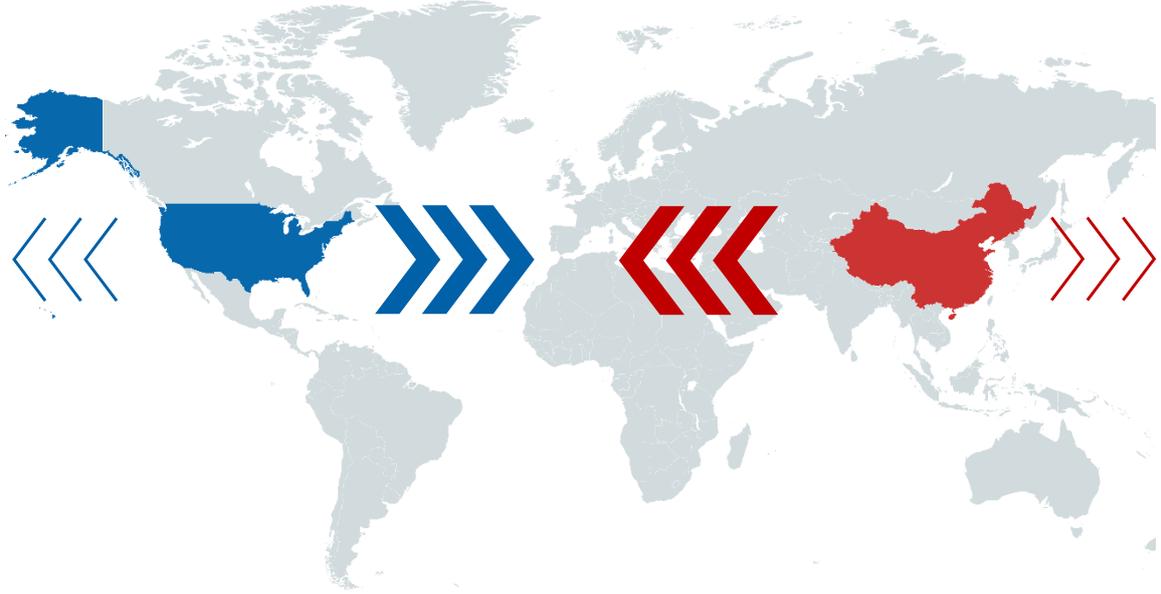


# Biden's American Come Back, Chinese Dilemma, and the Fate of Liberal International Order

Ikhtiarul Arefeen\*



*“Handful of issues in the Liberal International Order (LIO) has been reckoning its fate in recent years. Among them are populists upswing in Europe, the presidency of Donald Trump in the United States and pulling back of many strategic positions, and the rise of China in global politics through its strong economy and military.”*

The history, existence and future of liberal internationalism are always on the agenda of discussion, which is not only reflected on the international politics, but also demonstrated in the domestic level around the world. From Francis Fukuyama's 'The End of the History and the Last Man'<sup>i</sup> to the recent electoral victory of Brazilian Presidential candidate Lula De Silva defeating incumbent president Jair Bolsonaro<sup>ii</sup>, it remains a part of the same debate of survival and progression of liberal values and global cooperation.

Liberal internationalism promotes values of democratization, liberal and neo-liberal economic policies, free market, and the protection of property rights based on Locke's elements of liberalism<sup>iii</sup>. Although it facilitated the emergence of European colonialism in the past, three core principles of democracy, market economy and human rights keep it still valid around the world in both domestic and international affairs. In the near history, the end of Cold War ushered a new era of dominance for the Liberal internationalism with many countries were either forced or nudged to embrace more and more liberal values in governance and economy through assistance, sanctions, or military interventions.

Handful of issues in the Liberal International Order (LIO) has been reckoning its fate in recent years. Among them are populists upswing in Europe, the presidency of Donald Trump in the United States and pulling back of many strategic positions, and the rise of China in global politics through its strong economy and military. Thence, considering US as the key catalyst of the liberal world and its role in war and peace has skepticism. However, it is difficult to underestimate the significant role of the United States in liberal world order. On the other hand, China's position in the liberal world with its ideas, roles, and influence are not undoubted.

When Joe Biden emerged victorious defeating Donald Trump, it was termed as a significant come back of LIO<sup>iv</sup> through prioritizing the promotion of democracy and cooperation. Yet, the identification of the fate of liberal world and the US interest as the same creates some confusion<sup>v</sup> among the scholars. One of the

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basic questions about separating US and the liberal world as different entity and what would be the fate of that order if the former fails to retain its authority over the world is significant.

For instance, the exercise of the veto power by the superpowers can also be understood as an indicators of changing power balance and the decay of America's absolute authority over global affairs. Hence, would that diffused-authority over veto-power be considered as only the failure of US power or the decay of the whole LIO? Therefore, it is noteworthy while Jahn (2018)<sup>vi</sup> attempts to ask a question of whether the quintessence of the authority of America should be considered as the real fate of LIO. When America failed to deter Russian attack on Ukraine at the first place, was it a failure of LIO or American authority? These are the leading question that need to be answered to identify the existence and the future of liberal world.

Rise of populism in Europe<sup>vii</sup> and other part of the world, like the recent election of populist coalition in Italy is considered as a threat to liberal internationalism. Alongside many emerging threats, several competing and conflicting issues have made it even worse. While the populists' leaders are being elected in the election by the popular vote, it is another breaking point as the value of the voting right is a fundamental in exercising democracy, a core value of liberalism. Is it possible to deny the popular decision through franchise? This upturn could again encourage polities to question the liberalism at the domestic level, like the one which helped spread the colonialism. The question that needs answer is what the implications at the global level would be if domestic pressure grows by the populism substantively in relatively powerful countries.



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Multiple actors like China, India, Brazil and factors like globalization and the advent of the fourth industrial revolution (4IR), have emerged within the LIO as important actors and driving force. Amid the high pace of globalization through accelerated digitalization everywhere in the world, the border lines are already blurred between the countries. Outreach and contact among societies are happening very rapidly and the less capable governments are losing control over it. Moreover, the concentration of the world population in different regions, for example, in Indian Subcontinent including India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and China and their emergence and growth<sup>viii</sup> as rising global producers and consumers can bring a major shift in the global order in the upcoming days.

While Russia and Ukraine are fighting a significant war between NATO and former Soviet Union implicating president Putin as catalyst of bringing back a great Russia, its key ally making headlines claiming acknowledgment of its contribution and supremacy in the global order. China has recently been on the news for a different kind of reasons, the reelection of its incumbent president of Xi Jinping and his ambitious plans for taking his country to a high seat on the world stage. Xi's China is continuously trying to get its share in ruling the world since its emergence as a global producer and investor.

The direction and the influence of Chinese Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) that offer huge number of loans to problem-stricken developing and underdeveloped countries coinciding with its growing military power and burgeoning economy of 1.4 billion strong population are still unclear. Nevertheless, recent rhetoric of Chinese leadership<sup>ix</sup> could be termed as an effort of gaining a proper share of their contribution to LIO,

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rather than promoting a new international order that can answer *ad interim* a dilemma over Chinese direction in the current world order. However, we still need to see the real implications of BRI in the world and how it can solve this ‘Chinese Dilemma’ within the LIO.

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Furthermore, the recent Western military interventions in Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya, Syria in the name of protecting democracy and liberal order and their failure to bring stability and peace in those countries may sow the seed of mistrust and suspicion, rather than promoting democracy and cooperation. If there exist a tendency to relate these conventional military interventions as the ‘Clash of Civilization’<sup>x</sup>, it could be another breaking point in building the future of the LIO, while it could also lead to a pure ‘liberal dilemma’ in the world community. The future of liberal internationalism lies in the answers of these dilemmas, role of the newly emerging world powers and the impact of the fourth industrial revolution.

The emergence of fourth industrial revolution<sup>xi</sup> can be the key dynamic of global cooperation in future, where governments, businesses and individuals will face totally different set realities. Realism, in a sense, will be out of agenda in this projected industrial revolution. Thus, the question of lack of successes prescribed by Jahn (2018), rather than total failure of international liberalism would be more on the discussion table. Given such a scenario in the horizon, it would be difficult to conclude and say that the end of the liberal world will happen as reiterated by Francis Fukuyama<sup>xii</sup> again in 2022.

Reforms are either internal or external that would inevitably come if the current problems and dilemmas with LIO existed for a long period of time. Internal reforms must follow course where reliance on only one actor would be decreased, and the multiple actors could take their roles as a community. If not, then the competing powers, with substantial military and economic might in their hands, could force a systematic shift in the world order in the future.



## Endnotes

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