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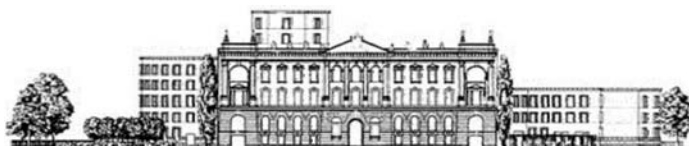
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## Tensions in Liberalism: The Troubled Path to Liberal World Order<sup>1</sup>

Georg Sørensen<sup>2</sup>

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- 2 Georg Sorensen was a guest at the WZB from January 2007 through June 2007. He is Professor of Political Science at the University of Aarhus in Denmark.  
E-mail: [Georg Sørensen <georgs@ps.au.dk>](mailto:Georg.Sorensen@ps.au.dk).



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Georg Sørensen

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Wissenschaftszentrum Berlin für Sozialforschung  
Reichpietschufer 50, 10785 Berlin, Federal Republic of Germany

Telefon: +49/30/25491-0 • Fax: +49/30/25491-684  
E-mail: [wzb@wzb.eu](mailto:wzb@wzb.eu) • Internet: <http://www.wzb.eu>

## Zusammenfassung

### Spannungen im Liberalismus: Der steinige Weg zu einer liberalen Weltordnung

Da kein allgemeiner Konsens über die Hauptmerkmale einer Weltordnung besteht, herrscht unter Wissenschaftler/-innen und Politiker/-innen große Verwirrung. Was für eine Weltordnung entsteht zurzeit? Ist es die „liberale Bewegung“ (ein erneuter Streit über die Machtverhältnisse), der „Kampf der Zivilisationen“ („Jihad gegen McWorld“) oder etwas völlig anderes? Obwohl solche Analysen auf einige stichhaltige Argumente weisen, erweisen sie sich als unterschiedliche Versionen von Weltordnungen eher irreführend und ungeeignet, weil sie das wichtigste Charakteristikum der heutigen Weltordnung nicht erfassen. Denn die Kernfrage der Weltordnung hat doch mit den Spannungen innerhalb des Liberalismus zu tun. Und Fortschritte, nach dem Ende des Kalten Krieges, in Richtung einer wirklich liberalen Weltordnung haben sich als weitaus komplizierter erwiesen, als zu erwarten war. Über die Hauptprinzipien einer Weltordnung sind sich die Liberalen einig. Doch was genau die Substanz dieser Ordnung ist und vor allem, was diese den Staaten und Völkern wirklich bringen soll, darüber herrscht noch große Unsicherheit.

## **Abstract**

The lack of a general consensus on the major characteristics of world order has led to a considerable amount of confusion among scholars as well as among policymakers. What kind of order is emerging now? Is it the “liberal moment”; a renewed balance of power competition; a “clash of civilizations”, “Jihad vs. McWorld”; or something else entirely? These analyses make valid points but they are misleading as versions of world order, because they fail to capture what is the most decisive characteristic of the present order. The core issue of world order has to do with tensions in liberalism. Progress towards a genuinely liberal world order has proven much more complicated than expected when the Cold War ended. Liberals agree on the major principles of world order but they are vastly unsure about the real substance of order, including what it should offer to people and states.

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## Introduction: The Argument

The current world order is more liberal than any previous order in history: it is dominated by liberal states; there is almost universal support for a state-market arrangement based on private property and “free market” exchange; a vast network of international institutions articulate and support liberal doctrines (Zürn, Binder, Ecker-Ehrhardt, and Radtke 2006). At the same time, liberal progress is much less secure in many areas than it might seem at first impression. For example, liberal democracy is not making significant progress in a large number of countries, and any global commitment to liberal principles and values remains thin and uncertain. It is in this complex situation of progress and problems that liberals are called upon to answer a fundamental question about the real content of liberal world order: What is it that liberal principles have to offer peoples and countries, and what does it mean to have a liberal order based on freedom and rights?

Liberals<sup>1</sup> do not have a clear answer to this, and for that reason a clear-cut blueprint for world order does not exist. Liberal values compete with one another, and liberals will probably not be able to agree on a set of coherent principles for world order. The liberal tensions that lead to grave problems for world order emerge in several areas. The liberal core value of freedom is a highly complex entity that can be defined in very different ways. Liberal democracy leads to peace but liberal democracies can also be highly aggressive. Liberal values are being advanced in ways that threaten to undermine what they seek to achieve. Liberal institutions do not always serve liberal principles. The task of the book to which this paper is the intended introduction analyzes the major problems and tensions facing the quest for a liberal world order. It also suggests ways of mitigating them but it remains skeptical about the prospects for a stable liberal order.

For several centuries, liberal ideas about world order have been just that: ideas, aspirations, visions of how a better world might look if it was constructed on the basis of liberal principles. After World War II, liberal democratic systems were consolidated in the OECD world, but the international scene was dominated by the military competition between the two superpowers and their respective allies. An order of “embedded liberalism” (Ruggie 1982) did emerge in the OECD world, but liberal principles were barred from global dominance under Cold War conditions. This all changed with the break-up of the Soviet Empire, the spread of liberal democracy to many more countries, and the true globalization of a liberal market economy. The post-Cold War hopefulness for a liberal

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1 In the present context, “liberal” refers to the governments of consolidated liberal democracies (especially the leading liberal states) who are compelled to face the dilemmas involved in the construction of a sustainable liberal order.

order was expressed by Georg Herbert Walker Bush (41<sup>st</sup> President of the United States) in 1990:

Until now, the world we've known has been a world divided—a world of barbed wire and concrete blocks, of conflict and Cold War. Now we can see a new world coming into view. A world in which there is the very real prospect of a new world order. In the words of Winston Churchill, a “world order” in which “the principles of justice and fair play protect the weak against the strong ...” A world where the United Nations, free from Cold War stalemate, is poised to fulfil the historic vision of its founders. A world in which freedom and respect for human rights find a home among all nations (Bush 1990).

Francis Fukuyama (1992) spoke of the “liberal moment,” but in 1989 he had already predicted a “‘Common Marketization’ of world politics,” meaning that a peaceful liberal world would be more preoccupied with “economics than with politics or strategy” (Fukuyama 1989: 16).

But progress towards a genuinely liberal world order has proven to be much more intricate than expected when the Berlin Wall fell in 1989 and the Soviet Union ceased to exist in 1992. Many different answers have been given as to why this is the case; some of the most important ones are briefly reviewed below. My argument is that current world order difficulties have much more to do with the tensions in liberalism than they have to do with a renewed balance-of-power competition between great powers, the existence of weak states, the phenomenon of international terrorism, or a confrontation between major civilizations. Before turning to these other views it is relevant to review the concept of world order and define its usage in the present analysis vis-à-vis other concepts. The final section of this paper contains an outline of the book chapters that will follow.

### **The Concept of World Order**

Order as opposed to disorder signifies some kind of pattern. The pattern can be more or less elaborate, it can be intended or unintended, and it may or may not promote a range of goals and values. At one extreme, a very slim and narrow concept of international order is offered by neorealist theory. Kenneth Waltz assumes that sovereign states seek their own preservation; they exist in a system of anarchy which requires them to practice self-help in order to survive. Given those conditions states are compelled to balance against one another, and order, in the form of a balance of power between states, must emerge.

A self-help system is one in which those who do not help themselves, or who do so less effectively than others, will fail to prosper, will lay themselves open to dangers, will suffer. Fear of such unwanted consequences stimulates states to behave in ways that tend toward the creation of balances of power (Waltz 1979: 118).

A broader and more ambitious concept of order is offered by Hedley Bull. He first notes that order in social life is not any conceivable or arbitrary pattern, “but a pattern that leads to a particular result, an arrangement of social life such that it promotes certain goals or values” (Bull 1995: 3-4). The relationship between sovereign states, according to Bull, is not merely one of mechanical interaction; it is a social relationship, because it involves acts of recognition and mutual obligations between states. Sovereign states make up an “international society” of states rather than a “system” of states. International order, then, is “a pattern of disposition of international activity that sustains those goals of the society of states that are elementary, primary or universal” (Bull 1995: 17). Bull identifies the preservation of the system of states, maintaining the independence of individual states and peace as major goals.<sup>2</sup>

Perhaps the most ambitious set of goals for world order were elaborated in the context of the World Order Models Project (WOMP). This project placed focus upon

encouraging a process of global reform that elevates law and world order values (peace, economic well-being, social and political justice, and ecological balance) above geopolitical calculations and state advantage ... a central aim is to demilitarise international relations within the existing framework of states and empires, as well as to promote reformist policies of a functional ... and humanistic ... character. There is, also, an openness to a variety of structural reforms by way of an augmented United Nations, stronger regional institutions and the evolution of a variety of specialised regimes to handle growing complexity and interdependence (Falk 1987: 17-18).

In sum, we may conceive of a slim and narrow variety of order at one extreme; a more or less stable pattern emerges because states are compelled to engage in the balance of power. At the other extreme is a regulated and institutionalized order that delivers an ambitious range of “world order values.” In the middle, the concept by Bull focuses on preservation of the society of states, state independence, and peace. I shall argue below that the actual ambitions for world order have indeed developed over time, from a narrow focus on a stable balance of power, towards a regulated order which incorporates a number of social values. As we shall see, it has been part of liberal progress that world order today involves significantly an elaborate network of international institutions committed to the liberal principles of freedom and rights.

The concepts of international and world order have been used interchangeably above. But any given international order can be more or less inclusive in terms of geo-

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2 Bull identifies a fourth set of goals of the society of states, which are also the common goals of all of social life: “limitation of violence resulting in bodily harm, the keeping of promises and the stabilisation of possession by rules of property” (Bull 1995: 18).



graphical scope. John Ikenberry has studied the order arrangements emerging after major wars. He notes how

the settlements grew increasingly global in scope. The Westphalia settlement in 1648 was primarily a continental European settlement, whereas the Utrecht settlement in 1712 saw the beginning of Britain's involvement in shaping the European state system. The Vienna settlement in 1815 brought the wider colonial and non-European world into the negotiations. In the twentieth century, the settlements were truly global (Ikenberry 2001: 8).

In other words, states and other actors did not perceive of international order in strictly global or "world" order terms before political and other relations had developed between states on a truly global scale. This only happened in the second half of the nineteenth century; previous international orders were not world orders in a geographical sense.

Hedley Bull makes a further distinction between international and world order. We saw above that international order was defined by Bull as an order among states. World order, by contrast, is defined as "those patterns or dispositions of human activity that sustain the elementary goals of social life among mankind as a whole," which indicates that world order is "something wider than order among states" (Bull 1995: 19, 21). But Bull's distinction overlooks the fact that world order issues, that is, problems concerning the "good life" of people, is often on the agenda of states today, as reflected in the WOMP definition of world order. States are not merely concerned with their own relations in a narrow sense; they are as often concerned with issues of welfare, security, freedom, order, and justice among humankind as a whole. In that sense, "world order" is the appropriate label.

The issue raises another question: Who or what are the entities that make up any given order? Are they sovereign states in the narrow sense of governments acting on behalf of each country, or do other actors (individuals, organizations, companies, institutions) play a role? Kenneth Waltz maintains that

so long as the major states are the major actors, the structure of international politics is defined in terms of them ... States set the scene in which they, along with nonstate actors, stage their dramas ... When the crunch comes, states remake the rules by which other actors operate (Waltz 1979: 94).

Robert Cox wants to emphasize that "there are forms of power other than state power that enter into global relations" and he seeks a definition of world order that is "neutral as regards the entities that constitute power" (Cox 1996: 494). Stanley Hoffmann agrees that world order and world politics

are no longer monopolized by states; on the one hand they are constrained by the world capitalist economy, which limits their domestic and external freedom of manoeuvre ... On

the other hand, the various peoples of the world, as opposed to governments, are more turbulent than ever before (Hoffmann 1998: 123-124).

The disagreement reflects real world ambiguities. The international society is a society of sovereign states: they are the members of international institutions; they form balances of power because they control the legitimate use of force; they set most of the rules that other actors play by. At the same time, international institutions in today's world are not mere reflections of, or handmaidens of, states; they exert influence in their own right. Furthermore, the separation between an economic sphere of the market and a political sphere of the state is a feature of modern, capitalist society. The major actors in the market (managers, firms, investors) influence the creation of order in the economic sphere. The more visible emergence of international terrorism has even called into question the states' monopoly when it comes to the balance of power.

The relationship between states and other actors develops over time. For several centuries, states competed with the church for authority. The peace of Westphalia gave states the upper hand. The rise of state power was amplified by major wars. The leading states emerged more powerful than ever from World War II but, as we shall see, they also set the stage for a world order which was increasingly influenced by other actors. States are special actors in the construction of order, but they are not the only players and there is no consensus on the privileged role of states. Who or what the relevant entities are, when it comes to world order, is more likely to be an integral part of the discussion and disagreement about what kind of order there is.

In sum, the present study is concentrated on world order in the second half of the twentieth century, with the major focus being on the period immediately after the end of the Cold War. Orders created in this period are global in geographical scope; they are world orders. The primary building block of world order is the sovereign state; at its core, a world order is a governing arrangement among states. In the context of decolonization, the institution of sovereignty became the universal principle of political organization. The United States took the lead in establishing a liberal post-war order based on sovereignty, common institutions, a liberal-capitalist world market economy, and a set of liberal values that concern both the preservation of the state system and the well-being of individual human beings. At the same time, the East-West confrontation meant that the balance of power continued to play a core role in world order.

This order did not completely disappear when the Cold War ended and the Soviet Empire folded, but there was certainly sufficient change so as to commence a new large and wide-ranging debate about the primary characteristics of the present world order. Since the present study claims to develop an alternative to these prevailing views, it is

relevant to comment upon them here. First, however, a few words about world order thinking and world order reality are relevant.

### **World Orders as Realities and Mental Constructs**

The world orders, that is, the governing arrangements among states, which have existed since the second half of the twentieth century, are complex structures. They involve at least four major dimensions: a security dimension which revolves around the major security concern of that order, an economic dimension which embodies the major patterns of economic exchange, an institutional dimension which represents the most important institutional aspects of the order, and a value dimension which contains the ideas or systems of meaning that undergird the current order (Sørensen 2006). I will further analyze these major dimensions in due course. The point in the present context is that, even if a world order is a complex structure, it is also a mental construct which guides our understanding and influences or even determines our patterns of action.

Such mental constructs are substantially simpler. They attempt to express the decisive characteristic of a given order. I taught a basic course in international relations (IR) for several years. Every year, I would request the group of 200 to 300 students to write down what they considered the three most important problems in the world today. Their answers were surprisingly consistent, both within and across years. We all carry and make use of such mental constructs which consist of just a few simple ideas, most often concerning the core difficulties of the present order. In that sense, any given world order is both a complex reality and a simple mental construct.

Most people could agree to the simple version of the Cold War world order. The foundation was the bipolar military competition between the two superpowers, the US and the USSR, and their respective allies. In the context of this “East-West” dimension there was also a “West-West” and a “North-South” order. The Western order was based on American hegemony, liberal democracy, the Bretton Woods system, and other international institutions. The North-South order was based on the process of decolonization and the entry of the newly independent states into the system of UN organizations.

The simple versions of world order are exceedingly important because they guide our actions and structure our thinking. Since the end of the Cold War and in particular since September 11, 2001, it has become increasingly difficult to agree on the simple (and, of course, also the complex) version of world order. At the same time, the world order images—and especially the images of key decision makers in leading states—are crucially important for the policies proposed and the courses of action taken. In this sense there is also an element of self-fulfilling prophecy in any conception of world order, because policies undertaken help confirm the underlying image of the world that led to those

policies. So it matters whether the current order is seen as one calling for a “Global War on Terror” or for a “New Cold War” or for much increased efforts to save the environment, because such views not only reflect an aspect of global conditions, they also contribute to shaping what those conditions will be in the immediate future.

The lack of a general consensus on the major characteristics of world order has led to a considerable amount of confusion among scholars as well as policymakers. What kind of order is emerging now? Is it the “liberal moment” (Fukuyama 1992), emerging multipolarity and a new round of potentially hostile competition between states (Waltz 1993, 2002), a “clash of civilizations” (Huntington 1996), “Jihad vs. McWorld” (Barber 1995), “the coming anarchy” (Kaplan 2000), or some combination of all this, or perhaps something entirely different, even a really “New World Order” (Slaughter 2004)? The diversity of propositions demonstrates the bewilderment regarding the issue of world order. On the one hand, there are a significant number of radically diverging views about the make-up of the present order; on the other hand there are people who think that lack of order is what characterizes the present period.

None of the analyses of world order briefly mentioned here are entirely wrong or misleading. Each of them focuses on one or more important aspects of the current world order. There has surely been liberal progress, as indicated by Fukuyama; more or less hostile power balancing continues to take place, as emphasized by Waltz; the point made by Huntington, that confrontations between different civilizational value systems have increased, rings true. Economic globalization as well as religion and tribal fundamentalism can definitely present threats to (liberal) democracy which is Barber’s major point. Weak states threatening further decay and failure are a significant element in the current order. Finally, the liberal networks which are at the center of Slaughter’s analysis do point to new forms of rule making and order creation.

Nevertheless, even if these analyses do make valid points, they are insufficient or, in some cases, partially misleading as simple versions of world order (and by implication as more complex structural analyses as well), because they fail to capture what is the most decisive characteristic of the present order. There has been liberal progress (Fukuyama, Slaughter), but that progress has exposed tensions in liberalism, which the above analyses do not identify or discuss. There is balance-of-power competition, but it has been constrained and moderated in new ways that traditional balance-of-power analyses (Waltz, Mearsheimer) do not recognize. Confrontations between value systems, especially among “the West and the Rest” are much more connected to tensions in liberalism than acknowledged by Huntington and others. Weak statehood and state failure are not new occurrences, and any “coming anarchy” has much more to do with liberal apprehension than noted by Barber.

The present study makes use of these analyses and attempts to integrate some of their insights into the view of world order suggested here. My view is not an alternative to the existing views in the sense that they would all be rejected; rather, it is an alternative in the sense that a different idea about the most decisive characteristic of the present world order is suggested. At the same time, the existing analyses are not accepted *tout court* but only selectively. The following sections will develop this point.

### **Balance of Power: A “Back to Basics” World Order?**

With the end of the Cold War, the United States has become the preponderant power in the world, especially in terms of military might. The distribution of military capability is at the center of neorealist theory (Waltz 1979), the spare version of realism which focuses on states in an international anarchy, driven by fear and self-help. Neorealist logic dictates that other states will balance against the US, because offsetting US power is a means of guaranteeing one’s own security: such balancing will eventually lead to the emergence of new great powers in a multi-polar system. The logic also dictates that NATO will not last and that there will be increased nuclear proliferation; intensified competition for power will also emerge between European great powers. Leading neorealists (Mearsheimer, Waltz, Layne) share these predictions (Fettweiss 2004; Paul et al. 2004; Ikenberry 2002). In sum, now that the common enemy had disappeared, the post-Cold War world order would be characterized by much intensified balance of power competition between “old friends,” both across the Atlantic and inside (Western) Europe, so the anticipation of neorealist theory.

This has not happened. Power balancing against the US has not taken place in a major way since the end of the Cold War. Kenneth Waltz has argued that it will eventually happen “tomorrow” (Waltz 2002); but, with almost two decades gone by, the argument appears less and less persuasive. Other realist scholars propose to repair the balance-of-power argument in various ways. William Wohlforth (2002), for example, argues that US power is so overwhelming that balancing is too costly; T. V. Paul (2004) contends that traditional “hard” balancing is, to some extent, being replaced by “soft” or “asymmetric” balancing.

Aggressive power balancing among states has certainly not disappeared in the international system; it continues to take place in several major regions in Asia as well as in the Middle East. Such balancing emerges from the existence of the security dilemma, that is, the situation where “many of the means by which a state tries to increase its security decrease the security of others” (Jervis 1978: 169). In a self-help system, the creation of more security for one state is inevitably the creation of more *insecurity* for other states; power balancing is the result of that situation.

But neorealist analysis fails to recognize that the security dilemma can be significantly mitigated or even transcended. Neorealists see the security dilemma as inescapable because states have “survival” (understood as “autonomy”) as their primary goal. In Mearsheimer’s words, “specifically, states seek to maintain their territorial integrity and the autonomy of their domestic political order” (Mearsheimer 2001: 31). It is certainly true that effective states pursue a number of basic social values, including security, freedom, order, justice, and welfare (Jackson and Sørensen 2003: 3-6). But in the quest for these values, states have often chosen to cooperate to an extent that has created a very high level of integration among them: economic integration, political integration, and social integration. A number of modern liberal states have become so densely integrated that both the territorial integrity and the autonomy of their domestic political orders are no longer upheld (Zürn and Leibfried 2005). In that specific sense, state survival is not the primary goal.

In context of the EU, the development of supranational authority and free movement across borders sets a new context where countries may continue to be formally independent, but at the same time deeply integrated in a cross-border community. States are transforming from segregated modern states towards integrated postmodern states.<sup>3</sup> (Figure 1 outlines the ideal types of modern and postmodern state, respectively.) A community like the EU cannot begin to be grasped with a notion of “anarchy,” because the community is densely framed by legitimate international and supranational authority. In such a framework, the use of organized violence to solve conflicts is no longer an option. The countries have become a security community (Deutsch 1957; Adler and Barnett 1998) where states no longer resort to force as a means conflict of resolution. The adoption of non-violent conflict resolution means that the security dilemma is eliminated: states do not fear each other in the classical sense of fear of attack; war between them is no longer a possibility. In other words, the liberal view that the security dilemma can be transcended has been validated, when it comes to the relations between the consolidated liberal democracies that are depicted as “postmodern” states in figure 1. The US and Europe disagree on many issues, both political and economic, but they also deeply share basic liberal values: liberal democracy, open market economies, and civil and political liberties. As regards the fundamentals of promoting liberal political and economic values, the US’s principal goals have been in harmony with the consolidated democracies in Europe. Quarrels over practical policies in Iraq and elsewhere have not begun to reinstate

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3 See Sørensen (2001a). The term was used by Robert Cooper in a 1996 article and therefore many attribute it to him; I did, however, suggest the term in a book in 1995, edited with Hans Henrik Holm (Holm and Sørensen 1995: 204); but maybe Christopher Coker (1992) or Stephen Toulmin (1990) came first.

a situation of power balancing and mutual fear; US global military dominance is not an ultimate threat to European security (Fettweis 2004; Sørensen 2006b).<sup>4</sup>

	<b>The Modern State</b>	<b>The Postmodern State</b>
Government	A centralized system of democratic rule, based on a set of administrative, policing and military organizations, sanctioned by a legal order, claiming a monopoly on the legitimate use of force, all within a defined territory.	Multi-level governance in several interlocked arenas overlapping one another. Governance in the context of supranational, international, transgovernmental and transnational relations.
Nationhood	A people within a territory making up a community of citizens (with political, social, and economic rights) and a community of sentiment based on linguistic, cultural and historical bonds.	Supranational elements in nationhood, both with respect to the community of citizens and the community of sentiment. Collective loyalties increasingly projected away from the state.
Economy	A segregated national economy, self-sustained in the sense that it comprises the main sectors needed for its reproduction. The major part of economic activity takes place at home.	“Deep integration”: major part of economic activity is embedded in cross-border networks. The “national” economy is much less self-sustained than it used to be.

**Figure 1**  
**The modern and the postmodern state**

The security community defined by postmodern statehood has thus developed to different degrees among different countries. Relations between North America and Europe are more institutionalized than relations between these areas and Japan; some countries are part of the institutional and economic networks without being fully democratic (e.g. Turkey); some countries are fully democratic without being deeply integrated in the institutional networks (e.g. Switzerland). The inner circle of the security community is EU-Europe, followed by Western Europe and Western Europe/North America, Western Europe/North America/Japan, and the members of the OECD.

But the forces of political economic integration are relevant elsewhere also and that further reduces the relevance of the security dilemma. Two basic factors are in play: first, a general process of democratization and liberalization. There are now 90 “free” (i.e.

<sup>4</sup> For the view that there is a crisis in the trans-Atlantic relationship but not one that is beyond repair, see Risse (no year, forthcoming).

liberal democratic) countries in the world, up from 43 in 1972; they represent almost half of the world's population. These established democracies are open towards cooperation and integration (Puddington 2007). Second, modernizing states—such as China—know that the road to greatness involves focus on manufacture upgrading and deep involvement in economic globalization; by no means does it involve territorial conquest and militarization. In this sense, China is following the “trading state” path set by Japan and Germany after World War II (Rosecrance 1986, 1999).

These changes have been accompanied by increasing respect for the “territorial integrity norm”, i.e., “the proscription that force should not be used to alter interstate boundaries” (Zacher, 2001: 215). According to Zacher's detailed analysis, that norm emerged in context of the League of Nations after World War I; it was generally accepted as an element in the UN Charter in 1945, and it has been strengthened since the mid-1970s. From 1976 to the present, “no major cases of successful territorial aggrandizement have occurred ...” (Zacher 2001: 237). One might argue that a future independent Kosovo will be a partial exception here, but still, the general respect for territorial integrity has increased.

These normative and substantial developments have all but eradicated the occurrence of interstate war (defined as armed conflict between governments in which at least 1,000 people are killed, or killed yearly as a direct (or fairly direct) consequence of the fighting). Few such wars have taken place since the end of World War II; fewer still since the end of the Cold War (Gleditsch 2004; Harbom and Wallensteen 2005: 623-35).

In short, the classical security dilemma is either irrelevant (among postmodern states) or in sharp decline (among modernizing and democratizing states). Setbacks are possible in the latter group of countries, but at present there do not appear to be strong groups in any of the great powers—including China and Russia—who want to revert to policies of militarization and confrontation. Yet the security dilemma remains virulent in several major regions in Asia as well as in the Middle East. My argument is not that the security dilemma has been completely eliminated across the board. The argument is sooner that: (a) the realist view posing the security dilemma as inescapable must be rejected; (b) the liberal view that the security dilemma can be transcended among liberal (postmodern) states is correct; (c) among many other states the security dilemma appears to have receded, although it may yet return; (d) in some regions the security dilemma remains active.

Because of these developments, a “back to basics” world order centered on intensified balance of power competition is not emerging. Confrontational and belligerent power balancing remains a significant feature in some regions, but the retreat of the security dilemma means that power balancing is muted and constrained in major areas of



international relations. Balance of power competition is not the core feature of the post-Cold War world order.

### **Weak Statehood and the Idea of “Coming Anarchy” as the Core of World Order?**

Are major parts of the world descending into chaos and anarchy, with the tyranny, lawlessness, crime, disease, environmental stress and demographic pressures of West Africa leading the way? According to Robert Kaplan the answer is affirmative and for that reason the most important feature of the new world (dis-)order is one of “coming anarchy” (Kaplan 1994).

Kaplan’s primary claim is that environmental problems are a key factor in the creation of disorder. Riots and other violent upheavals are not mainly due to ethnic and religious conflict, they are ultimately caused by environmental problems such as “deforestation and soil erosion, water depletion, air pollution, and possibly, rising sea levels.” Such factors make “more and more places like Nigeria, India, and Brazil, ungovernable” (Kaplan 1994: 81). Kaplan quotes extensively Homer-Dixon’s (1991) work.

Kaplan and Homer-Dixon include demographic factors in this analysis. The problem of surging populations is acute because “95 percent of the population increase will be in the poorest regions of the world” (Kaplan 1994: 82). The worst environmental degradation tends to be found where the population is highest; such places include the West African coast, the Middle East, the Indian subcontinent, China and Central America.

Environmental and demographic factors are surely important elements in many current, violent conflicts. But such elements are rarely, if ever, direct or even primary causes of conflict. They always emerge as serious problems in a context where social factors such as weak political systems, ineffective institutions, and ethno-political tension between groups in the population are of great importance. A recent comprehensive analysis of what Kaplan would call “coming anarchy”—extensive violent conflict in weak states, concludes that this type of conflict is due to “a complex interplay of failing state structures, a set of material grievances, hostile social identities, and political entrepreneurs who are willing and able to mobilize groups” (Arnson and Zartman 2005: 262-270). Outside of such an enabling socio-political context, environmental and population problems do not automatically trigger or determine the emergence of violent conflict.

It follows that countries with a relatively high degree of political and social order would be much less prone to “coming anarchy” than indicated by Kaplan’s and Homer-Dixon’s claims. It does not appear likely, for example, that India will fall apart which is what their analysis predicts. India has had a surprisingly stable political system for several decades which is also substantially democratic as explained in the study by Atul Kohli, *The*

*Success of India's Democracy* (2001). Nor is the declaration convincing that China will fall apart because it is subject to “a crime surge like the one in Africa and to growing regional disparities and conflicts in a land with a strong traditions of warlordism and of central government—again as in Africa” (Kaplan 1994: 9). Economic growth in China has helped create severe environmental problems (Wen 2005), but unparalleled growth has also lifted large numbers out of poverty; that is a situation entirely different from the one in most African countries.

“Coming anarchy” is therefore not the core feature of the post-Cold War world order. The problem of violent, domestic conflict is not spreading like a prairie fire because of environmental and demographic factors. It is sooner connected to the socio-political factors stemming from weak statehood. Weak states are not a new feature of the post-Cold War world; they emerged in the context of decolonization after World War II when the international society decided that colonialism was no longer acceptable.

The newly independent states—most of them in Sub-Saharan Africa—failed to modernize and develop. The colonial past had not created a good starting point, but the elites that came to power after independence were no great help either; their way of ruling exacerbated state weakness. What is a weak state? Three major characteristics must be mentioned: first, the economy is defective; there is a lack of a coherent national economy, capable of sustaining a basic level of welfare for the population and of providing the resources for running an effective state. Defective economies often depend crucially on the world market, because they are mono-economies based on the export of only one or just a few primary goods. In Sub-Saharan Africa, primary products account for 80 to 90 percent of total export. Furthermore, the Sub-Saharan economies are highly heterogeneous with elements of a modern sector, but also feudal or semi-feudal agricultural structures. In both urban and rural areas large parts of the population are outside of the formal sector, living in localized subsistence-level economies at very low standards.

The second major characteristic of weak states concerns relations between people in their societies; they do not make up coherent national communities. “National communities of citizens” may have been created at independence, but only in the formal sense of providing people with identity cards and passports. This was combined with some scattered attempts to launch nation-building projects designed to develop a common idea of the state. But the real substance of citizenship—legal, political and social rights—was not provided on a major scale by the new states. One consequence of the state’s failing to deliver or delivering only to a very limited extent is that people turn elsewhere for the satisfaction of material and non-material needs. In Sub-Saharan Africa, they have primarily turned to the ethnic communities that are the focal points for a “moral economy”:

The moral economy enables individuals in various contexts to rely on nonbureaucratic mutual aid networks and to reciprocate toward those who belong to a common society. Examples include those better off helping relatives and clan members find jobs or pay school fees ... (Ndegwqa 1997: 601).

The lack of community is connected to the third characteristic of weak states: the absence of effective and responsive state institutions. In most cases, the new post-independence leaders were not actively interested in the creation of strong states; they feared it would be a potential threat to their firm grip on state power. But in contrast to the colonial elite, the new rulers were not insulated from society; they were closely connected to it via ties of clan, kinship, and ethnic affiliation. The network of clients had great expectations of benefits from the power over the state apparatus. This opened the way to clientelism, patronage, and nepotism. According to Jackson and Rosberg (1994: 302), the Africanization of the state took place in the context of a political culture that

conceived of government offices and resources in terms of possession and consumption; multiethnic societies that wanted at least their equitable share of the governmental cake, if they could not have it all; politicians who recognized that granting or denying access to government offices and resources was a crucial *modus operandi* for expanding and retaining power, and, of course, the absence of, or at most the scarcity of, alternative sources of power, status, and wealth.

State elites in weak states are strong in the sense that they do not face serious domestic or external threat. In the domestic realm, civil society is divided among many different groups and it is unorganized with few possibilities of earnestly challenging the holders of state power. In the external realm the weak entities that were the newly independent, post-colonial states were left alone because borders were now considered sacrosanct. The UN, backed by the superpowers, provided these countries with a certified life insurance: no matter how bad things might go, no matter how little development they might be capable of, the international community would continue to respect their newly won sovereignty and their right to formal independence (Jackson 1992).

Some intervention by the superpowers did take place during the Cold War, but the East-West confrontation also helped strengthen the new norms of the right of ex-colonies to sovereign statehood. The new states could play on the fact that the global contenders were looking for allies around the world and they were anxious not to see too many countries line up on the side of the opponent. On this view, state elites in weak states are powerful and unconstrained. At the same time, however, they remain vulnerable and easily exposed to rival groups, often including parts of the military that want to establish their own hold on state power (Goldsmith 2004). State elites often do not have the resources or the political will to accommodate rival groups; challenges are instead met by

increasing repression, “not because it has a high probability of success but because the weakness of the state precludes its resort to less violent alternatives” (Mason and Krane, quoted in Job 1992: 29).

In sum, by basing themselves on patron-client relationships, self-seeking state elites lacked legitimacy from the beginning, and they faced populations divided along ethnic, religious, and social lines. They created “captive states” which benefited the leading strongman and his select groups of clients. The majority of the population was excluded from the system, and they faced a state which is sooner an enemy and a mortal threat than a protector and a champion of development (Sørensen 2001a).

This, then, is the general background for the insecurity dilemma in weak states. It emerges from the paradoxical situation that weak states are relatively free from serious external threat while simultaneously the weak state itself poses a serious security threat to major parts of its own population. In a basic sense, anarchy is domesticated: there is an international system or relative order with fairly secure protection of the borders and territories of weak states, and there is a domestic realm with a high degree of insecurity and conflict. As seen from the perspective of the populations of weak states, this is an insecurity dilemma, because citizens cannot know what to expect from the state; furthermore, strategies of resistance and support may be counterproductive in terms of achieving security. The government’s primary task ideally should be to provide security for its population, but instead it makes up the greatest potential threat to people within its boundaries. For this reason,

groups may fear that others control the government and may use its resources (the army, the secret police, the courts, economic influence) against them. Thus the search for security motivates groups in divided societies to seek to control the state or secede if the state’s neutrality cannot be assured. Obviously, these efforts exacerbate the situation, because one group’s attempts to control the state will reinforce the fears of others, so they respond by competing to influence and even control the government (Saideman, Lanoue, and Campenni 2002: 106-107).

Weak states have grave problems in three areas (Weinstein et al. 2004),

- There is a *security gap* in the sense of inability/unwillingness to maintain basic order (protection of the citizens) within the state’s territory.
- There is a *capacity gap* in the sense of inability/unwillingness to provide other basic social values, such as welfare, liberty, and the rule of law.
- There is a *legitimacy gap* in that the state offers little or nothing, and gets no support in return.

Weak statehood is a matter of degree meaning that the insecurity dilemma can be more or less pressing. That is no different from the security dilemma which can also be more or

less pressing. The characteristics of weak statehood identified above may be present in varying combinations; hence there are various attempts to measure the degree of weakness and sensitivity to complete breakdown or state failure (see, for example, “The Failed States Index” in *Foreign Policy*, 2005).

The human cost of weak and failed statehood has been extremely high. Three conflicts in Sudan, Ethiopia, and Mozambique each demanded the lives of somewhere between 500,000 and one million people; casualties in Angola, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, Liberia and Uganda have also been very high. In sum, with the decline of the security dilemma violent conflict is no longer mainly interstate war; there was none such conflict in 2004, and since 1989 the annual number of interstate wars has been between zero and two. By contrast, there were 30 intrastate conflicts (or intrastate conflicts with external participation) in 2004; the annual number of such conflicts since 1989 has been between 27 and 50 (Harbom and Wallensteen 2005). The data confirm that violent conflict today takes place *within* weak and fragile states rather than *between* states.

In sum, the existence of weak statehood is a core characteristic of the present world order, but this is no confirmation of Kaplan’s analysis. Weak states emerged for different reasons than the ones given by Kaplan; they provide no indication that consolidated states such as India, China, or Brazil are on the way to breaking down; and they are not a post-Cold War phenomenon. Weak statehood was a significant, but much less noticed, problem during the Cold War. Weak states are a serious problem, but they are not a new threat to the international system replacing the Cold War, nor are they an indicator of forthcoming “global anarchy.” Weak states loom extraordinarily large on the international agenda for two reasons: first, because consolidated liberal states have decided that widespread human suffering must be addressed and, second, because liberal states are comprehensively unable to follow through on that view in a consistent manner. These aspects, which will be further discussed later, are absent from Kaplan’s analysis.

### **The Threat from International Terrorism as the Principal Feature of World Order?**

Many people remember where they were and what they did on September 11, 2001. It was no ordinary day because of the attacks by international terrorists in New York and Washington. Scholars have suggested that “[f]or years to come, if not decades, the ‘war on terrorism’ will be the defining paradigm in the struggle for global order” (Booth and Dunne 2002: ix). A number of influential politicians, including President George W. Bush, appear to support that claim. The Bush administration has defined the global war on terrorism as the “Long War” and explicitly compares it to the Cold War as “a similar

sort of zero-sum, global-scale, generational struggle against anti-liberal ideological extremists who want to rule the world” (Buzan 2006: 1101).

This activates the element of self-fulfilling prophecy in world order that was mentioned above: policies undertaken help confirm the underlying image of the world that led to those policies. The question, then, is whether this belief by some leading Western policymakers can be shown to have a substantial basis or whether it is a largely misleading image of world order. Arguments in favor of considering terrorism a new, grave threat point to a number of factors: (a) a significant proportion of Muslims living in the Western world are not well integrated and that makes them potential recruits for terrorist activity; (b) Western societies are increasingly complex and therefore vulnerable entities; (c) the war in Iraq and the conflict in the Middle East generates a blowback effect, drawing more people into terrorist activity; (d) the access to weapons of mass destruction (WMD) for terrorist purposes is easier today than it was previously.

Even if all this is true, the evidence is still not strong enough to support the argument that international terrorism is a comprehensive danger to Western societies that replaces the Cold War as the foremost feature of world order. It is therefore not primarily the substantial threat from terrorism that is a new development in world order terms. The novel aspect is the aggressive response from some liberal countries—in particular the United States—that this threat has helped generate.

Terrorism can be defined as “premeditated, politically motivated violence perpetrated against innocents” (NSC 2002: 5). In general, the scale of terrorist operations makes them more like crime than like organized warfare; and just as crime has existed in most or all types of societies, terrorism “has been around forever and will presumably continue to exist” (Mueller 2004: 199). At the same time, there can be organized crime and there can be organized terrorism. The al-Qaeda network is a case in point and the September 11 attack was highly unusual in terms of scale and intensity. During the entire twentieth century, “fewer than twenty terrorist attacks managed to kill as many as 100 people, and none caused more than 400 deaths. Until [September 11] far fewer Americans were killed in any grouping of years by all forms of international terrorism than were killed by lightning” (Mueller 2004: 110).

Mueller has calculated the present risk for an American to become a victim of international terror; he puts it at one in 80,000, about the same as the risk of being hit by a meteor or a comet (Mueller 2006). This is based on the experience with international terrorism so far. Precise future predictions are of course not easy to make. It would appear that recent international terrorism is specifically connected to a radical, fundamentalist version of Islam which is not representative of Islam as such (Müller 2003). Other

cultural-religious belief systems (e.g., Confucianism, Hinduism, Buddhism, Christianity) do not exhibit a similar kind of embittered anti-Westernism.

Part of the threat conception from international terrorism hinges on the probability that terrorists will be able to acquire WMD and put them to use in terrorist attacks. Graham Allison suggested in 2004 that, if new measures are not taken, a nuclear terrorist attack is likely to occur within the next decade (Allison 2004). But there is no broad agreement about the imminence of such an attack. In a report to the U.S. Congress in 2002, Steve Bowman found that WMD “remain significantly harder to produce or obtain than commonly depicted in the press”; and even in the case that terrorists were able to get hold of an assembled nuclear weapon, “the built-in safeguards and self-destruction mechanisms would pose a serious challenge to detonating the weapon. In addition, the size of most nuclear weapons makes them rather hard to transport, especially clandestinely” (Bowman 2002).

Another extraordinary feature of the al-Qaeda attacks is the fact that they were acts of international terrorism. A very large number of terrorist groups has existed and continues to exist, but their ambitions remain primarily national, not international. That is to say, only very few groups move to become international terrorists, “attacking groups and states abroad whom they identify as allies of their local enemy” (Mann 2003: 160).

The threat from international terrorism has probably also risen to prominence because of the absence among liberal states of a serious “classical” security dilemma as discussed earlier. With old threats receding, new threats stand in sharper relief. At the same time, highly advanced societies are vulnerable in several ways and not easy to protect. Already in 1986, Ulrich Beck pointed out the significant extent to which such societies were organized around the management of risk (Beck 1986; 1992). September 11 was not least a shock because the attacks could be executed so relatively easily with plastic knives and a few hours of straight airplane flying practice.

In sum, the threat from international terror is not new and it is not likely to disappear sometime soon, because the complex set of factors that help produce this kind of terrorism will remain in place. They include: (a) traditional Muslim elites in Saudi Arabia and elsewhere unable to accommodate processes of modernization and Westernization; (b) alienated and radicalized groups of young, mostly male, Muslims in Western societies; (c) the existence of weak states such as Afghanistan and Iraq; (d) the Middle East conflict, especially the continuing conflict between Palestinians and Israelis; and (e) socioeconomic inequalities pushed by uneven globalization. There is no simple relationship between these underlying causes and the emergence of international terrorism; they are structural conditions, rather than triggers of the actions terrorism undertakes.

But just as terrorism itself, these factors were in place both well before as well as after September 11. A statement by the Clinton administration from September 1996 confirms this when it identifies the “greatest threats to our freedom and security” in the 21st century: “rogue states, terrorism, international crime, drug trafficking and the spread of weapons of mass destruction” (quoted from Buzan 2006: 1104).

In world order terms, the novelty is less international terrorism as such, even if September 11 was extraordinary; rather, it is the aggressive response pursued by some liberal states in the “global war on terror.” Liberalism, in contrast to realism, is normally presented as an optimistic view of international relations, because consolidated liberal democracies are at peace and they cooperate intensely through international institutions. For such reasons Keohane and Nye famously declared in the 1970s that the age of liberal interdependence would amount to a significantly “declining use of force in international affairs” (Keohane and Nye 1977: 24-26). The war on terror reveals a much more aggressive side of liberalism; the leading liberal democracy went into this war “to save civilization itself. We did not seek it, but we must fight it and we will prevail” (President George W. Bush 2001, quoted in Kennedy-Pipe and Rengger 2006: 544). The U.S. National Security Strategy of 2002 vows to “defend liberty and justice because these principles are right and true for all people everywhere” (NSC 2002) and the same document declares that unilateral and preemptive action may be needed in the war on terror. At the same time, decidedly illiberal measures of surveillance and control have been taken in the domestic realm in the name of security against terrorist threat (Chalk 1998).

In sum, international terrorism is not new and it cannot compare to the Cold War in terms of substantial threat. But it has helped bring forward a potentially aggressive and unilateralist side of liberalism that seriously questions what kind of world order that liberal progress can and will bring. This aspect will be analyzed in detail in subsequent chapters of the forthcoming book to which this paper will serve as the introduction.

### **The “Clash of Civilizations” as the Defining Feature of World Order?**

The analysis by Samuel Huntington first set forth in an article in *Foreign Affairs* (1993) and then in book form (1996) received wide attention from early on; and September 11, 2001, was seen by many as a confirmation of his prediction of intercultural conflict. Huntington’s argument is as follows:

The fundamental source of conflict ... will not be primarily ideological or primarily economic. The great divisions among humankind and the dominating source of conflict will be cultural. Nation states will remain the most powerful actors in world affairs, but the principal conflicts of global politics will occur between nations and groups of different civilizations.



The clash of civilizations will dominate global politics. The fault lines between civilizations will be the battle lines of the future (Huntington 1993: 24).

Civilizations are considered “the broadest cultural entity.” Huntington identifies “seven or eight” major civilizations. These are core entities in the post-Cold War world order.

The most important countries in the world come overwhelmingly from different civilizations. The local conflicts most likely to escalate into broader wars are those between groups and states from different civilizations ... The key issues on the international agenda involve differences among civilizations (Huntington 1996: 29).

Is it possible to draw together a common cultural pattern across a wide range of societies and thus identify “civilizations”? Huntington is himself in doubt as to whether there is an African civilization, perhaps because he considers religion a central defining characteristic of civilizations and there is not a religion shared by all Africans. At the same time, Confucianism is seen to lie at the heart of the Sinic civilization and that is not a religion in the ordinary meaning of the term. So one major objection to the analysis is that the complex pattern of cultures, religions, and civilizations are not spelled out with great clarity and if they were, it would not be possible to summarize those patterns in terms of general civilizational identities. Identities are much more diverse and religion is not necessarily the primary core, be it in Europe or in China. Paul Berman argues that cultural boundaries are not sufficiently distinct to permit the designation of civilizations; he therefore rejects the notion that there is an “Islamic Civilization” or a “Western Civilization” (Berman 2003).

Huntington identifies these civilizational qualities at the macro-level across larger periods of time. But in order to do that, it is necessary to ascribe primordial qualities to cultural identifications. That is to say, what it means to be “Orthodox”, “Islamic”, “Hindu”, “Japanese,” or “Western” is highly consistent over time; empires may “rise and fall, governments come and go, civilizations remain ...” (Huntington 1996: 43). Such a claim of consistency does not fit the historical pattern; the exact qualities connected with cultural-religious-civilizational labels are dynamic and not static. They have developed and changed dramatically over time; cultural identities are always contested. What it means to be German, European, and eventually “Western” today is not the same as it was several decades ago. In order to set civilizations in opposition to each other they have to be attributed certain consistent qualities, and that is not possible because there is too much diversity and dynamic change within civilizations (Senghaas 1998).

These objections question the claim made by Huntington, that “conflict between groups in different civilizations will be more frequent, more sustained, and more violent than conflicts between groups in the same civilization” (1993: 48). A systematic empirical analysis of militarized interstate disputes between 1950 and 1992 indicates that

pairs of states split across civilizational boundaries are no more likely to become engaged in disputes than are other states *ceteris paribus* .... Contrary to the thesis that the clash of civilizations will replace the Cold War rivalries as the greatest source of conflict, militarized interstate disputes across civilizational boundaries became less common, not more so, as the Cold War waned (Russett, Oneal, and Cox 2000: 583).

If the “clash of civilizations” can be ruled out as the defining feature of post-Cold War world order, then this raises the issue of valid insights in the analysis. Huntington would appear to be right in claiming that “in the coming decades, questions of identity, meaning cultural heritage, language and religion, will play a central role in politics” (Huntington 2007). But this is of course a much broader set of issues than the “clash” which is focused narrowly on certain conflicts seen to involve civilizations. The broader identity issue was also raised by Benjamin Barber; he used the label of “jihad” but extended it to include all kinds of ethnic, religious, or tribal conflict (Barber 1995).

The relevance of the identity issue has been demonstrated in a number of analyses (Gurr and Harff 2003), but the primary focus here will not be on various conflicts around the world that involve identity. With the victory of liberalism in the Cold War ideological struggle, the question of identity is increasingly directed at liberals.<sup>5</sup> Liberal democracy has progressed, a liberal market economy is globally dominant, international institutions based on liberal principles have proliferated, and these institutions have increasingly committed themselves to liberal principles, such as those expressed in the UN General Assembly’s adoption of the Millennium Declaration in September 2000 (UN 2000). At the same time, liberal progress is not secure and the commitment to liberal values is frequently thin and superficial. With no serious ideological rival in sight the identity question is now posed to liberals with much increased frequency: What is the real content of a liberal order and what kind of behavior can the rest of the world expect from liberals? The crucial identity issue at the moment is connected to liberals, not to its rivals and the substance of any liberal order will depend on the answers those liberal states, groups, and individuals come up with.

### **Tensions in Liberalism as the Core Issue of World Order**

It may sound slightly esoteric to some that the core issue of the present world order would be tensions in liberalism rather than the more colorful clashes and conflicts reviewed above. Let me therefore briefly indicate how “tensions in liberalism” tie together a series of the most pertinent current world order issues. The significance of liberal dilemmas today must be seen against the background of liberal success: the leading

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5 This is, in part at least, in disagreement with Huntington who believes that “the power of the West relative to that of other civilizations will continue to decline” (1996: 82).

states in the international system are liberal, and liberal economic and political principles enjoy a level of support in the world that is historically unprecedented.

War and peace is the traditional focal point of world order. That is why realists focus on the balance of power emerging from the security dilemma: competing states in a condition of anarchy make for a situation of enduring uncertainty with a constant risk of war. The maximum security, or order, one can hope for is a stable distribution (or balance) of power (Waltz 1979; 2002). It was argued above that the security dilemma had been significantly mitigated, in some places even transcended; therefore, a world order focused on the balance of power is not emerging. What is then decisive when it comes to war or peace among major states? It hinges primarily on what leading liberal states will do. Will they seek a rule-based, institutionalized and cooperative order where the issue of war or not is subject to common rules of international society? Or will they reserve for themselves the right to undertake preemptive or preventive strikes against perceived grave enemies? The issue of war and peace is increasingly connected to what liberal states choose to do; the advent of international terrorism has served to emphasize the tension between the cooperative and the aggressive side of liberalism.

Weak states and failed states characterize the present order but they are not a new phenomenon. What is new is sooner the fact that comprehensive intervention by international society in order to address human suffering has become a real possibility since the end of the Cold War. And again, that returns us to leading liberal states. They are the ones who need to make the decisions about intervention or not; non-liberal states do not take the lead. And when liberal states do act, they are compelled to evaluate how much outsiders can really do when it comes to the establishment of order and safety, the promotion of democratization, and even to the furthering of general social and economic development. Some liberals are highly optimistic in this regard; others are extremely skeptic. Both sides make strong arguments, so this tension in liberalism will not go away easily.

Finally, questions of identity play an increasing role in politics and since many of the leading states in the post-Cold War order are liberal, the identity question is increasingly directed at liberals. They are not sure of the appropriate answer. For example, Tony Blair recently argued in favor of the universal validity of core liberal values, and the strong need to promote those values all over the world (Blair 2007). Samuel Huntington, by contrast, claims that Western belief in the universality of liberal values is “false, immoral and dangerous,” and he advises Western countries to stay out of the affairs of other civilizations (Huntington 1996: 310). These are, to put it mildly, extremely conflicting ideas about what it means to be liberal and what a liberal world order should look like.

## Conclusion

In sum, the tensions in liberalism are the core issue in the present world order. This project is about those tensions and what they hold in store for the emerging world order. In developing the argument, liberal progress after the end of the Cold War will be recorded and the extent to which there is a liberal world order will be evaluated. I conclude that there is a “thin” liberal order at the global scale and a “thick” liberal order in the North Atlantic area. Emphasis is on how liberal progress has tended to increase the demands on world order: they are no longer merely about international peace and stability; world order is about achieving the “good life” for humankind as a whole.

Furthermore, the project will identify the inner tensions that liberals have to deal with. The core conflict is about what it means for individuals to enjoy freedom and the “good life.” The liberal idea of freedom is an essentially contested concept. Classical liberalism embodies a “liberalism of restraint” which concerns autonomy and the space to act unobstructed by others. Modern liberalism represents a “liberalism of imposition” that requires active intervention to secure the proper conditions for real freedom. This and other tensions in liberalism will be drawn out and the major non-liberal critiques of liberalism will be taken up.

The project aims to visit core areas of world order where the liberal tensions play out: the “war on terror” will be introduced to exemplify liberal willingness to go to war against non-liberal, violent threats. Liberal tensions here are about the use of “hard power” versus the use of “soft power” and the measures that can be taken without coming into conflict with basic liberal values. Humanitarian intervention, the liberal undertaking of saving strangers, will also be discussed. Liberals are committed to rescuing fellow human beings, but they uphold other commitments which constrain and moderate how much they can do.

Democracy promotion and state building must also be discussed. Liberal states have become vastly involved in efforts of democratization and state building around the world. The endeavor has raised the issue of how much outsiders can eventually do in these areas. Doing too much involves a risk of paternalistic behavior; doing too little might mean that necessary change will not take place. Liberals have no clear answer on how to proceed.

Then there is the liberal world economy. Economic globalization is a liberal project, but the process is unequal, creating losers as well as winners. Liberals strongly support the creation of free markets, meaning that governments should support market making measures. But modern liberals also support measures moderating the free market in order to look after social and other concerns. In Polanyian terms, liberals support the movement towards free markets as well as the counter-movement restricting free markets, and there is no consensus on how to strike a balance between the two principles.

International institutions are a further core subject for liberals. Liberals have been staunch supporters of international institution-building, and global liberal progress has helped increase the role and significance of international institutions. Institutions are a central part of the cross-border integration of liberal, postmodern states. At the same time, liberals are profoundly skeptic towards institutions where non-liberal states play important roles; liberal states have a propensity to seek cooperation and influence together with other liberal states, and keep non-liberal states at arm's length. This creates a tendency to undermine global institutions that include liberal as well as non-liberal states.

Finally, the project will draw together the results of the analysis and clarify why a stable liberal world order is not in the making. A liberal world order, much like the institution of liberal democracy, is not at all a well-defined project in substantial terms. It is a framework, a set of principles, upon which a substantial order can be built. Liberals agree on the major principles of world order, but they are vastly unsure about the real substance of order, including what it should offer to peoples and states. Without further elaboration of this, enemies of liberal world order principles will have a much easier time.

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