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Liberal International Order's (LIO) Approach to Justice: Peace and Security in Perspective

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Abstract

In the contemporary world, the Liberal International Order (LIO) is widely recognized as a key force shaping the domestic and international agendas of states and numerous global institutions. As the dominant global order, its efficacy is fundamentally influenced by liberalism and its approach to justice. Given the direct impact of justice on both domestic and international peace and security, the LIO's justice agenda warrants close scrutiny—especially at a time of escalating conflicts, geopolitical tensions, and growing resistance to liberal norms. Against this backdrop, the present article addresses the key question: How is the LIO's pursuit of justice evaluated, and what major obstacles hinder its ability to promote peace and security at national and international levels? Employing qualitative content analysis, this article supports the hypothesis that the LIO's conception and implementation of justice are fundamentally flawed—criticized not only by non-liberal states but also increasingly questioned within liberal democracies themselves. These endogenous and exogenous challenges have fuelled inequality, disillusionment, and instability in various regions. The article concludes that, without aligning its normative justice principles with more inclusive, coherent, and consistently applied practices, the LIO will remain ill-prepared to respond effectively to the growing peace and security needs of a rapidly multipolar world.

Keywords: LIO, Justice, Peace and Security, Fairness, Equality.

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Introduction

Contemporary international law, its institutions, norms and disciplines are often viewed through the lens of liberalism and are heavily influenced by liberal principles such as democratic governance, economic openness, human rights, and the protection of individual freedoms (Dugard, 2023: 225). These principles underpin what is referred to as the Liberal International Order (LIO). The norms and values that shape the LIO have evolved over the last two centuries, led by liberal democracies such as the United Kingdom and the United States, and have increasingly altered the Westphalian order, which had traditionally emphasised state sovereignty, autonomy, self-determination, and non-intervention in domestic affairs (Kundnani, 2017; Ikenberry, 2014: 94-95).

In the wake of the World War II, the LIO initially emerged as a security arrangement accompanied by a set of economic imperatives (Wolff, 2024: 2; Kundnani, 2017). By the end of the Cold War and the collapse of communism in East Central Europe and the Soviet Union, the LIO evolved further—in particular with the establishment of the World Trade Organisation (WTO) in 1994, which, according to *Ikenberry*, is “the most formal and developed institution of the [LIO]” (Ikenberry, 2011). It is also notable that the European Union (EU) was established during the heyday of the LIO and has since developed a foreign policy, identity, and set of interests largely aligned with this order (Bargués, Joseph and Juncos, 2023: 2287). It is thus unsurprising to see that the EU has often endorsed the liberal agendas put forward by the US and UK.

Despite the LIO’s evident dominance during the Cold War and its continuation into the post-Cold War period, it has faced intensifying challenges in recent decades (Scicluna, 2021: 319). The loosely defined LIO space enabled liberal democracies to pursue mutual interests, ultimately reinforcing US hegemony not only within the Western Hemisphere but also across other regions. The US and its allies have used their power to shape the LIO in ways that would otherwise have been impossible for most other states or international organisations (Makei, 2023: 124). This has led to a range of peace and security challenges. The prolonged wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, which failed to achieve

their intended outcomes, are prominent examples. Indeed, nearly two-thirds of US veterans believe the Iraq war was not worth fighting, and 58% feel the same about the war in Afghanistan (Igielnik, Parker, 2019). Another illustrative case is the Russia-Ukraine conflict, which began in 2014 and escalated significantly in 2022, resulting in severe humanitarian crises and international security repercussions. Meanwhile, the continued rise of emerging powers such as China, India, Brazil, and South Africa has further challenged the LIO, influencing efforts to restructure the global order. These rising states have adopted policy approaches designed to reconfigure global norms in their own favour. Platforms such as BRICS exemplify initiatives aimed at reforming current mechanisms of global governance and developing new multilateral institutions that can rival today's international institutions and rules of economic exchange and cooperation (Chu, Zheng, 2021: 2).

Furthermore, the deepening rift in the West has aggravated these concerns, unveiling a struggle for global dominance that is increasingly articulated through adversarial rhetoric and antagonistic behaviour—approaches which are themselves conducive to the emergence of security challenges to the world order (Diez, Von Lucke, 2023: 2221; De la Serna Galván, 2011: 161-162).

It is against this backdrop that many scholars and policymakers have come to view the LIO as contested, declining, or even failing. Some attribute this to the erosion of US global leadership, which, for decades, played a pivotal role in establishing and developing the LIO (Alcaro, 2018: 1). Others trace the LIO's shortcomings in promoting peace and security to liberal interventionism and the overreach of liberal international organisations (e.g. The North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO)) whose intrusive policies are perceived to undermine national sovereignty of different states (Mearsheimer, 2019: 30-35). Still others blame some liberal ideas, such as the “hyper-globalisation”, for exacerbating economic inequality and fuelling growing opposition to the LIO (Colgan, Keohane, 2017: 40-42.). However, the present research aims to uncover the roots of the peace and security challenges confronting the LIO, not merely in its political, ideological, and/or institutional architecture, but also in a more

fundamental component—namely, the LIO’s conception and approach to ‘Justice’. Justice is an essential human value and a cornerstone of the rule of law; the viability and endurance of political orders depend largely on widely accepted principles of justice and the members’ conformity to practices grounded in those principles. By adopting a justice-oriented approach to explore and explain the gap within and between theory and practice, this research aims to contribute to more effective and comprehensive peace and security solutions in today’s world (Lebow, Zhang, 2022: 32). This brings us to the main question of this article: How is the LIO’s pursuit of justice evaluated, and what major obstacles hinder its ability to promote peace and security at national and international levels?

The objective of this research is to explore and affirm the hypothesis that the LIO’s justice agenda suffers from significant conceptual and operational flaws—particularly in defining justice comprehensively and addressing key issues such as racial and gender equality—while also encountering resistance from non-liberal states and norms. To this end, and after outlining the methodology, this article examines its hypothesis by exploring the nexus between justice and security, analysing the key features of the LIO’s approach to justice and their repercussions, and exploring the endogenous and exogenous challenges hindering the LIO’s pursuit of justice. The discussion is organised into four sections and ends with conclusions.

1- Methodology

This research primarily adopts a qualitative and descriptive methodology. It thus explores the relationship between justice and security, as well as the defining characteristics of the LIO’s approach to justice, using a thematic analysis informed by qualitative content analysis. The research applies a deductive reasoning approach, in that it derives conclusions from the LIO’s underlying conception of justice rather than focusing solely on the causes of specific peace and security challenges here and there. Nonetheless, references to real-world examples and conflicts are used to enrich the analysis with some degree of bottom-up reasoning.

Additionally, this article draws partially from an interpretivist perspective, aiming to highlight policy divergence and interrogate emerging ideas shaped by narratives of crisis and injustice. In doing so, the research has reviewed and incorporated insights from over 50 primary and secondary sources, including books, academic journal articles, policy reports, and research papers.

2- Establishing the Nexus between Justice and Security

Justice and security are not mutually exclusive concepts; rather, they are mutually reinforcing. There can be no lasting security without justice (Miller, Piccone, 2015). Political orders that lack a foundation in justice are often deemed tyrannical—a view shared by major thinkers such as Aristotle and Max Weber—and are typically short-lived (Lebow, Zhang, 2022: 32). Against this background, the justice–peace and security nexus has gained traction both domestically and globally, increasingly being viewed as a critical component of sustainable security strategies (Rangelov, 2016: 17-18). A key example is the establishment of the International Criminal Court (ICC) in 2002, which seeks to foster long-term peace by holding perpetrators of war crimes, crimes against humanity, genocide, and aggression accountable. The purpose of punishment in this context is dual: to prevent reoffending by the perpetrator and to deter others from committing similar crimes (Ferragamo, Klobucista, 2025; Mandery, 2024: 8). Such initiatives clearly show that enhancing our understanding of peace and security can inform more effective justice delivery as well, and lead to improved institutional frameworks at national and international levels (Miller, Piccone, 2015).

However, the relationship between justice and security has traditionally been constrained by a narrow definition of peace and security which primarily focused on the use of armed force and the cessation of conflict, also known as “negative peace” (Ewan, 2010: 134). In this sense, peace simply implies the absence of war or armed violence. While this conception was long dominant, political developments in recent decades have catalysed a shift towards a more holistic, people-centred model of “positive peace”. This broader concept entails not only

the absence of exploitation and violence but also the presence of an equitable and just social order—along with attention to emerging global challenges such as ecological sustainability (Ewan, 2010: 134).

Realising positive peace remains a formidable challenge, given the lack of consensus on its definition, means of achievement, and end goals (Barash, Webel, 2009: 7-10). Domestic and international actors face two major challenges. First, positive peace expands the scope of security beyond the state, encompassing the interests of diverse social groups and individual men and women. Second, it implies the need to establish conditions that are still lacking in many societies. This reconceptualisation of security incorporates multiple dimensions, including economic stability, food security, health, and environmental protection. It moves beyond “freedom from fear” (i.e. protection from violence) to address “freedom from want”—highlighting how poverty, inequality, and underdevelopment also pose significant security threats to human beings (Ewan, 2010: 134-135; Barash, Webel, 2009: 9-10).

These paradigm shifts introduce new horizons for both global and domestic security efforts. For example, the denial of human rights by states or the imposition of standards that conflict with local traditions and needs may result in discrimination, violence, and insecurity for citizens (Ewan, 2010: 134-135; Robertson, 2004: 31-34). One case in point is the ongoing water-related disputes between Turkey and Iraq, or Iran’s water mismanagement exacerbated by droughts, which has led to significant water insecurity for both farmers and ordinary citizens (Calabrese, 2024). It is therefore reasonable to argue that achieving comprehensive peace and security at both domestic and international levels depends, *inter alia*, on providing basic human needs and ensuring a dignified life for all.

Similarly, on the other side of this nexus, the concept of justice is also subject to diverse interpretations. It is shaped by varying cultural, philosophical, and legal traditions, and thus lacks a universally agreed definition (Thürer, 2008: 127-128). While some emphasise principles such as fairness, proportionality, and impartiality, others prioritise values like equality, reciprocity, desert, and

need as the main elements of justice (Rescher, 2017: 15-22; Schmitz, 2012: 13-14). It is even more challenging to know that concepts like fairness and equality are themselves difficult to define with precision. Therefore, this article focuses on analysing the liberal conception of justice—given its foundational role in the LIO—alongside its criticisms and practical implications.

3- Exploring the Strengths and Weaknesses of the Liberal Conception of Justice

As might be expected, there is no single liberal conception of justice that commands unanimous agreement among scholars. Rather, there exist multiple liberal conceptions of justice, as various thinkers have proposed theories aiming to establish a plausible causal relationship between liberal values—such as equality and freedom—and the achievement of justice (Lewin, 2014: 440). Among these, the social contract tradition, primarily advanced by Thomas Hobbes and John Locke, has gained considerable traction as a general framework for liberal theories of justice. For both Hobbes and Locke, justice is intrinsically linked to the rule of law, which can only be realised within a politically organised society. In their view, naturally free individuals voluntarily enter into a social contract with a sovereign authority, agreeing to be governed and to obey its laws. This contract provides the framework within which individuals can realise the requirements of justice—both for themselves and in their interactions with others (Borinshtein et al., 2021: 258-260).

Another notable contribution to liberal theories of justice is Immanuel Kant's universal theory of justice. At the core of Kant's theory lies the idea of a universal law of justice, grounded in the protection and promotion of individual freedom. Justice, in this framework, is not merely a system of coercive laws that protect the freedom in the external relations of all individuals but also a condition of maximum liberty for all human beings. Kant thus emphasises the necessity of a "universal law of freedom" that harmonises individual wills and ensures mutual respect among persons (Rosen, 1993: 3-12).

John Stuart Mill, by contrast, developed a conception of justice rooted in the

principle of utility. For Mill, justice entails respect for individual rights, but its ultimate foundation lies in the promotion of the greatest happiness for the greatest number. Justice, therefore, consists of moral rules that are essential to human well-being, are binding, and must be observed by society as a whole (Ranson, 2024: 14-16).

Perhaps the most influential liberal theory of justice, however, is that of John Rawls, who sought to reconcile elements of both the social contract and utilitarian traditions. Rawls's theory—known as “Justice as fairness”—aims to articulate moral principles that can underpin a just social order, particularly with respect to the basic structure of society. This “basic structure” encompasses key institutions that shape individuals' life prospects, including constitutional rights, economic arrangements, property laws, and access to health and education (Graham, Hoffman, 2015: 78-83). Rawls proposes two core principles of justice that, he argues, “provide a way of assigning rights and duties in the basic institutions of society and they define the appropriate distribution of the benefits and burdens of social cooperation” (Rawls, 1999: 4). The first principle holds that each person is to have an equal right to the most extensive set of basic liberties compatible with a similar liberty for others. The second principle requires that social and economic benefits, positions and offices must be reasonably arranged, in everyone's advantage and open to all (Graham, Hoffman, 2015: 78-83).

Rawls's ideas have profoundly influenced contemporary political philosophy. His approach to justice avoids abstruse metaphor and instead offers a model that free and equal persons, willing to cooperate on fair terms, can plausibly endorse. Notably, Rawls's theory allows for certain inequalities, provided they serve to improve the position of the worst off—a feature that lends his theory a pragmatic flexibility. Moreover, he acknowledges the vulnerability of democratic systems when they lack a moral compass to reign in popular feelings, making his ideas particularly relevant to the functioning of modern liberal democracies (Audard, Forse, 2022: 5-6). Nonetheless, like other liberal theories, Rawls's approach to justice has not been immune to criticism. Several

critics from within and outside of the liberal tradition have highlighted shortcomings in liberal approaches to justice, whether in terms of their philosophical assumptions or their practical application within contemporary liberal democracies. These critical perspectives raise important concerns that can be viewed as endogenous challenges confronting the LIO in its pursuit of a just global system.

4- Tackling LIO's Endogenous Challenges to the Pursuit of Justice

The first endogenous challenge to the LIO's justice agenda concerns the criteria for the distribution of benefits and rights at both domestic and international levels. Although several liberal theories of justice, including that of Rawls, have attempted to depict an egalitarian method of resource and opportunity distribution, they are unlikely to establish true equality within society. This is largely due to their limited consideration of the significance of individual talents and abilities (Przybylinski, 2023: 23). One notable example is the rights of disabled individuals. According to reports, disabled people continue to suffer from architectural barriers, unequal access to opportunities and resources, and negative attitudes, leading to marginalisation and violations of their human rights—even in developed liberal democracies such as the US, let alone autocratic states (Pappas, 2020).

Women's rights represent another domain where the achievements of the LIO are often overstated. In the UK alone, it is estimated that over two million women fall victim to violence perpetrated by men each year—a serious crisis that arguably constitutes a national emergency, given that many of these violations result in serious injuries and even homicides (Dodd, 2024). The situation in the US is similarly alarming, with reports estimating that almost one-third of American women have experienced physical violence and one in ten has survived rape (Montgomery et al. 2015: 2156). This persists despite both States being party to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), which aims to address discrimination from a liberal feminist perspective (Parisi, 2017).

Perhaps even more troubling are the various forms of racial discrimination that continue to undermine the LIO's pursuit of justice. Many liberal states that advocate human rights today were historically engaged in slavery and racial oppression for centuries. The colonisation of Africa and the Western Hemisphere involved widespread racism, marginalisation, mistreatment, and genocide of indigenous and non-White populations, underpinned by a belief in White supremacy (Barabino et al., 2023: 36). This legacy sparked uprisings and revolts across different regions. In North America alone, over 300 slave revolts were recorded between 1663 and 1860, including the Stono Rebellion (1739) and Nat Turner's Rebellion (1831), both of which resulted in dozens of deaths (Mark, 2025). Even more horrifically, the American Civil War (1861–1865), the deadliest conflict in US history with over 600,000 deaths and 470,000 injuries (more than the US casualties in World War I and II combined) was also rooted in disputes over slavery (Weigley, 2000: xv-xvii).

Racism has similarly proved its devastating repercussions at the international level. During the American-Philippines conflict (1899–1902), US Senators dismissed independence for the Philippines, and disparaged the population as “a heterogeneous compound of inefficient oriental humanity” and “ignorant, brutal, hostile, and savage” (Maass, 2020: 192-193). This racialised mindset fuelled American intervention in the Philippines, and consequently turned into a war of racial exterminism that considered Filipino combatants and non-combatants a legitimate targets of violence (Kramer, 2006). Similarly, both World Wars were waged by leaders pursuing racist ideologies, leading to some of the most violent racial atrocities in history. While many liberal policymakers and officials have been blamed for preserving segregationist systems, acting on racialised fears and persecuting racial minorities (Maass, 2023: 94-95). Although formal state-sponsored racism has largely been abolished in many liberal democracies, public sentiment and collective awareness—not liberal justice theories—played the primary role in prompting institutional reform and the abolition of slavery and segregation (Maass, 2023: 108). Nevertheless, racial discrimination continues to threaten peace and security. A recent and well-known example is the widespread

unrest following the killing of George Floyd, an unarmed African American man, by police in Minneapolis on 25 May 2020. It is estimated that between 15 and 26 million people participated in subsequent protests across the US, making it one of the largest protest movements in American history. The unrest resulted in dozens of deaths, injuries to approximately 130 police officers, and the arrest of hundreds of demonstrators (Beckett, 2020; Cherone, 2020).

It is crystal clear that liberal states and the LIO continue to fall short in addressing the negative security needs of disabled people, women, and other marginalised groups. Their performance is even weaker when it comes to meeting growing positive security needs, such as the equitable distribution of economic, social, and welfare benefits. In fact, the neoliberal dominance of global economic policy has contributed to such rising inequalities in many countries. A 2023 study revealed that 81 billionaires now hold approximately 50% of global wealth, even as extreme poverty increases, pushing millions into deeper hardship each year (Christensen et al., 2023: 15-19). A creeping global trend which predisposes different societies and regions to the increasing risks of political unrest, civil wars and armed conflicts (Marks, 2016).

These failures stem from a range of factors, but the root cause often lies in the limitations of the liberal approach to justice. Liberal theories typically emphasise the general will of the people, which renders justice susceptible to populism and extremism. Popular opinions can significantly influence legislation and judicial outcomes, potentially leading to deviations from the rule of law in the absence of supra-constitutional principles of justice that could serve as a moral compass. Without such principles, there is a risk of succumbing to the “tyranny of majorities”, whereby the rights and needs of minorities are overlooked or undermined (Audard, Forse, 2022: 7). Moreover, issues such as gender and racial equality were insufficiently addressed in the social contract tradition, which tends to construct exclusionary socio-political systems that enable various forms of covert discrimination (Przybylinski, 2023: 18, 27-28). Although some liberal philosophers, such as Kant and later Rawls, sought to incorporate ethical considerations into their justice theories, their efforts often

entailed compromises that marginalised women, disabled individuals, and other disadvantaged communities for the sake of social order and cooperation (Nussbaum, 2006: 221).

These shortcomings once again highlight the impasse liberal theories face in articulating a coherent and context-sensitive account of legitimacy. Liberal thought rarely treats legitimacy as a concept distinct from justice, establishing a conflation that gives primacy to justice, and as a consequence, the legitimacy of liberal states is seldom questioned even when they exhibit deep injustices. However, in modern pluralistic societies, where citizens have divergent religious, political, and philosophical approaches, and therefore often disagree on fundamental conceptions of the good, a more explicit and independent understanding of legitimacy is essential (Sleat, 2015: 238-240, 247). Moreover, incorporating aspects of the capabilities approach may help address some of liberalism's blind spots regarding gender, race, and disability-based injustices. This approach emphasises equal access to opportunities that allow individuals—including women and marginalised communities—to live meaningful lives and exercise fundamental capabilities (Nussbaum, 2006: 405-415). And by advancing the equal enjoyment of positive rights, it supports basic levels of social and economic security for all (Przybylinski, 2023: 26).

However, the shortcomings of liberal theories of justice and legitimacy have also fuelled public backlash against the LIO, often in response to deepening inequality and the liberal characters of global governance. The European refugee crisis of 2015 is a notable example. As over 1.1 million migrants from the Middle East and Africa sought entry into Europe, many citizens perceived integration neither possible nor desirable. This sparked widespread anti-immigration protests in cities such as Amsterdam, Prague, Warsaw, Birmingham, and Dresden, with dozens of arrests (The Christian Science Monitor, 2016). Such anti-immigration approaches are considered illiberal, as they oppose liberal values such as freedom, equality, and universalism, and uphold exclusionary nationalist criteria (Minkenberg, 2000: 174-175). It is due to such public approaches that even core liberal states intermittently struggle to fully implement

the justice requirements put forward by the prominent liberal theories (Sleat, 2015: 244-245).

Similarly, On the global stage, liberal governments themselves have at times undermined the very institutional frameworks and legal norms they helped to create. The US retreat from multilateralism offers a stark example. While the US and its allies played a leading role in establishing trade regimes such as the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) and its successor, the WTO, as essential components of the LIO, the US government is no longer a staunch advocate of free trade and deeper economic integration (Wolff, 2024: 1-3; Bargués, Joseph and Juncos, 2023: 2288, 2294). President Donald Trump, for instance, imposed reciprocal tariffs of up to 49% on imports from approximately 60 countries—measures that arguably violated the WTO's Most-Favoured-Nation (MFN) and bound rate obligations which are the fundamental principles of the organization (The Economic Times, 2025). Though these policies were largely motivated by domestic concerns such as deindustrialisation and the decline in manufacturing employment caused by free trade policies, they have prompted retaliatory actions and increased geopolitical tensions, with potential spillover effects beyond the economic realm (Wolff, 2024: 1-5; Hillman, 2018).

Similarly, the ICC, long associated with liberal principles such as legality, fairness, and accountability, and intermittently viewed with suspicion as a hegemonic tool promoting the dominant Western liberal model, has faced resistance—even from liberal democracies and organisations. In 2024, the ICC issued an arrest warrant for Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. Hungary, a former liberal democracy and current EU member, failed to comply with its obligation to arrest and surrender him. Instead, it announced its withdrawal from the ICC prior to his visit. According to Article 127 of the Rome Statute, however, a “withdrawal shall take effect one year after the date of receipt of the notification, unless the notification specifies a later date”, meaning Hungary remained legally bound to cooperate (Giannini, Creuz, 2025: 10; Amnesty International, 2025). The decision also drew harsh criticism from US officials, who labelled the warrant a “dangerous” act against Israel's right to self-

defence and threatened to impose sanctions on the Court (Reyes, Christenson, 2024). Such responses contravene fundamental principles of international law, including the peaceful settlement of disputes, the principle of *pacta sunt servanda*, and the duty of international cooperation—all of which, when violated, increase the risk of global conflicts (Dogaru, 2024: 131-141).

5- Exogenous Challenges Hampering LIO's Success in Achieving Justice

The LIO's pursuit of justice does not take place in a vacuum. Divergent and sometimes contradictory policies adopted by various autocracies and international organisations are also hampering its success in one way or the other. It is therefore unsurprising that illiberalism is becoming entrenched as a new norm in numerous countries. Between 2000 and 2015 alone, about 27 countries experienced democratic collapse (e.g. Hungary), while many authoritarian regimes became even more autocratic (Daase, Deitelhoff, 2021: 490).

The LIO has not only failed to promote positive peace across societies, but it has also made no significant strides in improving negative peace. Although peace between major powers has largely prevailed since the Second World War, this situation primarily resulted from the balance of power between the Western and Eastern blocs, followed by US dominance era, rather than being a direct security achievement of the LIO (McGregor, 2024: 93). Yet, since the 1950s, the number of international armed conflicts has consistently ranged between approximately 20 and 60 per year, and there remains persistent disagreement over how best to prevent them (Barash, Webel, 2009: 9).

Still, the major external challenges stem from non-liberal powers such as China and Russia. Despite pursuing different policies, both seek to reshape the international order to be less Western and less liberal. China, for instance, has acknowledged the existence of the LIO and benefited from it in many ways. Nonetheless, Beijing strives to reform the LIO to better accommodate its interests. In contrast to liberal democracies, China prioritises economic opportunity over political rights and has for decades attempted to undermine the universality of human rights (McGregor, 2024: 94). The country's controversial

regional security ambitions, particularly in asserting control over the South China Sea and its intent to unify with Taiwan—one of the few liberal democracies in Asia—remain a significant potential flashpoint in its relations with many liberal states, including the US and EU countries (Krumbein, 2024: 171-172).

Russia's trajectory has been somewhat different. Following the dissolution of the Soviet Union, Russian leadership initially committed to "normalization" and expressed support for democracy and universal human rights. However, the challenging mundane realities of the LIO have gradually pushed Russia away. Not only is the Government concerned about the LIO's progressive conditionalisation of state sovereignty on human rights grounds but it is also very uncomfortable with the expansion of contemporary liberal organisations, such as the EU and NATO, into the eastern European countries that, during the cold war, belonged to the Soviet sphere of influence. Such geopolitical concerns and the pursuit of Russia's "Eurasian Dream" persuaded Moscow to launch a punitive campaign against Georgia (the 2008 Russo-Georgian War), and later intervene with Ukrainian President Victor Yanukovich to thwart the signing of the Association Agreement between the EU and Ukraine. This led to mass pro-EU protests in Ukraine, resulting in the installation of a pro-EU government in Kyiv after the fall of President Yanukovich in 2014. Subsequently, Russia annexed Crimea in 2014, and the conflict escalated, eventually leading to a full-scale war in 2022, when Russia launched a special military operation to stop Ukraine's westward drift (Groitl, 2023: 436-440).

Despite the LIO's global influence and pressures on Russia and China to conform to liberal norms, both states remain sceptical of liberalism's justice agenda—arguably shaped by the enduring influence of Marxist philosophy. They tend to perceive the LIO as a socio-political order dominated by the interests of the bourgeois ruling class—or, let's say, the global hegemons of the day (Przybylinski, 2023: 28). Even when justice might be advanced by benevolent global leadership, the issue of dominance remains a persistent concern among rival powers (Sjursen, 2023: 2213-2214). Consequently, both

China and Russia have actively sought participation in alternative or parallel institutional frameworks where they perceive themselves as underrepresented. Notable examples include the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), whose accomplishments have shifted perceptions about the legitimacy of longstanding institutions such as the Asian Development Bank (ADB), which has long benefited from strong leadership by Japan and close ties to the so-called Bretton Woods institutions (e.g. the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank). Likewise, the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation and the BRICS group have expanded their political and economic influence, particularly after the outbreak of the Russia-Ukraine conflict (McGregor, 2024: 94-96). These initiatives continue to challenge the LIO's global authority and complicate its efforts to promote its justice and security agendas in one way or the other.

Finally, an important exogenous challenge arises from international organisations which, despite embodying a tapestry of liberal values and objectives, often lack a cohesive and theoretically-based institutional framework specifically dedicated to realising liberal justice and security aims. The UN, as the cornerstone of multilateral cooperation and the only universal and comprehensive international organisation, exemplifies a mixture of realist, idealist, and liberal visions and frameworks aimed at pursuing justice and establishing peace and security. It therefore operates with a relatively wide margin of interpretation and discretion, as realist theories, for example, tend to recognise a narrower range of security needs for states, often equating security with the absence of conflict (i.e. negative peace) (Turan, 2016: 47-48; Groitl, 2023: 432-433). It is thus unsurprising that UN bodies have sometimes exhibited selective approaches to their responsibilities. For instance, the Security Council, which holds the primary mandate to maintain international peace and security, remained largely inactive throughout the Iran-Iraq War, only invoking Articles 39 and 40 of Chapter VII of the UN Charter after seven years of the conflict. In contrast, Iraq's invasion of Kuwait prompted the Council's swift response under Chapter VII of the Charter within a few hours (S/RES/598, 1987; S/RES/660, 1990). Such inconsistencies in enforcement continue to undermine perceptions

of justice and fairness—not only within the Security Council but across numerous international entities.

Conclusion

The LIO, largely constructed in the aftermath of the Second World War under the leadership of the US, has long been presented as a global framework for promoting justice, peace and security. It is grounded in liberal principles such as democratic governance, human rights, open markets, and international cooperation, and institutionalised through organisations like the UN, the EU, NATO, and the WTO.

However, as this article has shown, the LIO's justice agenda has provoked considerable controversy, particularly regarding its real-world implications for peace and security at both domestic and international levels. On the one hand, the justice-security nexus remains conceptually ambiguous, as both justice and security are variably defined and inconsistently applied, sometimes in contradictory contexts. On the other hand, the growing positive security requirements leave no doubt that the LIO must overcome both endogenous and exogenous challenges to its conception and pursuit of justice, if it is to respond adequately to the contemporary security needs at domestic and international levels.

Nonetheless, it must be acknowledged that the LIO's shortcomings in realising justice, resolving conflicts, and fulfilling the expanding positive security needs of humanity neither disable liberalism nor the LIO. No single doctrine or theoretical framework contains the whole truth. The LIO must therefore remain open to engagement with evolving liberal theories—or potentially a synthesis of them—that can advance a more inclusive and comprehensive conception of justice and security for all, particularly with an especial focus on appreciating a reasonable status for the multifaceted element of legitimacy within its justice agenda. In addition to such theoretical recalibrations, liberal states must first and foremost address the disjuncture between their professed liberal commitments and their actual practices.

Inconsistencies between espoused values (e.g. fairness, the rule of law, equality, and accountability) and real-world policies have bred scepticism and resistance. For example, actions taken by recent US administrations that undermine the normative frameworks of international organisations which have traditionally been recognised as liberal in terms of their values and practices are perceived as unjust not only by non-liberal critics but also by liberal allies in Europe and North America.

Once such foundational reforms are undertaken, attention must turn to engaging with non-liberal states. Their increasing resistance is often not a wholesale rejection of liberal norms, but rather a response to their perceived selective and sometimes discriminatory application. This reinforces the view among many that the LIO operates more as a Western-centric or US-driven model than as a one size fits all order. Unless these perceptions are addressed, the LIO will continue to face deficits that hinder its ability to foster a just and secure international order.

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