

## The Russia-Ukraine war: unravelling the challenges to the liberal international order

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### Abstract:

With the diffusion of power in global affairs, a convergence of multiple threats began to intersect and challenge 'the liberal international order'. On the one hand, the US, the sole hegemon, has been frequently abusing the rules and institutions of 'the liberal international order'. Besides, 'the post-Cold War US grand strategy of liberal internationalism' has been under pressure from 'the revisionist states such as Russia and China' and the right-wing populist leaders in advanced Western democracies. On the other hand, the global society is witnessing the return of great power politics, imperial ambitions, and Moscow's desire to gather Russians and re-establish a Russian sphere of influence in its neighbourhood by unleashing war against Ukraine. These geopolitical challenges aggravate the great powers' competition, undermining the American dream of the universal liberal order. With the return of 'the tragedy of great power politics', the United States needs to maintain a strategy of coexistence rather than confrontation. Washington ought to prefer stability over democracy promotion, shore up its democratic alliance, and shred its imperial character such as NATO enlargement to preserve the rules of the liberal international order.

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## 1. Introduction

There are decades where nothing happens, and there are weeks where decades happen” (Haass, 2022). There are also decades when centuries happen. With ‘the Russian invasion of Ukraine on 24 February 2022’, the world is in the middle of one such decade. The essence of the research work is to examine the health of the post-war liberal international order that contributed to economic revival in most of the Western democratic states, ‘the absence of the great powers’ wars’, and the maintenance of international peace and stability for the last seven decades (Allison, 2018). However, in the last two decades, the liberal order has been under constant threat from the within and from the outside. The research work privileges the qualitative analysis methodology of process tracing to establish how the liberal international order has been unravelling (Scholz, 2017).

From within the liberal order has been challenged by the US, the creator and operator of the liberal international system (Niblett, 2017). Since ‘the post-Cold War era’, the US has repeatedly infringed the rules of the liberal order by unilaterally using force without taking into consideration multilateral institutions (Mazarr, 2017). Besides, ‘the liberal economic order’ has failed to deliver its promises of economic plenty for all by facilitating the plutocrats, causing economic inequality, and wage stagnation (Schadlow, 2020). The economic grievances of the ordinary masses have aggravated the already existing cultural fault lines resulting in ‘the rise of a right-wing populist wave in the advanced democracies and democratic reversal in other parts of the world (Inglehart & Norris, 2016). With ‘the liberal international order’ assaulted from within, the core value of the liberal order such as territorial integrity is challenged from the outside by the Russian act of aggression in Ukraine (Fazal, 2022). In addition, the liberal institutional strategy of integration has also backfired. The Russian regime has strongly reacted against the expansion of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) in its near abroad (Mearsheimer, 2014). Besides, the integration of Russia into the liberal institutions did not transform its political character into a liberal democracy (Goddard, 2022). Moreover, the economic interdependence also did not prevent Russia from unleashing war against Ukraine (Haass, 2022).

First, the research study commences with a thematic review of the literature. It explores the literature gap and how the research work is going to contribute to the existing literature. Second, it unveils the theoretical framework. It explores how ideas of liberal internationalism shaped ‘the US foreign policy in the post-Cold War era’. It critically deconstructs the liberal theory and identifies its fallacies. It states that the liberal variants such as economic liberalism and political liberalism are in tension. The US, the champion of liberalism is constantly undermining core liberal ideas. In addition, the liberal values are challenged by the revisionist states such as Russia and China. The Russian invasion of Ukraine is a flagrant example of how liberal ideas are unravelling. Third, it discusses how the research work has consulted primary and secondary sources to understand why ‘the liberal international order is decaying’. It has analysed the data through the qualitative research methodology of process tracing. Fourth, it

examines the foreign policy behaviour of the US in global affairs in the unipolar moment. It investigates why the US pursued a transformative grand strategy of liberal internationalism and promoted liberal democracy, economic interdependence, institutional integration, and expansion of human rights rules and institutions (Lind, 2017). Fifth, it probes why the liberal dreams of the 1990s have been shattered mainly because of the rise of revisionist states such as China and Russia in the international system and why Moscow has shown such a strong reaction against the liberal integration strategy of NATO expansion in its near abroad (Mearsheimer, 2014).

Besides, this study also analyses why the liberal economic order has failed to deliver its promises of economic plenty thereby fanning ‘the rise of right-wing populism’ in the advanced democracies and democratic recession in the pseudo democracies. It explores why economic interdependence has not averted President Putin from unleashing war against Ukraine. Moreover, it also discloses that alongside the disruptive Russian behaviour in the international system, ‘the liberal international order has been challenged by the US’ by frequently abusing the rules and institutions of ‘the liberal international order’.

## **2. Literature review**

The research work examines the impact of the Russian invasion of Ukraine on the liberal international order. To assess why the liberal order is unravelling, it processes traces the origins of ‘the post-Cold War liberal international order’. It probes why in the unipolar moment the US broadened and deepened ‘the American-led Western liberal order into the liberal international order’ (Krauthammer, 1990; Ikenberry, 2012; Mearsheimer, 2019). It states that after the fall of the Soviet sphere of influence in Eastern Europe, Wilsonian ideals of liberal internationalism shaped the US foreign policy of global domination (Nye, 2019; Mearsheimer, 2011). Washington sponsored liberal democracy, economic interdependence, and institutional integration, and expanded the human rights order (Lind, 2017; Walt, 2019; Goddard, 2022). However, the liberal dreams of the 1990s of the universal liberal international order have not materialized.

On the one hand, ‘the liberal order is in crisis from within’ (Nye, 2017; Niblett, 2017; Lind & Wohlforth, 2019). The champion of liberal ideals, the US has frequently abused the rules and institutions of the liberal system (Mazarr, 2017). Besides, variants of liberalism such as economic liberalism and political liberalism are in tension with each other (Kundnani, 2017). Neoliberal capitalism has failed to meet the aspirations of the ordinary masses resulting in economic inequality, wage stagnation, and secular growth (Blyth, 2016; Colgan & Keohane, 2017; Fahnbulleh, 2020). The economic grievances have aggravated the cultural anxieties in the advanced democratic Western states resulting in the rise of right-wing populism (Inglehart & Norris, 2016; Harari, 2018). The right-wing populist leaders in the Western democratic states consider the liberal international order as a costlier enterprise and promise to retrench from it (Haass 2020).

With the liberal order assaulted from the within, it has been confronted from the outside as well (Layne, 2020; Allison, 2020). The authoritarian regime of Russia has resented the liberal institutional strategy of integration and particularly strongly reacted against the NATO enlargement in its near abroad (Borger, 2016; Sarotte, 2021). Besides, Moscow opposed the US strategy of democracy promotion in Ukraine by annexing the Crimean Peninsula in February 2014 (Mearsheimer, 2014). Moreover, economic interdependence could not prevent President Putin from unleashing acts of aggression against Ukraine in February 2022 (Fazal, 2022; Haass, 2022). Thus, the research work contributes to the existing literature by claiming that the liberal order is challenged from the within and as well as from the outside. The liberal order has been already bleeding but with the Russian invasion of Ukraine, it has been further stabbed at its core.

### **3. Theoretical framework**

The research work examines the impact of the Russian invasion of Ukraine on the liberal international order. It traces the origins of ‘the post-Cold War liberal international order’. It states that ‘after the demise of the Soviet Union’, the US became the sole hegemon of the international system (Krauthammer, 1990). It sponsored the American-led Western liberal system across the globe (Mearsheimer, 2019). The US pursued a grand strategy of liberal internationalism thereby promoting liberal democracy, economic interdependence, institutional integration, and broadening of the human rights rules and institutions (Lind, 2017). The essence of liberal internationalism was to transform the illiberal states, particularly the potential revisionist states, to create the American image in the entire world, and to sustain American primacy (Mearsheimer, 2011; Goddard, 2022). However, the liberal dreams of the 1990s have not been realized. There is a backlash against ‘the liberal international order from the within and the outside’ (Lind & Wohlforth, 2019). The liberal order has been challenged by the advanced democratic states because of internal tensions within variants of liberalism such as economic liberalism and political liberalism (Kundnani, 2017). Economic liberalism has failed to meet the aspirations of the ordinary masses in the advanced Western democratic states thereby resulting in resentment against the liberal order (Colgan & Keohane, 2017). The Western working classes increasingly come to view that the liberal order is fixed against them in favour of the corporate elites, thus, resulting in the rise of a right-wing populist wave in the Western democratic states. Besides, the ordinary masses in the US must believe that the American foreign policy enterprise of liberal internationalism is expensive because of the excessive US involvement in regime change operations across the globe (Nye, 2019; Haass, 2020). Moreover, ‘the liberal international order has also been challenged from the outside by illiberal authoritarian states such as China and Russia’. The Russian invasion of Ukraine is another jolt to the liberal international order; as a result, the liberal order is unravelling.

### **4. Research methodology**

To investigate how liberal order is unravelling, the research work has consulted primary and

secondary data such as books, journal articles, policy papers, news articles, reports, YouTube lectures, speeches of Russian and American statesmen, and official documents of the United Nations, and American and Russian governments. To ensure the reliability and validity of the work, the data is gathered from multiple sources. The research work privileges the qualitative analysis methodology of “process tracing to establish whether, and how, a potential cause or causes influenced a specified change or set of changes (Scholz, 2017).” The research work examines how Russia’s disruptive foreign policy behaviour in global affairs particularly its invasion of Ukraine is further undermining the core ideals of ‘the liberal international order’. It explicitly states that the liberal order was in decay before the Russian invasion of Ukraine. Moreover, it also claims that the liberal order was also challenged by the US.

## **5.. Liberal Dream of the Unipolar Moment**

With the sudden demise of the Soviet Empire, the Cold War confrontation between the United States and the Soviet Union simmered. The domination of the international system by the two superpowers, bipolarity, collapsed. With the succeeding global power transition in the international system, the unipolar world emerged with a single hegemon without any peer competitor (Mearsheimer, 2001). As no counterbalancing occurred against the preponderant power, the United States was tacitly recognized by all the great powers as the leader of the international system (Ikenberry, 2009). Thus, the ensuing mutually agreed rules-based liberal Western bounded order was globalized by the United States (Kundnani, 2017; Ikenberry, 2108; Mearsheimer, 2019). The four major components of liberal order: liberal democracy, economic interdependence, multilateral institutions, and human rights order were further broadened, deepened, and exported around the globe.

With the triumph of liberal democracy as the ultimate and final form of a political system, and free market capitalism as the economic system, the Western democratic states such as the US, Britain, and France championed the end of ideological confrontation among the great powers and proclaimed the victory of liberal international institutions (Fukuyama, 1989). Moreover, there also emerged bipartisan consensus over ‘the post-Cold War American grand strategy in the United States’ domestic politics between the liberal Democrats and neo-conservative Republicans to uphold and sponsor universal liberal ideals in the entire globe or according to John Mearsheimer the United States pursued a foreign policy of liberal hegemony (Mearsheimer, 2011). Thus, the United States as a sole pole in the international system pursued Wilsonian ideals of international engagement with the global community and especially with the newly liberated Eastern European states (Ikenberry, 2012; Waltz, 1979). Besides, during the nascent phase of the post-Cold War era, American foreign policy behaviour was pragmatic by not rubbing salt into the Russian wounds by extending cooperation with post-Soviet Russia. The liberal dream of the unipolar moment was to promote democracy, deepen economic interdependence, expand universal human rights, and embed states into the multilateral international institutions to enhance economic development and maintain perpetual peace in the international system (Goddard, 2022; Krauthammer, 1990).

### **5.1. Promotion of Liberal Democracy**

The liberal philosophy preached that popularly elected governments with the free consent of the people based on the rule of law pursue more cooperative relations with each other as compared to authoritarian regimes (Mead, 2021). Bruce Russett reinforced the Kantian principle that liberal democratic states are reluctant to wage wars (Pevehouse & Russett, 2006). The logic of ‘the democratic peace theory’ is that democratic states are less prone to violence because the democratic governments work on the principle of a mutual consultative decision-making process and the strong institutional checks and balances further ensure transparency and accountability (Doyle, 1986). Besides, democratic states can overcome the problems of the security dilemma. “The democratic states do not go to war against each other”. Hence, after ‘the fall of the Soviet empire’, the American foreign policy of liberal internationalism cherished and promoted liberal democracy in the world.

### **5.2. Economic Interdependence**

The proponent of commercial liberalism, Adam Smith, preached an open market economy, free trade, and economic exchanges among the states (Ikenberry, 2012). In his influential text “An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations”, Smith claimed that the laissez-faire capitalist model optimally allocates scarce resources through invisible hands, division of labour, and generates wealth maximization (World Library Foundation, 2020). Besides, the free trade liberals such as David Ricardo and Richard Cobden advocated unrestricted trade among the states. And they argued that free trade creates mutual gains and leads to international peace (Richardson, 1995). Economic interdependence theorists, Joseph Nye, and Robert Keohane asserted that under conditions of economic interdependence, ‘a complex web of interactions binds states together with the result of states’ national autonomy is limited. States renounce the use of force as a costly instrument of national policy and pursue national interests through economic means (Nye, 1988). Liberals consider a high degree of interconnectedness to create mutual gains as having a mitigating effect on international anarchy. Bruce Russett confirmed that international trade created incentives for economically interdependent states to avert war (Pevehouse & Russett, 2006). Hence, in ‘the post-Cold War era’, the United States grand strategy of liberal internationalism sponsored open markets, free trade, unrestricted movement of financial capital, and economic interdependence among the states to unleash economic prosperity and maintain international peace and stability in the world.

### **5.3. Expansion of Human Rights Order**

Liberal philosophy worships natural individual rights such as life, liberty, property, equality, and the pursuit of happiness (Mearsheimer, 2018). These liberal ideals shaped the human rights order during the Second World War negotiations (Ikenberry, 2012). However, due to the hostility of the great powers during the Cold War, the human rights order was confined to the Western democratic states, and lip service was paid to the human rights principles, norms, and

institutions in the international system (Ikenberry, 2011). However, after the disintegration of the Soviet Union, the United States foreign policy of liberal internationalism also promoted the liberal human rights order by expanding the concept of liberal humanitarian intervention, the Responsibility to Protect (R2P), and the creation of the International Criminal Court (ICC) (Kundnani, 2017). Liberal internationalism claims that individual rights are inalienable and universal in scope that ought to be recognized by the whole of mankind and that provision of the universal human rights would lead to progressive change in human society (Yale University, 2017).

#### **5.4. Liberal Institutionalism**

Liberal Internationalists claim that the creation of international institutions and rules by the great powers enables and underpins cooperation and collective problem-solving (Ikenberry 2009). Neoliberal institutionalism theorists such as Robert Keohane and Axelrod claim that international institutions provide the states with platforms for repeated interaction, reduce verification costs, and help the states overcome the problem of cheating in international affairs (Grieco, 1988). Besides, according to Pevehouse and Russett, international organizations socialize states behaviour, contribute to dispute settlement, and lessen anarchy in the international system (Pevehouse & Russett, 2006). Thus, ‘after the collapse of the Soviet Union’, the American foreign policy of liberal internationalism sponsored the expansion of multilateral institutions. Therefore, by the 1990s, it became evident that “NATO was not only to persevere but also to expand to Eastern Europe”. Meanwhile, the United States transformed the informal trade regime, the General Agreement for Trade and Tariff (GATT), into the powerful World Trade Organization (Goddard, 2022). Moreover, the American policymakers pursued a liberal cooperative security mechanism to integrate possible revisionist states such as Russia and China into the multilateral institutions to channel their aggression (Ikenberry 2012). The logic of liberal institutionalism was that incorporating Russia into the existing international institutions would gradually make her more liberal and encourage cooperative behaviour abroad. Besides, with Kremlin joining the international institutions for her power, wealth, and influence, it would become more responsible player of the system and less inclined to upend the existing international order (Fioretos, 2019).

### **6. End of Liberal Delusions**

#### **6.1. Resistance against Integration Policy**

In the post-Soviet transition, at first, the liberal institutional approach seemed to work. Russia joined the liberal international institutions and developed cooperative relations with the global community as a responsible stakeholder. “Russian President Boris Yeltsin triggered a 13<sup>th</sup>-month economic reform plan of shock therapy to rapidly privatize the Russian economy on the recommendation of American economists (Stiglitz, 2002)”. The Clinton administration convinced “the G-7 countries to commit \$28 billion of collective aid for Russia” to support its

economic privatization program (Sanger, 1993). Besides, in 1998 Russia was incorporated into the G-8 inter-governmental political forum. Yeltsin's successor, Putin, although not a democrat, initiated legal and economic reforms to gradually liberalize Russia. Moreover, after the 9/11 attacks, Russia cooperated with the United States in its global war on terror campaign and signed the New Start Treaty in April 2010 (Bugos, 2022). Besides, Russia also supported the UN Security Council's most comprehensive set of sanctions against Iran in June 2010 (UN Security Council, 2010). When the United Nations Security Council sanctioned to use all necessary measures to ensure protection of civilians in Libya against the Muammar al-Qaddafi's regime in 2011, the Russian President Medvedev was eager to work alongside the Western great powers and international institutions that he agreed to abstain from voting rather than using veto power in the UNSC (McFaul et al., 2014). After 18 years of prolonged negotiations, Russia finally joined the WTO in 2012 (Goddard, 2022).

However, the assimilation of Russia into the liberal international institutions could not transform the illiberal nature of the Russian domestic political system. On the contrary, international institutions have increased the Russian capacity to channel allies, gain influence over their trading partners, and secure legitimacy for their moral goals (Goddard, 2022). Thus, the integration into international institutions has not curbed the Russian revisionist's design to challenge the existing liberal order. As a result, in 2008 Russia used force in the two breakaway territories of Georgia such as Abkhazia and South Ossetia. It invaded eastern Ukraine and annexed the Crimean Peninsula in 2014. Notwithstanding, the hue and cry from the Western states, the Russian military forces intruded in the Syrian civil war to protect President Bashar al-Assad. Besides, the most horrific act of brutality occurred on 24 February 2022, when Russian forces invaded Ukraine (Goddard, 2022).

## **6.2. Resentment against NATO Enlargement**

To understand how Washington lost its post-Soviet peace, it is essential "to look beyond the binary category of whether NATO enlargement is either good or bad." The devil is in detail, how NATO expanded. The three policies that Washington pursued regarding NATO expansion, one under President George H.W. Bush (1989-1993), and two under President Clinton (1993-2001) closed all possible options for the European security order. The first key moment came on November 24, 1989, 'after the fall of the Berlin Wall', 'the Secretary of State James Baker' without knowing about the evolving White House thinking about NATO enlargement, offered Gorbachev a bargain, not Bush's, "What if Gorbachev allowed German reunification to proceed and Washington agreed not to extend NATO jurisdiction beyond one inch eastward from the present position" (Sarotte, 2021, p. 28). Kagan (2022) claims that Gorbachev himself allowed German Unification and incorporated Germany into NATO by believing that it would best guarantee Russia's security and the NATO expansion not a threat to the Soviet interests. Moreover, Kagan states that in the post-Soviet transition, the time of greatest Russian weakness, the Bush and Clinton administrations were reluctant to expand NATO despite earnest requests from the liberated Soviet satellite states (Kagan, 2022). On the



contrary, the Bush administration was eager to expand NATO beyond the Cold War line (Sarotte, 2021). Besides, President Bush announced, “We have a vision of a new partnership of nations based on consultation, collective action, especially through international organizations that transcend the Cold War” (Kissinger, 1994, p.804). By October 11, 1991, Bush asked NATO’s Secretary General Manfred Worner whether “NATO’s attempts to create a liaison organization for Central and Eastern European states include the Baltics. “Yes”, Worner said, if the Baltics apply, they should be welcomed” (Sarotte, 2021, p.28).

The second opportunity came in December 1994, when ‘the Clinton administration’ decided to marginalize ‘the Partnership for Peace’ (PfP) that would extend full security guarantees from the start and enlarge NATO to democratic states to the East (Sarotte, 2021). Even William Perry, the Clinton Defence Secretary was in favour of a gradual expansion of NATO to avert Russian resentment. But, the US diplomat, Richard Holbrooke, initiated the counterargument at the time and was backed by the vice-president, Al Gore, who stated: “We could manage the problems this would create with Russia” (Borger, 2016). Perry stated the derisive attitude of the US officials enraged the Yeltsin administration. At the Transatlantic alliance’s 50<sup>th</sup> summit in Washington in April 1999, the third moment came, Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia joined the NATO as full members (Sarotte, 2021). Thus, NATO membership would expand at the former Soviet border at the expense of Russian grievances. “During the first wave of NATO enlargement in 1999, Poland, Hungary, and the Czech Republic were incorporated” (Mearsheimer, 2014). And with the rise of Putin, US-Russia relations would deteriorate. The regime in Moscow bitterly complained about the NATO enlargement. Despite the Russian hue and cry, “during the second round of NATO expansion in 2004, Bulgaria, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania, Slovakia, and Slovenia joined it”. Moreover, subsequently, in its April 2008 Bucharest summit, the Bush administration (2001-2008) favoured the incorporation of Georgia and Ukraine in the transatlantic alliance which was resisted by France and Germany because it would threaten Russia’s security concerns (Mearsheimer, 2014). The consensus was reached among the NATO members that neither Ukraine nor Georgia was offered a membership action plan (Anghel & Stolle, 2022). However, Putin explicitly stated that “integration of Ukraine and Georgia into NATO would present a direct threat to Russia. And if Ukraine was admitted into NATO, it would cease to exist” (Mearsheimer, 2014, p.79). Nonetheless, NATO kept marching forward toward Eastern Europe, and Croatia and Slovenia became its members in 2009.

It was President Obama (2008-2016) who reoriented the US foreign policy to Asia-Pacific and less attention was paid to NATO enlargement in Eastern Europe. Moreover, in the subsequent NATO summits, no such language was used that would hint at the fusion of Ukraine and Georgia into NATO. It was ‘after the Russian annexation of Crimea in March 2014’ that NATO members would seriously think about investing to secure the Eastern Flank. The Eastern members of NATO were very alarmed at the aggressive behaviour of Russia’s foreign policy and signed a joint declaration in 2015 to redirect NATO’s attention to the region. Thus, during the Warsaw Summit of 2016, it was agreed to increase NATO presence in Europe through joint

training, enhanced troop interoperability, and troop rotations (NATO Press Release, 2016). However, during the Trump administration, many of the Eastern European states got more anxious because of Trump's commitment to Article 5 (Anghel & Stolle, 2022). Thus, it was not just NATO expansion rather how it grew exacerbated the friction between Moscow and Washington. Moreover, it was American gradual retrenchment from the international institutions and relative decline that created the opportunity for 'the revisionist powers such as Russia' to challenge the foundation of the liberal world order by invading Ukraine on 24 February 2022 (Goddard, 2022).

### **6.3. Discontentment against the Neo-Liberal Economic Ideology**

After German reunification, the United States supported by the Western democratic states and 'international economic institutions such as "the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank (WB)"' championed the neo-liberal market economic ideology in the world (Stiglitz, 2002). The Washington Consensus policies preferred limited role of the state in market affairs to ensure fiscal and trade balances. Meanwhile, the open financial market, trade liberalization, allowing the market forces to determine interest rates, maintaining a competitive exchange rate, friendly foreign direct investment regime, and technological developments transformed the world into a single global village (Irwin & Ward, 2021). The forces of globalization slashed extreme poverty. "The total number of people who lived in extreme poverty dropped from 1.9 billion in 1990 to 650 million in 2018 and the mortality rate for young children dropped 59% over the same period (Zakaria, 2020)."

However, 'since the global financial crisis of 2008', the faith of the people in the neo-liberal market policies has been gradually vanishing (Harari, 2018). Although globalization has triggered economic development and benefited the developing world, yet inequality is growing both between and within societies. A few multinational corporations such as Google, Amazon, Wal-Mart, Facebook, Volkswagen, and Ikea are accumulating enormous economic resources 'while billions are left behind'. "The richest 1 percent owns half of the world's wealth." Even more shockingly, "the richest hundred people together own more than the poorest 4 billion (Lowe, 2017; Oxfam, 2018)." "The overall gap between the world's rich and poor has kept growing (Zakaria, 2020)." The world's 85 percent population has 39 percent of the world's income (IMF, 2017). Besides, the economist Milanovic (2016) has established that the middle and working classes in Europe, the United States, and developing states have been experiencing wage stagnation. Moreover, Thomas Piketty has anticipated that if the current economic patterns persist, capitalism can be transformed into a new "patrimonial model of accumulation" where the inherited family wealth outplays any moment of merit (Varghese, 2018, p.41). Moreover, according to Dani Rodrik neo-liberal economic policies of "hyper-globalization" are undermining liberal democracy (Kundnani, 2017, p.2). The pro-market economic policies pursued by the Western States during the last three decades are undercutting 'political liberalism'. 'The Russian invasion of Ukraine' has shown that economic interdependence among the states cannot prevent acts of aggression (Haass, 2022). As propagated by the liberal

economic interdependence theorists' economic exchanges among the states would contain states' aggressive behaviour. "Russia's reliance on Western European markets for its energy exports would encourage restraint." In fact, such economic relations cannot mollify Russian behaviour. On the contrary, 'economic interdependence' of the Western and Central European States on Russian energy resources increased their economic vulnerabilities.

#### **6.4. Democratic Reversal**

During the third wave of democracy (1974-1990), the world witnessed a remarkable expansion of democracy. More than two dozen states transformed into democracy and authoritarian regimes either collapsed or reformed across the world (Huntington, 1991). 'In the post-Cold War era', most of the Eastern European liberated states democratized. By 1993, democracy further consolidated around the world as a majority of states having more than one million populations turned democratic. The US as the champion of the democratic world exported democracy around the globe. Clinton administration's main priority was to support Russia to become a strong liberal democratic state (Goddard, 2022). The logic of democracy promotion was as 'Michael McFaul, the former U.S. ambassador to Russia' stated that "no democracy in the world has been or is an American enemy and all of America's most enduring allies have been and remain democracies" (McFaul et al., 2014). From (1991-2005) many states initiated political reforms and promoted political liberties then lost them. But around 2006, the forward march of democracy came to a halt (Diamond, 2019). In last two decades the forward march of democracy has gradually waned. "Between 2000 and 2015, democracy broke down in 27 countries (Diamond, 2020, p.151)."

Besides, the democratic recession around the world, the regime in Moscow resented Washington DC's fomenting of pro-democracy protests in the colour revolutions in Georgia and Ukraine. However, "McFaul et al., (2014) write the U.S. government has not played any role in sparking the protests." On the other hand, US Defence Secretary William Perry stated that "When Putin came to power in the Kremlin; he became convinced that the United States had been conspiring against his regime. And from that point on a switch went on in Putin's mind that said: I'm no longer going to work with the West" (Borger, 2016). The Russian press purported McFaul, the Obama administrations' ambassador in Moscow who supported various democratic groups to stimulate another colour revolution (McFaul et al., 2014). Moreover, a non-governmental organization, the National Endowment for Democracy (NED) had sponsored more than sixty projects in Ukraine. Since 1991, the US has poured more than five billion dollars in Ukraine to democratize it. "The U.S. assistant secretary of state for European and Eurasian affairs, Victoria Nuland, and Republican Senator John McCain" were among the protestors in the Maidan protest movement in January 2014 (Mearsheimer, 2014, p.5). Further, "a leaked telephone recording revealed, Nuland had advocated regime change." No doubt, the Russians come to believe that the West played a role in Yanukovich's ouster. Thus, in recent years the Putin regime in Moscow has openly confronted the liberal democratic order by meddling in the U.S. elections, supporting right-wing populist parties in Austria, Hungary,

France, and Italy, threatening gas cut-offs to create friction in the Western democratic camp, exploiting fissures among the transatlantic alliance, and unleashing brute force against the democratic government of Ukraine on February 24, 2022 (Goddard, 2022).

### **6.5. Legitimacy Crisis of Human Rights Order**

In the unipolar moment, a bipartisan consensus was achieved in American domestic politics to promote and expand liberal human rights around the world (The Bush School of Public & Government Service, 2018). On a humanitarian pretext, under the American leadership, NATO used force against Serbia in 1999 without a mandate from ‘the United Nations Security Council’, a clear infringement of international law (Kundnani, 2017). It was resented by the Russian administration and condemned by many states, especially outside the West (Stronski, 2022; Mearsheimer, 2014). Besides, Wilsonian Neo-Conservatives persuaded the Bush Administration to use force against Iraq on fabricated grounds such as ‘the possession of Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD)’ by Baghdad, the brutal military dictatorship of Saddam Hussein, and its collaboration with the terrorist networks (Mead, 2017; Mearsheimer, 2006). The American forces unilaterally invaded Iraq without the United Nations Security Council resolution. As explicitly declared by “the United Nations Secretary-General, Kofi Annan, the US-led war on Iraq was illegal (MacAskill & Borger, 2004).” The Obama administration through a NATO-led coalition intervened in Libya in March 2011 on humanitarian grounds to protect the people of Libya from ethnic cleansing and genocide by Muammar al-Qaddafi under the UNSC Resolution of 1973 (Daalder & Stavridis, 2012).

The UNSC resolution endorsed NATO efforts to establish a no-fly zone over Libya and Russian President Medvedev instructed the Russian diplomats to abstain rather than veto it. There is evidence that Putin may have disagreed with this decision (Bondarev, 2022). However, later, the NATO-led air campaign to establish a no-fly zone violated the UNSC Resolution 1973 and turned it into a regime change operation and killed Qaddafi. And it was resented by the Russian and Chinese administrations and later, they would refuse to cooperate with the West. Moreover, after 9/11, the over-militarization of the American foreign policy to preserve its hegemony shattered the aura of the US military invincibility and tarnished the soft image of the US (Gates, 2020). The United States, the leader of ‘the rules-based liberal international order’ in the most blatant manner broke rules and damaged the legitimacy of the human rights order. Subsequently, Russia would justify its military interventions in global affairs by alluding to Western military interventions (Ignatieff, 2014). Russian aggressive behaviour against its neighbours emasculated many assumptions that shaped the post-Cold War era policies. Russia has eviscerated the norm of state territorial integrity by acquiring territory with force by invading Ukraine on 24<sup>th</sup> February 2022 (Fazal, 2022, p.20).

## **7. Conclusion**

This research states that the post-Cold War US grand strategy of liberal internationalism has

failed to meet its desired ends. On the one hand, economic liberalism did not fulfil its promises of economic plenty, democracy promotion, and abuse of human rights order eroded the US credibility as the leader of the liberal system. Besides, the ordinary masses in the US have resented the US foreign policy of international engagement. On the other hand, Moscow has strongly reacted against the American efforts of democracy promotion in Ukraine and NATO enlargement in its near abroad. Besides, the integration of Russia into the liberal institutions did not transform its illiberal political nature. Moreover, the economic interdependence could not stop Russia from unleashing acts of aggression in Ukraine. Thus, “the liberal international order is confronted from the within and the outside.” As a result of multiple challenges, the liberal order is unravelling. With liberal order decaying, the United States needs to recalibrate its liberal institutional integration approach in favour of a strategy of *realpolitik*. The US should abandon the idea that its strategy of liberal institutionalism is going to change the political character of Russia rather it should utilize international institutions to manage great power politics. It should strengthen its democratic alliance with the G-7 members to deal with the aggression from the revisionist states. Washington should not pursue the liberal dream of order building of the 1990s as “the next era of great-power politics is already here.” But it should not increase military confrontation and pursue selective retrenchment in areas where it overextended its power. Washington can better manage the game of great politics and norms of international society by strengthening international alliances and multilateral institutions.

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