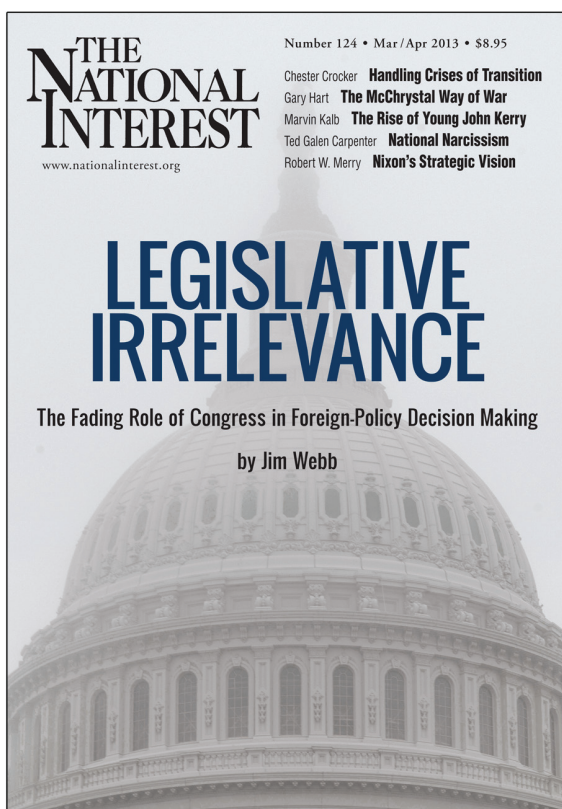


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The Mythical Liberal Order

By Naazneen Barma, Ely Ratner and Steven Weber

After a year and a half of violence and tens of thousands of deaths in Syria, the UN Security Council convened in July 2012 to consider exerting additional international pressure on President Bashar al-Assad. And for the third time in nine months, Russia and China vetoed any moves toward multilateral intervention. Less than two weeks later, Kofi Annan resigned as the joint UN–Arab League special envoy for Syria, lamenting, “I can’t want peace more than the protagonists, more than the Security Council or the international community for that matter.”

Not only have we seen this movie before, but it seems to be on repeat. Instead of a gradual trend toward global problem solving punctuated by isolated failures, we have seen over the last several years essentially the opposite: stunningly few instances of international cooperation on significant issues. Global governance is in a serious drought—palpable across the full range of crucial, mounting international challenges that include nuclear proliferation, climate change, international development and the global financial crisis.

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Where exactly is the liberal world order that so many Western observers talk about? Today we have an international political landscape that is neither orderly nor liberal.

It wasn’t supposed to be this way. In the envisaged liberal world order, the “rise of the rest” should have been a boost to global governance. A rebalancing of power and influence should have made international politics more democratic and multilateral action more legitimate, while bringing additional resources to bear. Economic integration and security-community enlargement should have started to envelop key players as the system built on itself through network effects—by making the benefits of joining the order (and the costs of opposing it) just a little bit greater for each new decision. Instead, the world has no meaningful deal on climate change; no progress on a decade-old global-trade round and no inclination toward a new one; no coherent response to major security issues around North Korea, Iran and the South China Sea; and no significant coordinated effort to capitalize on what is possibly the best opportunity in a generation for liberal progress—the Arab Spring.

It’s not particularly controversial to observe that global governance has gone missing. What matters is why. The standard view is that we’re seeing an international liberal order under siege, with emerging and established powers caught in a contest for the future of the global system that is blocking progress on global governance.

That mental map identifies the central challenge of American foreign policy in the twenty-first century as figuring out how the United States and its allies can best integrate rising powers like China into the prevailing order while bolstering and reinforcing its foundations.

But this narrative and mental map are wrong. The liberal order can't be under siege in any meaningful way (or prepped to integrate rising powers) because it never attained the breadth or depth required to elicit that kind of agenda. The liberal order is today still largely an aspiration, not a description of how states actually behave or how global governance actually works. The rise of a configuration of states that six years ago we called a "World Without the West" is not so much challenging a prevailing order as it is exposing the inherent frailty of the existing framework.

This might sound like bad news for American foreign policy and even worse news for the pursuit of global liberalism, but it doesn't have to be so. Advancing a normative liberal agenda in the twenty-first century is possible but will require a new approach. Once strategists acknowledge that the liberal order is more or less a myth, they can let go of the anxious notion that some countries are attacking or challenging it, and the United States can be liberated from the burden of a supposed obligation to defend it. We can instead focus on the necessary task of building a liberal order from the ground up.

Loyalists are quick to defend the concept of a robust liberal order by falling back on outdated metrics of success. The original *de minimis* aims of the postwar order achieved what now should be considered a low bar: preventing a third world war and a race-to-the-bottom closure of the global-trade regime. Beyond that, the last seventy years have certainly seen movement toward globalization of trade and capital as well as

some progress on human rights—but less clearly as a consequence of anything like a liberal world order than as a consequence of national power and interest.

What would a meaningful liberal world order actually look like if it were operating in practice? Consider an objective-based definition: a world in which most countries most of the time follow rules that contribute to progressively more collective security, shared economic gains and individual human rights. States would gradually downplay the virtues of relative advantage and self-reliance. Most states would recognize that foreign-policy choices are constrained (to their aggregate benefit) by multilateral institutions, global norms and nonstate actors. They would cede meaningful bits of sovereign authority in exchange for proactive collaboration on universal challenges. And they would accept that economic growth is best pursued through integration, not mercantilism, and is in turn the most reliable source of national capacity, advancement and influence. With those ingredients in place, we would expect to see the gradual, steady evolution of something resembling an "international community" bound by rights and responsibilities to protect core liberal values of individual rights and freedoms.

No wonder proponents of the liberal-world-order perspective hesitate to offer precise definitions of it. Few of these components can reasonably be said to have been present for any length of time at a global level in the post-World War II world. There may be islands of liberal order, but they are floating in a sea of something quite different. Moreover, the vectors today are mostly pointing away from the direction of a liberal world order.

How did we get here? Consider two founding myths of liberal internationalism. The first is that expressions of

International cooperation on security matters has been relegated to things like second-tier peacekeeping operations and efforts to ward off pirates equipped with machine guns and speedboats.

post–World War II American power and leadership were synonymous with the maturation of a liberal order. The narrative should sound familiar: The United States wins World War II and controls half of global GDP. The United States constructs an international architecture aimed at promoting an open economic system and a semi-institutionalized approach to fostering cooperation on security and political affairs. And the United States provides the essential global public goods—an extended security deterrent and the global reserve currency—to make cooperation work. Some essential elements of the system survive in a posthegemony era because the advantages to other significant powers of sustained institutionalized cooperation exceed the costs and risks of trying to change the game.

In the 1990s the narrative gets more interesting, controversial and relevant. This is when the second foundational myth of the liberal world order—that it has an inexorable magnetic attraction—comes to the fore. The end of the Cold War and the attendant rejection of Communism is supposed to benefit the liberal world order in breadth and depth: on the internal front, new capitalist democracies should converge on individuals' market-based economic choice and election-based political choice; on the external front, the relationships among states should become increasingly governed by a set of liberal international norms that privilege and protect the civic and political freedoms that capitalist democracies promise. The liberal order's geography should then expand to encompass the non-Western world. Its

multilateral rules, institutions and norms should increase in density across economic, political and security domains. As positive network effects kick in, the system should evolve to be much less dependent on American power. It's supposedly easier—and more beneficial—to join the liberal world order than it is to oppose it (or even to try to modify it substantially). A choice to live outside the system becomes progressively less realistic: few countries can imagine taking on the contradictions of modern governance by themselves, particularly in the face of expanding multilateral free trade and interdependent security institutions.

The story culminates in a kind of magnetic liberalism, where countries and foreign-policy decisions are attracted to the liberal world order like iron filings to a magnet. With few exceptions, U.S. foreign policy over the last two decades has been predicated on the assumption that the magnetic field is strong and getting stronger. It's a seductive idea, but it should not be confused with reality. In practice, the magnetic field is notable mainly for its weakness. It is simply not the case today that nations feel equally a part of, answerable to or constrained by a liberal order. And nearly a quarter century after 1989, it has become disingenuous to argue that the liberal world order is simply slow in getting off the ground—as if the next gust of democratic transitions or multilateral breakthroughs will offer the needed push to revive those triumphalist moments brought on by the end of World War II and the fall of the Berlin Wall. To the contrary, the

aspirational liberal end state is receding into the horizon.

The picture half a century ago looked more promising, with the initial rounds of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade and the successful establishment of NATO setting expectations about what multilateral governance could achieve. But international institutions picked off the low-hanging fruit of global cooperation decades ago and have since stalled in their attempts to respond to pressing international challenges. The 1990s served up the best possible set of conditions to advance global liberalism, but subsequent moves toward political and economic liberalization that came with the end of the Cold War were either surprisingly shallow or fragile and short-lived.

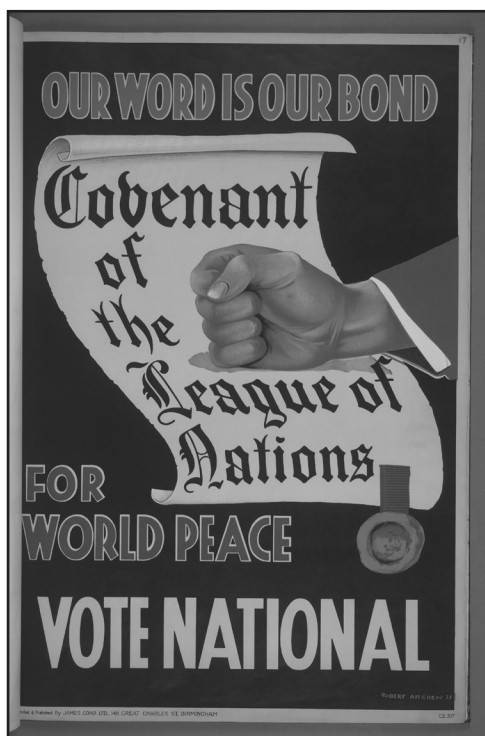
Ask yourself this: Have developing countries felt and manifested over time the increasing magnetic pull of the liberal world order? A number of vulnerable developing and post-Communist transitional countries adopted a “Washington Consensus” package of liberal economic policies—freer trade, marketization and privatization of state assets—in the 1980s and 1990s. But these adjustments mostly arrived under the shadow of coercive power. They generally placed the burden of adjustment disproportionately on the most disempowered members of society. And, with few exceptions, they left developing countries more, not less, vulnerable to global economic volatility. The structural-adjustment policies imposed in the midst of the Latin American debt crisis and the region’s subsequent “lost decade” of the 1980s bear witness to each of these shortcomings, as do the failed voucher-privatization program and consequent asset stripping and oligarchic wealth concentration experienced by Russians in the 1990s.

If these were the gains that were supposed to emerge from a liberal world order, it’s no surprise that liberalism came to have a tarnished brand in much of the developing world. The perception that economic neoliberalism fails to deliver on its trickle-down growth pledge is strong and deep. In contrast, state capitalism and resource nationalism—vulnerable to a different set of contradictions, of course—have for the moment delivered tangible gains for many emerging powers and look like promising alternative development paths. Episodic signs of pushback against some of the excesses of that model, such as anti-Chinese protests in Angola or Zambia, should not be confused with a yearning for a return to liberal prescriptions. And comparative economic performance in the wake of the global financial crisis has done nothing to burnish liberalism’s economic image, certainly not in the minds of those who saw the U.S. investment banking–led model of capital allocation as attractive, and not in the minds of those who held a vision of EU-style, social-welfare capitalism as the next evolutionary stage of liberalism.

There’s just as little evidence of sustained liberal magnetism operating in the politics of the developing world, where entrenched autocrats guarding their legitimacy frequently caricature democracy promotion as a not-very-surreptitious strategy to replace existing regimes with either self-serving instability or more servile allies of the West. In practice, the liberal order’s formula for democratic freedom has been mostly diluted down to observing electoral procedures. The results have been almost uniformly disappointing, as the legacy of post-Cold War international interventions from Cambodia to Iraq attests. Even the more organic “color revolutions” of Eastern Europe and Central Asia at the beginning of the twenty-first century have stalled into equilibria Freedom House identifies as only

“partly free”—in reality affording average citizens little access to political or economic opportunities. Only two years past the initial euphoria of the Arab Spring a similar disillusionment has set in across the Middle East, where evidence for the magnetic pull of a liberal world order is extremely hard to find.

Contemporary developments in Southeast Asia illustrate where the most important magnetic forces of change



actually come from. The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) has successfully coordinated moves toward trade liberalization in the region, but this has not been underpinned by a set of liberal principles or collective norms. Instead, the goals have been instrumental—to protect the region from international economic volatility and to cement together some

counterweight to the Chinese economy. And ASEAN is explicitly not a force for individual political and economic freedom. Indeed, it acts more like a bulwark against “interference” in internal affairs. The aspirations one occasionally hears for the organization to implement collective-governance measures come from Western observers much more frequently than from the people and states that comprise the group itself.

Global governistas will protest that the response to the global financial crisis proves that international economic cooperation is more robust than we acknowledge. In this view, multilateral financial institutions passed the stress test and prevented the world from descending into the economic chaos of beggar-thy-neighbor trade policies and retaliatory currency arbitrage and capital controls. The swift recovery of global trade and capital flows is often cited as proof of the relative success of economic cooperation. The problem with this thesis is that very real fears about how the system could collapse, including the worry that states would retreat behind a mercantilist shell, are no different from what they were a hundred years ago. It’s not especially indicative of liberal progress to be having the same conversation about global economic governance that the world was having at the end of the gold-standard era and the onset of the Great Depression. Global economic governance may have helped to prevent a repeat downward spiral into self-defeating behaviors, but surely in a world order focused on liberal progress the objectives of global economic governance should have moved on by now. And the final chapter here has yet to be written. From the perspective of many outside the United States, the Federal Reserve’s unprecedented “quantitative easing” policies are not far off from monetary warfare on the exchange and inflation rates of others.

The ease with which emerging powers route around liberal rules and institutions is perhaps the most conclusive evidence that the liberal order is a myth.

Astute analysts have observed that as banks have operated more nationalistically and cautiously, the free flow of capital across borders has declined. A global climate that is at serious risk of breeding currency and trade wars is hardly conducive to the health and expansion of any liberal world order.

On matters of war and peace, the international community is fighting similar battles and for the most part experiencing similar failures to provide a system of collective security. In Africa's Great Lakes region, more than five million people have died directly and indirectly from fifteen years of civil war and conflict. Just to the north, the international community stood by and watched a genocide in Sudan. In places more strategically important to leading nations, the outcome—as showcased in Syria—is geopolitical gridlock.

The last time the Security Council managed to agree on what seemed like serious collective action was over Libya, but both China and Russia now believe they were intentionally misled and that what was sold as a limited humanitarian mission was really a regime-change operation illegitimately authorized by the UN. This burst of multilateralism has actually made global-security governance down the road less likely. Meanwhile, international cooperation on security matters has been relegated to things like second-tier peacekeeping operations and efforts to ward off pirates equipped with machine guns and speedboats. These are worthy causes but will not move the needle on the issues that dominate the international-security agenda. And on the emerging

issues most in need of forward-looking global governance—cybersecurity and unmanned aerial vehicles, for example—there are no rules and institutions in place at all, nor legitimate and credible mechanisms to devise them.

Assessed against its ability to solve global problems, the current system is falling progressively further behind on the most important challenges, including financial stability, the “responsibility to protect,” and coordinated action on climate change, nuclear proliferation, cyberwarfare and maritime security. The authority, legitimacy and capacity of multilateral institutions dissolve when the going gets tough—when member countries have meaningfully different interests (as in currency manipulations), when the distribution of costs is large enough to matter (as in humanitarian crises in sub-Saharan Africa) or when the shadow of future uncertainties looms large (as in carbon reduction). Like a sports team that perfects exquisite plays during practice but fails to execute against an actual opponent, global-governance institutions have sputtered precisely when their supposed skills and multilateral capital are needed most.

Why has this happened? The hopeful liberal notion that these failures of global governance are merely reflections of organizational dysfunction that can be fixed by reforming or “reengineering” the institutions themselves, as if this were a job for management consultants fiddling with organization charts, is a costly distraction from the real challenge. A decade-long

effort to revive the dead-on-arrival Doha Development Round in international trade is the sharpest example of the cost of such a tinkering-around-the-edges approach and its ultimate futility. Equally distracting and wrong is the notion held by neoconservatives and others that global governance is inherently a bad idea and that its institutions are ineffective and undesirable simply by virtue of being supranational.

The root cause of stalled global governance is simpler and more straightforward. “Multipolarization” has come faster and more forcefully than expected. Relatively authoritarian and postcolonial emerging powers have become leading voices that undermine anything approaching international consensus and, with that, multilateral institutions. It’s not just the reasonable demand for more seats at the table. That might have caused something of a decline in effectiveness but also an increase in legitimacy that on balance could have rendered it a net positive.

Instead, global governance has gotten the worst of both worlds: a decline in both effectiveness and legitimacy. The problem is not one of a few rogue states acting badly in an otherwise coherent system. There has been no real breakdown *per se*. There just wasn’t all that much liberal world order to break down in the first place. The new voices are more than just numerous and powerful. They are truly distinct from the voices of an old era, and they approach the global system in a meaningfully different way.

Six years ago in this magazine we wrote about the development of a new configuration in international politics that we called a “World Without the West.” We argued that an important group of emerging states was neither assimilating into the Western order (as optimists hoped) nor attacking it (as pessimists feared).

Instead, they were finding ways to bypass it and “route around” it by enhancing their own interconnectivity at a rate faster than global interconnectivity as a whole was increasing. This in turn made the Western order progressively less relevant.

Though this was a controversial idea when first proposed, it has now become mainstream to note its foundational claim: that deepening interconnectivity in the non-Western world is outstripping both global and North-South integration. But many who have come to accept this basic notion still discount its significance. They fall into the mind-set traps that we anticipated: either doubting the sustainability and resilience of these emerging linkages or ignoring their increasingly profound impact on the way international politics works.

To be clear: “Routing around” is not a high-concept description of an alternative world-order system. And, like “balancing,” “bandwagoning” and similar concepts that analysts use to categorize state behaviors, routing around doesn’t necessarily imply some deep intentionality or master plan for international politics. Rather, the phrase simply describes a set of strategic choices that share driving forces and results.

The drivers come from the specific histories, economies and interests of today’s emerging powers. Postcolonial legacies combine with weak and unstable polities to oppose international intervention in domestic affairs. State-fueled manufacturing and large agrarian populations repress support for open and free trade. And the intense need for energy and other resources shapes external priorities throughout the world. Strategic behavior emerges from these self-interested priorities and objectives as well as the mind-sets they engender.

The ease with which emerging powers route around liberal rules and institutions is perhaps the most conclusive evi-

dence that the liberal order is a myth. Their greatest opportunities to act strategically arise because the actual liberal world order, weak and patchy as it is, bears little resemblance to the beliefs and aspirations of its defenders and promoters, who want badly to believe it is much stronger and more vibrant than in reality. Arbitraging against these wishful thoughts has become the best way to diminish further the influence of the liberal world order.

Consider regulatory arbitrage in the financial sector as a vivid example of routing around the weak structures of liberal interdependence. Recently, a number of China's biggest state-owned banks began moving sizable pieces of their European portfolios to Luxembourg in a clear bid to bypass London's tougher regulations. Several Russian banks—including the large parastatal Gazprombank—serve openly as conduits for Syrian oil sales and other financial transactions, collecting enormous fees made possible by the deviant economics of sanctions. Since these banks don't operate in London or New York, they are impervious to Western sanctions and can instead arbitrage against banks that play by the rules of the liberal world order.

The expanding heft of state-driven capitalist practices is another example. Sovereign wealth funds and other vehicles for state-directed finance are not new, but the volume of money sloshing around the emerging economies is unprecedented. And this government-directed finance is largely unregulated. The export-financing volume of the Export-Import Bank of China is estimated at more than that of the G-7 combined. While the Export-Import Bank of the United States is

governed by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's strict competitiveness and transparency rules and a tightly circumscribed congressional mandate, state financing elsewhere in the world need not play by the same rules. Why should it, when genuine integration into a liberal world order is so restrictive and costly, and when free riding on it is so beneficial?

Trade is typically thought to be the one international issue on which all agree in principle on the universal gains from liberal interdependence. But even here a number of emerging powers have routed around the existing system and charted their own course. We have demonstrated, using a gravity model of trade, that key emerging economies are preferentially trading more and more with each other, and shifting the



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of which players really matter in getting to an acceptable
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globe's economic center of gravity. When the BRICS—Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa—held their fourth annual summit in New Delhi in March 2012, they agreed on new measures to further deepen trade ties within the bloc. They also agreed on a deal to bypass the dollar—the linchpin of the liberal economic system—by extending credit facilities to each other in BRICS currencies. This follows on the heels of a growing network of bilateral currency swaps and agreements to settle trade accounts in nondollar currencies and commodities—between China and Russia; India and Iran; and China and Brazil, among others. On aggregate, the size of these currency-swap systems makes them harder to dismiss as a vanity play. These countries have yet to agree on how to set up a BRICS development bank to bypass the Bretton Woods institutions, but they have opened up talks on the matter.

It has now been more than a decade since China joined the World Trade Organization—more than enough time for liberal magnetism to have had a significant effect. Instead, China has used dispute-resolution procedures against others much more aggressively than it has liberalized its own practices. The rare-earths and alternative-energy sectors illustrate how China manages to advance its own strategic interests while pushing against the rules to see just how much give there is—playing to the letter of the law rather than to its spirit. This runs directly counter to the hopes of liberal internationalists that China would play a leadership role in breaking the decade-plus Doha deadlock.

Consider, too, efforts to strengthen the role of rules and institutions in the South China Sea, where the likelihood of near-term military conflict in East Asia is arguably the greatest. Based on a narrow reading of the challenge, the liberal solution is to pressure and prod China and other regional states to advance their claims in accordance with international maritime law. This strategy hinges on the application of the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea, which outgoing secretary of defense Leon Panetta has described as “the bedrock legal instrument underpinning public order across the maritime domain.” But the United States is not party to the convention. Even if it were, the agreement is silent on land-based sovereignty disputes, has no binding enforcement procedures and provides members with ample ways to opt out of participation in dispute-resolution mechanisms. The code of conduct being discussed between ASEAN and China would be no stronger in terms of providing hard rules and enforcement processes with teeth. The fundamental problem in the South China Sea is not China seeking to overturn some existing order or that China is refusing to integrate. It is that the prevailing order is so thin and weak as to be meaningless.

Routing around or arbitrating against the idea of the liberal world order has been an effective strategy for emerging powers seeking various objectives. Sometimes they simply want different outcomes from global governance. Brazil, China, India and South Africa brokered the deal they wanted with the United States at the Copenhagen

climate summit in 2009, successfully avoiding commitments to emissions caps. Sometimes key states are seeking simply to oppose Western freedom of action. (Russia has made an art of this.) And other times, they desire to break global-governance institutions so that they can ultimately reconfigure them in their own interests. In some cases, rather than arguing about their rules versus old rules, emerging powers prefer no rules at all. Routing around can be a combination, in mixed proportions, of all of these objectives—as illustrated by China and Russia vetoing multilateral action on Syria at the UN Security Council in July 2012.

What does this look like from a systemic perspective? Not what many Western analysts are looking for—that is, a cogent, coherent and comprehensive alternative order that does everything the liberal world order was supposed to do and one day snaps into place as a replacement package. We’ve never expected that, because in our view the nature of contemporary global competition is not about one order fighting to replace another, like the two mobile operating systems—Android and iOS—fighting it out for market dominance. A better understanding is to view the World Without the West’s strategies and choices as little bits of software code, partially completed beta-style apps, that countries mix and match, use and discard, upgrade and replace. Competition is not head-on, but indirect and oblique, and innovation is disruptive, not linear. Although the ordering principles of international politics in the developing world may not compute with the sophisticated “consumers” that espouse a liberal world order, they do appeal to, and provide tangible benefits for, a different and less developed constituency.

Disruptive innovation works when newcomers enter what looks like the low end of the market and then outpace the

current leader. This is the game being played now in international politics, and the fallout from the global financial crisis has quickened the pace and raised the stakes. Five years after the initial meltdown, the United States is mired in partisan gridlock that renders Washington unable to make a plausible commitment to address its unprecedented public-finance crater. The EU’s signature project of the last twenty years—the single currency—is at real risk of dissolution. By contrast, core players in the developing world have been the engine of growth for the world as Western economies wait for an elusive recovery. Consider as an obvious thought experiment what this landscape looks like to swing states in the developing world. Should a new post-Arab Spring regime clamor to join the liberal world order or look elsewhere as it constructs its new economy and state-society compact?

The real threat of disruptive innovation is the gradual siphoning of power, influence, resources and confidence from the West. This is in some sense a more insidious challenge because, in its subtlety, it is harder for leaders of liberal political systems to understand and deal with strategically. It fails to fit neatly into familiar solution categories for American foreign policy. The practical questions become how can and should the West respond.

The project of advancing liberal values is what matters, and it is too important to be yoked to a set of weakening, almost inert institutions. The obsession with world order is not helping the United States formulate foreign-policy objectives. We should stop trying to shore up an order that has failed to deliver on its promises and will only continue to disappoint.

Widening the reach of liberalism in human lives around the world deserves an approach that is oriented toward solving

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to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war, which twice in our lifetime has brought untold sorrow to mankind, and
to reaffirm faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person, in the equal rights of men and women and of nations large and small, and
to establish conditions under which justice and respect for the obligations arising from treaties and other sources of international law can be maintained, and
to promote social progress and better standards of life in larger freedom,

AND FOR THESE ENDS

to practice tolerance and live together in peace with one another as good neighbors, and
to unite our strength to maintain international peace and security, and

real problems and seeks to build liberal order from the ground up. Instead of defending the remit of universal multilateral institutions on the basis of chimerical advancements, let them give way, for the time being, to smaller coalitions that address specific challenges. The process of cobbling together coalitions and hammering out shared objectives—what we call “bargaining toward liberalism”—can provide a much more coherent source of collective action on international challenges and lay the foundations for a multigenerational liberal project.

Liberal internationalists like to say that “global problems require global solutions,” but that’s just not true. On most of the issues that matter, a solution worthy of the effort is possible through the cooperation of only a few countries, generally fewer than ten. The world doesn’t need big institutions to support that kind of bargaining. And foreign-policy makers don’t need concepts like a “concert of democracies” that constrain the bargaining game on the basis of regime type, or anything else.

Solving global challenges requires a hardheaded assessment of which players really matter in getting to an acceptable answer and a process of bargaining to get them aligned. And, on different issues,

different countries will matter more than others.

In some and perhaps many instances, this “coalition of the relevant” will need to find ways of legitimating the bargaining outcome to others. This can be tricky, but one thing is for sure—today’s big, multilateral global-governance institutions are not the right place to try to do that, since they are just not good at it anymore (if they ever were). It may be that performance and effective problem solving themselves serve as sufficient legitimation for a younger generation, outside the United States in particular, that is all too ready to jettison the irrelevant baggage of the postwar international system as it used to be and as only aging Americans and Europeans could be nostalgic about.

The core policy challenge within this new approach will probably be less about legitimation and more about how to minimize the losses, costs and damage done by countries that cheat and free ride, because some certainly will. Part of the answer is that the process of bargaining will factor this into the equation, so that any gains worthy of a consensus will have to outweigh the costs of free riding. We simply must let go of the dysfunctional assumption that mostly everyone has to be

on board to make a solution work and stick. That mind-set gives spoilers more leverage than they deserve. Instead, we should build the coalitions that demonstrate results and effectiveness, entice the reluctant to sign up for selective benefits and let them go if they won't.

The Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) trade agreement is a reasonable example of what bargaining toward liberalism looks like in practice. The pact, albeit a work in progress, has brought together nearly a dozen countries to devise a "gold standard" trade agreement for the twenty-first century. It is open to all who are willing to commit to a series of liberal economic and trade principles, and it holds the best promise for advancing a liberal trade agenda.

The TPP should stand not just as a model for future trade agreements but more broadly as a model for partial global governance. The relevant question for U.S. foreign-policy makers now is: Where can similar coalitions be constructed across the full spectrum of foreign-policy challenges, whether they are designed to address human rights, maritime safety, development or nonproliferation? Piecing together issue-by-issue solutions from the bottom up is a practical means by which committed partners can make visible progress on global challenges. Short-term but palpable results

are needed now and in some instances can be leveraged to tackle more difficult issues and possibly build broader coalitions. For example, nontraditional security threats such as natural disasters, trafficking in persons, counternarcotics and illegal fishing are ripe for delivering tangible benefits to participants and practicing the habits of collective action.

This, we believe, is the most effective way to advance liberal objectives and values at present. Can it work with America's domestic politics? We think so, because an ad hoc, problem-solving approach to global governance does not have to be postideological. Instead, it aims to deliver upon the goals that liberalism seeks to realize and to meet its aspirations through the pursuit of tangible results, not the pursuit of institutions or world-order solutions.

In this alternative framework, getting to a solution drives the form of collaboration rather than the other way around. We are advocating the pursuit of a multigenerational liberal project that can and should be advanced without the anxiety of trying to lock in interim gains through global institutions. Let's focus instead on laying the material foundations for a future liberal order—let the ideology follow, and the institutions after that. □