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**An Analysis of US-Led Liberal Disorder in Afghanistan Through a  
Liberal Theory of International Relations**

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## **Dedication**

First and foremost, I thank Allah, the almighty who gave us the strength and courage to fulfill  
this work.

I dedicate this work to my family and friends.

Houcem.

## **Dedication**

First and foremost, I thank Allah, the almighty who gave us the strength and courage to fulfill  
this work.

I Lovingly dedicate this dissertation to my parents, my siblings, and my nephew Taym for  
their unconditional support.

I dedicate it to my friends for being helpful whenever I needed them.

Mohammed Amin.

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## Abstract

The US withdrawal from Afghanistan (2021) signaled the end of the longest war in the nation's history and the failure of the liberal international order built and led by the United States. This research examines the US withdrawal from Afghanistan through the lens of Neo-liberalism, to showcase how the American-led international liberal order is falling, moving away from a progressive and liberal internationalist direction, and returning to its founding principles. Additionally, the purpose is to indicate how the US was able to build a liberal order by instilling its values in different regions of the world and how this order is deteriorating, shifting away from a liberal set of norms and institutions that was believed would deliver perpetual peace. The US established international organizations in order to protect and spread its values. However, leaving Afghanistan in the hands of the Taliban goes against all the principles established by the US and the liberal order. The research argues that the combination of the "leading from behind" policy during the Obama administration and most importantly the economic mentality of Donald Trump has significantly weakened the liberal order. However, the recent withdrawal from Afghanistan represents a monumental betrayal to the very pillars upon which the liberal order was built. This decision can be seen as the final blow to an already weakened order, as it undermines the principles of global cooperation, trust, and collective security. The US withdrawal from Afghanistan marks a withdrawal from its commitments to uphold democratic values, promote stability and international cooperation, further eroding the foundations of the liberal order.

## المخلص

يمثل الانسحاب الامريكي من افغانستان (2021) نهايةً للحرب الاطول مدةً في تاريخ الولايات المتحدة وكذلك فشلاً للنظام الدولي الليبيرالي. تتناول هذه المذكرة الانسحاب الامريكي من افغانستان من منظور نيوليبييرالي بهدف اظهار بوادر انهيار النظام الليبيرالي الدولي الذي تقوده الولايات المتحدة التي ابدت تحولاً جديداً في سياساتها حيث بدأت في التخلي عن سياستها التقدمية العالمية الليبيرالية والعودة الى سياسة العزلة التي تُعتبر احدى المبادئ الاساسية التي تأسست عليها الولايات المتحدة. تتناول هذه المذكرة كذلك الجهود التي بذلتها الولايات المتحدة لبناء النظام الليبيرالي الدولي عن طريق غرس قيمها و مبادئها الليبيرالية في كل انحاء العالم. بوادر الانهيار قابلها تخلي الولايات المتحدة عن قيمها ومبادئها ومؤسساتها الليبيرالية التي كان يُرى ان من شأنها تحقيق السلام الدائم. أنشأت الولايات المتحدة المنظمات الدولية رغبة منها في حماية و نشر قيمها ولكن انسحابها من افغانستان و تركها في قبضة طالبان لايتماشى و مبادئ الولايات المتحدة و نظامها الدولي الليبيرالي. ترى هذه المذكرة أن سياسة "القيادة من الخلف" التي تبنتها إدارة أوباما وكذلك المنهجية الاقتصادية لتزامب قد أضعفا بشكل كبير النظام الليبيرالي الدولي، ضف الى ذلك الانسحاب الأخير من أفغانستان الذي يُمثل خيانة لركائز النظام الليبيرالي الذي بُني عليها : السلام الديمقراطي والترابط والمؤسسات الدولية. يمكن اعتبار هذا القرار ضربة النهائية لنظام مضعف بالفعل حيث يقوض مبادئ التعاون العالمي، الثقة والأمن الجماعي. الانسحاب الامريكي من افغانستان هو انسحاب من التزاماتها تجاه تعزيز الديموقراطية، الاستقرار و التعاون الدولي وكذلك اضعاف جدي لركائز النظام الليبيرالي الدولي.

## Abstract

Le retrait des États-Unis d'Afghanistan (2021) a signalé la fin de la plus longue guerre de l'histoire de la nation et l'échec de l'ordre libéral international construit et dirigé par les États-Unis. Cette thèse examine le retrait des d'Afghanistan à travers le prisme du néolibéralisme, afin de mettre en évidence la manière dont l'ordre libéral international s'effondre, s'éloigne d'une direction progressiste et internationaliste libérale, et revient à ses principes fondateurs. De plus, le but est d'indiquer comment les États-Unis ont pu construire un ordre libéral en instillant leurs valeurs dans différentes régions du monde, et comment cet ordre se détériore, s'éloignant d'un ensemble de normes et d'institutions libérales qui étaient censées garantir la paix perpétuelle. Les États-Unis ont établi des organisations internationales dans le but de protéger et de diffuser leurs valeurs. Cependant, laisser l'Afghanistan aux mains des talibans va à l'encontre de tous les principes établis par les États-Unis et leur Ordre. La thèse soutient que la politique "leading from behind" d'Obama et la mentalité économique de Trump a considérablement affaibli l'ordre libéral. Cependant, le récent retrait d'Afghanistan représente une trahison monumentale envers les piliers mêmes sur lesquels l'ordre libéral était fondé. Cette décision peut être perçue comme le coup de grâce porté à un ordre déjà affaibli, car elle mine les principes de la coopération mondiale, de la confiance et de la sécurité collective. Le retrait des États-Unis d'Afghanistan représente un abandon de ses engagements envers la promotion de la démocratie, de la stabilité et de la coopération internationale, tout en portant un coup sévère aux fondements de l'ordre libéral international.

## List of Abbreviations and Acronyms

<b>AQIM</b>	Al Qaeda in the Maghreb
<b>ATT</b>	President Amadou Toumani Touré
<b>UNCD</b>	United Nations Conference on Disarmament
<b>CDA</b>	Cuban Democracy Act
<b>CFPB</b>	Consumer Financial Protection Bureau
<b>CFSP</b>	Common Foreign and Security Policy
<b>DOD</b>	United States Department of Defense
<b>EAEC / EURATOM</b>	European Atomic Energy Community
<b>EBRD</b>	European Bank for Reconstruction and Development
<b>EC</b>	European Commission
<b>ECSC</b>	European Coal and Steel Community
<b>EEC</b>	European Economic Community
<b>EU</b>	European Union
<b>EUROPOL</b>	European Police Office
<b>FIS</b>	Islamic Salvation Front
<b>FMF</b>	Foreign Military Financing
<b>GATT</b>	General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade
<b>GCTF</b>	Global Counterterrorism Forum



<b>ICISS</b>	International Committee on Intervention and State Sovereignty
<b>IMF</b>	International Monetary Fund
<b>ISIL</b>	Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant
<b>ISKP</b>	Islamic State Khorasan Province
<b>LNG</b>	Liquefied Natural Gas
<b>MNLA</b>	National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad
<b>NATO</b>	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
<b>NRFA</b>	National Resistance Front of Afghanistan
<b>OAS</b>	Organization of American States
<b>OECD</b>	Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development
<b>OEF</b>	Operation Enduring Freedom
<b>OSCE</b>	Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe
<b>PSI</b>	Pan-Sahel Initiative
<b>R2P</b>	Responsibility to Protect
<b>RBAP</b>	Regional Bureau for Asia and the Pacific
<b>TSCTP</b>	Trans-Saharan Counterterrorism Partnership
<b>UN</b>	United Nations
<b>UNAMA</b>	United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan

<b>UNHCR</b>	United Nations Human Rights Commissioner
<b>UNITAF</b>	United Nations International Task Force
<b>UNOSOM I</b>	United Nations Operation in Somalia
<b>UNSC</b>	United Nations Security Council
<b>US</b>	United States of America
<b>WAWG</b>	West Africa Working Group
<b>WB</b>	World Bank
<b>WBG</b>	World Bank Group
<b>WTO</b>	World Trade Organization

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## **Introduction**

This research study examines the decline of the American-led international liberal order, which has been dominant for many decades. It delivers the theoretical knowledge needed regarding Liberalism then the different methods the United States (US) adopted to expand its order worldwide. The study focuses on the recent victory of the Taliban regime in Afghanistan as a significant event that highlights the crisis of this international order.

For many decades, the United States of America has been dominating the international community by establishing specific world order known as the liberal international order. This order revolves around establishing multilateral institutions, democratic transitions, and tying the security and economic fortunes of countries in Europe, Asia, Latin America, and Africa. Fast forward to today, the American-led international liberal order is in crisis, especially with the Taliban taking over Afghanistan. This research study is significant as it aims to point out the ongoing collapse of the liberal international order and the recent shift in US policy, moving from a progressive and liberal internationalist direction back towards its founding principles. In order to arrive at such a conclusion, this study adopts Neo-liberalism as the most advanced theory of International Relations and the US withdrawal from Afghanistan in 2021 as a case study.

This research, principally, aims at offering an alternative reading of contemporary US foreign policy through the lens of Neo-liberalism, which serves as a road map for the argument, showcasing how the US foreign policies have been conducted in order to serve the liberal order led by America. By so doing, the study aims to indicate how America was able to build a liberal order by instilling its values, like democracy, freedom of choice, and human rights, in different regions of the world. This is done by providing examples in many continents such as Asia, Africa, South, and Latin America while also displaying how the US-

led interventions in many of these continents took many shapes and under many banners. Furthermore, this research demonstrates how the American-led international liberal order is deteriorating, as the US is sacrificing many of its values in order to deal with its internal and external affairs leaving many of its responsibilities and obligations towards countries and institutions leading this liberal order that was believed would deliver perpetual peace.

In their research entitled "Donald Trump isolationist doctrine “America first”: A case study of the US withdrawal from Afghanistan" (2022), Mekkari Imene and Benziane Yasmine examine the influence of Donald trump's isolationist policies citing them as the primary reason for the American withdrawal from Afghanistan. Showcasing how the US changed its methods from collaborating with other countries and having military interferences beyond its soil to adopting a policy in which the focus is on America first.

The previously-mentioned research shows many of the foreign policies of the US and how this withdrawal is a sign that America is adopting an isolationist policy focusing on its internal affairs which will benefit this research greatly in showing the deterioration of the US-led Liberal Order. However, while that research focuses on the policies of Donald Trump and how they led the US to adopt an isolationist policy, this research will focus on the effects of this withdrawal on the US-led Liberal Order through a neo-liberal lens and its effect on international politics.

In another research under the name "The American Withdrawal from Afghanistan" (2022), Hillevi Pihl takes a look at the same events, the US withdrawal from Afghanistan, under the lenses of both realism and liberalism concluding that the main reason for it was the length of the war, as the years went on the reasons to stay became more and more unclear. In addition, the focus on Afghanistan and the Muslim world gave rise to China which has become a big power in Asia. Another conclusion of this research is that even though the use

of liberal theory is mainly studying peaceful relations and the peacekeeping process, it is shown that this theory has the potential to be implemented when researching elements of war.

The research mentioned above applies the same theory as this research "Neo-Liberalism" in order to show the events of the withdrawal. In addition, both pieces of research focus on the same case study which is: the US withdrawal from Afghanistan. However, the research mentioned in the previous paragraph studies the withdrawal with the aim of finding its reasons and the effects of war on the US while this research focuses on the building of the US-led Liberal Order and how this withdrawal is seen as weakening US-led Liberal Order the and marks its eventual fall.

In an article called "Current United States Security Strategy: Underestimation of Afghanistan's State of Affairs and Resulting Impacts on American Freedom" (2022), Hannah Crosby argues that the Biden administration wants to change the focus to the domestic affairs of the country, by protecting the security of the whole nation while also enhancing the economic life of the citizens. On the international scene, the US is also in the process of power redistribution to combat the threats rising from both China and North Korea.

The article also discusses how the US changed its focus from foreign policies to internal policies which this research will also deal with; however, the article focuses on the reasons concluding that it is a redistribution of power to combat both North Korea and China while this research focuses on how this change of policies affects the US as the leading power in the international community and how this goes against its values and relations with many other countries and international institutions. More importantly, it emphasizes how all of that led to the downfall of its Liberal Order.

Therefore, this research answers questions regarding the potential impact of the end of the US war in Afghanistan on the future of the US-led international liberal order, assessing

the extent to which it may signify its decline or unraveling. Accordingly, this research aims at answering the following question: to what extent the end of the US war in Afghanistan really marks the end of the US-led liberal international order?

Given the nature of this research work, a qualitative approach is adopted to provide a profound examination of the American-led liberal international disorder, particularly in light of the Taliban regime's impending victory in Afghanistan. With the aim of approaching the topic properly in every respect, the study implements both the historical method and the content analysis methods. The first method assesses the historical events that have to do with the establishment, the decline, and the failure and fall of the US-led liberal international order starting from the end of the Cold War until recent years moving to examine the US withdrawal from Afghanistan (2021) as proof of that breakdown. The second method analyses various sources of data, be they primary sources or secondary sources, associated with the study above to deeply comprehend and uncover details as a way to help support conducting the research.

The thesis is divided into three chapters, the first chapter is a theoretical framework dedicated mainly to discussing Liberalism as a theory adopted throughout the conduct of this research, it focuses also on the main assumptions and sub-theories of Neo-liberalism that animate the liberal international order. Therefore, this chapter discusses the following sub-theories: The Liberal Institutionalism Theory, the Economic Interdependence Theory, and the Democratic Peace Theory, these theories mainly revolve around democratization and preserving the world peace by exporting democracy through military interventions and promoting the international political, economic, and military cooperation regarding different major global issues via international organizations.

The second chapter focuses on the early successes in building a well-functioning US-made liberal international order and the US application of the different theories discussed in chapter one on the ground. Hence, it is important to chronologically discuss the US economic, political, military, and security efforts employed to integrate different parts of the world under the umbrella of its liberal international order by means of military invasions, economic and political institutions, and security pacts and treaties, not forgetting to provide various examples from each continent.

The last chapter explores the decline of the US-led liberal international order by highlighting all the events and circumstances inside and outside the US prior to that fall. In addition to that, it examines all the acts and policies adopted throughout the presidency of each of the following US presidents: George W. Bush (2001-2009), Barack Obama (2009-2017), Donald Trump (2017-2021), and Joe Biden (2021-ongoing). Concluding with examining the US dismissing its deep-rooted values after its withdrawal from Afghanistan, which in a way marks the near fall of US-led Liberal order.

## **Chapter One**

### **Theoretical Framework**

#### **1. Introduction**

This chapter works as the backbone of this dissertation. It will cover the ideas, concepts, and theoretical knowledge one needs to know before delving into the main topic of the US-led liberal international order. As a result, it deals with the theoretical framework for the entire dissertation. It discusses Neo-liberalism as a concept, its definition, its historical background, its founding fathers, the movement that came before it, and the principles that define it.

In order to be able to deliver a correct, precise, and understandable framework for this dissertation, it is highly necessary to deliver definitions of all the major theories starting with realism, then liberalism, and ending with neoliberalism. The chronological order was respected in these definitions in order to give a clearer image of the emergence of these theories.

#### **2. Realism as Theory of International Relations**

Realism, usually referred to as political realism, is a perspective on world politics that emphasizes its adversarial and conflictual aspects. Often, it is compared to idealism or liberalism, which tends to place an emphasis on collaboration. Realists believe that states who are worried about their own security, pursue their own national interests, and contend for power, are the main actors in the international sphere. The emphasis on power and self-interest by realists might be problematic since they frequently question the applicability of moral principles to relationships between nations, they sometimes assert that although national politics is the domain of authority and law, international politics is a field devoid of justice that is defined by actual or potential conflict between states (Korab-Karpowicz).

## **2.1 National Interest**

Modern realism scholars contend that nations are the most significant players in international politics and that statesmen think and act in the nation's interest. Interest is characterized as power. That it shows how much influence the nation can exert on other states, whether at home or abroad (Morgenthau 5, 6).

Statism also holds that the idea of “raison d'état” dictates how states must behave and that the state is a legitimate embodiment of the people's will as a whole. Hence, group solidarity is a major emphasis in politics, where the cohesion it provides might lead to potential confrontation with other groups. According to realist scholars, nationalism is the most significant kind of group solidarity. The more nationalism there is, the more difficult it is to dominate and conquer other groups, and the more secure a state will be as a result (Wohlforth 133).

In addition, the absence of government, or literal anarchy, is regarded by realists, and particularly by contemporary neorealists, as the main predictor of global political outcomes. They contend that the international arena is fundamentally a self-help system due to the absence of a common rule-making and enforcement authority. Every state is free to establish its own interests, ensure its own survival, and strive for dominance. Hence, anarchy results in a setting where power dominates the formation of interstate interactions. As the Athenian envoy at Melos claimed, "the separate states endure [only] when they are powerful" due to the lack of a common authority that could impose discipline (Waltz 102).

## **2.2 Imbalance of Power**

The concept of balance-of-power has been around for a long time, with roots in ancient Greece. However, the policy of balance of power in the Western world was not recognized until centuries later, particularly in Renaissance Italy. Lorenzo Medici -a political

master of Machiavelli- acknowledged the balance-of-power policy prior to the French invasion of 1494. Guicciardini -a well-known Renaissance historian- further attributed the tranquility of Italy to Lorenzo Medici's use of all means to ensure balance. The idea that balance-of-power policy brings peace has been popular among many intellectuals from different eras, including modern realists (Danilovic 72).

A power balance in the global system is referred to as the balance of power. Realists worry about a lack of collaboration and relative gains when discussing the natural condition of disorder in international politics (Waltz 105). The foundation of a zero-sum game is relative gains, which means that if one state wins, another one loses. So, for the concerned states to prevail, they must compete for the resources. In anarchy, nothing can prevent a state from using force to achieve its goals. States exploiting and abusing their power and resources to obtain an advantage in global politics is a given due to the limited prospect of armed action, this power not only benefits the state but also maintains peace (Powell 1312).

The balance of power is a fundamental concept in international relations theory that has been around for a long time. Although there are different interpretations and versions of the theory, they all revolve around a recurrent equilibrium model that ensures the survival of major powers in the international system by preventing imbalances in military and material capabilities. To restore balance, major powers have various methods, such as building up their military, forming counterbalancing alliances, passing the burden of balancing to another state, partition and compensation in postwar peace settlements, and emulation. However, many scholars believe that secondary and tertiary states are more inclined to join forces with the stronger state or coalition of states, rather than trying to balance against them (Waltz 120).

Morgenthau -one of the "founding fathers" of the realist school- describes the balance of power as both a situation and a policy. As a situation, it can be in equilibrium or



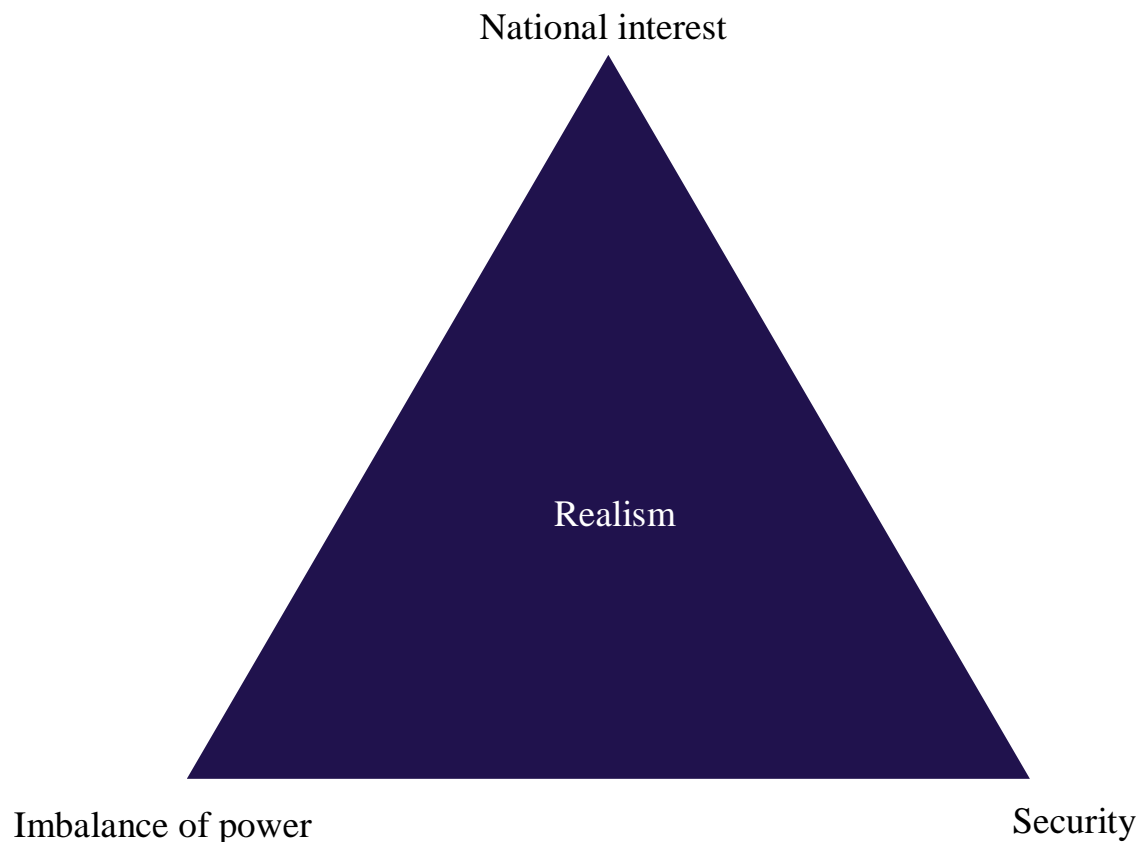
disequilibrium. Equilibrium occurs when the power of one state or group of states is balanced by the equivalent power of another state or group of states, such as during the Cold War between the US and the Soviet Union or NATO and the Warsaw Pact. Disequilibrium, on the other hand, happens when the distribution of power among contending states is not balanced. This can favor the leading hegemon and lead to the abuse of power by the strongest state, which may neutralize other states and become the deciding force and voice. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, this appears to be the case with the US (Toledo 59).

### **2.3 Security**

Realists argue that states should allocate all their resources towards maintaining security on a global scale. According to realist thinking, each state operates in a self-interested manner to ensure its own survival. This self-help dynamic, combined with a lack of trust among states, leads to a constant risk of conflict and the potential outbreak of war. Realists contend that states must therefore prioritize their security by utilizing all available means, including military capabilities, to protect their interests and deter potential threats. By doing so, they aim to ensure their survival and maintain stability in an inherently competitive and uncertain international environment (Gilpin 119-123).

The concept of security in international relations is primarily focused on factors that directly impact the structure of the nation-state system and its sovereignty, with particular emphasis on the use, threat, and control of force. Realists believe that the state is the main guarantor of security, and security is equated with state interests. The anarchic state system is considered a significant threat to security, as it creates insecurity and uncertainty about the intentions of state actors. Although liberalists believe that international organizations can provide a framework for safeguarding security, they still acknowledge nation-states as the primary source of insecurity. The language of security has been dominated by realism, with the terminology of force and state interests shaping the discourse (Tripp 1).

Figure 1. Realism and Its Pillars



Source: Own Elaboration

Realism is a theory of international relations that highlights conflict and sees states as the main actors pursuing their own interests and power. Realists prioritize national interest and security over moral principles and emphasize the importance of power imbalance. This theory is important to the study as it is the predecessor of Liberalism and neoliberalism which are the frameworks that this research uses.

### **3. Introducing Liberalism in International Relations Theory**

Liberalism often focuses on the idea that the government should be as hands-off as it can be, with the exception of the armed forces, law enforcement, and other "non-excludable products," and that individuals should be free to engage in their own free trade. organizations that they voluntarily found and joined. This form of state is frequently regarded as a "night-

watchman state", as the only goal of the minimum state is to uphold the most fundamental features of public order (Thorsen and Lie 4).

Liberalism holds that the most important objective of government is to secure the rights of individuals to life, liberty, and property. Thus, a fair political system should prioritize the welfare of individuals. Political structures characterized by unchecked power like dictatorships and monarchies fail to protect the freedom and liberty of their citizens. In response, liberalism seeks to establish institutions that can protect individual liberties by restraining political power. Although liberalism is primarily concerned with domestic politics, it recognizes that a state's actions in the international arena can have a significant impact on domestic liberty. Liberals are troubled by aggressive foreign policies that necessitate military buildup. The concern is that such militarization can be employed to oppress the state's own citizens. As a result, political systems founded on liberalism typically curtail military power by ensuring civilian oversight of the military (Meiser 1).

#### **4. Neoliberalism**

Neoliberalism is a political theory of international relations that emerged in the 1980s. The study of international institutions lacked a theoretical foundation. Keohane and Krasner provided a new framework for studying international organizations, arguing that their existence explains the persistence of economic cooperation. Neoliberal scholars rejected neorealist assumptions about the dominance of states in international relations and suggested that non-governmental actors also have an impact. The levels of international cooperation were higher than what neorealist theory could explain (Saleh et al. 114).

In the first place, neoliberalism is a theory of political economic practices that contends that the greatest way to enhance human well-being is to liberate each individual's business skills within an institutional framework marked by robust private property rights, free, and open markets. The establishment and maintenance of an institutional structure

suitable for such practices is the responsibility of the state. For instance, the state must ensure the reliability and quality of money. Additionally, it must establish the judicial, military, and law enforcement institutions and systems necessary to protect private property rights and ensure, through the use of force, that markets operate as intended. However, if there are no markets (for instance, in the water, education, health care, social security, or environmental damage). But the state should not go beyond these tasks. According to the theory, the state cannot possibly possess sufficient information to question market signals (prices), and strong interest groups will eventually manipulate and bias state interventions (particularly in democracies) for their best interest. As a result, state interventions in markets (once created) must be kept to a bare minimum.

Neoliberalism argues that states should prioritize absolute advantage rather than relative gains. It emphasizes the importance of international institutions and organizations, such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF), in shaping the international political and economic system. Neoliberalism focuses on studying how these organizations address problems and dilemmas related to bargaining, monitoring, and enforcement. The IMF, for example, must balance political and economic interests while avoiding moral hazard problems. Neoliberalism emerged from older intellectual paradigms in the study of international relations and emphasizes the balance between rule-based interaction and the unconstrained exercise of economic and political power (Saleh et al. 113).

Neo-liberalism emphasizes absolute advantage over relative gains and focuses on the central role of international institutions in the distribution of wealth and power. It emerged in the 1980s as a theoretical framework for studying international organizations and patterns of international behavior. Neo-liberals rejected neo-realism and transnationalism, arguing that non-governmental actors could impact international political behavior. At the international level, neo-liberalism has been imposed by powerful financial institutions such as the IMF, the

World Bank, and the World Trade Organization (WTO), leading to the monetization and expansion of civil non-governmental organizations. The well-to-do and privileged benefit from this structure, while the poor suffer. International organizations perform monitoring functions, provide forums for negotiation, and create structures for enforcement and dispute resolution (Alhammedi).

#### **4.1 Democratic Peace Theory**

Democratic Peace Theory is one of the three claims associated with neoliberalism that shape its perspective on international relations. It claims that states that uphold the rules of democracy like, live-and-let-live, rarely ever enter military confrontation with each other (Rosato 585). In addition, the existence of national institutions can make a hurdle in entering any fights with similar democratic nations.

Democratic peace theory posits that it is highly improbable for democratic states to engage in conflict with each other. The theory is based on two main reasons: first, democratic states have internal checks and balances that limit the concentration of power, and second, democracies tend to view each other as legitimate and cooperative. The theory is supported by both statistical analysis and historical case studies. However, some scholars question the validity of the theory, pointing out that there are few historical examples of democracies going to war with each other, and that other factors such as power, alliances, culture, and economics may be correlated with peace. Additionally, some argue that while democracies are less likely to fight each other, they may be more inclined to be aggressive toward non-democracies. Nevertheless, the democratic peace theory remains an important aspect of liberalism, with the potential to bring about a world free of constant war envisioned by realists (Meiser 2).

The founding father of This theory is Immanuel Kant in his essay "Perpetual Peace". In his essay, Kant claims that there should be three major elements for peace to exist through democracy:

1- is the existence of a "republican constitution," which implies the necessity of public permission before the government may decide on the use of armed action. This makes it harder for leaders and people in the position of power to wage any unnecessary wars, and by extension gives the power to the majority of people to make ethical decisions (Robert Longley).

2- The pacifying effect of tight commercial ties is named "the spirit of commerce" With more economic ties, it will be more expensive to wage wars on other states. Conflicts may cost offenders relations with other nations and weigh heavily on the economy of the state (Robert Longley).

3- The need for a federation of nations to combat the state of anarchy in international politics. The first outlined element is obviously the one that was later adapted to be called "Democratic Peace Theory" (Mello 2).

## **4.2 Interdependence**

According to liberal scholars, the issue of structural anarchy in the international system can be resolved, which is reflected in the neoliberal theory of "Complex Interdependence" developed by Keohane and Nye. This theory argues that the state-centric approach of realism is insufficient in explaining the distribution of power in the international system, as it treats the state as a single entity rather than a complex amalgamation of different groups and interests. Keohane and Nye's theory is based on three fundamental assumptions: there are various avenues connecting societies beyond interstate relations, there is no hierarchy of issues in the system, and the use of military force has declined in importance as a means of resolving international issues. They suggest that in several key areas, the concept of

complex interdependence offers a more robust theoretical framework than structural realism (Le Roy 2).

Interdependence can be seen as a state in which nations, organizations, and citizens all rely on one another to ensure not the survival and peace of one but the survival and peace of them all (Waheeda Rana 291). It can be easily seen that trade reduces conflict between states, as the bigger the benefit the smaller the reason to fight. In addition, it is also easily noted that conflict reduces trades and benefits to both parties. World leaders recognize these “facts”, so they work hard to avoid conflicts in order to keep the trades to a maximum which creates a state of interdependence between the nations (Einstein1).

Neoliberal institutionalism describes the international system as both anarchic and interdependent, with decentralized and self-enforcing behavior. Interdependence is created through the flow of goods, capital, and people, benefiting all countries involved. Disrupting these flows would have economic and political consequences. The mutual dependence created by interdependence brings benefits to all parties involved, but vulnerability to the potential loss of these benefits can be a power resource for the side that is less dependent. Economic interdependence fosters shared interests and reduces conflict costs (Milner and Moravcsik 15).

A good example of interdependence in today’s politics is environmental problems. Most international environmental issues involve complex interdependence, containing aspects of prisoner’s dilemma combined with common pool resource problems. Given the structure of the issue area, cooperation from all relevant states is required to successfully address problems, and so states that can threaten credibly to stay outside the process are empowered. Furthermore, complex interdependence can illuminate the particular character of cooperative agreements in environmental policy. Many international environmental agreements are shaped by the issue’s incentive structure. For instance, in most recent

environmental treaties concerns with free riding have led to the adoption of the standard clause requiring a certain number of ratifications before the treaty enters into force, but also a mandate that those ratifiers account for a certain degree of the activity responsible for the environmental problem. Most international environmental agreements also make information gathering their first priority in the process of addressing an environmental problem, as neoliberal institutionalism would suggest (Milner and Moravcsik 16).

### **4.3 International Institutions**

Since the end of World War II, international institutions such as the IMF, World Bank (WB), and the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) have been involved in managing the global economy. Although these institutions have allowed for the participation of multiple governments, many scholars of international relations have observed their close ties to the dominant state in the international system, which has been the US government. This view has been expressed by several theorists, including Waltz (1979) and Baldwin (1993) ...etc. (Chorev and Babb 461).

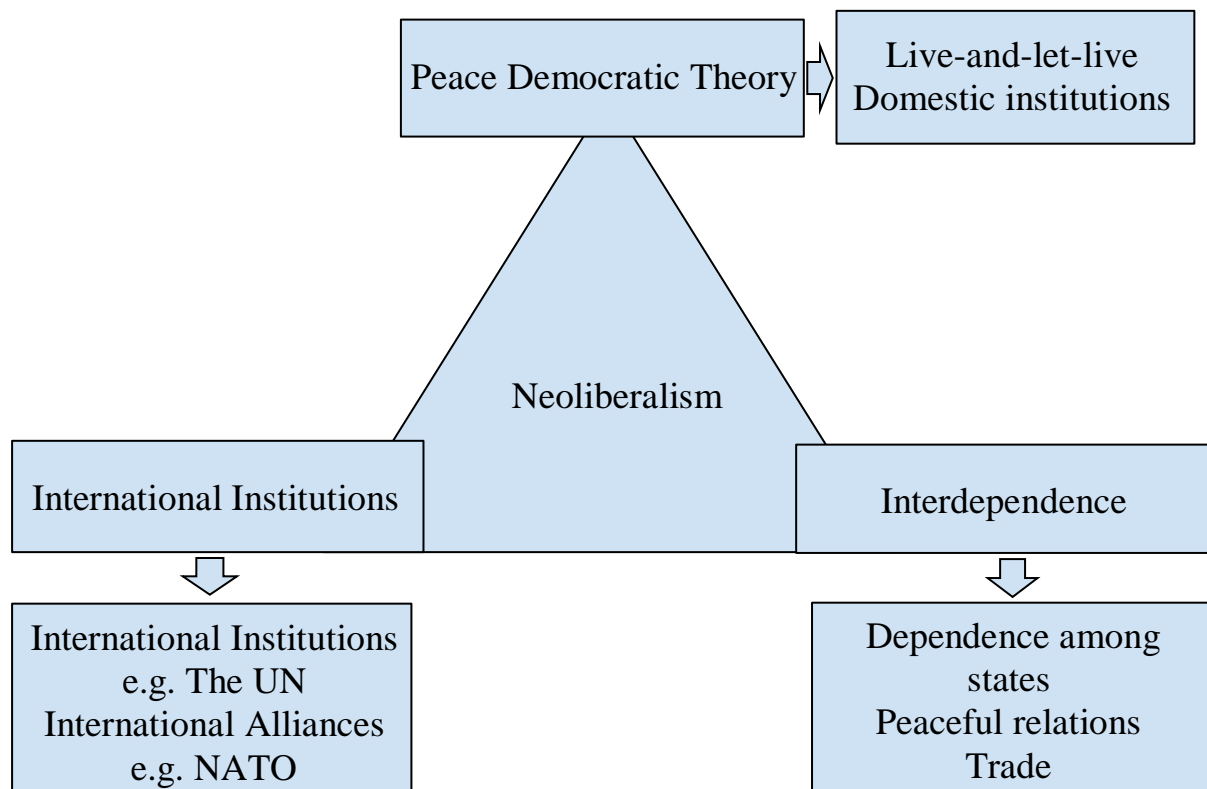
Most liberal states are usually in conflict with non-liberal nations. As a result, it is often easier for these liberal states to form alliances with each other under their common goals. These alliances are referred to as international institutions. Institutions like NATO hold quite reasonable power over most of the world. Developing countries cannot usually defy the power of one of these liberal states, and global superpowers cannot stand in the face of such a big league. This helps legitimize these institutions and let them act like world policeman. Thus, protecting their interests worldwide, while keeping the peace through a liberal order (Pihl 15).

During the period following World War II, International institutions such as the IMF, WB, and GATT played a crucial role in solidifying the dominance of the US. Through skillful negotiation and compromise at the United Nations Security Council (UNSC), these



institutions were able to present the interests of powerful groups as being in the best interest of all, and they were able to implement a universal policy. This hegemonic order was based on a model of national capitalism that combined the principles of Fordism and Keynesianism, and it relied on the ability of international institutions such as the International Monetary Fund and General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade to balance domestic policy goals such as full employment with the gradual liberalization of the global economy. After the economic crisis of the 1970s, the US transitioned from the post-war "embedded liberal" world order to a model of neoliberalism and global capitalism under Reagan and Thatcher. As a result, international institutions such as the World Bank and the IMF adapted their mandates to fit these ideological changes, with loans and trade agreements playing a prominent role in shaping and enforcing neoliberal policies on a global scale (Chorev and Babb 462).

Figure 2. Summary of the Theory of Neoliberalism and Its Main Pillars



Source: Own Elaboration

## 5. Chapter One: Synopsis

Realism is a perspective on world politics that emphasizes conflict and sees states as the main actors in the international sphere. Realists believe that states pursue their own national interests and contend for power, and they prioritize security as a key concern. Realists often reject the applicability of moral principles to international relations and argue that the international sphere is defined by the actual or potential conflict between states. National interest, power imbalance, and security are the main tenets of realism.

This theory has inspired the birth of liberalism as a view that comes against many of the beliefs of realists. Liberalism on the other hand emphasizes limited government intervention, except for matters such as national security and law enforcement. The focus is on individual freedom, with individuals being allowed to engage in free trade and join

organizations voluntarily. The goal of the government is to protect the fundamental rights of individuals, including life, liberty, and property. Liberalism seeks to establish institutions that restrain political power to protect individual liberties, and it is concerned about aggressive foreign policies that could oppress citizens. Political systems founded on liberalism typically curtail military power through civilian oversight.

Neoliberalism is a political and economic theory that emerged in the 1980s. It emphasizes the importance of free markets, private property rights, and minimal state intervention in the economy. Neoliberal scholars rejected the neorealist assumption that states are the dominant actors in international relations, arguing that non-governmental actors also have an impact. The theory prioritizes absolute advantage in international relations and highlights the significance of international institutions, such as the IMF, in shaping the global political and economic system. Neoliberalism has three pillars: International Institutions Interdependence and Democratic Peace Theory.

Democratic Peace Theory is a claim associated with neoliberalism in international relations that suggests that democratic states, which uphold the rules of democracy, rarely engage in military confrontations with each other. The theory also emphasizes the role of national institutions in creating a barrier to military conflict between democratic nations. Interdependence is a state where nations, organizations, and citizens rely on each other for their survival and peace. This reliance reduces conflicts between states, as the benefits of trade outweigh the reasons to fight. And international institutions mean that liberal states tend to form alliances with each other due to conflict with non-liberal nations, creating international institutions like NATO. These institutions hold significant power over the world and act as a global police force to protect liberal interests and maintain peace through a liberal order. The power of these institutions is such that developing countries and even superpowers cannot defy them, legitimizing their role in global affairs.

## **6. Conclusion**

To sum up, the theory of neoliberalism forms the basis of the current international community, used by world powers like the US to establish and lead a liberal global order. The maintenance of this order involves promoting democracy, fostering interdependence, and creating international institutions. In order to measure the success of this theory, it is necessary to view its real-life application in the international scene through a historical method.

## Chapter Two

### American Grand Strategy of Liberal International Order

#### 1. Introduction

The American architects of the liberal international order developed a solid strategy to widen -as much as possible- the liberal geopolitical space to keep the US the viable Global power. The American strategy, to grow its liberal sphere of influence, is built around the three main principles discussed in chapter one (The Liberal Institutionalism, The Economic Interdependence, and The Democratic Peace).

Therefore, this chapter discusses the application of the aforementioned notions and the different US attempts to integrate every existing country out there under its order, especially those which are naturally and historically not considered as allies and benefiting undoubtedly from the keen support and obedience of the liberal democracies in East Asia and especially Western Europe.

This chapter is structured geographically, it tackles the different US efforts to expand its liberal agenda in every continent. At first, the chapter deals with Europe and Asia by focusing of course on Russia and China as both are viewed as opponents to the US and its liberal hegemony, both experienced their fair share of attempts to get embedded in a web of liberal international institutions because they are the most powerful states in the system after the US and embedding them in as many institutions as possible, fully integrate them into the international economy, and help them transform into liberal democracies is definitely beneficial for the US-led hegemonic order.

Iraq in the Middle East and Afghanistan in South Asia are considered as a huge threat to the world and to the existence of the liberal order which one of its main principles is the

Democratic Peace Theory. Integrating such countries required a large-scale military action in an attempt to transform these countries into liberal democracies, using human, national, and international security as a justification for the different military involvements in the area. The chapter also tackles the US efforts to integrate the South American and African countries by examining the different US approaches in Haiti, Cuba, North Africa, The Sahel Region, and The Horn of Africa.

## **2. The US Efforts to Integrate Europe into the Liberal International Order**

Before the US liberal order became a reality, Europe began to integrate into this system. At that time, the integration process was limited to western Europe only and was accomplished through organizations and institutions such as NATO, the European Commission (EC), the World Bank Group (WBG), the IMF, the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), and the GATT. The integration process attempts to expand and include Eastern European countries and states that have made democratic transitions and connected themselves to various parts of the liberal system disregarding their previous distinctive ideologies and histories.

### **2.1 The US Efforts to Integrate Western Europe into the Liberal**

#### **International Order**

The liberal international order in Western Europe developed fairly when the idea of establishing a political, economic, and monetary union came to the surface, the European Union (EU) is founded mainly upon liberal principles which makes it easier to integrate into the is known as Liberal International Order.

The foundation treaty of the union is the Maastricht treaty (signed in Maastricht on February 7, 1992, entered into force on November 1, 1993), it is structured on many

principles grouped into three categories known as "pillars". The European Community (first pillar) comprises three distinct international organizations: the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) which organizes the movement of the coal and steel industry, the European Atomic Energy Community (EAEC or EURATOM) which brings the nuclear businesses under EURATOM's umbrella, and the European Economic Community (EEC) which is the most significant organization since it is responsible for the common management of the whole economies of the Member States (Valls).

Another demonstration of the US liberal system in Western Europe can be seen in the union's second pillar: The Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP), it calls on defining and implementing a common foreign and security policy in conformity with the principles of the United Nations Charter to affirm the necessity of peacekeeping, promote foreign aid and international cooperation, develop and consolidate democracy and the rule of law, and respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms (Sokolska).

The third pillar handles everything regarding Cooperation in the fields of justice and home affairs, the objective behind it is combating worldwide fraud, major crime, drug trafficking, and terrorism, creating the European Police Office (EUROPOL), and fostering judicial collaboration in both criminal and civil cases (Sokolska).

Putting all the previous policies into work is done via multiple institutions in different fields of activity, and cooperating with the US in these fields is definitely inevitable as it is by far the world's most dominant economic and military power. Benefiting from the fact of the EU becoming a member in the different international organizations, the US cooperates with the EU under organizations such as the WTO, IMF, and WB. Together, the EU and the US are responsible for 42 percent of both the global GDP and the global trade in goods and

services in 2021 (European Commission, “EU Trade Relations with the United States. Facts, Figures and Latest Developments”).

Militarywise, the Western European countries and the US cooperate together under the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (formed in Washington D.C. on April 4, 1949). The idea of creating NATO comes following calls from the head of the US Department of State George C. Marshall under the Truman Doctrine for creating a military alliance -or more precisely- a collective security system made initially to prevent the Soviet expansionism and the resurgence of the nationalist militarism in Europe through a strong US presence on the continent (NATO). Moreover, NATO pays special attention to both political and humanitarian aspects to promote European political unification and democratic values. This can be seen in the multiple NATO interventions in the Balkan Peninsula: Bosnia and Herzegovina (1992–2004), Serbia and Kosovo (1999–present), and North Macedonia (2001) (NATO).

## **2.2 The US Efforts to Integrate Eastern Europe into the Liberal International Order**

Eastern Europe here is mainly equivalent to the European part of the former Soviet Union which collapsed in 1991 and left behind significant and unbalanced powers in the region. Given their newness, all 15 post-Soviet states -including Russia- experienced some sort of US involvement at several levels. The US took that opportunity and provided political, economic, and security support simply to establish democratic regimes and prohibit any non-liberal activities in the region.



## **2.2.1 The US Efforts to Integrate Russia into the Liberal International Order**

During more than three decades since the Soviet Union collapsed, the relationship between Russia and the US has experienced ups and downs, and elements of partnership and rivalry have both been present. This -to some extent- works to Washington's benefit, since its main aim is to bring Russia closer and integrate it under the international order. And indeed, the events in Ukraine became a way for the US to impose its liberal agenda not only on Russia but on the nations that border it as well (Clunan 49-51).

### **2.2.1.1 The 2014 Crimean Crisis**

In Kyiv, A pro-European Union government took office after the Euromaidan protest movement (November 2013) which prompted the president of Ukraine to flee the country towards Russia (February 2014). In response, the Russian government sent out unmarked troops to aid in staging a separatist referendum for the peninsula's citizens. The Russian government made a calculated attempt, using both non-military and military measures, to annex Crimea. Despite the fact that the United Nations (UN) does not recognize Crimea as being a part of Russia, the annexation actually took place (March 2014), and Russia is now de facto the only ruler of the peninsula (Biersack and O'Lear 249).

Apart from the nonrecognition of the Crimean independence, the US also placed sanctions on Russia for its activities in Crimea since Russia was a signatory to the 1994 Budapest Memorandum, which stipulates that in exchange for Ukraine giving up its nuclear arsenal, the parties to the Memorandum promised to respect the independence and sovereignty and the existing borders of Ukraine and refrain from the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of Ukraine (Yost 507, 508).

In collaboration with the EU, the Obama Administration announced sanctions related to the events in Ukraine in March 2014 and then announced additional measures over the following months. The sanctions targeted particular people, companies, and industries and aim to increase Russia's political isolation as well as the economic costs to Russia, especially in areas of importance to President Putin and those close to him. The sanctions include:

- Asset freezes and restrictions on doing business with certain Russian individuals (Russian government representatives, deputies, businesspeople, and close friends) and entities (Russian companies like Bank Rossiya and Almaz-Antey Corporation).
- Restrictions on certain Russian oil-related services, technology, and exports to limit Russian oil exploration, extraction, and production (Nelson).

To exert even more pressure on the Russian government, the US blocked new Russian projects at the WB and European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD).

Besides that, the members of the G8 voted to expel Russia and started to meet under the new name G7 (Nelson).

### **2.2.1.2 The Russo-Ukrainian War (2022)**

The strategy of integrating Eastern Europe into the Liberal International Order involves moving the boundaries of NATO and the EU further eastward. However, such expansion is definitely capable of inflicting immense violence in the region, as demonstrated by Russia's full-scale military invasion of Ukraine in 2022 after attempts of expanding NATO to Russia's borders by integrating Ukraine. In response, the US has taken on the role of a security provider in the region, working to maintain Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity within its internationally recognized borders and territorial waters (George and Sandler).

Under the Foreign Military Financing policy (FMF), the US provides security assistance not only to Ukraine but other 17 of its regional neighbors to defend themselves against any

Russian aggression, the assistance includes the necessary equipment and training these countries need to preserve their territorial integrity, secure their borders, and improve their interoperability with NATO (U.S. Department of State, “US Security Cooperation with Ukraine”).

Moreover, The US imposed severe sanctions in 2022 and 2023 that affected numerous Russian players and industries. The "classic" sanctions similar to those of 2014 are still the most often used, although they are getting more severe and far-reaching (Szczepański). The new sanctions include:

- Financial sanctions on Russian banks and other monetary entities.
- Import ban on Russian energy products such as coal, liquefied natural gas (LNG), oil, and as well as gold, diamonds, seafood, and alcoholic drinks.
- Export restrictions on US technology.
- Bans on all future US investments in Russia.
- Bans on the use of Russian airlines and planes in US airspace, as well as bans on the entry of Russian vessels into US ports (Szczepański).

### **3. The US Efforts to Integrate Asia into the Liberal International Order**

The US used diverse strategies to force every state in Asia into the international liberal order. In Eastern Asia (China), the US relied on embedding the states within that region in the different economic, political, and military international organizations, ensuring a military presence there, promoting human rights, and consolidating democracy, and peace. In Central and Western Asia (Afghanistan, Iraq, and Syria), military interventions dominated the scenery there for one main reason which is the fight against terrorism.

### **3.1 The US Efforts to Integrate China into the Liberal International Order**

China, which was formerly among the least connected countries in the world, is now among the most linked when measured by international organizations' membership. It found itself involved with 1,275 international non-governmental organizations and more than 50 international organizations (Kent 526-531).

The starting point was after setting the 1978 economic Open Door Policy, but the PRC did not really start to branch out beyond its UN membership until 1980 when it joined the IMF, the UN Conference on Disarmament (UNCD), and the WB. Additionally, it started talks in 1986 to open up full participation in the GATT, which ultimately led to its admission to the WTO in December 2001 through the assistance of the George W. Bush administration, particularly after the September 11 terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center (Johnston 33, 34).

Due to the history of the region which is marked by multiple wars and conflicts, especially among China, Japan, Korea, and Taiwan (the Sino-Japanese wars, the Taiwan Straits crises, and the Korean War), the region experienced significant alterations in the balance of power, as well as unequal distributions of military force inside and among the nations.

Given the historically based mistrust among the previous countries, the US maintains a significant military presence in China's neighboring countries with more than 61,000 US military personnel in Japan, 28,000 in South Korea, and 11,500 in Guam, operating in hundreds of military bases spread all over the region, this makes the US -by far- the most powerful military actor in the Western Pacific (U.S. Department of Defense, "Defense Manpower Data Center"). Hence, that intensive military presence exists primarily for security purposes and seeks to strengthen regional peace and security, guarantee an open and free

Indo-Pacific, counteract China's growing influence there, and improve support for regional humanitarian aid initiatives (Chalk 7-16).

A protest movement that started in Beijing's Tiananmen Square in April 1989 eventually became one of George H. W. Bush's presidency's most dramatic and defining moments. Daily coverage of the events by international media sent images of students clashing with Chinese law enforcement and armed forces around the world. The movement eventually led to a brutal military reaction against the demonstrators in a clear violation of human rights on June 4, 1989.

Therefore, the US reaction to the Tiananmen massacre was built on humanitarian reasons, the congress pressed for heavy economic penalties on China to accelerate the democratization process and to force greater flexibility by the PRC administration on the subject of human rights (Hyer 3, 4).

### **3.2 The US Efforts to Integrate the Middle East and Afghanistan into the Liberal International Order**

The attempts of applying the US International liberal agenda in the Middle East and its surroundings often took the course of military violence, economic sanctions, humanitarian assistance, state-building attempts...etc. The US intervened in Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria, and many more using the previous tools which fall under one reason which is maintaining the US-liberal hegemony over the whole region.

#### **3.2.1 Afghanistan**

The US involvement in Afghanistan took the form of a massive military intervention under the name of “war on terror” in an operation codenamed Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) following the traumatic 9/11 terrorist attacks. The September 11, 2001 attacks were a

series of airline hijackings and suicide attacks committed by 19 terrorists associated with the Islamic extremist group al-Qaeda. It was the deadliest terrorist attack on US soil with nearly 3,000 deaths (The Global Terrorism Database). The attacks involved the hijacking of four planes, three of which were used to strike significant US sites, the World Trade Center's north and south towers, and the Pentagon.

The US used its military, economic, and political power to apply its liberal agenda in Afghanistan as it took advantage of the international organizations and institutions it governs to give the war credibility and legitimacy and to fund it with the necessary manpower, armaments, and finance. In just 36 hours after the terrorist attacks, the US invoked the NATO alliance's Article V for the first time in history, declaring that an attack on one member was an attack on all. The US sent NATO eight specific demands, the most noteworthy of which was to send units of the NATO Airborne Early Warning Force to the US (Williams 68, 69).

In Afghanistan, the objectives were not to force the Taliban or bin Laden to negotiate, but to destroy al Qaeda's ability to operate within Afghanistan and bring about the downfall of the Taliban regime. The US launched the war on Afghanistan because the latter refused to extradite Bin Laden and his top Taliban aides. Therefore, in addition to the large-scale military intervention, the US made significant efforts to make Afghanistan become diplomatically isolated, condemned at the UN, subjected to an arms embargo, and economically sanctioned (Posen 53).

### **3.2.2 The Middle East**

The Middle East has always been the region with the highest priority on the US agenda, owing to one important reason: preventing strong states in the region from exerting influence over the entire region and keeping the region solely under the supervision of the US. The region witnessed a quick growth of anti-US hegemony powers that can stand against

the interests of the US in the region. Therefore, US involvement in Iraq and Syria was inevitable as terrorism broadened its outreach to a certain degree where it threatened US national security. The US objective was to totally control the Middle East and integrate its states -especially Iraq and Syria- under the liberal international order, using in that regard all its liberal pressure tools and liberal justifications for the different Middle East involvements.

### **3.2.2.1 Iraq**

The scenery in Iraq was not dissimilar to that in Afghanistan, which also encountered a similar US military intervention. The US invaded Iraq twice and both were carried out by military coalitions, the first invasion, known as the Gulf War, occurred in 1990. Since the First World War, the Middle East has never experienced a crisis of this magnitude that includes both regional and extra-regional military forces (Halliday 224). The second invasion of Iraq took place in 2003 and was known as the Iraq War, this war is pretty much similar to the War in Afghanistan since the US considers it a war on terror as well, but this war has certain characteristics that set it apart from the rest.

#### **3.2.2.1.1 The 1990 Gulf War**

The Gulf War broke out as a result of Iraqi forces invading Kuwait across their southeast border, The Iraqis swiftly took control of Kuwait City and then the entire country of Kuwait. Six days after, Iraq seized control of Kuwait and proclaimed it as the twentieth Iraqi province.

The invasion led to a period of high global tension in which the US exploited the international organizations with the view of restoring peace and security in the Gulf region. The US pushed The UNSC to approve Resolution 660 which determined that there was a breach of international peace and security by the Republic of Iraq as it violated Articles 39

and 40 of the UN Charter. Through Resolution 660, the US demanded Iraq's immediate and unconditional withdrawal of its forces from the Kuwaiti-occupied territories (UN. Security Council, “Resolution 660 661 (1990)”).

In the meantime, the US took action involving both military force and economic pressure against Iraq, it deployed forces to the Gulf to defend Saudi Arabia and other States of the region, and later on, it implemented economic sanctions against Iraq imposed by the UN’s Resolution 661 under Article 51 with the object of securing Iraq's withdrawal from Kuwait and restoring the authority of the legitimate government. The US demanded from all UN members and non-members to impose very wide trade, economic, and financial embargoes on Iraq (UN. Security Council, “Resolution 660 661 (1990)”).

The US pushed as well the UN to approve Resolution 678 which states that the coalition forces are allowed to use all necessary means to secure the restoration of peace and security in the region (UN. Security Council, “Resolution 678 (1990)”).

### **3.2.2.1.2 The 2003 Iraq War**

International and regional security were the primary motives for US President George W. Bush to declare war on Iraq since it is capable to threaten US national security through having links with terrorism, especially after the 9/11 attacks as well as the security of the neighboring states through possessing an arsenal of weapons of mass destruction, including nuclear, chemical, and biological weapons (Rayburn and Sobchak 31).

G. W Bush moved forward with US plans to invade Iraq leading a military coalition that includes US allies in NATO called the “coalition of the willing”. The coalition’s mission was to restore security and peace in the region by removing Saddam Hussein from power to liberate Iraqis from three decades of its terror and brutality, clear out Iraq from terrorism, and give Iraq a chance to form a free, democratic government (Garey 123, 124).



### 3.2.2.2 Syria

The 2014 US involvement in the Syrian scene was prompted by the Syrian civil war which started in March 2011 as an Arabic-Spring protest movement similar to those successful ones in Tunisia and Egypt. The violence escalated quickly and turned into a civil war with multiple fighting parties with different political and religious leanings (Syrian Armed Forces, National Defense Force, Shabiha, Hezbollah, Syrian National Army, Al-Qaeda, Islamic State (ISIL), and Syrian Democratic Forces...).

The US attempted to address the Syrian issue by carrying out military actions under a US-led security coalition called The Global Coalition against the Islamic State. The US plan focused on having a small military presence on the ground as well as conducting airstrikes from above (Humud and Blanchard 14, 15) to fight against terrorism and terrorist groups, and to pursue the Syrian weapons of mass destruction, missile programs, and chemical weapons (U.S. Department of State, "U.S. Relations with Syria"). Moreover, the US provided military assistance, training, and equipment to the Syrian opposition forces to fight terrorism and al-Assad's regime themselves (Humud and Blanchard 15, 16).

The US involvement in Syria was also a humanitarian one in response to human rights abuses done by the al-Assad regime and the large use of chlorine gas weapons, providing over \$12.2 billion in humanitarian assistance for vulnerable individuals inside Syria and those displaced in the region since the start of the crisis (U.S. Department of State, "U.S. Relations with Syria").

Economically, The US government authorized a sanctions program on Syria under Executive Order 13894 under Caesar Syria Civilian Protection Act that allows for sanctions to be levied on those preventing, disrupting, or obstructing solutions to the Syrian conflict

which includes of course, President Bashar al-Assad and its pro-regime forces (Syria Justice and Accountability Centre).

## **4. The US Efforts to Integrate Latin America into the Liberal International Order**

The US has a long history of involvement in Latin American countries since they are the closest in distance and it is necessary to integrate them into the US-led liberal international order. Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, the US government increased its involvement in the Caribbean nations of Cuba and Haiti, implementing a range of political and military interventions. Both countries faced a combination of economic sanctions and humanitarian assistance in an effort to promote liberal values and to contain any non-liberal influence in those countries.

### **4.1 The US Efforts to Integrate Cuba into the Liberal International Order**

Following the Soviet Union's collapse, Cuban President Fidel Castro maintained the adoption of strong Marxist-Leninist principles in Cuba. The US-Cuban history which is marked by multiple conflicts: "the Bay of the Pigs invasion in 1961" and "the Cuban Missile Crisis in 1962" and the commitment to having a communist future in Cuba led the US to apply an embargo that targeted all areas of Cuba activity.

The attempts of integrating Cuba took one major form throughout the years, the US strategy was to subject Cuba to a series of economic sanctions that varied in severity depending on the US president then. During George H. W. Bush's presidency, the US announced new measures aimed at strengthening the embargo and expediting the democratic change in Cuba. The US president endorsed "the Cuban Democracy Act" (CDA) in 1992, the bill brought a series of sanctions to isolate Cuba economically and a series of limited

openings to appease the Cubans by giving the impression that the embargo is enforced only for humanitarian and/or human reasons (Sweig 161, 162).

The sanctions include:

- Bans on trade with Cuba by prohibiting ships from docking in American ports if they had been in Cuban ports during the preceding six months.
- Bans on using US dollars for international transactions and in the international banking system.
- Bans on the amount and number of remittances that could be sent to Cuba (Sweig 162, 163).

The limited openings include:

- Allowing US telecommunications companies and the Postal Service to operate in Cuba.
- Allowing the sale of **US** medicine and medical products to Cuba under some conditions.
- Permitting the US to support people and groups promoting nonviolent change in Cuba (Sweig 163, 164).

Over time, the Cuban embargo became more stringent. In 1996, US President Bill Clinton endorsed a new act called “the Cuban Liberty and Solidarity Act” or simply “the Helms-Burton Act”. The bill pushed laws to reinforce and tighten the previous sanctions as well as new laws to weaken Cuba from abroad, discourage foreign investment there, and change Cuban society internally. The act also legislated the conditions Cuba must provide for the US to eliminate its sanctions. First and foremost, it is necessary for Fidel Castro and his brother Raúl to relinquish power starting with initiating work toward free elections, free press, free labor unions, and the release of all political prisoners (Sweig 171–173).

## 4.2 The US Efforts to Integrate Haiti into the Liberal International Order

The strategy used by the US to integrate Haiti into the liberal international order bears a close resemblance to that used in its western neighbor, Cuba. Since 1990, The US imposed a number of embargoes and occasionally provided Haiti with assistance in a form of humanitarian aid. Both US methods aim at establishing democracy and peace and protecting human rights on the island.

After the first internationally observed Haitian election in 1990, Jean-Bertrand Aristide assumed the presidency and became Haiti's first democratically elected president. The US did not only deliver electoral assistance to Haiti but also delivered assistance in many other crucial areas to make Haiti align with the international liberal standards (The White House). The US aid to Haiti touched on areas like politics, economy, health, education, and agriculture, these aids were designed by the US to foster the institutions and infrastructure necessary to embed Haiti in a number of international organizations, including the UN, Organization of American States (OAS), IMF, WB, and WTO (U.S. Department of State, "U.S. Relations with Haiti").

However, Aristide's presidency was short-lived as he was ousted by a military coup d'état in September 1991. In response to the coup, the US implemented economic sanctions which initially targeted freezing Haitian government assets in the US and withholding foreign aid to the de facto regime. These sanctions were later expanded to include additional measures such as restrictions on imports and exports, commercial flights, and arms and oil shipments (Gibbons and Garfield 1499).

In another response to the coup d'état, The US intervened militarily in an operation codenamed "Operation Uphold Democracy" in 1994. The US pushed the UN Security Council to pass Resolution 940 which gave the US permission to overthrow Haiti's military-

backed government using force. The US invasion occurred according to a two-stage plan: First, the US troops would remove the military leaders responsible for President Aristide's overthrow and launch a retraining program for the Haitian army and police. Second, the Blue Berets of the UN peacekeepers then take over to ensure political stability in Haiti until the full reinstatement of Aristide's government (Ballard 85–88).

## **5. The US Efforts to Integrate Africa into the Liberal International Order**

The US employed a range of tactics and strategies to enforce the international liberal order on each country in the African continent. One of the most prominent approaches was through military interventions, which were heavily utilized in regions such as the Sahel, the Maghreb, and the Horn of Africa, as these areas shared similar security challenges. These regions have all experienced a surge in terrorism due to a combination of economic, security, climatic, and political issues, such as the 1992 coup d'état in Algeria, the 2012 coup d'état in Mali, and the 1991 coup d'état in Somalia. The US' primary strategy was built on the global war on terror and involved a range of measures such as providing humanitarian aid, forming security coalitions, conducting peace-restoring and peace-keeping military operations, and developing state-building plans.

### **5.1 The US Efforts to Integrate Algeria into the Liberal International**

#### **Order**

Even though the US assistance to Algeria started away before the 9/11 terrorist attacks, it falls exactly within the global war on terror. Starting from 1990, all the US interventions in Algeria were held from a national and international security angle, over fears of a radical Islamist government taking over power and challenging the US interests in Algeria and the Maghreb region.

As a result of the cancellation of the electoral process in 1992 which brought the Islamic Salvation Front (FIS) party close to power, Algeria entered a decade-long Civil War where it received military aid from the US, especially following President Liamine Zeroual's election. The US strategy involved endorsing the government as long as it took steps to expand and hasten the process of reconciling differences, implementing economic reforms, conducting elections, and engaging in dialogue with the opposition, which also included moderate Islamists (Zoubir 73).

After the 9/11 attacks in 2001, it became clear that terrorism was a real threat to the US national security and had to be eradicated everywhere in the world. Since the Algerian territories were a strategic area for radical Islamism and terrorist groups for more than ten years, the US Department of Defense (DOD) intervened in the region with the intention to combat terrorist activities and extremists like al Qaeda in the Maghreb region. This intervention was justified within the context of George W. Bush's global war on terrorism, which the administration utilized to expand its military presence and exert influence in Algeria and the Maghreb region (Qasi 5).

In the same regard, the US pushed Algeria to Join international counterterrorism organizations like the Global Counterterrorism Forum (GCTF), in which it became an active member and the co-chair of the organization's West Africa Working Group (WAWG), Algeria also became a Partner for Cooperation with the world's largest regional security organization: Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), an observer to the OAS (U.S. Department of State, "U.S. Relations with Algeria"), and The United States Africa Command (AFRICOM) which the US used to ensure the safety of oil facilities and provide the necessary security environment in Algeria (Qasi 6). In addition to the security organizations, The US pushed Algeria to join the UN, the International Monetary Fund, and the World Bank (U.S. Department of State, "U.S. Relations with Algeria").

## **5.2 The US Efforts to Integrate Somalia into the Liberal International Order**

The US involvement in Somalia came onto the world's radar screen in 1991 when the longtime president of Somalia Siad Barre was overthrown and the country descended into a clan-based civil war. As a response to Somalia's political vacuum, The US pushed the UN to approve the UN Security Council Resolution 733, the resolution allowed the US to involve in Somalia using 3 ways: an arms embargo, humanitarian assistance, and a cease-fire. Moreover, UN observers were deployed in Somalia to surveil the cease-fire there in an operation codenamed: United Nations Operation in Somalia (UNOSOM I), the mission aimed at securing the grounds to fairly distribute the relief supplies to Somalians (Prunier 55-58). The humanitarian aid was mainly a result of the terrible famine that devastated Somalia and the Horn of Africa for decades, while the cease-fire and the arms embargo played the role of facilitating the delivery of relief supplies to the affected areas of Somalia.

In a failed state like Somalia, the distribution of humanitarian aid was extremely difficult because the warlords there used food as a weapon to control the country. In response to that problem, President Bush pushed the UN to allow the use of all necessary means to establish -as soon as possible- a secure environment for humanitarian relief operations in Somalia. Indeed, the UN issued the UN Security Council Resolution 794 which entailed sending US troops grouped under the United Nations International Task Force (UNITAF) banner to secure the delivery of aid and relief supplies in Somalia (Prunier 59-63).

The US continued its military presence in Somalia for peace-keeping and state-building purposes under a second UN Operation, UNOSOM II. The resolution responsible for maintaining the troops in Somalia was the UN Security Council Resolution 814 which also included rebuilding basic Somalian institutions. The state-building process aimed at

enhancing democracy, civil society, and human rights in Somalia through the building of governmental, non-governmental, and security institutional capacities (Menkhaus 155-159).

### **5.3 The US Efforts to Integrate Mali into the Liberal International Order**

The attempts of integrating Mali into the liberal international order fall right within the US global war on terror, as its involvement there became notable only following the 9/11 terrorist attacks. At first, the US counterterrorism plan in Mali was only preventative because the Bush administration decided to just train and equip African forces to fight terrorism themselves rather than initiate direct US military operations. But after the beginning of the Sahel conflict in 2012, the US strategy regarding the insecurity in Mali shifted to become more direct, as it formed security coalitions with France and some African countries to contain the conflict and establish democratic regimes in Mali and its surrounding countries. Along with the military involvement, the US interfered in Mali for humanitarian and developmental reasons as a result of the harsh climatic conditions of the Sahel region.

Before the Sahel crisis in 2012, Mali already experienced three (03) US counterterrorism programs in the Sahel region. First, the US launched the Pan-Sahel Initiative (PSI) in 2002, which grew out of the US strategic shift after the 9/11 attacks. The initiative aimed at training, equipping, and building the capacity of the counterterrorism forces in Mali (Idahosa et al. 729). Second, the US replaced the PSI with the Trans-Saharan Counterterrorism Partnership (TSCTP) in 2005, which increased the reach of the US anti-terrorism actions in Mali and the Sahel region (Tankel 882, 883). Third, the US established AFRICOM in 2007 whose mission was to execute political and military operations in Mali and the other Sahel countries, including military-to-military training activities, humanitarian relief operations, and counterpiracy and counterterrorism activities (Mueller).



In 2012, Mali witnessed a crisis that started as a coup d'état on President Amadou Toumani Touré (ATT) who made significant progress in putting the country on the path to democracy. The fall of ATT as well as the failure to react seriously to the growing Tuareg separatist movement led by the National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad (MNLA) brought the country and the region into a major crisis called the Sahel crisis (Wing 101). The insecurity in Mali increased after the involvement of Al Qaeda in the Maghreb (AQIM), Boko Haram, then ISIS which posed an international threat that required an US interference to find ways of countering the state of instability in Mali and the Sahel.

After the Sahel crisis began, the US started to intervene more directly in Mali, it supported the coalition forces (France, Niger, Mali, and Chad...) by sharing accurate intelligence and providing air support and heavy airlifts for soldiers and vehicles in the different active conflict areas in Mali and the other Sahel countries. Moreover, the US deployed a number of special operations forces to participate in counterterrorism missions leading French and US-trained African forces (Tankel 887-891).

Moreover, the US provided humanitarian and developmental aid to Mali due to the country's prolonged struggle with harsh climate conditions that have hindered its ability to maintain stability and democracy. The assistance provided by the US included various initiatives such as healthcare, agriculture, education, democracy-building, and peace-building efforts. The objective of the US aid was to promote peace, enhance human rights, and address the different developmental and humanitarian issues faced by Mali (U.S. Department of State, "U.S. Relations with Mali").

## **6. Conclusion**

In summary, the US made significant efforts to establish a global liberal order, which it relied upon to strengthen its position as the world leader and exert influence over other

nations in the name of this international system. The purpose of discussing how the US constructed this order is to highlight its power, coherence, and internationality as well as the US' ability to exert control over every aspect of global affairs. Additionally, this chapter raises concerns about the sustainability of the order and the US' capacity to confront recent challenges. Consequently, the chapter is written in a manner that sets the stage for a potential failure of the US-led international liberal order, a topic that will be explored in detail in the following chapter.

## Chapter 3

### The Fall of the US-led Liberal International Order

#### 1. Introduction

The US-led liberal order, which emerged in the aftermath of World War II, has been the backbone of the international system for decades. It has been characterized by institutions such as the UN, NATO, and the World Trade Organization, which have worked together to promote democratic values, free trade, and international cooperation. However, recent years have seen the emergence of cracks in this liberal order, with the US itself being a major contributor to its weakening. The US has abandoned its traditional role in international institutions, pursued unilateral policies, and undermined the rules-based order it helped create. This has led to increasing skepticism and criticism of the liberal order, with some arguing that it is now in danger of collapsing.

This chapter discusses the US' policies and how they led to significant rifts and fissures in the US-led liberal order. This chapter also demonstrates how US policies have undermined the foundations upon which this system was built and how the US withdrawal from Afghanistan in 2021 put an end to US hegemony.

#### 2. The Declining Signs of the US' Liberal Order

The US has long been recognized as a dominant global superpower with significant political, economic, and military influence around the world. However, in recent years, there has been a noticeable decline in the US liberal hegemony. This decline has been characterized by various signs, including the erosion of democratic institutions, a growing trend of protectionism in trade policies, and a reduced willingness to engage in international cooperation. These signs point towards a shifting global order, with other emerging powers such as China and Russia competing for greater influence on the world stage. Understanding

the declining signs of the US liberal hegemony is crucial for policymakers, scholars, and individuals alike, as it will have profound implications for the future of global governance and international relations.

The decline of US' international liberal order can be traced through a series of events that have challenged its traditional role as the leader of the free world. These events include President Obama's "leading from behind" approach to foreign policy, which aimed to reduce US military engagement abroad. President Trump's economic nationalism and protectionist policies also contributed to the decline, with the US withdrawing from international trade agreements. Additionally, the US' refusal to intervene militarily in the Syrian conflict highlighted a shift away from the US' traditional role as a global peacekeeper. Together, these events signify the cracks in US' international liberal order and raise concerns about the future of US global leadership.

## **2.1 Obama's Policies**

### **2.1.1 The Dodd-Frank Wall Street Reform and Consumer Protection Act**

The financial crisis of 2008 had devastating effects on the American economy, leading to widespread job losses and significant wealth erosion. President Obama responded by signing the Dodd-Frank Wall Street Reform and Consumer Protection Act into law, aiming to address the broken financial regulatory system that caused the crisis. The law held Wall Street accountable for their irresponsible behavior, introduced measures to prevent excessive risk-taking, and created the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau (CFPB) to enforce rules and protect consumers. These reforms went against neoliberal principles of deregulation and prioritized consumer protection and stability in the financial industry. The Dodd-Frank Act sought to level the playing field, increase transparency, and prevent systemic risks, representing a departure from the neoliberal policies that contributed to the crisis (Murdock 1321).

### **2.1.2 Leading from Behind**

The concept of "leading from behind" involved a collaborative approach where the US would work with other countries, including regional powers and allies, to achieve common goals instead of taking the lead unilaterally. This approach marked a departure from the interventionist foreign policy of the previous Bush administration. Instead of relying solely on American military power, Obama's strategy focused on building consensus and achieving shared objectives through cooperation with other nations, with the US playing a supportive role. The aim was to avoid the perception of imposing American will on other countries and to encourage their active participation and ownership in the decision-making process. However, some neoliberals criticized this approach as it deviated from the traditional American foreign policy of proactive and assertive leadership. They believed that the US should take a more active role in promoting democracy and human rights abroad, using its economic and military power to shape global events and support its allies, rather than relying on other countries to take the lead (O'Connor and Cooper 654-659).

### **2.2 Trump's Economic Mentality**

During his presidency, President Donald Trump's background as a businessman influenced his economic policy proposals, with a focus on economic nationalism and prioritizing American interests. His policies, such as renegotiating trade deals and reducing regulations on businesses, generated mixed reactions. The "America First" policy strained relationships with democratic allies, and demands for increased payments from Japan for US troops stationed there created tension. These actions diverged from neoliberal principles of interdependence and cooperation between countries. Furthermore, the Trump administration's withdrawal from international agreements, such as the Paris Agreement on climate change, was seen as disregarding the importance of international law and undermining American influence in the world (Seligman and Gramer).

## **2.3 US Non-Military Intervention in Syria**

The Syrian War has had devastating effects, resulting in the destruction of the state, economy, and infrastructure, and causing a high number of casualties and displacements. The US' decision not to intervene in the conflict can be seen as a departure from neoliberal principles and a rejection of traditional US foreign policy approaches in the Middle East. Concerns about the complexity of the conflict, the potential costs and complications of military intervention, and skepticism toward using force for complex political ends influenced this decision. The US' non-interventionist stance in Syria has been criticized for its departure from promoting democratic governance, preventing mass atrocities, and upholding humanitarian values. This inaction has raised doubts about the integrity of the liberal order that the US has historically supported (Itani 340).

## **3. The Fall of the Liberal Pillars**

In recent years, there has been a growing sense that liberal values are in decline. From the rise of populism and authoritarianism in many parts of the world to the erosion of democratic norms and institutions, the pillars of the liberal order seem to be under threat. This trend is particularly troubling given the key role that liberal values have played in shaping the international system over the past century. The principles of individual liberty, democratic governance, and free market capitalism have been seen as the foundation of a prosperous and peaceful world. However, the current state of affairs suggests that these values are no longer as secure as they once were and that the liberal order is facing a crisis of legitimacy.

### **3.1 The Democratic Peace**

The erosion of democracy is not limited to other countries but is also evident within the US itself. Disinformation, structural racism, inequality, violence, and polarization are

contributing to the decline of democracy. This decline has implications for foreign policy and national security, as strong democracies are considered more stable and reliable partners.

While the US will continue to support democracy, it will focus on reform and incentives rather than military interventions or attempts to forcefully overthrow authoritarian regimes.

Urgent attention and action are needed to address the root causes of democratic decline within the US (Repucci and Slipowitz).

The US' struggles to maintain democracy within its borders have broader implications for the international community. The decline of the US liberal order, characterized by its promotion of democracy and human rights, could signify a shift in the global balance of power. Disputes with other democratic nations, such as France, undermine cooperation and mutual respect. The US engaging in economic and diplomatic conflicts with democratic allies weakens alliance networks and isolates the country on the global stage. Furthermore, the US itself has been found to fail in upholding human rights, particularly regarding racial discrimination against ethnic minority groups, contributing to social unrest and a lack of confidence in the social order. To effectively promote democracy and human rights abroad, the US must first address these pressing issues within its own borders and uphold its own liberal principles (Blinken).

### **3.2 Interdependence**

Recent actions by the US government raise questions about its commitment to free-market principles and neoliberalism. Imposing sanctions on countries like Iran and Venezuela, using allies to promote its economic interests, and intervening in the market itself indicate a departure from the principles of free-market capitalism. For example, the US-led campaign against Huawei and its involvement in the Trans-Pacific Partnership were seen as efforts to maintain economic dominance rather than promoting fair competition. The US has also supported regimes known for human rights abuses, such as Saudi Arabia in Yemen,

undermining its claims of promoting democratic values. Additionally, the government's bailout of financial institutions during the 2008 crisis contradicted the principle of free-market capitalism. These actions suggest a more pragmatic approach to international relations and economic policy, raising doubts about the US' commitment to neoliberalism (Drezner 7).

### **3.3 International Institutions**

The US has faced criticism for its departure from various international institutions and agreements, raising concerns about its role and the efficacy of these organizations. Notable instances include the US withdrawal from the Paris Agreement on climate change in 2017, seen as a setback to global efforts in addressing climate change. Another example is the US withdrawal from the Iran nuclear deal in 2018, despite Iran's compliance as certified by the International Atomic Energy Agency. The US has also drawn criticism for its stance on the International Criminal Court, refusing to join and even threatening sanctions against its officials and judges (Schabas 719).

The US has been accused of undermining international institutions further by employing its veto power in the UN Security Council to block resolutions critical of Israel. Moreover, the US has faced accusations of undermining the World Trade Organization through trade disputes and imposing tariffs. The US withdrawal from the World Health Organization in 2020, citing concerns over its pandemic response, was criticized for impeding global health initiatives. The use of unilateral sanctions, particularly on countries like Iran, Venezuela, and North Korea, has been viewed as causing humanitarian crises and being ineffective. The US has also been criticized for interference in other countries' affairs, involvement in regime change operations, and supporting authoritarian regimes despite their human rights records (Drezner 143).



## **4. Afghanistan Prior the US Withdrawal (1989-2021)**

The US engagement in Afghanistan stands out as one of the lengthiest and costliest conflicts in the annals of American history. Spanning two decades, this war proved unsuccessful in vanquishing the Taliban and achieving sustainable nation-building objectives. Consequently, the US was compelled to commence negotiations for peace with the Taliban. The culmination of these talks precipitated the complete withdrawal of US forces, leaving the country under the firm grasp of the Taliban which managed to easily oust the Western-backed Afghan government and seize control of the country even before the US troops pullout.

### **4.1 Historical Background: Understanding the US War in Afghanistan**

#### **4.1.1 1996 Taliban's Rise to Power**

The power vacuum created in Afghanistan by the withdrawal of the Soviet Union was occupied by a fragmented transitional government composed of groups from the Mujahideen movement that was armed and financed by the US to fight against the Soviet Union during the Soviet invasion and occupation of Afghanistan from 1979 to 1989. However, following the Soviet withdrawal, Afghanistan descended into a brutal civil war. Rival mujahideen factions, equipped with surplus weaponry from the covert anti-Soviet military aid program and abandoned Soviet arms stockpiles, inflicted extensive damage and destruction on the country. In fact, the devastation caused by this internal conflict may have surpassed, or at least equaled, the destruction wrought during the decade-long Afghan-Soviet war (Johnson and Mason 72-74). Amidst the civil instability that followed the war, a group of students from southern Afghanistan came together with the aim of bringing stability to the political landscape. They adopted the name 'Taliban,' which translates to 'students.' Surprisingly, under the leadership of Mullah Mohammed Omar, who declared himself as Amir ul-Mumineen (Commander of the Faithful), the group garnered significant popular backing. In 1996, they

managed to capture 90% of Afghanistan, including the capital city of Kabul. This marked the establishment of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan at that time (Johnson and Mason 79-81).

#### **4.1.2 Tal-Qaeda**

Upon gaining control of Afghanistan, the Taliban took the opportunity to evaluate its objectives and emphasize the importance of international recognition. Among the initial actions of the new Taliban government was the decision to provide shelter to al-Qaeda. This involved offering a safe haven for Osama bin Laden and his group, enabling them to freely engage in activities such as recruiting, training, and dispatching terrorists to other nations (National Counterterrorism Center).

The Taliban held the belief that Arabs were wealthy, and the tales of Osama bin Laden's lavish spending reinforced the notion that he would generously invest in the construction and development of Afghanistan. These expectations turned out to be accurate, as bin Laden successfully financed the Taliban's fight against their adversaries, earning their trust in the process. As an initial gesture to establish closer ties, bin Laden purchased expensive vehicles for Mullah Omar and his loyal followers. This act elevated bin Laden's status within the Taliban, positioning him as more than just a mere guest. (Strick and Kuehn 76-88).

During the latter part of 1996, Al-Qaeda, operating from Afghanistan, released several religious decrees (fatwas) sanctioning attacks on the US. They believed that the US was the primary obstacle to the revival of the historic Islamic caliphate and needed to be confronted and overcome. Consequently, Al-Qaeda began devising various plans and operations targeting the US and its interests. Among these plans were the initial outlines of what would later be recognized as the September 11 attacks, which were internally referred to as "the planes' operation" (Strick and Kuehn 83-88).

### **4.1.3 The Global War on Terror (2001)**

Following the September 11th attacks, the US officially attributed responsibility to Al-Qaeda, which was operating and finding refuge in Taliban-controlled Afghanistan. These devastating terrorist acts took place in New York, Washington DC, and Pennsylvania, resulting in the loss of nearly 3,000 lives (The Global Terrorism Database). This event marked the commencement of a prolonged global war on terrorism led by the US. On October 7, 2001, the US began its two-decade-long presence in Afghanistan. In the subsequent two months, the Taliban was ousted from power, with many members being killed or captured while others fled the country (Khan et al. 96, 97).

After achieving an initial military victory, the US shifted its focus towards the process of state-building in Afghanistan, recognizing that defeating the Taliban and Al-Qaeda was not the sole objective of the US invasion. One of the key goals of the US in Afghanistan was to establish a Western-style nation based on liberal standards. This involved implementing a framework for the reconstruction of Afghanistan, including the adoption of a new Constitution and the establishment of various state institutions such as a representative government, electoral system, judiciary, security forces, and civil administration. To support these state-building efforts, the US, along with other donor states and agencies, provided substantial funding. Under the administration of George W. Bush, notable progress was made, with the adoption of a new constitution and the successful conduct of presidential elections in 2004. The following year, elections for the National and Provincial Assemblies were also held (Riaz and Iqbal 25-27).

Under President Obama's administration, the Taliban established an unofficial political office in Qatar as a means to engage in negotiations with the US. This significant development aimed to achieve a peace agreement, ultimately enabling the withdrawal of US

forces from Afghanistan. Initially, the discussions between the US and Afghanistan primarily revolved around exchanging prisoners, but they eventually progressed into broader peace talks. However, the two parties struggled to find common ground, resulting in a stalemate in the peace negotiations. It was not until President Trump assumed office that a renewed Afghan peace process was undertaken with a well-defined objective (Khan et al. 102, 103).

Despite the overwhelming military power of the US, the Taliban managed to exert subtle social influence and gain support among the Afghan population. They exploited grievances related to perceived corruption within the US-backed Afghan government, insufficient social services, and ethnic discrimination. Additionally, the Taliban capitalized on the historical narrative of foreign occupation by foreign powers such as the Soviets and Americans. These factors contributed to the Taliban's ability to garner logistical support for potential insurrections. Initially, the US was cautious about its reputation and optimistic about securing a favorable deal. However, President Trump believed that the US was stuck in an enduring and costly war, leading him to pursue direct negotiations with the Taliban. This strategy eventually led to the signing of a peace agreement in Doha on February 29, 2020. Subsequently, under President Biden's administration, the peace deal paved the way for a complete withdrawal from Afghanistan in August 2021 (Riaz and Iqbal 31, 32).

The Doha agreement stands as a significant milestone, being a historic accord inked by principal negotiators representing the Taliban and the US. Qatar played a pivotal role in persuading both parties to convene in Doha for negotiations, seeking to discover a mutually acceptable middle ground. This peace agreement consists of four components, encompassing provisions that safeguard against any exploitation of Afghanistan's territory by any entity or individual that could pose a threat to the security of the United States and its allies. In return, it entails a complete withdrawal of foreign forces within a specified timeframe. Additionally, the agreement paves the way for intra-Afghan peace talks, with the ultimate goals of

achieving a lasting ceasefire and establishing a power-sharing arrangement between the Taliban and other rival Afghan factions (U.S. Department of State, “Agreement for Bringing Peace to Afghanistan”).

To sum up, the Bush administration pursued a strategy focused on counterterrorism and nation-building, yet they were unable to halt the Taliban's progress. The Obama administration later devised an exit plan, but due to the challenging security conditions in Afghanistan, only a partial implementation was feasible. In the late 2020s, the Trump administration achieved success by reaching a peace agreement with the Taliban in Doha. As a result, the Biden administration decided to withdraw US troops from Afghanistan, leading to a swift takeover of the country by the Taliban.

## **5. The US Withdrawal from Afghanistan as Evidence of the Liberal Hegemony Impairment**

The US, once seen as a beacon of democratic values and a champion of the liberal order, has been grappling with the challenge of upholding its own ethical standards in recent years. From racial inequalities to economic disparities, the cracks in America's liberal order have become increasingly apparent. However, the decision to withdraw from Afghanistan can be seen as a final blow to the very foundations of the liberal order that the US has long sought to uphold. This withdrawal not only signifies a retreat from its international commitments but also raises concerns about the future of democracy, human rights, and global stability. As the US disengages from Afghanistan, the ramifications for the liberal order and the international community at large are profound, signaling a potential shift in the global balance of power and the erosion of the values that the US once championed.

## **5.1 The Taliban's Ascent to Power**

Just a few days before the finalization of their departure, the Taliban managed to seize control of the capital city of Kabul and declared their complete authority over the entire government. As Afghanistan's main city fell and the country's key institutions collapsed, the Taliban swiftly established an interim government in a span of three weeks. However, the new Islamic Emirate cabinet faced opposition from the public due to the absence of representation for various ethnic and political groups in the country. The Taliban dominated governmental positions, while women were excluded from any political representation. This sparked another armed conflict between the government and the National Resistance Front of Afghanistan (NRFA), which was an offshoot of the former Mujahideen movement. Additionally, protests erupted in different parts of the country by political opponents, resulting in escalated violence and a heavy-handed response from the authorities (Pannett). The Taliban seems to be inclined towards employing similar strategies as they did in the 1990s, as evidenced by the fact that many members of the current cabinet had previously held positions of power during their previous rule from 1996 to 2001. The Taliban's approach towards political opposition and human rights has been marked by a disregard or elimination of both, which has led to a fading of the Afghans' hopes of seeing a better Taliban version than the one that ruled the country between 1996 and 2001 (Boni 380-382).

## **5.2 The US Renouncing its Liberal Values**

The US departed, leaving behind an unstable Afghanistan under the control of inexperienced Taliban militants, who further exacerbated the situation and plunged the country into a severe humanitarian catastrophe. The Taliban's military prowess did not translate into a comparable ability to effectively govern the nation. Presently, Afghanistan is facing a worsening humanitarian crisis that is projected to deteriorate in the future. The US-

led intervention in Afghanistan has resulted in more conflicts than resolutions, as it heightened political divisions and failed to establish lasting peace. Consequently, the country continues to suffer from dire social and economic conditions, depriving the Afghan people of their basic necessities.

### 5.2.1 The Refugee Crisis

The rise of the Taliban in Afghanistan led to a significant decline in the protection of human rights, with the militants committing widespread violations that instilled fear among the Afghan population. As a result, a large number of people were forced to flee their homes and seek refuge in neighboring countries. Data from the UN Human Rights Commissioner (UNHCR) in Table 1 presents the number of Afghan refugees in neighboring countries since August 2021.

Table 1. The number of Afghan refugees in neighboring countries since August 2021

Host country	Refugees
Pakistan	250000
Iran	1000000
Uzbekistan	13020
Tajikistan	5710

Source: The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) Regional Bureau for Asia and the Pacific (RBAP). “Afghanistan Situation #23.” The UN Refugee Agency UNHCR, 1 Feb. 2023.

The impact of the US withdrawal in Afghanistan has had a particularly devastating effect on women and girls, who have faced significant challenges and hardships.

Disturbingly, statistics show that over 80 percent of the forcibly displaced individuals from

Afghanistan are women and children (The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)). This staggering number highlights the vulnerability and increased risks faced by women and girls in times of conflict.

### **5.2.2 Women\Children Rights Violations**

Since taking power, the Taliban have enforced an extensive and expanding set of regulations and directives that severely restrict the rights of women and girls. Their interpretation of Islamic Sharia law dictates that women are confined to their homes and obligated to serve their husbands, and they are allowed to leave the house only if they were accompanied by a mahram or a male member of their family (Pradnyawan et al.). These policies effectively deny women and girls the ability to exercise their fundamental rights and severely limit their freedom of movement and autonomy. Furthermore, the Taliban strictly prohibits women from engaging in any form of governance or occupying high-ranking positions within the civil service. They have announced and consistently enforced regulations that effectively bar women from pursuing a wide range of employment opportunities. This severe restriction prevents women from participating in various professions and hinders their ability to contribute to society and exercise their skills and talents (Human Rights Watch).

The UN has reported over 2000 instances of human rights violations in Afghanistan, encompassing issues such as child marriage, child labor, and child abuse. Startling statistics reveal that approximately 10 million children in Afghanistan are in dire need of humanitarian assistance, with a significant portion of them suffering from acute malnutrition (US Department of State, “2022 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Afghanistan” 36-38). This paints a distressing picture of the challenges faced by children in the country, as they are subjected to various forms of exploitation and abuse while grappling with severe health and nutritional deficiencies. Urgent efforts are required to address these pressing issues



and provide the necessary support and aid to improve the well-being and future prospects of Afghan children.

### **5.2.3 Food Insecurity**

Following the Taliban's assumption of power, the economic collapse in the country led to a dire situation where more than 90 percent of the population faced food insecurity. This resulted in tens of millions of people being compelled to forgo meals on a daily basis or endure entire days without eating during the year 2022. (Human Rights Watch). The profound impact of the economic turmoil on the availability and accessibility of food has created a significant humanitarian crisis, exacerbating the suffering and vulnerability of the Afghan population.

On the other side, the withdrawal of the US from Afghanistan has eliminated the motivation to provide donations and aid to the country, as there is no longer financial oversight. Consequently, the USA and other donor nations have halted their support for crucial workers who provide healthcare, education, and other essential services in Afghanistan. This has led to a significant decline in wages, coinciding with the rising prices of food, fuel, and other essential commodities. The combined effect of these factors has caused widespread financial hardships and increased the overall cost of living for the Afghan population. (Human Rights Watch).

### **5.2.4 Absence of Democracy and Peace**

Although the 2004 constitution guarantees Afghan citizens the right to participate in free and fair elections to choose their government, the Taliban disregarded this provision and instead reverted to a slightly modified version of the 1964 constitution shortly after the withdrawal of US forces. (US Department of State, "2022 Country Reports on Human Rights

Practices: Afghanistan” 23). the Taliban dissolved the Independent Election Commission, the Electoral Complaints Commission, and the Ministry of Parliamentary Affairs, asserting that these institutions were no longer required in Afghanistan's present circumstances. This action signaled their intention to forego any future elections or democratic processes. (US Department of State, “2021 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Afghanistan” 37).

The Taliban has engaged in many acts of violence, including extrajudicial killings and forced disappearances, targeting former government officials and security personnel. In various instances, Taliban forces have conducted military operations and nighttime raids, specifically targeting residents believed to be harboring or supporting members of the Islamic State Khorasan Province (ISKP). These operations have resulted in the assault of civilians and the arbitrary detention of individuals without proper legal procedures. Disturbingly, detainees have been forcibly disappeared or killed, with some instances involving beheadings. In certain provinces, the Taliban authorities have left bodies in public areas or displayed them on streets and intersections as warnings.

During the later part of 2021 and continuing into 2022, individuals in Nangarhar province discovered and uncovered a mass grave containing a minimum of 45 bodies at different stages of decomposition. These bodies exhibited distressing indications of torture or cruel executions, including instances of missing limbs, ropes around their necks, or beheadings. In other provinces like Panjshir, the Taliban conducted search operations with the aim of targeting communities that they accused of providing support to the NRFA, During these operations, the Taliban detained and subjected local residents of the province to torture and mistreatment (Human Rights Watch).

### 5.3 Afghanistan and the Dilemmas of US' International Liberal Order through the Liberal Lens

Table 2. Examples on the US withdrawal from Afghanistan from a liberal perspective.

Theoretical approach	KEY COMPONENTS	Examples
<b>LIBERALISM</b>	Democratic peace theory (a)	(a) Both the Taliban and the US wanted the US to withdraw. (a) The Doha Agreement signed by the former president had to be upheld to prevent major losses in money and casualties.
	Interdependence (b)	(b) The previous interdependence that had existed between the ISAF and the Afghan police as well as between the US and Pakistan, was gone. (b) The Afghan government was threatened as long as there was a US presence in Afghanistan
	International institutions (c)	(c) It was a collective decision with NATO and the UN to withdraw from Afghanistan. (c) The goals established by international institutions, such as ISAF, had been fulfilled and thus there was no reason to stay in Afghanistan.

Source: Pihl, Hillevi. *The American Withdrawal from Afghanistan Bachelor Thesis. The American Withdrawal from Afghanistan Bachelor Thesis. 2022.*

#### 5.3.1 The Democratic Peace

The Taliban's swift takeover of Afghanistan came as a shocking turn of events, directly following the US' declaration of leaving behind a strong democratic government. The

speed and ease with which the Taliban seized control underscored the fragility of the Afghan government and raised questions about the efficacy of the US' nation-building efforts. Despite nearly two decades of American presence and significant investments in infrastructure, security, and democratic institutions, the sudden collapse of the Afghan government revealed the deep-rooted challenges that persisted beneath the surface. The Taliban's resurgence highlighted the complex realities on the ground, including widespread corruption, ethnic divisions, and a lack of cohesive leadership within the Afghan government. The rapid shift in power demonstrated that the establishment of a stable democracy requires more than external intervention; it necessitates a comprehensive understanding of local dynamics, inclusive governance, and sustainable solutions that resonate with the aspirations and needs of the Afghan people which the US used as a banner for many interventions outside of its soil (Krauss).

In the years following their ousting in 2001, the Taliban received considerable support. According to a 2009 survey conducted by the US-based nonprofit organization, the Asia Foundation, approximately half of the Afghan population, particularly Pashtuns and rural Afghans, expressed sympathy for armed opposition groups, predominantly the Taliban. The Afghan people's backing for the Taliban and its affiliates was partly rooted in grievances against public institutions. However, a subsequent survey conducted in 2019 revealed a significant shift in sentiment, with only 13.4 percent of Afghans expressing sympathy for the Taliban. This change in perception coincided with stalled intra-Afghan peace talks in early 2021, during which an overwhelming majority of respondents emphasized the importance of safeguarding women's rights (United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA)).

In a viral video showcasing the final moments before the collapse of Kabul, Afghan citizens are seen desperate to flee the Taliban's control. The citizens clung to a departing US

military aircraft as it taxied down the runway on Monday, August 16, 2021. Tragically, some individuals lost their grip and fell to their deaths as the plane gained altitude. A significant number of people raced alongside the massive US Air Force aircraft at Kabul airport, with a few managing to hold on before it ultimately took off. This highlights not only their desperation to escape the Taliban's rule but also serves as a powerful symbol of the public's unequivocal rejection of the Taliban regime. The harrowing scenes witnessed at the Kabul airport exemplify the profound fear and uncertainty that accompanied the Taliban's takeover, signaling the beginning of what many perceive as a dictatorial rule imposed upon the Afghan people (Associated Press).

The Taliban's takeover of Afghanistan should have prompted the US to reconsider its position and potentially initiate another intervention in the name of promoting democracy. The international liberal order, which the US has long championed, stands for principles such as individual rights, freedom, and the rejection of tyrannical rule. By leaving the Afghan people under the control of the Taliban, an extremist group known for its oppressive practices, the US appeared to have abandoned its commitment to these values. The Taliban's track record of violating human rights, suppressing women's rights, and stifling individual freedoms contradicts the principles the liberal order strives to uphold. The lack of immediate action to counter the Taliban's ascendancy may be seen as a failure to protect the Afghan people from an oppressive regime, further undermining the US' credibility as a promoter of democracy and defender of human rights. This turn of events serves as a showcase of the failure of the Liberal order promoted by the American government (Dodge 51, 52).

### **5.3.2 Interdependence**

The recent investments made by Chinese and Russian companies in Taliban-controlled Afghanistan highlight a shifting landscape of economic interdependence, with potential implications for the US-led liberal order. The Chinese firm's multimillion-dollar

contract to extract oil in Afghanistan signifies the country's growing economic ties with China, a major competitor and geopolitical adversary of the US. Similarly, Russian involvement in trade agreements with Afghanistan further deepens economic cooperation between the two nations. These developments demonstrate a diversification of economic partnerships for Afghanistan, diminishing its reliance on Western powers and potentially challenging the economic interdependence that has characterized the liberal order (Kumar and Noori).

The expanding economic relationship between Afghanistan and China, as well as Russia, raises concerns for the US-led liberal order. Both China and Russia are seen as major adversaries to the US, with differing political and economic ideologies. The investment by a Chinese state-owned company in Afghanistan's oil extraction sector strengthens China's foothold in the region, potentially enhancing its influence and strategic interests. Likewise, Russian involvement in trade agreements signals a broader alignment with Afghanistan, potentially undermining the liberal order's economic dominance and Western-led initiatives in the region (Yi En).

These economic collaborations between Afghanistan, China, and Russia pose a challenge to the US-led liberal order's efforts to maintain economic interdependence among like-minded nations. The increased economic ties with China and Russia provide alternative avenues for economic growth and development for Afghanistan, potentially reducing its reliance on Western support. This diversification of economic partners challenges the traditional Western-centric economic order, as Afghanistan expands its economic relationships with countries that have different political and ideological orientations. The emergence of these new economic alliances reflects a shifting global landscape, with potential ramifications for the liberal order and its power dynamics.

The rapid rise of China's economy and its increasing influence in Afghanistan underscore a shifting dynamic where peace can no longer be solely maintained through economic ties. With China's expanding presence and investments in various sectors, including oil extraction, Afghanistan is becoming less reliant on the support of the US and other Western powers. The growing economic clout of China presents an alternative source of economic stability and development for Afghanistan, potentially reshaping the geopolitical landscape and challenging the notion that peace can be sustained primarily through economic interdependence.

### **5.3.3 International Institutions**

The Responsibility to Protect (R2P) is an international principle aimed at preventing the recurrence of mass atrocity crimes, including genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing, and crimes against humanity. It originated as a response to the insufficient international action taken during the atrocities in Rwanda and the former Yugoslavia in the 1990s. The International Committee on Intervention and State Sovereignty (ICISS) formulated the concept of R2P in 2001. One of its pillars shows that if a nation clearly demonstrates its inability to safeguard its own people, it is imperative for the international community to be ready to engage in suitable collective measures, promptly and decisively, while adhering to the principles outlined in the UN Charter (Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect).

Under the Taliban regime, there has been a widespread and systematic occurrence of extrajudicial executions targeting individuals associated with the former government, armed groups, and those who allegedly do not comply with the Taliban's rules. The UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) documented numerous cases, with at least 237 extrajudicial executions recorded between the Taliban takeover in August 2021 and June 2022. In addition, the Taliban displayed a disregard for human rights, committing war crimes by targeting individuals associated with the NRFA in Panjshir province. Despite reports of

these violations, impunity prevailed as the Taliban denied such occurrences and rejected the findings of the non-governmental organizations (NGO) (Amnesty International).

The Taliban's actions extended beyond extrajudicial executions, encompassing other gross human rights violations. They resorted to public executions and floggings, targeting individuals accused of crimes such as murder, theft, or violating social norms. The space for free media diminished significantly as the Taliban created an intimidating environment, leading to the closure of numerous media outlets and imposing restrictions on journalists. Freedom of expression, association, and assembly were curtailed, with journalists facing arbitrary arrests, unlawful detentions, and torture for criticizing the Taliban. Civil society organizations and human rights groups faced constraints, hindering their ability to document and report on human rights abuses (Amnesty International).

Women's and girls' rights suffered severely under the Taliban's rule. The Ministry of Women's Affairs was replaced with a restrictive Ministry for the Propagation of Virtue and Prevention of Vice, which issued decrees limiting women's rights. Secondary and tertiary education for girls was prohibited, and higher education for women became increasingly inaccessible, with gender-segregated classrooms and limitations on subject choices. The Taliban imposed strict dress codes and required women to have a chaperone in public, effectively restricting their freedom of movement. Women who protested against these restrictions faced unlawful detention and violence. The dismantling of government structures and the conversion of the judicial system reduced protections for women, leading to increased reports of domestic violence and forced marriages. Women were also barred from working with NGOs, further impacting their livelihoods (Ahmadi and Sultan).

Throughout this period, unlawful attacks and killings persisted, with the ISKP carrying out targeted attacks on ethnic and religious minorities. The Taliban authorities failed to adequately investigate these attacks or provide protection for minority groups. In areas of



armed resistance against the Taliban, civilians faced death, arbitrary arrests, torture, and restricted movement enforced by local Taliban authorities. Forced evictions were also reported in certain areas (Al Jazeera).

The egregious human rights violations committed by the Taliban in Afghanistan demonstrate a clear need for intervention by the US, as the leader of the liberal order committed to upholding the R2P under UN rules. The R2P norm was established precisely to prevent mass atrocities and protect populations from genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing, and crimes against humanity. The systematic extrajudicial executions, restrictions on freedom of expression and assembly, denial of women's rights, and unlawful attacks on civilians demand a decisive response from the international community, with the US taking a prominent role.

As the champion of liberal values and defender of human rights, the US has an obligation to intervene in situations where populations are suffering grave abuses. The atrocities committed by the Taliban undermine the principles of justice, freedom, and dignity enshrined in international human rights law. By leveraging its global influence and resources, the US can rally international support to address these violations, provide humanitarian aid to affected populations, and pressure the Taliban to respect human rights standards. Failure to take action not only jeopardizes the lives and well-being of Afghans but also undermines the credibility of the liberal order and the principles it seeks to uphold.

Moreover, intervention in Afghanistan is not only a moral imperative but also aligns with the strategic interests of the US. Allowing the Taliban to maintain its grip on power without consequence risks creating a safe haven for terrorist organizations and destabilizing the region. The US has a vested interest in promoting stability, peace, and human rights, as these elements are vital for preventing the spread of extremism and ensuring a secure global environment. By fulfilling its leadership role and upholding the R2P principle, the US can

contribute to the restoration of peace, the protection of human rights, and the advancement of its own national security objectives.

The failure of the US to intervene effectively in Afghanistan, coupled with its withdrawal from the country, has dealt a significant blow to its role as the leader of the liberal order and raises questions about its commitment to upholding liberal principles. The human rights violations perpetrated by the Taliban, including extrajudicial executions, suppression of freedom, and denial of women's rights, demanded a resolute response from the US as the standard-bearer of liberal values. However, the decision to withdraw without ensuring the protection of vulnerable populations and the subsequent collapse of the Afghan government has exposed a lack of resolve and undermined the credibility of the liberal order. This retreat sends a message that the US is no longer willing or able to uphold the rules and norms that underpin the liberal order it once championed, marking a concerning shift in the global landscape.

## **6. Conclusion**

In conclusion, the US has been known for promoting and upholding a liberal order that values democracy, human rights, free trade, and international cooperation. However, in recent years, the US has increasingly gone against its own ethics and principles, causing the liberal order to crack and start to fall. The US has abandoned its role in international institutions such as the UN and many other agreements, while also using its allies to promote its own economic interests and interfering with the market which goes against its neoliberal pillars. The US has also shown a disregard for human rights with a decline in democracy and peace-promoting, all of the previous can be projected on the case of the US withdrawal from Afghanistan which is considered evidence of the US' failure to uphold its liberal order. A withdrawal that further compounded the already dire situation for the Afghan people, causing a Taliban return, and pushing the country into nearly two years of conflict, instability, and

human rights violations. The US-led liberal order, which has been a guiding force for democracy and human rights across the world, is showing clear signs of cracks after the withdrawal. The US is increasingly turning inward and abandoning its role as the international leader, which threatens the stability of the global order. This has led to the US being seen as an unreliable partner by its allies and partners, causing its influence to decline. If these trends continue, the cracks in the US liberal order are likely to widen, ultimately weakening the system that has underpinned, to some extent, global stability and prosperity for decades.

## Conclusion

A thorough examination of the latest trends in the US, ranging from the Obama administration's "leading from behind" approach to the Trump administration's economic mentality, provides clear evidence of the rapid decline of the US-led liberal order. The shift in American leadership and policy priorities has had significant implications for the global order. Under President Obama, the US exhibited a more cautious and collaborative approach to international affairs, which, while still aligned with liberal values, marked a departure from assertive American leadership. This change in leadership style created a void that was subsequently filled by the Trump administration's inward-looking and economically focused agenda.

The Trump administration's economic mentality, characterized by protectionism and unilateralism, further accelerated the decline of the US-led liberal order. The imposition of tariffs, withdrawal from multilateral agreements, and disregard for global norms undermined the principles of free trade and international cooperation. This shift not only fractured relationships with traditional allies but also emboldened other nations to pursue alternative models of governance, diminishing the influence of the US as a champion of liberal values.

Moreover, the political polarization and social divisions within the US have contributed to the decline of the liberal order. The rise of populism and identity politics has fueled a deepening sense of distrust and disunity, eroding the shared values necessary for a thriving liberal democracy. These divisions have had profound implications on the country's ability to project its liberal ideals and effectively engage with global challenges.

The chaotic and hasty withdrawal from Afghanistan has exposed a lack of strategic planning and coordination among key actors. The abrupt exit without a clear plan for supporting the Afghan government and security forces has not only led to a rapid collapse but also eroded confidence in the US' ability to uphold commitments and protect its allies. This

failure to maintain stability in Afghanistan has wider implications for the credibility of the US-led liberal order, as it raises doubts about America's commitment to its international obligations.

Taliban's swift resurgence and takeover of Afghanistan have emboldened non-liberal actors and undermined the values of democracy, human rights, and gender equality that are central to the liberal order. The return of a repressive regime with a history of harbouring extremist groups raises concerns about the potential for a resurgence of terrorism and threatens regional stability. Such developments weaken the argument that the liberal order is the prevailing and preferable system, as it appears incapable of preventing the rise of illiberal forces in strategic regions.

Thirdly, the withdrawal from Afghanistan has strained relationships with key allies, causing a fracture in the unity of the liberal international system. The lack of consultation and coordination with NATO partners and other countries involved in the mission has created a sense of betrayal and mistrust. This rupture in alliances weakens the collective ability to address global challenges and reinforces the perception that the US-led liberal order lacks the cohesion and solidarity necessary to tackle complex issues effectively.

Furthermore, this event has provided an opportunity for rival powers, such as China and Russia, to fill the void left by the retreating US. These countries, with their authoritarian systems and alternative models of governance, are increasingly positioning themselves as alternative global leaders. Their eagerness to engage with the Taliban regime in Afghanistan showcases a willingness to seize opportunities created by the weakening liberal order and promote their own interests and influence on the global stage.

The withdrawal from Afghanistan has dealt a significant blow to the morale and credibility of the liberal order. It has reinforced the perception that the US-led international system lacks the resolve and perseverance to see through its commitments and obligations.

This loss of confidence can lead to a self-fulfilling prophecy, as doubt and skepticism further erode the pillars of the liberal order, making it increasingly challenging to revive or sustain.

The US' withdrawal from Afghanistan has served as a final blow to the pillars of the liberal order. Firstly, the decision to leave Afghanistan to an authoritarian regime, the Taliban, undermines the principle of democratic peace upon which the liberal order is built. The Afghan people, who had embraced democratic values and worked towards establishing a more inclusive society, have been left vulnerable to repression and human rights abuses. This abandonment of democratic ideals tarnishes the US' credibility as a promoter of liberal values.

Secondly, the loss of a key country in the production of oil, such as Afghanistan, to Chinese and Russian influence highlights the erosion of interdependence within the liberal order. The US' failure to maintain stability in Afghanistan has allowed rival powers to exploit the power vacuum and gain strategic advantages. This shift undermines the economic interdependence that has been a driving force behind the liberal order, and it weakens the US' position in shaping global economic norms and maintaining its own energy security.

Furthermore, the US' departure from Afghanistan without ensuring the protection of vulnerable populations raises concerns about its commitment to the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) norm. R2P is a principle that the US has invoked and relied upon in the past to justify military intervention in Libya (2011). The failure to uphold this norm in Afghanistan not only exposes a double standard in US foreign policy but also undermines the credibility of the liberal order's commitment to human rights and the protection of civilians.

Lastly, the withdrawal from Afghanistan calls into question the US' adherence to international institutions that form the foundation of the liberal order. The hasty exit without proper consultation and coordination with NATO allies and other partners reveals a disregard for the multilateral approach and cooperation that these institutions represent. This unilateral

decision-making weakens the liberal order by eroding the trust and unity among member states, and it sets a dangerous precedent for other countries to pursue their own national interests without regard for the collective well-being.

In conclusion, the withdrawal from Afghanistan represents the final blow to the US-led liberal order. This event, coupled with the preceding trends, exposes the vulnerabilities and weaknesses of the liberal international system. The hasty and disorganized withdrawal, the subsequent Taliban takeover, and the geopolitical consequences have severely undermined the liberal order's pillars of democratic peace, interdependence, and adherence to international norms.

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