn informed the U.S. commitment to the postwar recovery and security of Europe through the Marshall Plan and the North Atlantic Treaty.

However, these documents based on liberal principles were signed only by Western powers. There was no document that laid out the basis for a specifically liberal international order that was agreed by all the world’s powers. The only shared basis of the postwar order was the United Nations Charter, which was signed by 50 of the 51 original member countries of the United Nations in June 1945. However, this was based largely on Westphalian principles rather than the liberal principles to which Western powers committed after 1945. The global economy did become somewhat more liberal after 1945 though the General Agreement on Trade and Tariffs (GATT). But the Bretton Woods institutions — the World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF) — were somewhere in between Western and global

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institutions: they aspired to be global but were dominated by Western powers and to some extent reflected Western economic interests.

After the end of the Cold War, the liberal international order evolved further. In some respects, it is Western democracies rather than authoritarian, non-Western, or rising powers that have been the “revisionist” powers during this period. In particular, they drove the creation of the International Criminal Court (ICC) (though the United States has not joined it) and developed the ideas of a “responsibility to protect” (R2P), which was adopted by the United Nations in 2005, and of “humanitarian intervention.”¹⁰ These innovations have qualified the sovereignty of states in important and controversial ways. If state sovereignty is an essential element of the liberal international order (and some would argue that it is its essence), sovereigntist powers such as China and Russia have a point when they argue that it is they rather than Western powers that are defending the principles of the liberal international order — albeit the 1945 version of it.¹¹

Seen against the background of this evolution, current arguments between the West and authoritarian powers such as China and Russia are not so much about the liberal international order itself but about different versions of it and in particular about the way Western powers have sought to change it since the end of the Cold War. In particular, Russia seems to want to go back to the order agreed at the Yalta conference in 1945, in which states with different ideologies and political systems co-exist and in particular respect territorial sovereignty — a “purely Westphalian world,” as Peter Harris puts it, which would be “tolerant of pluralism among nations.”¹² In contrast, the more “liberal” order for which many in the West

8 The Atlantic Charter, August 14, 1941. I would like to thank Dhruva Jaishankar for a helpful discussion of the points in this paragraph.

9 Franklin Delano Roosevelt, “Annual Message to Congress on the State of the Union,” January 6, 1941.

10 The Clinton administration signed the Rome Statute, which created the ICC, but did not submit it for Senate ratification. Under the Obama administration the United States became an observer at the ICC, but the Rome Statute remains unratified by the United States.

11 See Richard Haass, “World Order 2.0.” *Foreign Affairs*, January/February 2017. Haass calls this version of the liberal international order based on the concept of classical Westphalian sovereignty “World Order 1.0.” He proposes an updated “World Order 2.0” based on the principle of “sovereign obligation.”

12 Peter Harris, “Losing the International Order: Westphalia, Liberalism and Current World Crises.” *The National Interest*, November 10, 2015.

argued in the post-Cold War period “demands that states be obedient to liberal principles in foreign policy (and in significant aspects of domestic policy, too).”

Elements of Liberal International Order

If examining the evolution of the liberal international order is one way to get at the complexity inherent in the concept, another is to disaggregate it into its constituent parts — in other words, thematically or by policy area. A straightforward typology of the liberal international order might include three elements: the security order, the economic order, and the human rights order.¹³ Disaggregating the liberal international order into these three elements allows us to see more precisely how each has evolved since the end of World War II — and the consequences this evolution has had for the other elements. It also takes us beyond the shorthand of an “open and rules-based order” and shows the different senses in which the liberal international order can be seen as “liberal” — and thus illustrates even more clearly the tensions within the concept of the liberal international order.

The Security Order

It is to a large extent the security order that analysts have in mind when they speak of the liberal international order as being “rules-based.” In particular, Ikenberry writes that an order that is liberal in the sense of being “rules-based” contrasts with one that is “organized into rival blocs or exclusive regional spheres.”¹⁴ What this means is that it is an order in which what states can and cannot do is not simply determined by power. Rather, international law constrains the action of states. For example, the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, which was signed in 1982 (though it still has not been ratified by the United States) defines

13 For a different typology, see Daniel M. Kliman and Richard Fontaine, “Global Swing States. Brazil, India, Indonesia, Turkey and the Future of International Order.” German Marshall Fund/Center for a New American Security, November 2012. Kliman and Fontaine break the liberal international order down into five elements: the trade order, the financial order, the maritime order, the nonproliferation order, and the human rights order.

14 Ikenberry, *Liberal Leviathan*, p. xii.

international law on maritime disputes — and thus is of particular relevance to current territorial disputes in the East China Sea and the South China Sea. The United Nations Security Council is the final instance that ultimately decides what states can and cannot do.

There was a particular evolution of the security order in Europe following 1945 that took place in three phases. First, there was the post-1945 order — the early Cold War system based on the terms of the Yalta Agreement, which was based to a large extent on the Westphalian principle of state sovereignty. Second, there was the post-1975 order — the late Cold War system based on the terms of Helsinki Final Act, which further affirmed the inviolability of borders and created what became the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe.¹⁵ Finally, there was the post-1990 order — the post-Cold War system based on the terms of Paris Charter, which established democracy

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as “the only system of government of our nations.”¹⁶ These agreements, each of which included the Soviet Union, further “liberalized” the European security order in Ikenberry’s sense by extending the system of rules and institutions that governed it.

Since the Russian annexation of Crimea in 2014, many in the West have expressed outrage that Russia has broken the rules of the European security order. Some are also concerned about Chinese island building in the South China Sea, which, though more subtle than Russian actions in Eastern Europe, amounts to the same thing — that is, the acquisition

15 The Helsinki Final Act dealt with a variety of issues divided into “baskets.” A first basket included ten principles covering political and military issues, territorial integrity, the definition of borders, peaceful settlement of disputes and the implementation of confidence building measures between opposing militaries. A second basket focused on economic, scientific, technological, and environmental cooperation. A third basket emphasized human rights, including freedom of emigration and reunification of families divided by international borders, cultural exchanges and freedom of the press. See Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, Helsinki Final Act, August 1, 1975.

16 See Charter of Paris for a New Europe, November 21, 1990.

and consolidation of territory using force and in violation of international law. It therefore seems as if it is authoritarian states that are “breaking the rules” — and therefore challenging the liberal international order — while the West seeks to uphold them. Ikenberry argues that “democracies are — in contrast to autocratic and authoritarian states — particularly able and willing to operate within an open, rule-based international system and to cooperate for mutual gain.”¹⁷

However, during the post-Cold War period, it was often the West that “broke the rules” of the security order. In particular, the NATO military intervention against Serbia in 1999, which was carried out without a mandate from the United Nations Security Council, was perceived by many, especially outside the West, as a violation of international law. This was followed by the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq in 2003. The question here is not whether each or both of these interventions, which were justified in various ways, was right or wrong. It is also important to emphasize that these interventions also did not involve the annexation of territory. But they illustrate that Western powers were prepared to break the rules when they believed there was a compelling reason to do so. It is only more recently, as other powers have broken the rules, that Western powers have insisted on the paramount importance of the “rules-based” order.

The Economic Order

It is implicitly to the economic order that Western analysts refer when they speak of an “open” liberal international order. Thus Ikenberry writes that “openness is manifest when states trade and exchange on the basis of mutual gain” — in other words, when economic relations between states are organized on the basis of liberal principles.¹⁸ Thus the “openness” of the economic order, which is a key element of the “liberalism” of the liberal international order, is closely connected to globalization — that is, the

“breaking down of artificial barriers to the flow of goods, services, capital, knowledge, and (to a lesser extent), people across borders.”¹⁹ In fact, the liberal international order and globalization are so closely connected that it has become increasingly difficult to separate the two.

During the immediate postwar period — the era of GATT — the liberalism of the economic order was limited. Trade was liberalized but states retained substantial autonomy in policymaking — a compromise that John Ruggie called “embedded liberalism.”²⁰ But since the end of the Cold War, the economic order has become much more liberal — in particular with the creation in 1994 of the World Trade Organization (WTO), which, according to Ikenberry, is “the most formal and developed institution of the liberal international order.”²¹ Alongside the rules that govern the security order, WTO rules are another a key element of what is meant when Western analysts speak of a “rules-based” order. This liberal economic order became truly global when China joined the WTO in 2001 and Russia joined it in 2012. During this period, the economic order has become closely connected with what Rodrik calls “hyper-globalization.”

During the last decade, economists like Rodrik have become increasingly critical of aspects of this extreme form of globalization. But many defenders of the liberal international order often refuse to accept that the reform of the economic order may be needed. Thus they become uncritical defenders of the particular version of economic liberalism that Europe and the United States have pursued over the last 30 years — what critics call “neoliberalism” — and even argue that “hyper-globalization” must be taken further. During the last few years many Western analysts and policymakers argued that “mega-regional” trade

¹⁷ Ikenberry, *Liberal Leviathan*, p. 63.

¹⁸ Ikenberry, *Liberal Leviathan*, p. 18.

¹⁹ This definition of globalization comes from Joseph Stiglitz, *Globalization and its Discontents*. Harmondsworth, Penguin, 2002, p. 9.

²⁰ See John Ruggie, “International Regimes, Transactions, and Change: Embedded Liberalism in the Postwar Economic Order.” *International Organization*, Vol. 36, No. 2, 1982, pp. 379-415.

²¹ Ikenberry, “The Future of the Liberal World Order,” p. 62.

agreements such as the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) and the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) were crucial for the maintenance of the liberal international order. This illustrates a tendency to elide European and U.S. policy with the liberal international order itself.

The Human Rights Order

The human rights order goes back to the United Nations Charter, which “reaffirmed faith in fundamental human rights, and dignity and worth of the human person” and committed all member states to promote “universal respect for, and observance of, human rights and fundamental freedoms for all without distinction as to race, sex, language, or religion,” and the Universal Declaration on Human Rights, which was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 1948.²² But this element of the order “took root more slowly” than the others, as Ikenberry puts it, and during the Cold War remained largely declaratory.²³ However, in the post-Cold War period, Western powers have sought to expand the human rights order in controversial ways that have qualified state sovereignty.

In particular, the ICC and concepts of R2P and “liberal intervention” became vehicles for an attempt by the West to develop the human rights order. During the 1990s, it seemed as if other powers had accepted these innovations. More recently, however, it has become apparent that this expansion of the human rights order has had costs. In particular, Russia has sought to use Western military interventions to justify its own interventions, which Western analysts now see as a challenge to the liberal international order.²⁴ It now seems, in other words, as if by seeking to develop the human rights order, the West undermined the security order. Put differently, by trying to make the

liberal international order more “liberal,” the West undermined order. This illustrates that there can be a tension between “liberalism” and “order.”

Western and Non-Western Perceptions

The differences between Western and non-Western perceptions of the liberal international order illustrate why it is important to think more clearly and consistently about what exactly it is. Many outside the West see the liberal international order — and in particular understand the role of the United States in it — in quite different terms than those within the West. For example, at the Munich Security Conference in 2016, Fu Ying, chairwoman of the Foreign Affairs Committee of the Chinese National People’s Congress, distinguished between three elements of the “U.S.-led world order”: “the American value system,” “the U.S. military alignment system”; and “the international institutions including the UN system.”²⁵ When Chinese officials talk about supporting the international order, she said, they meant the third element — that is, they support liberalism in one sense (a “rules-based” order) but not in another (a system based on Western values like democracy).

“**By trying to make the liberal international order more ‘liberal,’ the West undermined order.”**

However, it is not only in authoritarian states such as China and Russia that the liberal international order, and American “hegemony,” is perceived differently than in the West. In fact, in what Dan Kliman and Richard Fontaine called “global swing states” — that is, democracies like Brazil and India that are crucial for the future of the liberal international order — many people seem comparatively relaxed about what is seen in the West as a crisis of the liberal international order. Some even see the end of the

22 Charter of the United Nations, June 26, 1945; Universal Declaration on Human Rights, December 10, 1948.

23 Ikenberry, “The Future of the Liberal World Order,” p. 61.

24 See Michael Ignatieff, “The End of Intervention?” Talk at Chatham House, London, March 19, 2014.

25 Speech by Fu Ying at the 52nd Munich Security Conference, February 13, 2016..

liberal international order as an opportunity. For example, Neelam Deo and Aditya Phatak argued in the spring of 2016 that the election of Donald Trump as U.S. president could lead to “the dismantling of the geopolitical Bretton Woods” and could therefore “energize a multipolar world.” Thus “Trump may be the unwitting catalyst for a more equitable era.”²⁶

The reason for this disconnect is a fundamental difference in the way the role of the United States in the liberal international order is understood. Within the West, it is understood in terms of the provision by the United States of public goods such as international security, free trade, financial stability, and freedom of navigation. Former U.S. Deputy Secretary of State Anthony Blinken put this view in an op-ed published in *The New York Times* after the election of Trump as follows: “The liberal order led by the United States favored an open world connected by the free flow of people, goods, ideas and capital, a world grounded in the principles of self-determination and sovereignty for nations and basic rights for their citizens.”²⁷ In short, American “hegemony” is benevolent.

However, this is not a description of the U.S.-led liberal international order that many outside the geographic West recognize. There, many see the liberal international order not in terms of public goods, but in terms of a particular ideological agenda (such as the “Washington Consensus”) and, ultimately, the interests of the “haves” in the international system — that is, Europe and the United States. Attempts by Europe and the United States to “maintain” the liberal

26 Neelam Deo and Aditya Phatak, “Dismantling the geopolitical Bretton Woods.” Gateway House, March 31, 2016.

27 Antony J. Blinken, “What Is America Without Influence? Trump Will Find Out.” *The New York Times*, December 13, 2016.

international order are, therefore, seen as desperate attempts to preserve their own power and privilege. In other words, this is a less benign view of American “hegemony” — hence the openness to the idea of “multipolarity,” which is equated with greater equality (or even “democracy”) in the international system.

The complex reality is that both sides of this argument have a point. Western foreign policy elites do often have a somewhat idealized view of the liberal international order. Both Americans and Europeans tend in different ways to identify their own interests with those of humanity as a whole — in part because they see those interests as based on universal values. They think about the liberal international order in an imprecise way. They are not always clear about the sense in which the current order is “liberal” and can be blind to the ways in which it negatively impacts others around the world. In particular since the Iraq war and the financial crisis, the idea that the United States provides stability — according to hegemonic stability theory the central function of a hegemon — has become less credible.

Probably the best example of this idealized view is the economic order. Europeans and Americans like to think that the current liberal economic order reflects shared rather than particular interests. Liberal economists like to see trade in “win-win” terms and believe that the liberalization of trade is therefore a kind of public good. This thinking has informed Western trade policy in recent years. In particular, through “mega-regional” trade agreements like TTIP and TPP, Europe and the United States have in the last few years sought to set the “rules” for trade in the 21st century. But supporters of these trade agreements often fail to see how those rules — for example on intellectual property rights — might be skewed in favor of the most developed countries. As a result, some outside the West saw TPP as “geo-economic containment” not just of China but of emerging economies more generally.²⁸

28 Author conversation with former Indian official, July 2016.

At the same time, the liberal international order is not simply a cynical cover for the interests of Europe and the United States, as some outside the geographic West believe.²⁹ U.S. security guarantees *have* pacified regions such as East Asia and prevented the emergence of regional hegemony (whose “hegemony” would likely be of an even less benign kind than that of the United States). The trade order and the globalization for which it was the basis has not only benefited Americans and Europeans, but has also lifted millions outside the geographic West out of poverty. In fact, the current backlash against globalization in Europe and the United States is caused partly because of the way it has negatively impacted some within the geographic West – particularly those who worked in manufacturing industry.³⁰

The challenge now is to find some common ground. Western foreign policy elites need to think more precisely about the liberal international order and the problems with it — and how they can be fixed to create a more equal world. But at the same time, people outside the West (and those within the West who are critical of American power) need to take seriously the Western argument about public goods. There are certain public goods — especially freedom of navigation — that, were the United States to cease to provide them, cannot (yet) be easily provided by other powers. A world without these public goods could be disastrous for many outside the West. Thus Western and non-Western powers need to reach a shared understanding of how the liberal international order can be reformed in order to save it.

To Defend or Reform?

In the context of the current external and internal threats to the liberal international order, the understandable instinct of many Western foreign

²⁹ Here and in the remainder of this essay, I use the term “geographic West” to differentiate it from other — in particular, normative and strategic — versions of the concept of the “West.”

³⁰ See Branko Milanovic, “Global Income Inequality by the Numbers: in History and Now.” World Bank, November 2012.

policy experts is to try to defend it. But, in part because of the lack of clarity about what exactly the liberal international order is, this often tends to lead to a tendency to refuse to engage in discussions about the problems with the liberal international order as it currently exists. The implication is that one is either for it or against it. This binary logic usually narrows the discussion to

the need to communicate better with citizens, both within the geographic West and beyond it. Thus supporters of the liberal international order often become uncritical defenders of the status quo.

Instead Western policymakers need to both defend and reform the liberal international order. They should insist on a more nuanced discussion in which it is possible simultaneously to identify problems with the current liberal international order while at the same time seeking to defend it from those who want to destroy it altogether. The focus should be on identifying the elements of the liberal international order that need to be changed and the elements of it that are fundamental and non-negotiable. The ultimate objective should be to identify a set of changes that need to be made to the liberal international order in order to save it. Beyond a few obvious changes like increasing the representation of non-Western countries in the IMF, there is little consensus about what a reformed liberal international order that would both accommodate rising powers and regain support within the geographic West would look like.

One necessary change may be to reluctantly recognize that, even where it may be justified in moral terms, the cost of military intervention without a mandate from the United Nations Security Council in terms of order is too high. This may already be the reality — illustrated by the Obama administration’s

“ *The ultimate objective should be to identify a set of changes that need to be made to the liberal international order in order to save it.*”

reluctance to intervene in Syria even as 400,000 people were killed in the conflict (though of course, it remains to be seen how the Trump administration's policy will evolve). In effect, this means accepting a liberal international order that is one sense less "liberal." Robin Niblett has recently argued that, on this basis, the liberal international order will "evolve into a less ambitious project: a liberal international economic order that encompasses states with diverse political systems."³¹ But though it would be less "liberal" as a price for greater "order," it would also be, in Harris's terms, an order that is more "tolerant."

However, there may also be a need for change in the economic order in order to create what Ikenberry calls a "post-neoliberal consensus on the rules and regulation of an open world economy."³² Rodrik argues for an adjustment in the "balance between national autonomy and economic globalization."³³ Critics have long criticized the effects of globalization on developing countries – for example the way WTO rules have limited policy space and in particular made it harder to pursue an industrial policy. It has now also become increasingly apparent — not least since the emergence of Bernie Sanders and Donald Trump in 2016 — that support for globalization is also declining within the geographic West. Yet supporters of the liberal international order often refuse to engage in discussions about whether globalization has gone too far and in particular about whether WTO rules have limited the ability of national governments to take measures to protect citizens from the disruptive effects of globalization.

Instead of accepting the binary logic of the populists who believe there is an elemental struggle between "globalists" and "nationalists," those who believe in the liberal international order should insist on a more nuanced discussion in which it is possible to accept that there are problems with "hyper-globalization"

without rejecting globalization altogether. The policies of the last thirty years — for example the abolition of capital controls — have made the global economy more liberal but they may have also undermined order. Instead of a simple assumption that any change to the current trade policy will lead to the end of the liberal international order, a serious debate is needed about whether and how it is possible to rethink the economic order — and perhaps even to reverse some elements of the evolution of it since the end of the Cold War — without this leading to an unraveling of it.

³¹ Robin Niblett, "Liberalism in retreat." *Foreign Affairs*, January/February 2017.

³² Ikenberry, *Liberal Leviathan*, p. 307.

³³ Dani Rodrik, "Put Globalization to Work for Democracies." *The New York Times*, September 17, 2016.

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About the Author

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