

CALL FOR PAPERS

What is the Future of “the West”? ***Transatlantic Political Order in an Era of War and Upheaval***

G. John Ikenberry and Thomas Risse

Over the last century, the United States and Europe have worked together to build a sprawling economic, political, and security order. It is a political formation that has been given a variety of names – “the West,” the transatlantic alliance, the Free World, the G-7 world, the North Atlantic community, the liberal international order. In one sense, it is a geographic region, uniting North America and Western Europe across the Atlantic Ocean. In another sense, it is a non-geographical political community, defined by shared, universal-oriented, political principles and values. To some observers, the core of this political formation is the NATO alliance, the longest-surviving collective security organization in the modern era. Other observers see “the West” as an essential part of the liberal international order (LIO) defined by its open, consensual, and rules-based institutional characteristics. Some see it as an artifact of American power and hegemony, forged within the wider world of Cold War and great power competition. Others see it as an outgrowth of the emergence and spread of liberal democracy. Others stress its entanglements with empire, capitalism, and global civil society. Despite these different views, few would disagree that “the West” has been – for better or worse, in good times and bad -- a unique, expansive, and formidable political order.

But what is its future? Across the decades, the Western liberal order has navigated great upheavals – war and peace, economic boom and recession, the end of the Cold War and the rise of unipolarity, the Iraq War, financial crisis, and – most recently – the rise of China and the return of great power competition. On the one hand, Russia’s invasion of Ukraine has at least momentarily led to a resurgence in Western unity. On both sides of the Atlantic, NATO and the EU are increasingly seen by Western publics and elites as critical bulwarks for the preservation of shared values and interests. On the other hand, the U.S. has increasingly found itself in a superpower struggle with China, forcing Europe to make hard economic and security choices about whether and in what way to follow. In the meantime, liberal democracy itself is in trouble in the United States and in various countries across Europe. Nationalism, populism, and illiberalism are shrinking the political center in Western democracies.

Within this shifting global setting, we pose the question that motivates this project: what is the future of “the West”, and what is “the West” anyway? We invite scholars from across disciplines to join our efforts to explore various facets of this question. There are several themes and questions that we hope might be addressed:

-- what is the status of the transatlantic political order as a “security community?” Looking back over the Cold War and post-Cold War era, how have the deep values that define the logic

of security community changed, evolved, or eroded? What underlying “bargains” have shaped and defined the Western political order, and how are these bargains either breaking down or being renegotiated today?

-- in what ways has the Russian invasion of Ukraine, and the Western response to it, illuminated old or new features of the international order? What surprises or hidden dynamics have emerged from this crisis?

-- what is the future of “the West” as a leader and patron of the liberal international order? How critical – and in what ways – is the Western system and leadership for the stability and functioning of this wider liberal order? To what extent is “the West” prepared and capable of meeting the various challenges to global governance, such as climate change?

-- how will the growth of U.S.-Chinese competition/conflict – and the increasing resort to industrial policy, securitized trade and investment, technology protectionism, and weaponized interdependence – impact transatlantic relations? Will the rise of China bring Western allies closer together or push them apart, and why?

-- what are the limits and possibilities of a wider liberal democratic political coalition and community? Is there such a thing as a “Global West,” that is, a larger grouping of liberal democracies with sufficient common identity and interests to exert itself on the global stage and in the liberal international order broadly defined? How do Asian, Latin American, and African democracies fit in?

-- can the West survive the rise of illiberal, populist leaders in the United States or in leading European countries? What norms, institutions, and mechanisms exist within the West for responding to and managing illiberal populism and leaders who seek to undermine or sabotage Western order?

If you are interested in joining this project, the first step will be to send a short paper proposal to the two editors. Professors Ikenberry and Risse will evaluate and seek the submitted proposals, doing so with an eye to craft a coherent project and edited volume.

The timeline for this project is as follows:

- October 1, 2023: deadline for submission of paper proposal
- November 1, 2023: invitations to contribute to the project
- Spring 2024: conference in Berlin, where short memos (“half-papers”) are presented
- Early 2025: full papers are presented in Princeton

Send proposals to:

G. John Ikenberry, Princeton University

Gji3@princeton.edu

Thomas Risse, Freie Universität Berlin

Thomas.risse@fu-berlin.de