

Rethinking the New World Order



Georg Sørensen

Rethinking World Politics

Series Editor: Professor Michael Cox

In an age of increased academic specialization where more and more books about smaller and smaller topics are becoming the norm, this major new series is designed to provide a forum and stimulus for leading scholars to address big issues in world politics in an accessible but original manner. A key aim is to transcend the intellectual and disciplinary boundaries which have so often served to limit rather than enhance our understanding of the modern world. In the best tradition of engaged scholarship, it aims to provide clear new perspectives to help make sense of a world in flux.

Each book addresses a major issue or event that has had a formative influence on the twentieth-century or the twenty-first-century world which is now emerging. Each makes its own distinctive contribution as well as providing an original but accessible guide to competing lines of interpretation.

Taken as a whole, the series will rethink contemporary international politics in ways that are lively, informed and – above all – provocative.

Published

Mark T. Berger and Heloise Weber
Rethinking the Third World

Nick Bisley
Rethinking Globalization

Nathaniel Copsey
Rethinking the European Union

John Dumbrell
Rethinking the Vietnam War

Martin Griffiths
Rethinking International Relations Theory

Adrian Guelke
Rethinking the Rise and Fall of Apartheid

Ray Kiely
Rethinking Imperialism

Peter Shearman
Rethinking Soviet Communism

Richard Stubbs
Rethinking Asia's Economic Miracle

Colin Wight
Rethinking Terrorism

Owen Worth
Rethinking Hegemony

Fredrik Söderbaum
Rethinking Regionalism

Georg Sørensen

Rethinking the New World Order

Forthcoming

Alex Bellamy
Rethinking Humanitarian Intervention

Mark Beeson
Rethinking Global Governance

David H. Dunn
Rethinking Transatlanticism

Robert G. Patman
Rethinking the Global Impact of 9/11

In preparation

Rethinking the Cold War
Rethinking the Emergence of a Global Economy

Rethinking the First World War
Rethinking the Rise of Islam
Rethinking the Second World War
Rethinking the Twentieth Century
Rethinking the Twenty Years Crisis: 1919–39

Also by Georg Sørensen

A Liberal World Order in Crisis: Choosing Between Imposition and Restraint

Fragile States: Violence and the Failure of Intervention (with Lothar Brock, Hans-Henrik Holm and Michael Stohl)

Introduction to International Relations: Theories and Approaches (6th edn) (with Robert Jackson)

Democracy and Democratization: Processes and Prospects in a Changing World (3rd edn)

The Transformation of the State: Beyond the Myth of Retreat

Changes in Statehood: The Transformation of International Relations

Democracy, Dictatorship and Development: Economic Development in Selected Regimes of the Third World

Whose World Order?: Uneven Globalization and the End of the Cold War (co-edited with Hans-Henrik Holm)

Political Conditionality (editor)

Rethinking the New World Order

Georg Sørensen



palgrave

© Georg Sørensen 2016

Foreword © Michael Cox 2016

All rights reserved. No reproduction, copy or transmission of this publication may be made without written permission.

No portion of this publication may be reproduced, copied or transmitted save with written permission or in accordance with the provisions of the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988, or under the terms of any licence permitting limited copying issued by the Copyright Licensing Agency, Saffron House, 6–10 Kirby Street, London EC1N 8TS.

Any person who does any unauthorized act in relation to this publication may be liable to criminal prosecution and civil claims for damages.

The author has asserted his right to be identified as the author of this work in accordance with the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988.

First published 2016 by
PALGRAVE

Palgrave in the UK is an imprint of Macmillan Publishers Limited, registered in England, company number 785998, of 4 Crinan Street, London, N1 9XW.

Palgrave Macmillan in the US is a division of St Martin's Press LLC, 175 Fifth Avenue, New York, NY 10010.

Palgrave is a global imprint of the above companies and is represented throughout the world.

Palgrave® and Macmillan® are registered trademarks in the United States, the United Kingdom, Europe and other countries.

ISBN 978–1–137–48325–6 hardback

ISBN 978–1–137–48324–9 paperback

This book is printed on paper suitable for recycling and made from fully managed and sustained forest sources. Logging, pulping and manufacturing processes are expected to conform to the environmental regulations of the country of origin.

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

A catalog record for this book is available from the Library of Congress.

For Sebastian

Contents

<i>Foreword by Michael Cox</i>	x
<i>Acknowledgements</i>	xii
<i>List of Abbreviations</i>	xiii

Introduction: The Argument	1
1. Debating the Post-Cold War World Order	7
Introduction	7
The liberal view	8
The realist view	11
The English School and world order	13
Marxist IPE and world order	14
Empire versus regions	17
Non-state actors: Good ones and bad ones	20
The environmental challenge	25
A framework for analysis	27
Conclusion: Rethinking the new world order	29
World order: The concept	29
2. The Fragility of States	32
Introduction	32
Types of state in the present international system	33
Advanced liberal states	35
Modernizing states: China and the other BRICS	43
Fragile states in the Global South	52
Conclusion	54
3. The Decreasing Importance of Interstate War	56
Introduction	56
Anarchy and the security dilemma	58
The security community of liberal democracies	60
Modernizing states and interstate war	65
Domestic anarchy in fragile states	68

	The role of nuclear weapons	71
	A complex peace: The problem of overdetermination, ideas, structures and causation	73
	Conclusion	76
4.	The Distribution of Power and World Order	79
	Introduction	79
	Concentration of power: Material power and anarchy	81
	Diffusion of power: Non-material power in a cooperative environment	84
	Power in the present world order	86
	A stable and legitimate world order	91
	Conclusion: Power and world order	95
5.	Security: Intervention, Order and Legitimacy	99
	Introduction	99
	Fragile states	101
	The traditional security agenda: Global and regional order	110
	The larger horizon of human security	118
	Conclusion	121
6.	Economics: The Dynamics of Globalization	124
	Introduction	124
	The benign view: Globalization leading towards 'one world'	128
	What sort of convergence?	130
	Hidden worlds of globalization	136
	Common fate? The environmental challenge and globalization	140
	What kind of economic model will move the world forward?	146
	Conclusion	149
7.	Institutions: Governance or Gridlock?	154
	Introduction	154
	Good-enough governance or gridlock?	157
	Emerging powers in global governance	171
	The United States and global governance	176
	Conclusion: Gridlock or good-enough governance?	180

8. Values: A Victory or Crisis of Liberalism?	183
Introduction	183
Democratic progress and setbacks	184
Individual values: Moving in a liberal direction?	188
Interstate values: A liberal world order?	190
Independence and interdependence as liberal values	197
Independence and interdependence in the present world order	200
Conclusion	204
9. Conclusion: Rethinking the New World Order	207
<i>References</i>	217
<i>Index</i>	240

Foreword by Michael Cox

One of the most prolific scholars and steadiest voices in IR over the past – very turbulent – twenty five years has been the Danish academic, Georg Sørensen. Always measured and never quick to rush to judgment in a profession where putting pen to paper on headline-grabbing subjects has become something of a habit of late, Sørensen is in many ways a model academic who many in the field today would be well advised to emulate. Never flashy, invariably wise, and more often than not closer to getting it right than many of the shriller voices in the field, Sørensen remains a writer to whom we can return time and again to get a clear fix on the world out there.

In this wide-ranging book Sørensen manages to say a great deal about a great many things in a relatively limited number of words. He begins where nearly all students quite reasonably are asked to begin in IR: by evaluating the claims made by liberal optimists and sceptical realists about the international system as it unfolded after the end of the Cold War – by far and away the most significant global event of the past quarter century. Others might dispute his claim that ‘liberal and realist positions define the overarching theme in the discussion’ of the emerging ‘world order’, and they are certainly free to do so. However, for those of us teaching IR it is still the case that these two approaches still appear to make most sense to more students than any others on the bloc – try though some of us have to suggest otherwise!

Sørensen though is not uncritical of either realism or liberalism. Nor is he unaware of the dark underside of liberalism in the economic shape of the modern capitalist economy. Nor to be blunt is he so wedded to ‘old ways’ of thinking about the world that he chooses to ignore other modes of thinking about international security. Indeed, he makes it abundantly clear that we need new ways of reflecting on the world which take into consideration the ‘human’ and the need to protect the individual from hazards that directly impact on their lives including, amongst other things, poverty, social injustice, environmental degradation and political regimes that do not recognize the rights of the human. But Sørensen also reminds us that states still

remain the crucial players in international politics; and perhaps the easiest way of seeing how important it is to look at what happens when states fail or become ‘fragile’. Yet as he goes on to point out, even if states are the building blocks of international society—even today—the chances of war between them is now fairly remote. So we thus live in a world, he implies, which has never been more ‘war free’ but in which all manner of dangers arising from state failure from Syria to Libya have never been so acute. And the situation could be getting worse as atrocities in London, Paris and Brussels—not to mention Ankara, Baghdad and Lahore—have shown only too clearly. Moreover, all this appears to be happening in a world where, according to Sørensen, ‘the advanced liberal states are less willing and able to take the lead’ and where our traditional institutions appear to be failing badly.

The kind of intelligent liberalism championed by Sørensen is therefore on the back foot: its theoretical strengths self-evident, but its shortcomings more obvious still in an increasingly unequal world where social changes in the advanced countries alone are undermining the established contract between the political class and those over whom they purport to rule. Donald Trump to this extent may be less the buffoon some think he is and more a harbinger of things to come. Progress is thus by no means inevitable as the once great liberal optimist Francis Fukuyama has recently suggested: and Sørensen, reluctantly, would seem to agree. Difficult and possibly dangerous times lie ahead therefore. The challenges facing the liberal project have never been more serious. It is one of the many virtues of Sørensen’s volume that he does not shy away from confronting them.

PROFESSOR MICHAEL COX
Director, LSE IDEAS

Acknowledgements

I was hesitant about this project at first; I knew it would be complicated and frustrating. Fortunately, it has also been most enjoyable. The book would probably have come to nothing if not for the relentless insistence of my publisher, Steven Kennedy; he kept pulling me back to it every time I thought I had successfully run away. I am really grateful for his persistent support, which was followed through by his successor, Stephen Wenham. Mick Cox generously accepted the book for his *Rethinking World Politics* series where I believe it fits very well.

Aarhus Institute of Advanced Studies (AIAS) provided a perfect one-year retreat where I could focus on the project. Thanks to director Morten Kyndrup for taking me in and to AIAS fellows and staff for providing a stimulating and very pleasant working environment. Colleagues at the Department of Political Science in Aarhus were supportive as always. Impeccable secretarial assistance from Annette Bruun Andersen has, once again, been a vital part of the project. Hosey Nezam effectively helped out with all the technical details. I am indebted to the commentators who carefully read the manuscript and offered suggestions for improvement; they helped me sharpen the argument and make it a better book. Thanks to Mick Cox, Elias Götz, Steven Kennedy, Jørgen Dige Pedersen, Stephen Wenham and the anonymous reader appointed by Palgrave Macmillan. Chloe Osborne and Alex Antidius Arpoudam effectively steered the book through production. Kristine Kristiansen was a great help in compiling the index.

The book is dedicated to my son, Sebastian. He specializes in subjects I know little about: music and mathematics. But the enthusiasm and energy with which he devotes himself to these topics is a great inspiration to people around him, including myself.

AARHUS, February 2016

List of Abbreviations

AIIB	Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank
AMISOM	African Union Mission in Somalia
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
AU	African Union
BIC	Brazil, India, China
BRICS	Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa
CAR	Central African Republic
CCP	Chinese Communist Party
CFR	Council on Foreign Relations
COP	Conference of the Parties
DFS	Department of Field Support
DPA	Department of Political Affairs
DPKO	Department of Peacekeeping Operations
EU	European Union
FDI	foreign direct investment
FPÖ	Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs
FSB	Financial Stability Board
GATS	General Agreement on Trade in Services
GAVI	Global Alliance for Vaccines and Immunization
GCI	global connectedness index
GDP	gross domestic product
GEF	Global Environment Facility
IEA	International Energy Agency
IGO	intergovernmental organization
IIPE	illicit international political economy
IMF	International Monetary Fund
INGO	international non-governmental organization
IPE	international political economy
IR	international relations
ISIL	Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant
LDC	Least Developed Country
MAD	mutually assured destruction
MEF	Major Economies Forum

NAFTA	North American Free Trade Agreement
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NCSES	National Center for Science and Engineering Statistics
NGO	non-governmental organization
NPT	treaty on the non-proliferation of nuclear weapons
NZEC	near-zero emissions coal
OAS	Organization of American States
OCHA	Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
OSCE	Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe
PPP	purchasing power parity
R&D	research and development
R2P	responsibility to protect
TOC	transnational organized crime
TRIMS	trade-related investment measures
UIA	Union of International Associations
UN	United Nations
UNCED	United Nations Conference on Environment and Development
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNEP	United Nations Environment Programme
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNFCCC	UN Framework Convention on Climate Change
UNSC	United Nations Security Council
US	United States
WEO	World Environmental Organization
WHO	World Health Organization
WMD	weapons of mass destruction
WTO	World Trade Organization

Introduction: The Argument

The end of the Cold War was also the end of global or world order as we knew it: a bipolar standoff between two superpowers and their respective allies. The dissolution of the Soviet Union effectively terminated that order and gave way to—what exactly? It was certainly not clear at the time; surprisingly, it is not clear today, more than a quarter of a century later. The first reaction, understandably, was one of liberal optimism; if anything, the events marked the unabashed victory of political and economic liberalism. Liberal democracy and the liberal market economy would now encompass the whole world and peace, cooperation, security, order, common values, welfare and even the good life for all would eventually follow (Fukuyama 1989, 1992).

The next reaction was much more pessimistic and sceptical; it came early in the 1990s even though that decade was a liberal honeymoon period of high hopes. Realist scholars predicted that old friends would get at each other's throats now that the common enemy was gone (Mearsheimer 1991). At the same time, liberal hubris would produce an arrogant form of liberal universalism which amounted to imperialism. Such behaviour would help produce a clash of civilizations and, increasingly, future conflicts would appear at the fault lines of civilizations (Huntington 1993, 1996). The central division would be between the Western states, on one hand, and the Islamic and Confucian states-cum-civilizations, on the other.

Liberal optimism was not to be frustrated; an analysis from the late 1990s argued that ever more sophisticated economies would need to enter into ever closer networks of cooperation. Nation states would remain major units in international politics but would be compelled to cooperate in order to provide a protective umbrella for a globalized economy (Rosecrance 1999).

2 *Rethinking the New World Order*

Then September 11, 2001, transformed the international agenda. The leading country, the United States, embarked on a global war on terror which led to the interventions in Afghanistan and Iraq. International terrorism became a major security issue. Later in that decade, it emerged that the globalized market economy was not the rock-solid foundation for a cooperating world which some liberals had made it out to be. The financial crisis that broke in 2008 disturbed the entire economic system, even though it was the established capitalist economies in North America and Western Europe that were hit the worst. The world economy did not break down completely, but maybe the crisis is not over. It was sufficiently serious so as to provoke a debate about the appropriate capitalist model for the system, especially about the proper relationship between free market forces and political regulation.

At the end of the first decade of the twenty-first century, *Time Magazine* pronounced the 2000s a ‘decade from hell’; the ‘most dispiriting’ years Americans had lived through since World War II (Serwer 2009). Sceptics repeated their message: the end of history had been replaced by the return of history. Aggressive rivalry among great powers had not gone away but had instead intensified, especially between liberal and autocratic states, in the context of the re-emergence of a struggle among radical Islamists and modern secular cultures and powers (Kagan 2007).

Liberal optimists continued to disagree. One liberal observer introduced a theory of convergence which argued that significant forces were driving humanity closer together, towards creating one world of global citizens. Economic globalization, technological change, common material aspirations and the environmental hazards that threaten us all are the major factors in this process of global convergence (Mahbubani 2013).

Several other observers, with a variety of theoretical orientations, have made contributions to the debate about world order. I introduce them in due course. In spite of the divergence of views, I shall argue that the division between liberal optimists and sceptical realists is the major fault line in the world order debate. Liberal optimists look to processes of cooperation, convergence and shared values in an increasingly liberal world; sceptical realists emphasize conflict, divergence and the lack of shared values in a context of rivalry and competition. Additional contributions can be considered in relation to this primary disagreement.

The debate between liberal optimists and sceptical realists will surely continue. Real-world developments keep throwing up new events that point in one or the other direction. But it is a relevant time for stocktaking: a dozen years of liberal hopefulness after the end of the Cold War have been followed by a dozen years of new security threats, an abundance of violent conflict and a severe economic crisis. So where exactly are we today as regards world order? That is the question pursued in this book. I shall argue that both liberal optimists and sceptical realists make valid points but both also have significant shortcomings.

World order is a contested concept; I introduce it in detail in due course, a brief definition will suffice here. On one hand, world order is a governing arrangement among states, with the participation of other actors. That is the international dimension. On the other hand, world order also has a domestic dimension, which is about major aspects of socio-political conditions within states. Many sceptics share a view of world order as a ‘thin’ order where competition and rivalry among or within states always threaten violent conflict. Many optimists share a view of world order as a ‘thick’ order where the ‘good life’ is increasingly available to all people.

I begin with a presentation of the major contributions to the debate about world order ([Chapter 1](#)); that sets the context for my own analysis. The following chapters ([2](#), [3](#) and [4](#)) set forth the framework conditions that make up the context for the current world order. [Chapter 2](#) is about domestic conditions within major types of state in the present system. I make the claim that we live in a world where all states are increasingly fragile. The term ‘fragile states’ has been used to signify the weak, post-colonial states in the Global South with frail economies, corrupt and ineffective political systems and a lack of national community. But both modernizing states, such as Brazil, India and China, and the so-called advanced states in Western Europe, North America and East Asia are increasingly characterized by fragility as well. Their political systems are less effective and sometimes corrupt; state capacity is also threatened because these states are less socially embedded and intense participation in economic globalization undercuts their room for manoeuvre. National community is weakening also, under pressure from socio-economic inequality and patterns of migration. All this has consequences for world order because it affects the international roles that states and societies can play.

The fragility of states is bad for citizens, of course. It reduces the possibilities of living the 'good life' where security, order, justice, welfare and freedom are values that most people can enjoy. The situation is most serious in the very fragile states in the Global South because they must permanently live with insecurity and violent conflict. But there are also problems in many other states. They concern, among other things, the environment, health, economic inequality and personal security. That is a destabilizing element in the present world order.

[Chapter 3](#) turns to international conditions with a focus on relations between states. I demonstrate that the traditional security dilemma of imminent war among sovereign states is much less pertinent in today's order. Liberals have a point: there is a 'democratic peace' among consolidated democracies; furthermore, even non-democratic states want to participate in economic globalization and in international institutions. Together with other developments, this means that traditional interstate war is in sharp decline. That important point is often overlooked because there is still a large amount of violent conflict in the world.

The decline of interstate war and the fragility of states are two major framework conditions in relation to world order. A third framework condition is discussed in [Chapter 4](#); it concerns the power structure of the present system. It is argued that in terms of material power, the United States remains the most powerful country in the present order. But there is also a social side to power which concerns the ability to create and sustain a legitimate order; in this area the United States faces significant problems. Its dominant material power is not sufficient on its own to establish a stable and effective order and no other great power, or coalition of powers, is capable or ready to take on that task.

So the framework conditions point in different directions. On one hand, increasingly fragile states are less able and willing to create and sustain an effective and legitimate order. On the other hand, the decreasing importance of interstate war should improve the prospects for a robust world order. In material power terms, the United States and Western countries remain strong; the question is whether they are capable and willing to take the lead in establishing an effective and legitimate world order.

Given these three framework conditions, [Chapters 5](#) through [8](#) examine patterns of world order in major areas of concern. Four

sectors are analysed in detail: security, economics, institutions and values. [Chapter 5](#) discusses the three dominant items on the security agenda: fragile states, great power rivalry and competition in different regions, and human security. The chapter concludes that we are headed towards increasing crisis and instability.

[Chapter 6](#) is about economics and the shifting dynamics of globalization. The liberal expectation of convergence and cooperation in the economic field has to some extent been proven correct, but economic globalization is also highly uneven and there are strong limits to convergence. That creates backlashes against globalization and intensified cooperation.

[Chapter 7](#) investigates international institutions and the current status of global governance. Is it 'good-enough governance' or is it a case of gridlock? The chapter argues that it is piecemeal governance in the sense that a great amount of governance is supplied but it does not provide solutions that go beyond short-term crisis management.

Finally, [Chapter 8](#) is about the standing of liberal values in the present order. The chapter posits a tension between two basic liberal values: the value of *independence* versus the value of *interdependence*. A move towards intensified interdependence has characterized the period since the end of the Cold War, but presently, the pendulum swings the other way: towards more emphasis on independence. That does not improve the conditions for establishing an effective world order.

In overall conclusion, liberals have a point in diagnosing substantial liberal progress after the end of the Cold War. But they seriously underestimate the tensions and contradictions built into the process. On one hand, the transformations inside and among countries throw up a host of problems that liberals tend to assume away; on the other hand, serious tensions between liberal values, such as the tension between independence and interdependence, are built into the current world order. As a result, destructive dynamics may prevail over constructive dynamics, not because realists are right about the omnipresence of conflict and rivalry in any world order, but because current domestic and international conditions impede the kind of progress that liberals tend to take for granted.

At the very moment when world order is more liberal than it ever was, both the economic and the political dimension of liberal order are in crisis. The liberal market economy is increasingly unequal and its financial infrastructure remains fragile and crisis-prone. There is

6 *Rethinking the New World Order*

a comprehensive set of international institutions but they are rather weak and in need of reform. Liberal values are nominally endorsed by most states but they are in internal conflict and make up no firm basis for a stable world order. We live in a liberal world order, but it is not nearly as peaceful, cooperative and converging as liberals have predicted it would be.

1

Debating the Post-Cold War World Order

Introduction

The debate about world order has been dominated by events: the fall of the Berlin Wall; the dissolution of the Soviet Union; the break-up of Yugoslavia; the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001; the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq; the financial and economic crisis; the severe violence inside and around fragile states, including Syria, Libya and the Congo. But events do not speak for themselves; in order to evaluate their real significance, and their relative importance in relation to a myriad of other events, we need theory. Theories, however, disagree both about which events are important and about how certain events must be understood. And theories alone cannot tell us which theory to prefer among competing theories. Since there is no objective way of choosing the best theory, our choice will be influenced by our personal values and political priorities. That is why the debate about a subject such as world order is never-ending: analysing the world from the perspectives of different theoretical traditions can be broken down into three interrelated components: what goes on out there in the real world, the theoretical insights we employ in our study, and the values and priorities upon which these tools are based.

This chapter briefly goes through previous major analyses of the post-Cold War world order. The early years were dominated by the liberal optimists (and there is still solid support for their view); they were certain that the end of history was in sight because the last serious rival to a world of liberal democracies had been defeated. Realists, by contrast, envisioned a world of new and more intense rivalry

between states leading towards a situation where we would soon miss the relative stability of the Cold War. Additional theories provide important elements to the central debate between liberals and realists. English School theory recognizes the importance of power but equally emphasizes the existence of common rules. That leads to a more nuanced, but also somewhat complex, analysis of world order. Marxist international political economy (IPE) underlines the continued importance of the capitalist world economy for world order. In sketching the views of these major theories, I focus on the big picture; discussions among more or less pessimistic realists, for example, or debates among Marxist IPE theorists on a range of topics, are not included. At the same time, I clarify the ways in which these theories help inform the present analysis.

I also address three further debates about world order; they are not theories in the wider sense but they cover developments that are of special importance for world order. First, there is the ‘empires versus regions’ debate; we are neither in a world of US empire, nor are we in a world of pure regions, but these analyses are relevant to an account of world order. Second, non-state actors, both malign ones such as international terrorists and benign ones such as transnational civil society networks, are of increasing importance but they are not trumping states as the most important units of world order. Finally, environmental concerns are by now a permanent feature of the current world order but the issue, in terms of world order, is rather a matter of bargaining between diverging interests than it is one of supreme concern for the future of the planet, as such.

The chapter ends with a brief presentation of the framework for analysis and a discussion of the core concept of world order.

The liberal view

The first influential view of post-Cold War order was liberal; that was not coincidental. More than four decades of bipolar confrontation between a liberal-democratic superpower and its communist-autocratic rival had ended with the outright victory of political and economic liberalism. This played directly into the optimistic liberal view of progress. Liberal philosophers, beginning with John Locke in the seventeenth century, had great faith in the potential for human progress in the modern civil society and the capitalist economy

which could flourish in a state that guaranteed individual liberty. It was exactly this liberal economic and political system which had prevailed in the Cold War and the gate was now open for the expansion of the liberal system to the rest of the globe. That is what the end of history is about: the ‘universalization of Western liberal democracy as the final form of government’ (Fukuyama 1989: 3, 4; 1992). The new world order would soon be liberal and democratic, and because democracies collaborate and do not use violence against each other, it would also be peaceful and cooperative. Note that liberals take domestic developments seriously; for them, democratization within states is the fundamental basis for a new world order.

Fukuyama’s argument is about the great prospects for liberal democracy in the world but it also connects to other major elements in liberal international theory. Interdependence liberalism foresees a high level of economic and other interdependence among countries that are modernizing and democratizing. Focus will then be on cooperation instead of military security. Sociological liberalism emphasizes the importance of transnational, non-state actors. The networks they create across borders reduce the relative importance of governments and add to the patterns of cooperation. Finally, institutional liberalism underlines how international institutions facilitate cooperation among states by creating arenas for negotiation and exchange of information (see Jackson and Sørensen 2016 for an overview of liberal international theory). Some of today’s liberal international theory is more cautious about the prospects for solid liberal progress (e.g. Milner and Moravcsik (eds) 2009); others remain optimistic (e.g. Deudney and Ikenberry 2009; Mahbubani 2013). Yet all liberals share a vision of the possibility of progress.

The question is, of course, to what extent is liberal optimism warranted? It looked good in the beginning. The demise of the Soviet Union marked the victory of the liberal idea. What remained was the practical problem of setting up of liberal political and economic systems across the world. That went rather well at first. Most countries accepted the free market principles of a capitalist economy. The number of democracies in the world doubled, from 43 in the early 1970s to 88 by the late 1990s (Sørensen 2008). Most countries wanted to participate in transnational cooperation through international institutions. The Millennium Declaration, adopted by UN member states in 2000, confirmed universal allegiance to liberal principles.

In the new century, things have gone the other way. In many places, the transition to democracy turned out to be a frail political opening rather than a real change of the political system; many countries remained semi-democratic or semi-authoritarian. The financial crisis was the most serious economic slump since the 1930s. The commitment to liberal values was frequently only skin-deep, a set of rhetorical gestures with no real substance behind them. At the same time, September 11 conjured a different set of security threats.

For these reasons, we cannot have faith in a liberal idea about unimpeded progress. Society does not always move forward. History does not contain an inbuilt law of progress. Standstill, or regression, is possible too. More sceptical liberals were clear on this point early on. 'History', said Isaiah Berlin (1988) in a phrase he borrowed from Alexander Herzen, 'has no libretto'. But how pessimistic should we then be, given the fact that some substantial liberal progress has actually taken place? Are the present setbacks really that important in the larger scheme of things or can they be considered a mere bump in the road, a temporary obstruction in a larger process of uninhibited liberal progress?

As indicated, liberal optimism remains strong in some quarters. A recent contribution by Kishore Mahbubani argues that we are seeing the 'steady disappearance of absolute poverty' (2013: 18), in particular due to rapid growth in China and India. His general outlook is also very optimistic. The people of the world now share a common set of material and educational aspirations. These forces have created common values. Even while 'we retain our different cultural and religious identities, we will converge on some important and fundamental values' (2013: 84); these common values are clearly liberal in character: they include a global market economy that can foster economic growth and development, and basic liberal political values, including the rule of law.

In sum, there has been liberal economic and political progress after the end of the Cold War and this fact must enter our analysis of the present world order; but it does not mean we must fully endorse an optimistic liberal vision about a harmonious and peaceful liberal world order. History is not predetermined to move forward and upward and liberal principles are dynamic entities that may or may not be able to confront the major challenges of a globalized world. That calls for a more careful assessment of the current standing of

liberal values in the current world order. Liberal progress is possible, but the optimistic liberal view of certain and secure progress after the end of the Cold War is not a valid guide to the assessment of the present world order. Both in the domestic heartland of liberal democracies and market economies and in the global realm of liberal world order there are difficulties which liberal theory and practice have not sufficiently confronted.

The realist view

For most realists, individuals are self-seeking and competitive in ways which may easily lead to conflict. And the international system of sovereign states is anarchic; it lacks an overarching authority, there is no world government. In a system of that kind, states have to provide for their own security and they are always in potential danger because other states may have malign intentions.

During the Cold War, the international system was relatively stable for most periods because there was a stable balance of power, according to realist analysis. Bipolarity is a clear and transparent structure because it comprises two superpowers, each with a large number of allied countries. In addition, both superpowers could rely on a large arsenal of nuclear weapons. An all-out nuclear war would be enormously destructive on both sides. In a situation of *MAD* (mutually assured destruction), nobody is really interested in a full-scale nuclear confrontation.

One influential realist, John Mearsheimer, argued in 1991 that the post-Cold War situation was potentially more unbalanced and therefore conceivably much more dangerous and conflict-prone than the earlier period. With the common enemy gone, rivalry and competition would re-emerge both inside Europe and across the Atlantic. That situation increases the risk of war in a 'Back to the Future' scenario (Mearsheimer 1991).

However, none of this happened. Instead of intensified rivalry, the Western European countries intensified cooperation, especially in the context of the European Union (EU). This led realist scholarship in new directions. On one hand, there is a new discussion about the content of the balance of power concept, including the idea that there can be different forms of 'hard' and 'soft' balancing (Pape 2005;

Paul 2005; Brooks and Wohlforth 2008). On the other hand, analysis of the balance of power was put in a larger context that included the personality of leaders, domestic politics, ideas and contingency (Wohlforth 2011: 456; Lobell, Ripsman and Taliaferro (eds) 2009).

Many realists will now grant that power competition or even violent conflict between Western allies is not a likely development. But they maintain that there remain dangers of violent confrontation in other parts of the international system. One prominent early analysis to that effect was put forward by Samuel Huntington (1993; 1996). He emphasized that sovereign states remain the most important actors in world politics, but future conflicts between them will follow the fault lines between civilizations. That is linked to the fact that most of the great powers in the post-Cold War world come from different civilizations. In that sense, the ‘clash of civilizations’ will dominate global politics. The clash would especially involve the Western states versus the Islamic and Confucian states (for a critique, see Katzenstein 2009).

Empirical analyses of violent conflicts between states in the second half of the twentieth century have not been able to confirm Huntington’s thesis about the importance of disputes across civilizational boundaries (Russett et al. 2000). To the extent that conflicts involve different identities, they are frequently intra-civilizational, as between Sunni and Shia Muslims, or between Catholic and Protestant Christians. One set of post-Cold War conflicts, between Orthodox and Muslim peoples in the Balkans, would appear to confirm Huntington’s idea. But even in this case it can be argued that the self-seeking interest of dominant political leaders was the central factor involved (Kaldor 1999).

Instead of a ‘clash of civilizations’, realists now focus on the rivalry and competition between the West and the emerging, non-liberal great powers, in particular Russia and China. The argument is that this represents a ‘return of geopolitics’ after a period where many observers thought that peace and cooperation would prevail (Russell Mead 2014; see also Kissinger 2014).

In sum, even if there is not a ‘back to the future’ reality where European great powers are in aggressive competition, there is a great deal of rivalry and competition out there. The processes of conflict and divergence emphasized by realists can be found in relation to several aspects of world order, as will be made clear in the chapters that follow.