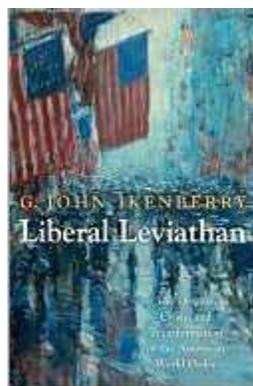




## Liberal Leviathan: The Origins, Crisis, and Transformation of the American World Order

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### Introduction

**JOANNE MYERS:** Good afternoon. I'm Joanne Myers, director of Public Affairs Programs, and on behalf of the Carnegie Council I'd like to thank you all for joining us.

Our speaker is the Albert G. Millbank Professor of Politics and International Affairs at Princeton University, the highly acclaimed G. John Ikenberry. Professor Ikenberry will be discussing America's place in the world and how we should think about our role in the future.

As one of the foremost advocates of [liberal internationalism](#), it is not surprising that our speaker believes that it is in America's interest to support international institutions, such as the UN and the [WTO](#) [World Trade Organization], in order to establish a more predictable international environment where all nations play by the rules.

The title of his latest work is [Liberal Leviathan: The Origins, Crisis, and Transformation of the American World Order](#), which he says can be viewed as a sequel to his earlier work, [After Victory: Institutions, Strategic Restraint, and the Rebuilding of Order after Major Wars](#). Both books address postwar orders and institutions in our global society.

As the 2012 presidential election gets under way, the future of U.S. foreign policy hasn't been widely debated just yet. But it will.

Even so, for some time now many pundits have been saying that America is in crisis, that our influence and power is waning, and as a country we are on the decline. Some argue that it was the [Bush](#) Administration's recent assertive unilateralism that put us in jeopardy of losing our status as the sole superpower.

Whether true or false, we are nevertheless at a moment when our authority within the international system is contested as it has rarely been. As such, now is the time, argues Professor Ikenberry, for America to renegotiate its relationship with the rest of the world and pursue a more enlightened foreign policy.

In making his case, Professor Ikenberry does several things as he advocates for a renewal and reorganization of a global system of liberal democracy. For starters, he traces the connections between the emergence of a largely liberal internal system after World War II, when the concentration of global power resided within the United States, and how now, in recent times, this American-led hegemonic order has been troubled.

What he provides is a clear and informed synthesis of theories being discussed on global governance, and what can be done to shape the evolving character of liberal internationalism. His focus is on the shifts underlying the international systems, such as the rise of unipolarity, the erosion of sovereignty, and the transformation of security interdependence, which have led to making the American-led hegemonic order unstable.

To further explore the underlying questions about international order and to begin the conversation about who commands and who benefits, please join me in welcoming one of the leading scholars of international affairs, our speaker this afternoon, Professor John Ikenberry.

## Remarks

**JOHN IKENBERRY:** It's great to be here. What a lovely introduction and summary of my book. I don't really have to work so hard now, because Joanne very nicely summarized what I try to do.

Here's the book. It's a painting by [Childe Hassam](#), a 1920s impressionist American painter. This painting is in the Princeton Art Museum. It's a painting of the flags on Fifth Avenue during World War I. It bespeaks a certain kind of—it's raining—a sense of pensiveness, about America and the world. That's the kind of image I wanted to convey, of reflection. There has been this extraordinary era that we've gone through, and what's next? What's America's next act, so to speak?

The other reason I put it on the cover of the book is that the sister painting of this one is in the Oval Office. If you see a picture of [Barack Obama](#), look to his left, and this painting looking very much like this is on the wall next to his desk in the Oval Office. My idea was that someday, when he's in a bookstore, he'll see this cover, and he'll say, "That looks very familiar. I'd better take a closer look." So we shall see.

This book is an attempt to ask big questions, to reflect on the past and the future about America's role in the world, the world order that the United States built after World War II, and the question of the future. So I look both back and forward at, really, both ends of this arc of American power, the beginning and whatever we want to call the current period.

When I look back, I'm really interested in the question of what kind of order the United States built, what did it do with its power, particularly after World War II, when it had so much material capability to shape the world.

But of course [in 1919](#) it tried a kind of first effort, if you will, at order building. 1945 was the big show. After the Cold War, the United States again had an extraordinary opportunity to build order. And even today, no country really has more power and opportunity to shape the rules and institutions of the international system.

So if you step back, it's extraordinary. No country in world history has had such opportunity. The United States may not be exceptional, but it certainly is unusual in having that capacity to inflict itself or shape the world in various ways.

So my book asks the question: What did the United States do with that power? What did it do with that opportunity, those moments in history when things get settled? How did it connect power to purpose, how did it articulate a vision?

How did the American-led order differ from past orders? Those of you who study history know it was different than the past, even from the British Empire in the British era in the 19th century, another liberal state—free trade, many characteristics like the United States. But the United States did do things differently.

Part of what I want to do, before we talk about the future, is to reflect one last time—at least for my own scholarly purposes—on the past, and try to capture historically and theoretically the character of that order.

I'm optimistic. I make an argument about the American accomplishment, that the United States had this opportunity and did things differently—not because it's a better state, or that God's on its side, or that it didn't use violence and do bad things around the world. We can talk about the balance sheet of American behavior.

But there was something quite remarkable that happened, particularly after the 1940s, in the shadow of the Cold War and after. It has to do with building a rule-based order and building an alliance system and multilateral institutions, which I'll talk about in a moment.

And then I ask the question in this book about the future. It's really trying to say: What next? What is America's role going forward? The question really is: When the world becomes less American, will it also become less liberal? Will it become more of an order that will reflect other values?

In particular, I have China in mind, and at the end of my talk I'll say a little bit about China. I'm obsessed with China. I think about it. I'm writing about it now in my new work. At Princeton we have debates about China. I am in a debate with another colleague who has just written a book that's a very strong argument about why we should worry about China.

So we've got a lot of things to talk about in terms of what comes next.

Once again, though, I'm optimistic. I argue that the underlying characteristics of that order are actually in demand more than ever before. And the kinds of problems that the world faces can only really be solved with

arrangements that are like the ones the United States promoted after World War II and into the current century, even though the authority and the leadership will be shared in more complex ways. More on that in a moment.

But the book is really trying to speak to many different audiences. It's not just an academic book for my colleagues who are writing articles in journals you've never heard of, although I do spend some time thinking about those arguments as well. But it's really trying to do a number of things.

It's trying, first and foremost, to make the argument of what are the analytic and theoretical underpinnings of the kind of order that the United States built. Here I'm really asking the question: Why would a powerful state, the most powerful state at the time, agree to build an order around rules, as opposed to an imperial order? Why do powerful states build rule-based orders to the extent they do? That's something that I've always been interested in.

Power and rules are not enemies. Powerful states actually, in my rendering, like and need rules because they're like other kinds of investments. They really are an investment in predictability and structuring and allowing actually your power to become more expansive, and to sync or to create lock-in arrangements with other countries, so you have a more predictable environment. So a powerful state without an institutionally and rule-based order is one that is in a fluctuating world where you're never sure what is going to happen tomorrow, and your power is always going to have to be on display and in use. So rules and power, how do we think about that, and how did the United States solve that puzzle, that conundrum, in a particularly unique way?

The second multitasking purpose of the book is to provide a grand narrative. When I go to Washington, this is really the debate about how to think about America at its various moments, including today. Where are we in history? How do we think about the arcs and the world historical movements, the rise and decline, the American position? What has been this long period of the 20th century into this current period? What kinds of stories do we tell? So it's a narrative about the rise of a powerful state and the unleashing of a set of ideas and the way in which the Cold War and economic opportunity, but also crises, created this unusual system.

And then, finally, in my multitasking way, I try to speak to the policy agenda, to Washington. During the Bush years, I was always debating the neoconservatives. So now it was my moment to say what do I think, if I didn't agree with invading Iraq or using power in a certain way, what is my view?

Again, I am, in some sense, making arguments to the current administration or the next one, arguing about how—in a period where American power may be declining, and the ability of the United States to assert itself and to control the system is declining—the United States probably will not ever again be as commanding on the world stage.

That's not necessarily bad news. But it does mean that some of these tools that it has used in the past when it has been powerful are needed yet again, and the kinds of networks of alliances and partnerships that the United States has had so much willingness to pursue in an extraordinary way—and I'll talk more about that in Q&A—the way the United States likes to make friends and build alliances and partnerships.

The United States has 64 allies today, formal allies that are [Article 5-type allies](#), where we agree to defend you if you are attacked, and most of them are reciprocal—not all of them.

China has one. China doesn't do alliances. The United States does. There's something about the United States, of building these kinds of webs and networks, that is quite interesting. I'm suggesting that is something to remember, as we move into a more difficult and more constrained international environment. Again, more on that at the end.

Let me just say something about looking back, about what I'll call the American or Western accomplishment, looking back at the 1940s and after.

The United States didn't invent liberal internationalism. It was a way of thinking about the system of international relations.

Liberal internationalism, what does that mean? It means promoting an order that is open and relatively rule-based. Of course this is a feature of the order as the liberal democracy started to rise in the late 18th century, with Britain and northwest European democracies, republic political theory, the rise of limited state constitutionalism—Britain, of course, most importantly.

But during the 20th century, the United States in some sense became the purveyor of those ideas and put its own stamp on that liberal internationalist agenda, and made it an American agenda. The book is about that.

What you first of all have to recognize—I certainly do—is the way in which the United States in the 1940s, as the

Cold War was starting to pick up, engaged in this incredible order-building using institutions and ideas. But these were ideas that were being used to create structures and relationships.

Between 1944 and 1951, there has never been so much international order-building in world history. Think of the big institutions—the United Nations; the [IMF](#) [International Monetary Fund]; the [World Bank](#); the [GATT](#) [General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade], which later became the WTO [[World Trade Organization](#)]; the [NATO](#) [North Atlantic Treaty Organization]; the U.S. alliances in Asia, the so-called bilateral [hub-and-spoke](#) alliances.

And then, of course, the ideas behind them. We can tick off the ideas: open trade, multilateralism, cooperative security, alliances, democratic solidarity, progressive ideals. U.S. hegemonic leadership—the United States would play a special role, providing public goods. The United States would underwrite this system.

There was a kind of making a virtue out of necessity to some extent. The United States didn't really, in the age of [Roosevelt](#), think that the United States was going to win a war and run an international system. It was really thinking until 1947 that it would be a kind of multipolar world, and there would be lots of collaborative ways in which this system would be run.

But the Cold War took the Soviets out of the order. The Second World War really took Europe out of the action. It was very weak, and Europe could not play a kind of parallel equal role with the United States. So the United States kind of got stuck with the system.

So its economy became an instrument of the global economy, its dollar became a global currency, its military and alliances became a kind of substitute for the UN as a purveyor of security, and on and on and on. The United States kind of fused itself to the international system.

Americans didn't know this. If you're somewhere in the Midwest during this period, you're in the United States—it's a country; there are lots of countries. They didn't know, and to some extent we still do not know today, that the United States played this systemic functional role of keeping the order going, of creating order and stability and openness. It was, therefore, a distinctive type of liberal order, what I call liberal hegemonic order.

I don't want this to be a triumphalist book, but I do want it to let us reflect on the way in which different international orders have different attributes, pluses, and minuses. This order had pluses and minuses. But let me remind you of some of the pluses.

It was an order, again beginning in the 1940s and 1950s, that opened up the world economy from the 1930s, which was this contraction and protectionist system, ushering in the golden age of trade and growth.

Germany and Japan were turned into friends. It's extraordinary. I still reflect on this: How did Germany and Japan become enemies and then friends so quickly, flipping so readily?

France and Germany found new ways to live together. After three wars that [started in the 1870s](#) they couldn't live together, but now they found ways to bind to each other—the [Coal and Steel Community](#), new practices for overcoming old animosities.

Developing countries were brought into the system. A half-billion people came out of poverty and found themselves in the world economy in various places.

Korea, Taiwan, various other countries, in the framework of this order, made democratic transitions. I go to Korea a lot. There's an extraordinary story there—Korean growth through trade, export-oriented development, and then making this democratic transition in the late 1980s. And then global Asia and global Korea, not just simply an actor in Asia but supporting—as Korea is in the next year—the [2012] [Nuclear Safety Summit](#). It also [hosted the G20](#).

So the kind of new states rising up inside of this structure. It's certainly not an empire.

So there is this way that we might reflect on the past and draw these conclusions about how the order had these characteristics that seemed to allow for openness, for growth, and for ways to settle conflicts.

After this, the book really turns and pivots to the future. It talks about the new challenges. After the Cold War, you had this new reality. We couldn't really imagine what the world would be like at that point, and to what extent would the United States still play a role. Well, it *did* still play a role.

The story there is really how rising states now are making their own choices about how to interact with this order. Here everyone is talking about China and the rising non-Western developing countries.

The question that I would pose is: What is the relationship between rising non-Western states that were not part of the moment of creation when this liberal order was established, who were outside of it at that point—China, but also India and Brazil—what is their stance going to be? How will they interact with this order?

Here I try to argue that they are still countries that may have an interest in living inside of a liberal international order. Why is that? Well, for one thing, that's why they have become so influential and grown so rapidly as it is, that they have been trade-oriented, they found ways to take advantage of this liberal order, and now they are stakeholders in important ways. China is in the WTO. Russia wants to get into the WTO. These countries enjoy and profit from openness.

And these countries also profit from rules in an important way—even China, not a democracy, has an interest in frameworks like the WTO, which allow it to protect its interests and shield itself from what will clearly be efforts by countries that are not winning, the way China is winning, to pursue protectionism and discrimination against China. So rules matter, even for non-Western states that don't necessarily embody all those rules at home.

China will want rights and protections that the given system provides China. So, China is not necessarily a revisionist state that is bent on trying to overturn the system.

You think of Japan as an important example of this—Japan, a non-Western state that rose up in the 1970s and 1980s—and it too made choices about how to interact with the Western system. It became a stakeholder. It had international business interests that were very much involved in internationalism, and it became a partner with the United States.

There is reason to think that China will not be as easy an integrative actor in the system, but that it has interests at home that will make this something that they will want to do.

Finally, I want to make an argument about the robustness of liberal internationalism by making a different point, which I really end on in the book. That is the way in which we think about, not other rising states, but rising problems. Here I make the argument that, when we look into the 21st century we see, not a particular state that is a worrisome state like the Soviet Union was, not an actor like Nazi Germany or Japan, but the sheer interdependence of the system, the fact that we are going to look into the 21st century and see economic and security interdependence.

There are lots of different transnational challenges. Let's think about them—terrorist groups, weapons proliferation, global warming, health pandemics, energy insecurity, civil wars, and weak states. What we worry more about are weak states rather than strong states. We worry more about states that haven't been able to really become states, more than about powerful states with big armies.

And so, in some ways, the master trends of the 21st century are really rising economic and security interdependence: that we are not capable of really being secure alone, that we are in a world where we are going to have to experiment with all sorts of new forms of cooperation, if we are to become safe and secure.

Think about the problems. It's not a singular problem. It's really the diffuse problems of the 21st century—how countries burn energy, their public health systems, how they treat their minorities, how they abide by international treaties or not—the kind of behavior of states that we used to not really have to worry about, because they weren't actors that were capable of inflicting harm on us. But the safety and security of modern societies increasingly depends on our ability to reach out to other regions of the world, and to find solutions that allow us to collectively tackle these problems—energy, environment, violence with nonstate actors, and so forth.

So when I look into the 21st century, I see a world where we are going to have to find more complex ways to cooperate. The United States is going to paradoxically—and it's the challenge for Obama, it's the challenge for whoever comes next—that you are simultaneously going to be more influenced by other peoples and processes abroad, but you are going to also have less influence yourself over them. So the kind of return to multipolarity, which is the term we use in academics, of multiple power centers, but also a more rising, demanding agenda for international cooperation.

We are going to have to be very creative and inventive in the 21st century if we are going to survive, and we are going to have to make partners and adjust, and the United States is going to have to make a transition from being top dog to being one of multiple dogs, being one with other countries that are also going to be influential.

The good news again takes us back to the beginning really of my remarks tonight, and that is that the United States has a record of seeing its interests tied with the interests of others, of building institutions that allow for more heightened forms of cooperation, and I think it understands this agenda of complex interdependence and security interdependence.

When I think of Obama as a leader, I think he gets it. Although he's a very constrained and beleaguered president today, his focus is on nuclear safety, his understanding it.

I think [Hillary Clinton](#) in her speech has this notion of a multi-partnership world. That's the kind of idea that I'm getting at—not America as an imperial power that can impose itself on the world, but not isolationism either, but this middle position that is one where the United States has been in, and occupied intellectually and in terms of policy, for many, many decades.

Finally, I would say that in the period going forward, it is going to be a tougher road for the United States to provide leadership. But the message tonight and in the book is, really, that there is no country that is poised on the side of the stage to come in and take America's leadership from it. In fact, when I travel around the world, there is worry about the United States stepping back and not providing that leadership.

In Asia—I just came back from Seoul on Friday—I had a very nice hour-long chat with President [Lee](#), who's now in Washington. There is a real interest in keeping America engaged in Asia and elsewhere. But the United States will be engaged in new ways. It won't be simply this hegemonic unipolar state. It will need to work with others.

So, at home, when American leaders see the virtues, if they do—if they've read my book, they'll see the virtues of this kind of liberally oriented leadership—how do they sell it at home? Here I do worry that we are in an era of constraints, that there will be a demand for cutting foreign aid and for retracting America's role. And people will say, "Let's save money by taking troops out of here and there."

Let me tell you, that's not where you're going to save money. In fact, many of those deployments are cost-effective in various ways, including the costs of maintaining those forces. So that may not be the best place to save money. But we can talk about that.

But the U.S. politicians who are eager in carrying forward the flame of this kind of American approach to liberal leadership will have to articulate a vision of internationalism on the cheap and on the sly—on the cheap, in that we aren't going to have a lot of money to spend. [Marshall Plans](#) and those kinds of things are going to be very difficult to do. So it's going to have to be leveraging our resources, working with others. Burden-sharing is part of multilateralism.

And then, on the sly in the sense that I think you can't simply stand up to Americans and say, "We've got to do this because it's in the national interest." I think you've got to connect internationalism to their lives, to their jobs, to the reality of their circumstances. That's where we come back to interdependence.

We can't live safe, healthy, and stable lives anymore without being deeply connected with the outside world. There are two ways of being connected. Being connected by default, where we have no influence over those connections—that's bad; that means we are reactive, that we experience come what may. Or interactive and connected in the sense of having thought in a kind of forward, enlightened way about creating, recreating, reinventing, and re-legitimizing these structures of cooperation that we have built up and invested in for 60 or so years, and that can help to shape those interconnections—even though the U.S. will have to experience some rainy days where everything doesn't simply look like the sunshine is simply shining on this particular country. That's my thesis.

One of my old Canadian friends read this book and said, "I like it; it's very interesting, but it's a brave book."

I took that to mean foolish, that being brave was a euphemism for: Are you sure you really want to be arguing that?

But I do. Even if I'm that musician in the band on the [Titanic](#), I'm going to be singing—the oboe, or whatever, is going to be playing, even as my feet—

I think that in the end, even though we are in this period of gloominess—of a sense that things aren't working out quite like they used to, the sense of slight worry about the future which pervades this country, and really most of the world, at least the Western world—that one should take heart, gird up your loins, and think about how we can draw on our visions from the past to project them into the future and make the best of it.

## Questions and Answers

**QUESTION:** William Verdone.

I like the term "multi-partnership." But within the global community there are spoilers, and I can think of four of

them. What do we do with a North Korea, an Iran, a Venezuela, and a Pakistan? How do we bring them into the fold—or do we? What's your assessment on that?

**JOHN IKENBERRY:** These are always the difficult questions. I don't think—[Romney](#) said this in his speech—there are no silver bullets, there's no quick solution.

North Korea: since I was just in Korea, I think that it's very difficult to see anything that's going to happen soon. I think that with that country, and I think for all of them, you have to do what I would call different ways for different countries, because these are all very different. You have to contain the worst of it, and then look for regional solutions to stabilize the relations that are threatened to be destabilized, because of those countries. Let me just explain.

With North Korea, I think we need to continue to—as we are now—work closely, fist in glove, with South Korea and Japan, and push China for its good offices. China is never going to push North Korea to the extent that it threatens the collapse of Pyongyang. But it will be a country that, I think, increasingly realizes there's a downside to having [Kim Jong-Il](#) and the Kim family as a client state, that the downside is there, and that they are uniquely positioned to constrain and encourage it.

The U.S. needs to be ready to negotiate. There's a deal out there that would be a grand bargain. They would have to rethink the way they think about their nuclear weapons, but if they were to relinquish them in a verifiable and irreversible way, there's a path to normalization. It has been there for a while. Former Secretary of Defense [William Perry](#)—the [Perry Report](#), which is still, I think, the model for thinking about what the relationship would be for their reform, for their opening. There would be aid, and there would be security guarantees.

With Iran, I can't stand up here in front of you and say I can help you with that one, any more than most people who are floundering.

But sanctions have to be put down as hard as possible. I think there are going to be new sanctions. I don't know. I haven't seen what happened today, but of course yesterday there was [this report](#), and there is going to be a response. There will be something at the Security Council, and, hopefully, there will be additional steps by countries that are the spoilers—not the country Iran, but the spoilers who spoil the sanctions regime. That has been, of course, China and Russia.

To bring the chain back, part of the reason why we needed to reset relations with Russia was that we needed Russia to help us on Iran. If you can get Russia helping us on Iran, China doesn't want to be isolated.

So there has been some tightening there, I think, of the sanctions—not enough to precipitate a regime change, or even a reversal of what we think is the nuclear program going on. But the international community needs to stand patiently for that statement, as it does with North Korea, that there will not be normal relations under these conditions; that if you want to be a member of the international community in good standing, there is a pathway to get there. But it's not through your current policies, and maybe not through your current leaders.

Pakistan and Venezuela—When we step back, I do think that history is on our side, and that these are countries that are troubled and troubling, and that containment, and other policies and sanctions, have to be part of the toolkit. But in the end, the changes will have to come through the kinds of social changes that will undermine these regimes partly from within. One of the things we've learned is you can't do it from without, from outside, only.

This is, of course, the story of the Soviet Union. We contained the Soviet Union, yes. And that's why people say containment worked; the Cold War ended on good terms for the West. But containment didn't work in a good way. There was interaction, there was society interaction creating constituencies inside of the Soviet Union for change.

So containment is not enough, because you need to have that engagement, so that the more evolutionary social processes can—in ways that are still mysterious and unpredictable—ignite social change from within.

**QUESTION:** Ron Berenbeim.

I was interested, especially, in your reference to weak states because they may be the most important challenge. I would make a distinction here between weak states and failed states. Fiji may not be an especially strong state, but the Democratic Republic of the Congo is definitely a failed state.

So how can the United States take a leadership role in the liberal international order, an order that is based on sovereignty, when the major issues in a failed state—and there are many of those—entail problems inside of the country, and when China and Russia, for reasons that are easily understood, are not in favor of this kind of

interference in the internal affairs of another country?

**JOHN IKENBERRY:** That's a great question. Let me think a little bit about that and reflect on it.

In the next issue of *Foreign Affairs* [I have a little exchange on this issue](#) with Professor [Amitai Etzioni](#) from George Washington University, where he is critiquing me, arguing that my liberal sympathies for responsibility to protect the kind of abridgements to sovereignty are creating resistance in China, and other countries like China, that don't want to abridge sovereignty, and we've got to move back to a more [sovereigntist](#) type of position.

There is a healthy debate on this. I will make the following argument. In my remarks, I talked about the fact that the master security trend of the 21st century is the rise in security interdependence, that transnational threats of all sorts—some of them are manmade, like nonstate actors; some of them are nature's revenge, environmental problems, energy problems, health pandemics—that that's why weak states, failed states, the weak states that don't have good public health can generate viruses that can get into the international system, and we're all at risk.

It's in that spirit of complex interdependence, of security interdependence, that we need to be more activist and work with others to try to encourage these states to have some modicum of capacity to ensure their own viability, and to enforce the rules and govern in a responsible way.

But we know that that's not going to happen right away. And so, at various moments, there does appear to be reason why the international community has a stake in what goes on inside of countries. Of course, this is where the two great order-building projects that have shaped the modern world—we'll call it the [Westphalian](#) project—building the state system, the spread of states, national self-determination. Once upon a time, we had 20 or 30 states; we now have almost 200—the United Nations as the trade association for states. That's the state system. It has been emerging; it's growing, expanding.

Every part of the world—north, south, east, and west—has sovereign states. They cling to sovereignty. The notion of sovereignty is the single most universally shared norm in world politics. So that's true.

The Westphalian project, from [1648](#) to today, has been about the promulgation, elaboration, and institutionalization of sovereignty. That's what China has anchored itself to. That's all true.

But there has been this other project that I've been discussing—which is the heart of my book really—and that is the project associated with the liberal ascendancy, the liberal project of building open rule-based order. This has been, for the most part, congruent and consistent with sovereignty.

Think of [Woodrow Wilson](#). I teach in a building called the Woodrow Wilson School, so every talk I give I have to at least mention Woodrow Wilson. I'm fascinated by him. I collect all the books written about Wilson.

He, in his statements about self-determination and about his anti-imperialism, was in fact using Westphalian norms for the pursuit of a liberal project. So he was taking the norms of self-determination, non-discrimination, that all states should have their own state. He was inconsistent about that, but that was the [Wilson vision](#).

So there is a congruence. But sometime in the latter half of the 20th century—and I'll blame one person, a woman named [Eleanor Roosevelt](#). She was the real figure behind the [Universal Declaration of Human Rights](#) that really planted the seed for this notion that individuals have rights that are to be recognized by humanity, and they are rooted in your humanity. And if states abuse those rights or jeopardize those rights, the international community has some obligation to assist or to respond.

That, of course, kind of got muddled for half a century. But in the post-Cold War period you started to get—and of course the way the [Holocaust](#) and way in which the [War Crimes Tribunal](#)—we held soldiers individually accountable—we were starting to break down sovereignty even then. But of course it became frozen for half a century because of the Cold War.

Then, because of terrorism, because of [Rwanda](#), [Srebrenica](#), we can't stand by. Can modern Western democratic leaders stand by for another Srebrenica, when they would have the forces to go in and prevent a bloodbath? Well, that's violating sovereignty. So, you're in this territory where the liberal agenda—with notions of an international community that's putting itself in favor of upholding human rights and protections—stands by when those things happen? But if your answer is no, then you have opened the door for compromising sovereignty.

My argument would be, we just can't close that door. Our morals don't allow us. There are realists who say that sovereignty is sovereignty, but I think even some of the hard-boiled realists like [Henry Kissinger](#) would, in fact, say that, yes, there are these moments where violating sovereignty really is necessary. Certainly, most of us would say that we can't close the door on that kind of action.

What we can do is try to make as consensual and widespread, as possible, agreements about how we respond, who responds, under what conditions, make it a more truly, more enlightened kind of policy of going to the aid.

We can bring the Chinese around. The Chinese voted [in 2005 in the Security Council](#) for R2P [responsibility to protect]. They have, in principle, acknowledged that there are circumstances where the abridgement of sovereignty would be necessary—even the Chinese.

If you think about it this way. We're in an international community that is in a debate between those who say "sovereignty," and those who say "on some occasions we need to violate it." The debate is under what conditions to make it as un-imperialistic and power-political as possible.

But think about the debates we have inside of societies about conflicting values between liberty and equality: "Liberty; don't tamper with markets, or with my wealth and with my income," and those who say "Equality is important so we need to restrict." We have that debate every day. Sometimes we move a little this way, sometimes we move a little that way.

In the international community we've got a debate between not liberty and equality, but between sovereignty and R2P. So we're going to move a little this way, a little that way. There's going to be a debate. We're going to try to make it enlightened.

At the end of the day, I plant my flag with those who say, "We've got to be careful, but we've got to be responsible."

But I think it is the big debate of how we can do it, hopefully through the United Nations—which, by the way, is a Westphalian project. Putting R2P in the Security Council is a way of bringing back into synchronization these two order-building projects, the Westphalian project and [liberal project](#).

**QUESTION:** Howard Lentner.

In leading the way to this liberal project internationally, the United States had to have some coherent decision-making system, and some ideas and vision in the political class. It seems to me that these days those things are not apparent, that they may be being eroded a lot. The inequality that we have in the United States has become so apparent that many people are discouraged that we're in the same boat together. It's no longer that we have a common purpose. We also have the dedication to contracting out governmental services, so much that it begins to erode the very notion that we have a common agenda.

So I'm wondering whether you see this as a possible threat to the United States playing a responsible or a leading, even though a shared, role in the ongoing liberal project.

**JOHN IKENBERRY:** I do. In my remarks I kind of paused at a moment when I was talking about the domestic support structure for American leadership and American liberal internationalist leadership. This is in some sense—in that category I think about—I worry. I worry, as you suggest, about the erosion of a coherent American political system with a sense of "We're in it together."

You would think that we could find those projects, because they are not as evocative as [Sputnik](#) and the Cold War. We need to come together, and the national interest looks very obvious and overwhelming. It's harder to generate that now.

These problems seem so complex, and it is so easy to see our differential interests. Taxes are going to put burdens on these folks, not those; there are various ways in which we can very quickly become brought down into partisan politics.

But I think that we have to give it a go. I think that the thing we need to keep in mind, is that there are implications for how we operate at home, for how we lead abroad. Part of the secret in the heyday of American leadership and power was that there was an American model that, in one way or another, was seen as appealing and cutting-edge.

The debate, of course, during the Cold War was between these two visions of modernity, a Soviet vision and a U.S./Western vision. Part of the politics of the Cold War—and the rise and decline of each of these two superpowers—was tied not just a military struggle, but a struggle for defining a model that was appealing and seemed to get at the cutting edge of modernity, of development, a progressive movement towards a better world, who has that vision.

The United States has kind of lost that vision. Again, it's very depressing in some ways to travel around—I go to

Asia a lot and Europe, and recently to Brazil and Argentina. You sense that, in Argentina and Brazil, there is a sense that what we'll call the [neo-liberal model](#) that has been the American brand since the 1980s—it follows in quite bipartisan ways through the Clinton years—has become discredited.

So the United States needs to rebrand itself, in terms of its model of modernity and capitalism. I think it needs to go beyond the neo-liberal model.

It's worth remembering that the model we used to project our influence in the 1940s and 1950s was a more kind of neo-[New Deal](#) model that resonated with countries that wanted markets, but also wanted stable structures of governance.

I think we need to re-legitimate—and I'll leave it to you to decide what that model is—but we need a model that is seen as appealing. We really do.

I think people want to see it. I think there is a real sense, particularly in countries in between China and the United States. There are lots of countries that would like to see the American brand become more appealing and inflate a little bit, because it seems to be deflating. When countries are so close to China, they are rooting for a revival of the U.S., of a way in which we can bring the various pieces together and provide a kind of model or template for modernity. That's missing.

I think there was a real moment during the August, over [raising the debt ceiling](#), that that really shook up a lot of our friends, and it shook me up. This was new, this was unusual.

What the United States has had going for it is that it's an open, transparent, rule-based system, something that China doesn't have going for it. The United States has this more open rule-based system. That's an asset for the 21st century. But we showed the downside of it, in a way.

And China is showing the upside of its more authoritarian model, building subways for the Olympics—"You need it in a couple of weeks? Okay." Needless to say, there are some flaws and glitches.

But in the democratic recession, democracies don't seem to be functioning as well—not just Americans, but obviously Europeans are also poster children for the kind of dysfunctions of modern democracy.

Getting that back, getting the mojo back— And I think it's a rebranding. I think it is a kind of mixed system, where we both have things to say about stability, market economies, and employment, the kinds of things that we were saying to the world after World War II that were so resonant. I think there's a real upside potential there to do that.

**QUESTION:** George Paik.

Actually, I wanted to ask something similar to this question. However, let me put a different twist on it. Liberalism is clearly at the heart of this international system, as you're talking about it, probably more than I might have realized from some of your previous writings. Of course, the United States was founded as a liberal state.

The question I would have put was: Do we have sufficient consensus on what that is, and what the priorities are?

I guess the other twist I'd put on it is: Are there sources for this? Are the words of a [Paul Berman](#) a good guide, or is there anybody else that you might think of that would be a hint to rebuilding this kind of branding as you're talking about?

**JOHN IKENBERRY:** I'm not sure I have an author in mind. But I do think—it's kind of the [Steve Jobs](#) story, it's the story of that kind of innovation and education.

When President Obama went to Brazil to meet President [Dilma \[Rousseff\]](#), he asked her about her agenda. She said, "My agenda is fourfold: education, science and technology, entrepreneurship, and innovation." Then President Obama said, "Well, those are my agenda items too."

All these societies are trying to invest, so we can get to the next level. Education is there, science and technology are there, infrastructure is there. There is kind of a vision of investment so that you have people operating at their most productive and innovative level, and getting to the high end of the chain of production and innovation.

It seems to me that's the kind of vision, that's the kind of world where a Steve Jobs can flourish.

When I had a sabbatical at the Institute for Advanced Study—back in 1988, 1989—I had this chance to meet Steve Jobs. He was coming to see somebody that I knew. At the coffee time at the Institute, I was able to go into the

coffee room. There were all these physicists and philosophers.

"Can I introduce you to my friend Steve Jobs?" It was my kind of moment, where I was able to work the room pretty well.

It seems like that is the vision of building and working with those assets.

There's this lovely person who has been writing, a public intellectual from Singapore, who has been arguing that the future is with China, and that the West needs to acknowledge that and step aside.

I was just talking to him the other day and asked him, "Where did you send your kids to college?" He came here to see their graduation at Yale and at—

**JOANNE MYERS:** You're talking about [Kishore \[Mahbubani\]](#).

**JOHN IKENBERRY:** So when our friends send their children to Renmin University and Peking University, that will be a sea change.

But right now, the United States does have those assets in education and science. So I think that's the golden egg, that's the goose shall we say, and that we need to keep that goose healthy.

**QUESTION:** Sondra Stein.

How does Afghanistan fit into your international view of us?

**JOHN IKENBERRY:** Not at all. [Laughter] Let's just gracefully put it on the back burner, and hopefully turn the flame down.

I'm not disputing the original rationale for the intervention at this moment. But what I'm suggesting is that it's a diversion, and it's sapping resources.

Iraq and Afghanistan both—think of the trillion dollars. What could we have done with it, apropos of my last answer about the goose, and investing in things that will pay off in the out years, in terms of the ability to innovate, imagine new things, and solve new problems? I weep at the resources we've spent, even as I feel awful about the circumstances that we found there, and that probably we're going to leave there.

But I think that we have to reduce that as a kind of hard-nosed cold analysis of American grand strategy. I am very much of this view, reaffirmed by Hillary Clinton [in a speech yesterday](#), this pivot, the [Asian century](#), the U.S. and the Asian century—that is to say, the United States pivoting from those wars, to a focus on Asia and the rise of China. I think the National Security Council calls it "repositioning," that kind of thing.

That's my answer, that we need to back-burner and lower flame.

**JOANNE MYERS:** Thank you. You began the conversation, and I'd like to invite everybody to continue it.

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