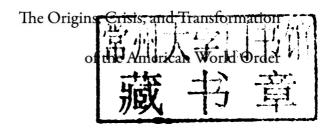


## G. JOHN IKENBERRY

# Liberal Leviathan ≡



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"Sed quis custodiet ipsos custodes?"

["But who watches the watchers?"]

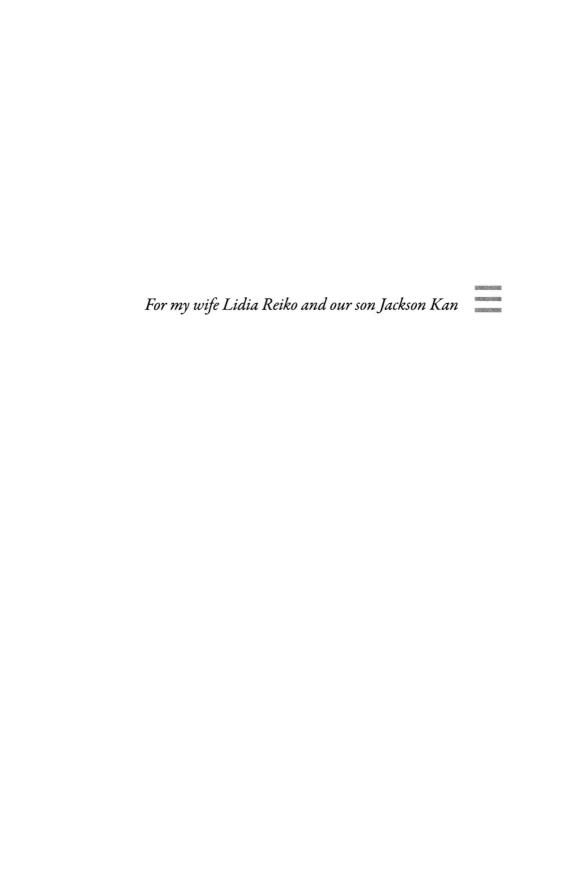
—Juvenal, Satires, VI, 347

"What I fear more than the strategies of my enemies is our own mistakes."

—Pericles in his funeral oration as recorded by Thucydides

"He that is taken and put into prison or chains is not conquered, though overcome; for he is still an enemy."

—Hobbes, *Leviathan*, conclusion



Preface =

This book is an inquiry into the logic and changing character of liberal international order. Over the last two hundred years, Western democratic states have made repeated efforts to build international order around open and rule-based relations among states—that is, they have engaged in liberal order building. This "liberal project" has unfolded amidst other great forces and events that have shaped the modern world—imperialism, revolution, world war, economic boom and bust, nation-building, and globalization. In the second half of the twentieth century, the United States engaged in the most ambitious and far-reaching liberal order building the world had yet seen. The result was a particular type of liberal international order—a liberal hegemonic order. The United States took on the duties of building and running an international order, organizing it around multilateral institutions, alliances, special relationships, and client states. It was a hierarchical political order with liberal characteristics. Defined in terms of the provision of security, wealth creation, and social advancement, this liberal hegemonic order has been, arguably at least, the most successful order in world history. This book offers an account of the origins and inner workings of this far-flung political order.

But in the last decade, this American-led hegemonic order has been troubled. The most obvious crisis in this order occurred during the recent George W. Bush administration as it generated worldwide opposition to its unilateralist tendencies, "war on terror" grand strategy, and invasion of Iraq. Some observers argue that under Bush's watch, the United States turned itself into an empire. The United States coerced more than it led. For those who trace this imperial turn to the Bush administration, the crisis may now be over. But for those who see imperial tendencies in the unipolar distribution of power that stands behind American foreign policy, the crisis continues. Other observers argue that the problems with the American-led order run deeper. We are witnessing a passing of the American era, a return to multipolarity, and the rise of rival non-liberal order-building projects. In the view of some commentators, it is liberal internationalism itself that is passing away.

This book engages this debate. I argue that the crisis that besets America-led liberal world order is a crisis of authority. A political struggle or contest has been ignited over the distribution of roles, rights, and authority within liberal international order. The hegemonic aspect of liberal order—that is, America's role and the old hegemonic bargains that surround it—is under pressure. But the deeper logic of open and loosely rule-based international order remains widely embraced. Problems and dilemmas about the organization and operation of liberal international order have mounted in recent years. But the solutions to these problems and dilemmas lead toward the renewal and reorganization of liberal order—not its overturning.

To get to this argument, I make some distinctions between levels—or layers—of international order. It is useful to think of these levels as geological strata. At the deepest level, you have the bedrock of the modern international order: the Westphalian system of sovereign states organized around a group of leading states arrayed in a rough power equilibrium. On this foundation, various sorts of international orders have been—and can be—organized. As I have noted, liberal international order is order that is open and at least loosely rule-based, and as such, it can be contrasted with order that is organized into rival blocs or exclusive regional spheres. But

liberal international order itself can be organized in different ways. And in the past decade, its organization through the leadership of a dominant state—the American-led hegemonic order—has reached a crisis.

The crisis runs deeper than the controversies generated by recent American foreign policy. Transformations in the Westphalian system—the rise of unipolarity, eroded norms of state sovereignty, the shifting sources of violence, and the intensification of security interdependence—all make the management of liberal hegemony more difficult and problematic. But these dilemmas and problems that have made the U.S.-led liberal hegemonic order contested and unstable are not destroying liberal international order, but pushing and pulling states toward a new kind of liberal international order—more inclusive, less hierarchical, and infused with more complex forms of cooperation.

This book can be read as a sequel to my earlier book, After Victory: Institutions, Strategic Restraint, and the Rebuilding of Order after Major Wars. That book was published on the eve of the Bush administration and September 11. In the light of my argument in After Victory, the Bush administration presented an extraordinary puzzle. The strong version of my claim was that the United States had so bound itself to the larger Western and global system through layers of multilateral institutions and alliances that it would not be possible for the United States to unbind itself. But this is what the Bush administration attempted to do. The weaker version of my argument was that a president could attempt to uproot America from the liberal multilateral system it built over a half century, but it wouldn't want to—and if it did, it would be punished for doing so.

The Bush administration may well have paid a price for its policies. It certainly retreated from them in its last years. But the puzzle of the Bush administration led me to look more deeply at the underlying shifts in the global system that created pressures and opportunities for the Bush revolution. It is this puzzle that has led to my focus on the shifts in the Westphalian underpinnings of liberal order—the rise of unipolarity, the erosion of sovereignty, and the transformation of security interdependence. But the story is even more complicated than this. Yes, the Westphalian foundations of liberal order have shifted, and this has

triggered problems and dilemmas that make American-led hegemonic order unstable. But these underlying shifts themselves have, for the most part, emerged out of the great postwar success story of liberal internationalism. The global liberal system has outgrown its American-led, hegemonic foundation. This is a problem—but it is a problem of success rather than failure of the liberal project.

At the end of the book, I offer arguments about how the United States might seek to pursue liberal order building in the coming era. I argue that the United States should "lead through rules" and look for ways to renegotiate hegemonic bargains with other states. I also argue that the United States needs to recapture the public philosophy of liberal internationalism—a blend of liberal and realist thinking—that served it so well in the postwar decades. It combined the liberal spirit of the United Nations and the realist spirit of NATO and the Americanalliance system in East Asia. I have always thought that Harry Truman and Dean Acheson together reflected this dual vision. Truman embodied the liberal spirit. As a disciple of Woodrow Wilson, he carried in his billfold the poem "Locksley Hall," Tennyson's famous ode to the world's common humanity and the dream of universal peace. Truman really did believe that a global peace organization could be built that could tame the violence of nations. Acheson, Truman's secretary of state, was a realist. He was famously skeptical of the United Nations. In one speech, he noted: "In the Arab proverb, the ass that went to Mecca remained an ass, and a policy has little added to it by its place of utterance." Yet while these visions seemingly clashed, they ended up working in tandem. One vision inspired the building of institutions and the search for universal principles of order. The other vision built alliances and aggregated power in pursuit of safety and freedom. As I argued in After Victory, and as I argue again in this book, power and rules are not enemies; they can be friends, and they are both necessary in the production of liberal order.

It is perhaps no coincidence that one of my favorite Western movies is John Ford's *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance*, which stars Jimmy Stewart and John Wayne. It is a classic morality tale. The movie takes place in a small Western town being terrorized by a gang of outlaws. Into this town

rides Ransom Stoddard, played by Jimmy Stewart, a newly minted lawyer from the east. He sets up his office in town and immediately encounters the fearsome outlaw, Liberty Valance, played by Lee Marvin. Stoddard is appalled that the townspeople are not resisting the outlaw and his gang. But when he confronts Valance he is slapped down, and the gang prepares to make quick work of him. In the background stands Tom Doniphon, played by John Wayne, a tough rancher able to stand up to Valance. He tells Stoddard to get out of town before he is killed. The young lawyer's appeal to laws and what is right is useless without the ability to back it up with force—one "needs a gun in these parts." Stoddard refuses to leave ("Nobody fights my battles") and instead organizes a school to teach townspeople about the virtues of democracy and the rule of law enshrined in the American Constitution. In the inevitable gunfight with Liberty Valance, Stoddard is hopelessly outmatched. But standing secretly in the shadows, Doniphon takes his rifle and dispatches the outlaw, and the gang is run out of town. Both of these figures—the lawyer and the man with the rifle—were necessary for the story to end as it did.

The point is made over and over again across the historical eras: power is most durable and legitimate when exercised in a system of rules. Rules are most durable and legitimate when they emerge through a consensual process of rule making and are backed up by the right configuration of power. The United States has been one of the most successful order-building states in world history because it has combined the exercise of its power with the championing of rule-based order. The challenge for the United States in the coming decades is to hold on to this logic of order building even as the deeper foundations of liberal international order shift.

To reach these conclusions, the chapters that follow explore and offer arguments about:

- the logic and ideal-type relations between leading states and the international system
- the nature of hierarchical international orders
- the incentives and constraints that powerful states face supporting and operating within rule-based international relations

- the character and logic of the postwar American-led liberal international order
- the nature of the crisis confronting the American-led liberal international order
- the sources and dimensions of the transformation of the Westphalian system
- the impact of unipolarity on patterns of international dominance and cooperation
- the Bush post-Westphalian grand strategy and why it failed
- the intellectual dilemmas, contradictions, and ambiguities confronting liberal internationalism
- a liberal grand strategy for unipolar America

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