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EDITORIAL

Challenges to the ‘World Order’ of Liberal Internationalism: What Can We Learn?

Of the many crises that threaten stability in the world at the beginning of the twenty-first century, three in particular stand out: first, the crisis of climate change and global warming with ever-increasing levels of carbon emissions and cumulative environmental consequences; second, the structural crisis of the world financial system that continues to exist some six years after the 2007–2008 global meltdown; and third, the rise of non-state Islamic militants who are currently attempting to establish a caliphate in intersecting portion of Syria and Iraq and the risk of nuclear war in the Middle East.

In each case, the crisis belongs to a larger set of global problems and appears resistant to easy political, scientific, or diplomatic solutions. Take the case of the crisis of climate change fueled by increasing carbon levels. China now spews forth more than USA and Europe combined. The problem belongs to the larger set of problems that we can call long-term sustainability of the industrial growth model that damages prospects for world development and imperils transitional economies at exactly the point that they are ‘catching up’ with the West. Oil and gas are still king, even if there is some transition to the ‘cleaner’, non-polluting digital activities of the knowledge economy.

The global financial crisis (GFC) belongs to the larger problem set we can call the pervasiveness of finance capitalism that demonstrates a world out of balance. The impossibility of regulating or tracking the high-frequency trading (HFT) of automated financial transactions characterizes ‘cloud capitalism’. HFT is increasingly driven by messaging systems utilizing laser and other ‘instant’ technologies that place it effectively outside the ambit and control of nation-states and beyond the purview of inter-banking and international financial agencies. The GFC is part of the profound shift that has taken place since the mid-2000s to fully automated financial systems now controlled by sophisticated algorithms and mathematical modeling. The legacy of the GFC is still with us: the structural imbalance between the real productive global economy on the one hand and the world derivative markets on the other—the uncoupling of the productive sector and shadow banking and insurance that controls markets at a distance.

The third crisis of extremist Islamic insurgency that threatens ongoing insurgencies between Sunni and Shite, Israel and Palestine and has witnessed the rise of militant Islamic groups such as Al-Qaeda, al-Shabaab, and Boko Haram that wish to

systematically spread terrorism to all major continents. The risk of nuclear war in the Middle East region has increased markedly since the Arab Spring. The region faces almost unimaginable complexity in terms of the rise and sheer number of non-state actors. The historical stakes are very high in this region drawing in existing nuclear powers such as Israel, Pakistan, and possibly Iran, despite the promise of the recent agreement for a 'nuclear deal'. The current picture of the changing and confused alliances is far more risky and more complex than the Cold War peak event of the Bay of Pigs standoff between Soviet Russia and the United States of America. This third crisis represents the greater category of regional conflict and might equally register other possibilities of a Korean nuclear war, and perhaps, more importantly the possible future conflict between China as a rising power or Russia under a warmongering Putin and the hegemonic United States.

These are only three significant global crises that threaten the reality of world order and have deep implications for a workable concept. Yet each of them in their own way calls into question the very concept of world order as it has evolved as a hybrid of the European Westphalian state-system based on the notion of balance of power among equals and the US system of 'liberal internationalism' based on the active promotion of liberal democracy abroad. Each crisis poses a critical test for the system of liberal internationalism comprised of the present collection of institutions devoted to world governance. The three crises mentioned here—two truly global crises and a regional crisis that affects the world and has the potential to result in a 'limited' nuclear conflict drawing in other partners—are critical challenges also the very coherence and consistency of the concept of 'world order' in a nonpolar world marked by the rise of the non-state actor and the decline of US power. The crises—ecological, financial, and terroristic—are also interlinked.

In each case of crisis, the concept and reality of world order is threatened and an extreme threat is posed to American liberal internationalism. Kissinger's (2014) latest book *World Order* provides a recent introduction to the meaning of the concept of 'world order' and its various models and interpretations. It also raises the question of the relativity of 'world order' to a religious or cultural framing: Will Pax Americana endure? Does it have the capacity to recognize that 'liberal internationalism' may be failing?

Kissinger served under Richard Nixon as National Security Advisor and later Secretary of State for both Nixon and Ford. As an proponent of *Realpolitik*, he had significant impact over US foreign policy for almost a decade from 1969. His apologists mention his negotiation of the ceasefire during the Vietnam War, for which he received the Nobel Peace Prize in 1973, and the *détente* with the Soviet Union and the opening up of relations with China. His critics such as Christopher Hitchens (2012) suggests that he deserves prosecution for war crimes, for crimes against humanity and for offenses international law.¹ There are reports that as a ninety year old, he has been advising the White House over the Syrian crisis and a new *détente* with Russia.²

Whatever the assessment of Kissinger's foreign policy, there are very few like him, who as a statesman, diplomat and practicing academic and author over fifty years of engagement with world issues, make his seasoned views interesting and at least worth

considering. His most recent book is built upon this experience of working in international relations based on an undernational of the international system and himself having been a major players in past world crises.

Kissinger's (2014) *World Order* is an analysis of the crisis currently facing the concept of order as it underpins the modern era. As he points out, the fact is that there has never been a concept of world order accepted by all sovereign states. Indeed, the liberal internationalism promoted by Lord Palmerston as British Foreign Secretary in the early twentieth century and President Woodrow Wilson was designed to promote a form of intervention based on liberal principles. It was the means to encourage the architecture of global structures that were supposed to enhance the spread of liberal internationalist democratic politics: a liberal economic order including the free market together with the doctrine of global free trade, the Rule of Law with limited government at home, state sovereignty, and self-determination. This internationalist order was also credited with the encouragement of human rights and a form of internationalism that could be built by multilateral organizations after WWII like the United Nations aimed at eliminating the worst excesses of power politics.

This melange of principles and institutions stood opposed to isolationism, non-interventionism, and protectionism. Yet as Kissinger explains, 'While 'the international community' is invoked perhaps more insistently now than in any other era, it presents no clear or agreed set of goals, methods or limits. ... Chaos threatens side by side with unprecedented interdependence' (p. 2). The problem as Kissinger frames is that true world order has never really existed. The reality is that the Western powers imposed liberal internationalism progressively and successively after each World War and the Cold War, and yet, today a stable liberal system of sovereign states has never looked so vulnerable. Western powers designed the institutions and wrote the rules for the emerging international order, but the fact is that non-Western powers and emerging ones including China, Russia, India, and the Islamic world never really accepted them (or had the opportunity to amend or reject them). The concept of order that has underpinned the modern era, Kissinger asserts, is now in crisis—witness the collapse of Libya and other Arab states after being 'liberated'; Russia's aggression in the Ukraine and rising tensions with NATO and Europe; the Islamic State's attempt to impose a 'caliphate' in Syria and Northern Iraq; and the potential for conflict between US an a hegemonic power and the rising power of China.

To make matters worse, there seems little possibility of agreement on the shape of world order. Different civilizations have had there own versions, often based on the celestial and transcendent order of faith and religion, rather than on the empirical events of world history. These ethnocentric religious-based versions divide up the world into believers and non-believers (barbarians or infidels). There is to be no accommodation. What is more, these religious models of world order point to the final resolution only after the world ends when the 'day of judgement looms' and the moral worth of all deeds are toted up. The difficulty here is that Western empirical or historical models embrace a view of history and world view that is radically at odds with religious models operating on radically different accounts and assumptions of 'time' and 'history'.

Europe's 'Westphalian' balance of power that emerged after the Thirty Years War stumbled toward a series of three treaties in 1648 based on the principle *cuius regio, eius religio* roughly translated as 'Whose realm, his religion', which meant the religion of the ruler dictated the religion of the ruled. The Peace of Augsburg (1555) ended the armed conflict between Catholic and protestant forces and the principle of *Cuius regio, eius religio* provided for internal religious unity within a state in effect enshrining the concept of the nation-state with special status for the ecclesiastical states and legitimating the principle of peaceful coexistence within states. The balance of power left everything to itself. It provided for stability by protecting against hegemony, and it protected the independence of each state. It provided a minimum of order so that international law, diplomacy, rules of war, and free trade can flourish. The European Community is going beyond that minimalist vision today.

The American commitment to the democratic extension of the liberal international order is seen as 'an inexorably expanding cooperative order of states observing common rules and norms, embracing liberal economic systems, forswearing territorial conquest, respecting national sovereignty, and adopting participatory and democratic systems of governance'.

Kissinger's book is described as the summation of his 'thinking about history, strategy and statecraft' and is surprising in the message that the concept of world order cannot be simply made in the West's own image and yet little argument to cope with radically different pluralism at the level of concepts of world order. We might say that Kissinger raises and defines the problem—perhaps *the* problem of global survival—although he does not provide the basis for its resolution.

As Wolfgang Ischinger (2015) puts it in his review 'The World According to Kissinger: How to Defend Global Order',³ there are limitations to Kissinger's idealization of the Westphalian system:

Western ideas about states and politics have been foisted on other regions ever since colonial times, and they still compete with other, older visions of order and power that cannot be ignored.

This is certainly the case in the Middle East where the regional order based on European styled nation-states 'is threatened by transnational political Islam'.

While the international system is still dominated by the nation-state, Kissinger does give some credence to new globalizing forces including the global economy, the environment, and new information technologies, although these are considered secondary. And this is the problem: these new forces shaping the globe and also demanding global solutions to global problems are not easily addressed by the world's 206 sovereign states. It is evident that Kissinger feels less at home in this new world disorder and also less comfortable with its structuring forces outside the purview of sovereign politics. In the new environment, however, the problems have not subsided or diminished. If anything, they have multiplied and grown in complexity.

Clinton's (2014) affirmative review of Kissinger's book testifies to the welter of problems and new threats:

When I walked into the State Department in January 2009, everyone knew that it was a time of dizzying changes, but no one could agree on what they all meant. Would the economic crisis bring new forms of cooperation or a return to protectionism and discord? Would new technologies do more to help citizens hold leaders accountable or to help dictators keep tabs on dissidents? Would rising powers such as China, India and Brazil become global problem-solvers or global spoilers? Would the emerging influence of non-state actors be defined more by the threats from terrorist networks and criminal cartels, or by the contributions of courageous NGOs? Would growing global interdependence bring a new sense of solidarity or new sources of strife?

In this context, Clinton makes references to Obama's acceptance speech for the Nobel Prize where he talks of new threats and the history and legal codification of the ancient 'kill or be killed' principle that translated into concepts of just war and just peace. Both Obama and Clinton focused on managing the peaceful rise of new powers especially in Asia through the promotion of universal norms and values. Kissinger attempts to demonstrate that 'world order' is a contingent notion, an incomplete one, yet while being a cultural and historical artifact is also the best we have so far evolved.

Yet the Litmus test for liberal internationalism to their response and handling of the three challenges mentioned at the beginning of this article. While there has been a stronger approach to regulation of world finance and a series of fines issued to big banks for the deliberate manipulation of the Libor rate and systematic fraud, the deeper aspects of the structural crisis represented by GFC have not been recognized. The effects of the Financial Global Crisis as still with us and 'financialization', a term that describes an economic system or process that attempts to reduce all value that is exchanged (whether tangible, intangible, future or present promises, etc.), either into a financial instrument or a derivative of a financial instrument, is a process taking place as an aspect of increased symbolization, mathematization, and computerization of financial markets that are trends within knowledge capitalism. Contemporary forms of neoliberalism are the expression of the power of finance that has gathered pace with the internationalization of capital and the globalization of markets. Neoliberalism and globalization are themselves expressions of finance, closely tied to the development of derivatives markets and the evolution of an international financial system where the international rentiers have managed to significantly increase their share of national income often on the basis of systematic fraud, corruption, and widespread criminalization of financial practices. The current financial crisis is a systemic crisis of the entire capitalistic system based on interconnected global financial markets.

Global warming and rising carbon emissions have led to the discussion of the emergence of the concept Anthropocene, a concept that registers that the human imprint on the global environment has now become powerful that it rivals some of the great forces of Nature. The global-scale human influence on the environment and its impact on the functioning of the Earth system constitute a new epoch in Earth history and demand new and immediate proposals for managing our relationship with the

large geophysical cycles driving the Earth's climate system. As Paul J. Crutzen and Christian Schwägerl (2011) argue in 'Living in the Anthropocene: Toward a New Global Ethos':

It's a pity we're still officially living in an age called the Holocene. The Anthropocene—human dominance of biological, chemical and geological processes on Earth — is already an undeniable reality. Evidence is mounting that the name change suggested by one of us more than ten years ago is overdue. It may still take some time for the scientific body in charge of naming big stretches of time in Earth's history, the International Commission on Stratigraphy, to make up its mind about this name change. But that shouldn't stop us from seeing and learning what it means to live in this new Anthropocene epoch, on a planet that is being anthroposized at high speed. http://e360.yale.edu/feature/living_in_the_anthropocene_toward_a_new_global_ethos_/2363

What can liberal internationalism learn from the environmental crisis about a new kind of problem that does not conform to criteria of traditional international relations and can it learn fast enough to avert irreversible damage? Crutzen and Schwägerl (2011) make the following suggestions:

First, we must learn to grow in different ways than with our current hyper-consumption. What we now call economic 'growth' amounts too often to a Great Recession for the web of life we depend on.

Second, we must far surpass our current investments in science and technology. Our troubles will deepen exponentially if we fail to replace the wasteful fossil-fueled infrastructure of today with a system fueled by solar energy in its many forms, from artificial photosynthesis to fusion energy. We need bio-adaptive technologies to render 'waste' a thing of the past, among them compostable cars and gadgets ... We must invest at least as much in understanding, managing, and restoring our 'green security system'—the intricate network of climate, soil, and biodiversity.

Finally, we should adapt our culture to sustaining what can be called the 'world organism'.

In line with these imperatives, liberal internationalism fails badly. While it has made some efforts, the world is still controlled too much by and in the interests of the 'oil and gas' monolithic behemoths.

One might be forgiven in thinking that the issue concerning the rise of Islamic State and the growing risk of nuclear war in the Middle East region is a cap feather in Obama's foreign policy, especially with his initiative to reach a deal with Iran to resolve the nuclear issue and to break down the isolation of the Republic. Obama called the preliminary agreement reached in Switzerland a 'historic understanding' that would prevent Iran from obtaining nuclear weapons, while getting relief from international sanctions. Obama is quoted as saying the 'If this framework leads to the final deal, it would make our country, allies and the world safer'. Obama's Iran policy is the centerpiece of his liberal internationalism. He spells out the reasons very clearly:

We do not want to see a nuclear arms race in one of the most volatile regions in the world. We do not want the possibility of a nuclear weapon falling into the hands of terrorists. And we do not want a regime that has been a state sponsor of terrorism being able to feel that it can act even more aggressively or with impunity as a consequence of its nuclear power.⁴

The global effort to meet the single great threat in urgency—securing, destroying, and stopping the spread of weapons of mass destruction—has always been a strategic objective of Obama, at least since 2009, as well as rebuilding and constructing the alliances and partnerships necessary to meet common challenges and confront common threats.

In a recent interview, Obama indicated the current position in the aftermath of the GCC summit:

What we saw at the GCC summit was, I think, legitimate skepticism and concern, not simply about the Iranian nuclear program itself but also the consequences of sanctions coming down. We walked through the four pathways that would be shut off in any agreement that I would be signing off on. Technically, we showed them how it would be accomplished—what the verification mechanisms will be, how the UN snapback provisions [for sanctions] might work. They were satisfied that if in fact the agreement meant the benchmarks that we've set forth, that it would prevent Iran from getting a nuclear weapon, and given that, they understand that ultimately their own security and defense is much better served by working with us. Their covert—presumably—pursuit of a nuclear program would greatly strain the relationship they've got with the United States.⁵

Obama's 'world order' is conventional liberal internationalism. He opines that 'Throughout human history, societies have grappled with fundamental questions of how to organize themselves, the proper relationship between the individual and the state, the best means to resolve the inevitable conflicts between states'. He first highlights the European democratic way based upon a set of ideals that privileges the belief that through conscience and free will, each of us has the right to live as we choose, the belief that power is derived from the consent of the governed and that laws and institutions should be established to protect that understanding.⁶ He contrasts this American-European view with a more traditional of power where 'individuals surrender their rights to an all-powerful sovereign'. And he spells out the major tenants of a liberal internationalism based on freedom, democracy, free markets, and a rights-based approach to international law:

I believe that over the long haul as nations that are free, as free people, the future is ours. I believe this not because I'm naive. And I believe this not because of the strength of our arms or the size of our economies. I believe this because these ideals that we affirm are true. These ideals are universal.

Yes, we believe in democracy, with elections that are free and fair, and independent judiciaries and opposition parties, civil society and uncensored

information so that individuals can make their own choices. Yes, we believe in open economies based on free markets and innovation and individual initiative and entrepreneurship and trade and investment that creates a broader prosperity.

And yes, we believe in human dignity, that every person is created equal—no matter who you are or what you look like or who you love or where you come from. That is what we believe. That’s what makes us strong. And our enduring strength is also reflected in our respect for an international system that protects the rights of both nations and people—a United Nations and a Universal Declaration of Human Rights, international law and the means to enforce those laws.

The question is how does liberal internationalism cope with the philosophical issue of competing conceptions of ‘world order’ and practically how well does it measure up the major practical challenges to liberal internationalism in terms of the crises of climate change, of GFC and its aftermath, and the rise of extreme Islamic militant terrorism and risk of nuclear war.

Notes

1. In this regard, Julian Assange’s release of State department cables signed by Kissinger during the 1970s certainly offers some hard evidence of his incendiary opinions; see <http://www.bbc.com/news/magazine-22095116>.
2. See Sean O’Grady’s (2015) column in *The Independent* at <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/people/profiles/henry-kissinger-a-diplomatic-colossus-who-is-still-a-key-influence-in-us-amid-syria-crisis-8815533.html>.
3. <http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/143062/wolfgang-ischinger/the-world-according-to-kissinger>.
4. See the Iran Dossier at <http://www.uspolicy.be/dossier/iran-united-states-policy-toward-iran-dossier>.
5. See the interview with Jeffrey Goldberg for *The Atlantic* on the 21st May, 2015: <http://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2015/05/obama-interview-iran-isis-israel/393782/#ISIS>.
6. Obama’s speech addressing Europe and Russia on March 25, 2015, at http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/transcript-president-obama-gives-speech-addressing-europe-russia-on-march-26/2014/03/26/07ae80ae-b503-11e3-b899-20667de76985_story.html.

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