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“THINK LOCALLY, ACT GLOBALLY”

The Slow Erosion of the US Liberal Order

By Kevin Doremus

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ABSTRACT

Liberalism has been the dominant philosophy in recent debates about the role of the United States' leadership on the international stage. A foreign policy of liberal hegemony or primacy has grown out of progressive-liberalism where the US is an activist country with the objective of providing global security, global capitalism, democracy, and peace. The combination of universal liberal values with the unmatched US military power leads to advocates ignoring the historical and cultural contexts of other countries. The unintended consequences of progressive-liberal policies on the international stage is a rise of illiberal political movements. If liberalism does not become inward thinking, the belief in universal values may be its downfall.

Introduction

The foreign policy of the United States has more or less been the same from one administration to another. The foreign policy establishment, a bipartisan consensus, firmly believes that U.S. primacy or U.S. global leadership can ensure global security and economic stability. Examinations of grand strategy are absent from public attention and resides almost exclusively in the academic world. If the political class was having a debate, it would be limited to “how to implement primacy rather than alternative grand strategies.”¹ This paper argues that the national ideology of the U.S. limits policymaker’s ability to assess geopolitical realities.

¹ Benjamin H. Friedman and Justin Logan, “Why Washington Doesn’t Debate Grand Strategy,” *Strategic Studies Quarterly* 10, no. 4 (2016): 14.

The U.S. national ideology, what I will call progressive-liberalism, believes that politics should be rationally justified and if it cannot be it should be rejected. Primacists make empirical pronouncements about how the world operates while never providing evidence to support their argument. This motivates an epistemic hubris against realistic experience and binds policymakers to a limited toolkit, exogenous response to an endogenous process. When analyzing U.S. from the end of the Cold War to the present, one could argue that primacy, also known as liberal hegemony, has weakened the U.S.'s position on the international stage.

Primacists argue that the U.S. needs to be the hegemon in the current international system, the liberal international order. The interests of the U.S. are not just security concerns, but also are “to defend and promote a range of values associated with Western society” such as global security, global capitalism, democracy, and peace.² The origins of the concept of making the world safe for democracy is commonly placed on Woodrow Wilson, however other scholars point to Theodore Roosevelt’s “Progressive Imperialism.”³ Both liberal hegemony and progressive imperialism saw the anarchic nature of international politics as a corrupting force. It would be a dramatic shift if the U.S. foreign policy was to abandon the progressive-liberal ideology it has embraced in a long time.

In this paper, I present how progressive-liberalism harms U.S. foreign policymaking. As an ideology that claims universal status, the underlying assumption is that a regime type tells an analyst more about a country than its history and culture. First, I describe progressive imperialism and liberal hegemony and demonstrate how they are influential in grand strategy

² Barry R. Posen, *Restraint: A New Foundation for U.S. Grand Strategy*, Reprint edition (Ithaca; London: Cornell University Press, 2015), 6.

³ Edward Rhodes, “The Search for Monsters to Destroy: Theodore Roosevelt, Republican Virtue, and the Challenge of Liberal Democracy in an Industrial Society,” in *US Grand Strategy in the 21st Century*, 1st Edition (New York: Routledge, 2018), 162.

formation. Second, I will compare the U.S. to Athens from the Peloponnesian War and describe how liberal hubris undermines U.S. national interests. Third, I will propose that the policymakers should adopt an ideology that considers the cultural and historical context of the “other.” At a minimum, the foreign policy establishment needs to have a more realistic outlook on international politics. By this I mean that decision-makers needs to be tolerant of the diverse histories and cultures that exist.

Defining Liberalism

To start it is important to provide the definition for liberalism. Liberalism as a concept is rooted in the cultures of the Holy Roman Empire and Greco-Roman culture.⁴ As a western idea. the central notion of the ideology is “the elimination of all that threatens the survival of individual freedom and impedes it development.”⁵ One reason is the belief that humans are not perfectible and are cognitively limited in regards to “planning beyond the very short term and outside a circle of immediate reasons.”⁶

Over time liberalism fragmented into many different variants. Decedents of traditional liberalism are classical liberals, libertarians, conservatives, neoconservatives, social liberals, and progressives. Two strands of liberalism formed: one advocates a universal regime, while another advances pluralism and coexistence.⁷ When pertaining to international relations, liberals do not fall into a specific category. Liberals, depending on the what variant, can be realists, liberals,

⁴ Andrei P. Tsygankov, *The Dark Double: US Media, Russia, and the Politics of Values*, Paperbacka (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019), 11; Victor Leontovitsch, *The History of Liberalism in Russia* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2012), 1, <https://www.upress.pitt.edu/books/9780822944157/>; Edwin van de Haar, *Classical Liberalism and International Relations Theory: Hume, Smith, Mises, and Hayek*, The Palgrave Macmillan History of International Thought (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 17.

⁵ Victor Leontovitsch, *The History of Liberalism in Russia*, 1.

⁶ van de Haar, *Classical Liberalism and International Relations Theory: Hume, Smith, Mises, and Hayek*, 20.

⁷ John Gray, *Two Faces of Liberalism*, Paperback (New York: The New Press, 2000), 2–9.

constructivists, or liberal realists (English School). For the purpose of this paper I am going to define liberalism in the context of the international relations literature. This means focusing on the liberal school of international relations in which social liberals, progressives, and neoconservatives fall under.

Liberals in this case will be described as those who are supporters of a grand strategy of primacy and democratic peace. I am aware there are progressive realists, however I would still consider them liberals because they “have excessive faith in international norms, little real appreciation of power’s uses and limits, and minimal interest in foreign policy...”⁸ While there are differences between progressives and neoconservatives, the disagreements relate more to what methods to use.⁹ Michael Desch summarizes the distinctions, “Neoconservatives are far more unilateralists than Liberals, who believe that the United States ought conduct its foreign policy in a multilateral framework under the auspices of international institutions.”¹⁰

Liberals are followers of what is called democratic peace. Writers such as Immanuel Kant, Norman Angell, Richard Cobden, and Robert Keohane discuss the possibilities of a liberal zone of peace.¹¹ Democratic peace theory rests on “human rationality, man’s capability of maintaining peace, the ability to overcome power politics, and the peace-enhancing effects of trade.”¹² U.S. presidents like former presidents Woodrow Wilson, Bill Clinton, George W. Bush, and Barack Obama also were supporters and believed the U.S. could be a tool to spread

⁸ John Gray, *Two Faces of Liberalism*, Paperback (New York: The New Press, 2000), 2.

⁹ Friedman and Logan, “Why Washington Doesn’t Debate Grand Strategy.”

¹⁰ Michael C. Desch, “America’s Liberal Illiberalism: The Ideological Origins of Overreaction in U.S. Foreign Policy,” *International Security* 32, no. 3 (January 1, 2008): 20, <https://doi.org/10.1162/isec.2008.32.3.7>.

¹¹ van de Haar, *Classical Liberalism and International Relations Theory: Hume, Smith, Mises, and Hayek*, 146–47; Erik Gartzke, “The Capitalist Peace,” *American Journal of Political Science* 51, no. 1 (2007): 166–91; John R. Oneal et al., “The Liberal Peace: Interdependence, Democracy, and International Conflict, 1950-85,” *Journal of Peace Research* 33, no. 1 (1996): 11–28.

¹² van de Haar, *Classical Liberalism and International Relations Theory: Hume, Smith, Mises, and Hayek*, 147.

liberal values. It is understood that liberal states do not go to war against one another, due to constraints from public opinion, democratic institutions and economic interdependence. Edwin van de Haar describes this social transformation:

Individuals are seen as able to improve their conditions, because their reason enables them to understand their interests are best served in a situation of human harmony and a world without conflicts. [Followers of democratic peace] believe people are able to overcome or neutralize the bad influences of the human vices and therefore have the potential to achieve this better world.¹³

In terms of economics, democratic peace encourages a capitalist peace. Kant wrote that “For the spirit of commerce sooner or later takes hold of every people, and it cannot exist side by side with war.”¹⁴ Patrick McDonald argues that free trade between states results in “the emergence of common political interests among societies stemming from mutual economic dependence.”¹⁵ Globalization is thought to create a global cosmopolitan identity and economic incentives would make war-making too costly.

In regards to domestic politics, democratic peace impacts states by making “states try harder if there is a war and it makes leaders more selective about the disputes they are prepared to escalate to warfare.”¹⁶ Leaders of democratic states would only be willing to engage in war if they knew there was a significant chance of winning. The domestic constraints would punish the leader if they were to lose. When it comes to two democracies in a dispute, armed conflict is off the table because leaders would have to risk political defeat. Democracies would rather

¹³ van de Haar, 10.

¹⁴ Immanuel Kant, Donna M. Brinton, and Janet M. Goodwin, *Kant: Political Writings* (Cambridge University Press, 1991), 114.

¹⁵ Patrick J. McDonald, *The Invisible Hand of Peace: Capitalism, the War Machine, and International Relations Theory*, Reprinted (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 33.

¹⁶ Bruce Bueno de Mesquita et al., *The Logic of Political Survival*, Paperback (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2005), 243.

negotiate with each other and the leaders can control the narrative so that they can appease their base to stay in power.¹⁷

Thirty years since the end of the Cold War, it would appear that liberal peace is based on wishful thinking. The economic argument that trade produces peace misrepresents liberal economics, especially Adam Smith's thesis. Liberal economists such as David Hume and Adam Smith never argued for perpetual peace. David Hume has a skeptical view of human nature is "enslaved by the passions..."¹⁸ States are not always going to act rationally, some states may forgo trade in the name of a higher purpose. While it is nice to focus on the economic incentives not all actors value cooperation the same way.

Progressive imperialism

For non-interventionists, President Woodrow Wilson is blamed for changing the nature of US foreign policy. However, the evolution of US foreign policy did not develop towards an activist foreign policy overnight. It originally grew out of a mission to repair the US itself. During the 1890s, the US faced social unrest following the depression of 1893. In addition to economic issues, some people were concerned that the social fabric of the US was eroding due to "urbanization, industrialization, immigration, and the reincorporation of the South..."¹⁹ There was also a growing separation between the urban and rural areas of the United States. To solve this problem, Theodore Roosevelt and other progressives thought of a way to unify the country.

Edward Rhodes explains how Theodore Roosevelt's progressive imperialism unshackled the U.S. for its constraints to become a moral crusader. One observation is

¹⁷ Bruce Bueno de Mesquita et al., 264.

¹⁸ Edwin van de Haar, "The Liberal Divide over Trade, Peace and War," *International Relations* 24, no. 2 (June 1, 2010): 140–46, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0047117809362401>.

¹⁹ Rhodes, "The Search for Monsters to Destroy: Theodore Roosevelt, Republican Virtue, and the Challenge of Liberal Democracy in an Industrial Society," 163.

that originally adventures abroad were designed “to respond to the social transformation taking place...the American social fabric was ripping apart.”²⁰ Roosevelt’s solution was to find lofty and challenging goals for the American public. The goal Roosevelt had in mind was to instill people with the virtues of self-government and “bring order out of chaos.”²¹ He compared America’s mission to that of England:

England’s rule of India and Egypt has been of great benefit to England, for it has trained up generations of men accustomed to look at the larger and loftier side of public life. It has been of even greater benefit to India and Egypt. And our duty aright in the Philippines, we will add to that national renown which is the highest and finest part of national life, we will greatly benefit the people of the Philippine Islands, and, above all, we will play our part well in the great work of uplifting mankind.²²

To prevent liberalism from decaying the American Republic, Roosevelt proposed a solution which was to engineer virtuous people. This was his “Make American Great Again” program. Roosevelt appealed to Americans of the past:

The old days were great because the men who lived in them had mighty qualities; and we must make the new days great by showing these same qualities. We must insist upon courage and resolution, upon hardihood, tenacity, and fertility in resource; we must insist upon the strong virile virtues; and we must insist no less upon the virtues of self-restraint, self-mastery, regard for the rights of others; we must show our abhorrence of cruelty, brutality, and corruption, in public and in

²⁰ Rhodes, 163.

²¹ Rhodes, 174 and 179.

²² Theodore Roosevelt, “The Strenuous Life: Speech before the Hamilton Club, Chicago, April 10, 1899,” accessed August 9, 2019, https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/The_Strenuous_Life.

private life alike. If...we develop these qualities in the future to an even greater degree than in the past, then in the century now beginning we shall make of this Republic the freest and most orderly, the most just and most mighty, nation which has ever come forth from the womb of time.²³

According to Edward Rhodes, “To Roosevelt’s way of thinking, earlier American generations had in fact been blessed by the challenges that history placed before them.”²⁴ The challenge or task that Roosevelt set for the US was activism. The ambitious goal targeted backward societies such as the Philippines, Cuba, and Puerto Rico.

Today, US foreign policymaking is not concerned with domestic issues as Roosevelt was. Instead, the ends and means are flipped. The early progressives sought to restore virtue to US life, while President Wilson and other progressive-liberals meant to bring American attributes to the rest of the world at the expense of American life.

Progressive Christianity

The unintended consequence of Roosevelt’s progressivism was that it laid the groundwork for Woodrow Wilson and liberal internationalists. The ‘search for monsters to destroy’ to rebuild the social fabric transitioned to ‘making the world safe for democracy.’²⁵ Ricard Gamble portrays the transition as ‘the rise of a messianic nation.’ Leading up to the U.S. involvement in World War I, Progressive Christianity also known as the social gospel rose to adapt the Abrahamic religion to modern times.²⁶ The mutation lead to the advocacy of helping

²³ United States. President (1901-1909 : Roosevelt), *Addresses and Presidential Messages of Theodore Roosevelt, 1902-1904* (New York, London : G.P. Putman’s Sons, 1904), <http://archive.org/details/cabotlodgeroose00theorich>.

²⁴ Rhodes, “The Search for Monsters to Destroy: Theodore Roosevelt, Republican Virtu, and the Challenge of Liberal Democracy in an Industrial Society,” 167.

²⁵ Richard M. Gamble, *The War for Righteousness: Progressive Christianity, the Great War, and the Rise of the Messianic Nation*, Paperback (Wilmington, Del.: Intercollegiate Studies Institute, 2003), 64.

²⁶ Gamble, 43.

and occasionally intervening in backwards nations.²⁷ Advocates argued Americans were given a divine calling from God to spread progressive values. Progressive Christianity asserts that U.S. policy should be “guided by abstract notions of universal democracy and permanent peace, a world order benevolently led and dominated by America.”²⁸

Progressive Christianity not only thought of bringing peace to the world but also establishing global justice. Church leaders such as Josiah Strong, argued that the establishment of the kingdom of God “included bringing international relations under the rule of Christian ideals as part of its progressive reign. He saw internationalism as the logical application of social gospel ideals.”²⁹ Ideally all Christian nations would be pacifists, but peace has to be built first.³⁰

The creation of peace was the US’ “transcendent service to humanity.”³¹ In the minds of the clergy, World War I represented a threat to the Christianization of the world. While some clergy still held to pacifism, Richard Gamble points out that most failed to see how they primed America for war by assigning the US the role of redeemer and claiming Germany was doing the work of the devil.³² This service was supposed to “purge humanity of almost every imaginable evil, from selfishness, to materialism to nationalism to paganism.”³³

As progressivism has evolved and advocated for secularism, it still maintains its ideological roots from Progressive Christianity. The result of ideas such as democratic peace being institutionalized into modern political thought has created a hubris. Liberalism in the U.S. has become absolutist and imperialistic to some degree. Similar to John Mearsheimer’s, **The**

²⁷ Gamble, 70.

²⁸ Gamble, 73.

²⁹ Gamble, 73.

³⁰ Gamble, 109.

³¹ Gamble, 150.

³² Gamble, 178–79.

³³ Gamble, 182–83.

Great Delusion, Victor Leontovitsch in 1957 contended that western liberalism would evolve into democratic absolutism or imperial democracy.³⁴

Problems with Democratic Peace

Democratic peace theory faces some inconsistencies. New terms are created to make sure the theory can still work. An example of this is the ‘bifurcated democracy’ or Wilhelmine Germany.³⁵ John Owen points out that liberal states “must consider the foreign state a liberal democracy.”³⁶ Even if a country has democratic institutions, there is still the possibility of it not being labelled as a democracy for the sake of the argument.

The quest for democratic peace has resulted in a rise of illiberal cosmopolitanism. Due to the vague and abstract writings of Immanuel Kant, interpretations of his categorical imperative and “unjust enemies” has led some liberals to believe that the U.S. should be a benign hegemon. For peace to happen in the international system, states would have to leave the state of nature, which is brutish and immoral. States would be required to embrace liberal values and be formed by representative governments. If there were some actors who refused to leave the state of nature, it was the duty of liberal states to intervene and bring representation. This belief is at the foundation of liberal foreign policy prescriptions.³⁷

Actions from U.S. presidents demonstrate that interventionism has always been part of the U.S.’s national ideology. Clinton introduced the notion that universal human rights were part of the U.S. national interests. President Bush and the neoconservatives argued that a democratic Middle East would bring peace and stability. President Obama said in his final address to the

³⁴ Victor Leontovitsch, *The History of Liberalism in Russia*, 10–14.

³⁵ Christopher Layne, “Kant or Cant: The Myth of the Democratic Peace,” *International Security* 19, no. 2 (1994): 41–42.

³⁶ John M. Owen, “How Liberalism Produces Democratic Peace,” *International Security* 19, no. 2 (1994): 96.

³⁷ Desch, “America’s Liberal Illiberalism.”

United Nations that people were facing a choice between a cosmopolitan world or a world with regionalism and violence. Robert Kagan said that:

The US is a liberal, progressive society through and through, and to the extent that Americans believe in power, they believe it must be a means of advancing the principles of liberal civilization and a liberal world order.³⁸

Along the same line, Michael Desch compares President. Bush to President Wilson. He argues that Bush and Wilson shared the similar premises “that fostering democracy is more important than maintaining stability.”³⁹

Liberal Hubris

Liberals have embraced a rationalist constructivist view of the world. This view believes that all knowledge derives through reason with no recognition of cultural and historical influences. People are assumed to be predictable, and if the right political system exists, perpetual peace is obtainable. Power politics would not be relevant if there is a political structure that allows people to rationally pursue their preferences with little interference by others. Followers of the Wilsonian and Kantian traditions believe that a liberal order can subvert the anarchic nature of international politics.⁴⁰

One issue the rationalist constructivists face is that there is no single universal standard. J. Samuel Barkin points out that, "Actors can create social structures through practice, but this does not mean that they can create any social structure they want to. They may well

³⁸ Robert Kagan, “Power and Weakness,” Hoover Institution, June 1, 2002, <https://www.hoover.org/research/power-and-weakness>.

³⁹ Desch, “America’s Liberal Illiberalism,” 20–25.

⁴⁰ Desch, “America’s Liberal Illiberalism”; Layne, “Kant or Cant”; J. Samuel Barkin, *Realist Constructivism: Rethinking International Relations Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010); John Mearsheimer, *The Great Delusion: Liberal Dreams and International Realities*, Hardcover (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2018).

have their own internal logics."⁴¹ Local cultural and historical contexts influence the local social structure. Virgil Henry Storr and Laura Grube reference Max Weber were they argue that types of capitalism can vary depending on the social structures that exist.⁴² The capitalist system in North America and Western Europe is influenced by western Christianity, where Confucianism influences the Chinese market economy. To have a universal standard, rationalist constructivists would have fundamentally change the current makeup of the world where different nations operate using different traditions.

A universal standard is a must for liberals. It is an a priori assumption that countries will act a certain way.⁴³ The reason for this thinking is due to the assumption that illiberal, autocratic, and nondemocracies are a threat to liberal democracies. Liberals argue that domestic regime types influence a country's foreign policy. Nonliberal states are thought to be self-interested and aggressive, which threatens the mission of spreading liberal institutions and values. To achieve a world safe for liberal democracies, it is imperative for the US to use its military power.

A liberal study of international politics is not reflexive. "We do everything right, they don't," is a common belief because the ideology is not aware of its limits.⁴⁴ Reflexivity recognizes that "one's analysis will be inherently biased to one's perspective" and that one cannot claim to understand the mindset of the adversary fully.⁴⁵ Democratic Peace Theory is asocial because it argues that if two countries have a specific type of government (democracy), a war between the two will not happen. The theory assumes that "individuals either will not act outside

⁴¹ J. Samuel Barkin, *Realist Constructivism: Rethinking International Relations Theory*, 37.

⁴² Virgil Henry Storr and Laura Grube, "Introduction," in *New Thinking in Austrian Political Economy*, Advances in Austrian Economics 19 (Emerald Group Publishing, n.d.), 28.

⁴³ J. Samuel Barkin, *Realist Constructivism: Rethinking International Relations Theory*, 57.

⁴⁴ "Jaw-Jaw: When It Comes to China, America Doth Protest Too Much, David Kang Thinks," War on the Rocks, April 30, 2019, <https://warontherocks.com/2019/04/jaw-jaw-when-it-comes-to-china-america-doth-protest-too-much-david-kang-thinks/>.

⁴⁵ J. Samuel Barkin, *Realist Constructivism: Rethinking International Relations Theory*, 88.

of structurally determined scripts, or that such actions will not affect outcomes in international politics."⁴⁶ There is no consideration of how culture or history influences how people act because peace theory assumes democratic government overrides those influences. Similar to Progressive Christianity, Progressive-liberals see that human nature as perfectible.

Liberalism assumes that it can transplant its model to the Middle East and other parts of the world without considering the local context. Imam Mohammad Tawhidi writes how Western understanding is severely limited due its lack of literature, however at the same time, the literature is increasing.⁴⁷ While Islamic reformers speak of *zakat* correlation with democratic principles, "there has been no printed review of the Quran..."⁴⁸ In addition popular Muslim reformers claim that their ideas are based off people and not the holy books.⁴⁹ It should not be surprising that when it comes to analysis, people with knowledge of specific regions "are easily outnumbered by those who have the technical knowledge, nuclear weapons knowledge, or arms control knowledge."⁵⁰ This leads to a Thucydides' Trap.

The Thucydides' Trap

The study of history is one way to learn from the past. Students can learn the evolutions of modern political thought and how events can impact a societies trajectory. When it comes to foreign policymaking, many of the policy proposals originate out of thinking from the Western European and North American experience.

⁴⁶ J. Samuel Barkin, 106.

⁴⁷ Imam Mohammad Tawhidi, *The Tragedy of Islam: Admissions of a Muslim Imam*, Paperback (Adelaide: Reason Books International, 2018).

⁴⁸ Tawhidi, 323.

⁴⁹ Tawhidi, 324.

⁵⁰ Big Think, *Is War with China Inevitable? | David Kang*, 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s5cU9ebJ3VU>.

Citing Thucydides' History of the Peloponnesian War, the cause of the war was "the growth of power of Athens and the fear this inspired in Lacedaemon."⁵¹ As the dominant power, the US seeks to have international norms that are as close to its liberal national values. A rising China would like international standards to be compatible with its Confucian national values. The US does not consider Chinese interests but sees a rising China as a threat to its liberal hegemony.

Interpretations of Thucydides' history vary. According to David Kang, applying western history across the world is a flawed approach because "there is a lot of East Asian history that does not look anything like European history."⁵² A policy influenced by Thucydides' *History of the Peloponnesian War* may not be applicable in Asia. However, Thucydides can still provide some lessons. Scholars such as Lowell Gustafson sees the US as Athens. Athens' arrogance after its previous victories led to an attempt to conquer Sicily, an island that the leaders were unaware of its size and inhabitants. An Athenian general Nicias warned that Athens might be over expanding: "success comes from foresight and not much as even granted simply by wishing for it."⁵³ In the end, the Athenians defeat, should serve as a warning to the US.

The US is similar to Athens. The fall of the Soviet Union created the idea that liberal democracy was the final form of government. As the single superpower, a belief grew over time it had the moral duty to spread liberal values across the world. For example, the US intervened in the Balkans, secondly, was the integration of the Central and Eastern European countries into

⁵¹ Lowell S. Gustafson, "Introduction," in *Thucydides' Theory of International Relations: A Lasting Possession*, ed. Lowell S. Gustafson (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2000), 8.

⁵² Big Think, *Is War with China Inevitable?*

⁵³ Thomas Waldman, "War, Clausewitz and the Trinity," Google Book, February 17, 2016, https://books.google.com.sg/books?id=X7yXCwAAQBAJ&pg=PT190&lpg=PT190&dq=%22success+comes+from+for+esight+%22+Nicias&source=bl&ots=wLPgQmn_Vo&sig=ACfU3U3ntVCMd2xkQGP-ozxS-ula3Q5d8Q&hl=en&sa=X&redir_esc=y#v=onepage&q=%22success%20comes%20from%20foresight%20%22%20Nicias&f=false.

NATO and the European Union, and finally, the US shifted its attention to The Greater Middle East by assisting in overthrowing illiberal governments. This created a problem of overextension.

A Fragile Liberal Sphere

The US is similar to Athens. The fall of the Soviet Union created the idea that liberal democracy was the final form of government. As the single superpower a belief grew over time it was a moral duty to spread liberal values across the world. The US intervened in the Balkans, second, was the integration of the Central and Eastern European countries into NATO and the European Union and finally, the US shifted its attention to The Greater Middle East assisting in overthrowing illiberal governments. This created a problem of overextension.

As the US shifted its attention to The Greater Middle East it failed to secure its ideological presence in Central Europe.⁵⁴ The result is an ever-expanding order that did not solidify itself in its newest territories. The lack of solidifying its sphere of influence means that the liberal order is fragile and can fragment quickly.

Central Europe is now in what Kevin J. McNamara called a foreign policy triangle. The issues stem from historical/cultural differences and a clash between progressive and post-socialist values.⁵⁵ McNamara writes that western policymakers “do not seem to recognize that Central European nations hold different perspectives, nor do they see any need to change course.”⁵⁶ The result is that 37% of Czechs, 23% of Slovaks, 42% of Poles, and 45% of

⁵⁴ Kevin Doremus, “Central and Eastern Europe’s Growing Borderlands · 71 Republic,” 71 Republic, May 14, 2019, <https://71republic.com/2019/05/14/central-eastern-europe-growing-borderlands/>.

⁵⁵ Kevin J. McNamara, “How America’s European Allies Got Stuck In a Foreign Policy Triangle,” Text, The National Interest, August 16, 2019, <https://nationalinterest.org/feature/how-americas-european-allies-got-stuck-foreign-policy-triangle-74211>.

⁵⁶ McNamara.

Hungarians want to see their countries part of the west. A majority in these four countries prefer that their countries be in-between and experience the “best of both worlds.”⁵⁷ Additionally Western Europe trends to vote left-wing while Eastern Europe votes for right-wing parties.⁵⁸

Progressive-liberalism did not seek to solidify, it sought to divide. Instead of concentrating on what binds people together, the focus was on what made people different whether it was culture, race, gender, class, and sexual orientation. Adrian Pabst contends liberal identitarianism has transformed politics in four ways:

1. from contribution and sacrifice to a culture of victimhood
2. from building a common life to a politics of protest
3. from the struggles of representative democracy to direct action outside parliament
4. from collective agency to narcissistic group think that is amplified by the echo chambers of social media.⁵⁹

When the liberal order looks inward, it searches for conflict and not for unity that binds a multinational society together.

To maintain stability, Liberals have adopted a "manipulative corporate populism." Mainstream right and left-wing parties now form grand coalitions to prevent populist parties from taking power.⁶⁰ The centrist coalitions have adopted authoritarian methods "to override the official opposition in parliament and quash extra-parliamentary resistance."⁶¹ Politics has now been wielded by the media, in which corporations in cooperation with governments and NGOs manage "access to information and knowledge."⁶² Ideas that are perceived as harmful are now removed from public debates on platforms. There are no alternative ways of thinking, actors

⁵⁷ “GLOBSEC Trends 2019: Central and Eastern Europe 30 Years after the Fall of the Iron Curtain,” *GLOBSEC* (blog), accessed September 6, 2019, <https://www.globsec.org/publications/globsec-trends-2019/>.

⁵⁸ Europe Elects, “EU28,” Twitter, June 15, 2019, <https://twitter.com/europeelects/status/1139889842794483712>.

⁵⁹ Adrian Pabst, *Liberal World Order and Its Critics: Civilisational States and Cultural Commonwealths*, Kindle (New York, 2019), sec. 858.

⁶⁰ Pabst, sec. 740.

⁶¹ Pabst, sec. 734.

⁶² Pabst, sec. 758.

must follow a specific liberal script. The lack of solidifying its sphere of influence means that the liberal order is fragile and can fragment quickly. The attempts to manage the system through a top-down structure has resulted in blowback.

Blowback

The universal belief that liberalism is the only way breeds illiberalism. Adrian Pabst contends the Liberal Order is “intolerant about the cultural values of ordinary people in the West and elsewhere while concentrating power in the hands of unaccountable Western elites and Western-dominated institutions.”⁶³ The response by the populists is an example of blowback because there is a fear that the national histories and cultures are being eroded away.

Populism is seen to be “A crisis of representation, distrust of politicians, growing inequality, austerity, and the rise of new digital technologies have all divided and polarized Western societies.”⁶⁴ However, populism, as Bruno Maçães points out, is a result in the distribution of power in the international system.

The problem is that populism is not a national phenomenon—it is an international and geopolitical one. Populism is a direct result of significant shifts in the global distribution of power. Namely, it is a reaction to the loss of power by a formerly hegemonic West.⁶⁵

Maçães notes that if populist cared about domestic issues, they would be addressing domestic socioeconomic concerns and corruption. Instead populist leaders around the world

⁶³ Pabst, sec. 6.

⁶⁴ Bruno Maçães, “The Secret Sources of Populism,” *Foreign Policy* (blog), accessed September 6, 2019, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2019/06/18/the-new-political-influencers/>.

⁶⁵ Maçães.

focus on international issues from immigration, terrorism, and trade. Like Theodore Roosevelt, President Donald Trump appealed to the loss of greatness.⁶⁶

A new political faction has been formed in opposition to progressivism and western elites, it is called the new right. Many are familiar with the alt-right, however it is only a subset of a larger political faction. Michael Malice defines the group as:

A loosely connected group of individuals united by their opposition to progressivism, which they perceive to be thinly veiled fundamentalist religion dedicated to egalitarian principles and intent on totalitarian world domination via globalist hegemony.⁶⁷

The new right is predominantly an internet phenomenon consisting of people from the alt-right, traditional conservatives, center-left liberals, and left/right-wing anarchists. While united in opposition, the group fragments on what they believe. Some members want monarchy to return, while others want an ethno-state or a return to the status quo.⁶⁸

What makes the new right different is that it is not just focused on politics as most of its attention is given to culture. Continuing the religious connections, the new right refers to the press and educational institutions as the cathedral. The cathedral is viewed as the main influence of public policy and culture.⁶⁹ As a tactic the group treats the opposition with utter contempt and forces the elites to choose between principles or being loyal to one's own people.

A key tactic used by the New Right is forcing the enemy to make difficult choices. Are they going to be held to the principles they espouse, or are they going to be loyal to their own people? When they are in complete control, they

⁶⁶ Mações.

⁶⁷ Michael Malice, *The New Right: A Journey to the Fringe of American Politics* (New York: All Points Books, n.d.), 3.

⁶⁸ Malice, 4.

⁶⁹ Malice, 18–19.

can get away with doing both. But if there's pressure, then they will have to choose. In such a case, some will choose the former while others will choose the latter—and both sides will be upset with other for making the “wrong” choice.⁷⁰

On the international stage, countries have become illiberal, for example such countries "as Russia and China that oppose Western liberal culture and norms underpinning the international system in the name of their own civilisational-state model."⁷¹ The liberal order has created a nationalistic response that calls for the defense of cultural and ethnic traditions.

Conclusion

The attempt to create a world where people would act in a certain way has resulted in domestic and international opposition. The lack of reflexivity has created a hubris that it is impossible to apply lessons from Europe in non-European places. Progressive-liberalism has created a society that prioritizes differences over common ground that hold a multinational society together. The result is a geopolitical, geocultural, and geoeconomic conflict between the liberal and the non-liberal sphere of the world. Before the United States enters another conflict, it should heed the warnings left by Thucydides and consider the cultural and historical contexts of other countries.

Does this mean that the liberal order is eroding? It depends on what type of liberalism is discussed. It is too soon to tell but cracks are appearing, showing that the progressive-liberal order is vulnerable. One thing that is great about liberalism in general is its adaptability. If liberalism takes on its more classical version which allows for tolerance and considerations of the historical and cultural contexts, it will still be around. As Adrian Pabst says, “The liberal

⁷⁰ Malice, 195.

⁷¹ Pabst, *Liberal World Order and Its Critics: Civilisational States and Cultural Commonwealths*, 921.

world order has not been dislodged and the forces supporting it are among the most powerful interests across the West.”⁷² He goes on:

my contention is that it is in reality the new which is dead and the old which is yet to be reborn. The failure of liberalism means that we are witnessing the death throes of liberal humanitarianism and neo-conservatism – and their shared commitment to unfettered economic globalisation, mass immigration and democracy promotion by military means that have come to characterise the liberal world order.⁷³

The liberal order that embodied the policy prescriptions of progressive-liberalism may be eroding.

In the future the current liberal order will be studied for its lack of reflexivity. What originally started as a method to rebuild the social fabric of the US turned into an internationalist project. The US grand strategy of primacy, influenced by progressivism lead to an activist foreign policy. Commencing with the religious convictions of Progressive Christians to advocates of democratic peace who sought to make the world a better place, the lack of pluralism or tolerance laid the seeds for push back. For a better world, being more tolerant and reflexive will go along way.

⁷² Pabst, sec. 1107.

⁷³ Pabst, sec. 1107.

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