INTERVIEW WITH **AMITAV ACHARYA**
The New "Multiplex World"

In this interview with Helen Suzman Foundation Researcher, Tove van Lennep, **Amitav Acharya** reflects on the internal crisis of the liberal world order and the advent of a new "Multiplex World" of multiple, crosscutting international orders. Although not all emerging hegemons are committed to progressive values, multiplexity does not necessarily imply a decline in global justice and commitment to human rights. The liberal international order functioned as a club of the West, under which democracy was promoted selectively and human rights abuses were rife. The weakening of the Club may create more openings for weaker actors, state or non-state, to play a greater role in global governance.

PROFESSOR AMITAV ACHARYA is the UNESCO Chair in Transnational Challenges and Governance and Distinguished Professor at the School of International Service, American University, Washington, DC. He was the first non-Western scholar to be elected (for 2014-15) as the President of the International Studies Association (ISA) – the largest and most influential global network in international studies. Previously, he was a Professor at York University, Toronto, and the Chair in Global Governance at the University of Bristol, UK. He held the inaugural Nelson Mandela Visiting Professorship in International Relations at Rhodes University, South Africa in 2012-13. Acharya is widely published and highly regarded in the IR field for his contribution to non-Western IR theory and inclusion.

TOVE: Beginning with the concept at the heart of this edition of FOCUS, what should be understood by the "liberal international order"?

ACHARYA: This is a very fuzzy concept, as different people use it differently and there is no agreed definition. At its simplest, the liberal international order (LIO) means the US-crafted and -dominated system of multilateral institutions after World War II. But the concept has also been used to refer more generally to a "rules-based" system that is open to all states. Another aspect of LIO directs attention to liberal values and norms, such as human rights, democracy and free market capitalism. These are not mutually exclusive; so, one might say that the LIO concept incorporates capitalism, democracy and multilateralism under US hegemony.

TOVE: In your paper 'After Liberal Hegemony: The Advent of a Multiplex World Order' you argue that the current challenge to the liberal order is 'as much, if not more, from within as from without'. You view Trump's ascent to power as a consequence rather than a cause of its decline. What then is responsible for the decline, or indeed, implosion of liberal hegemony?

ACHARYA: Several factors. One is the global economic shift, with the rise of non-Western nations led by China and India but also more generally East Asia. One consequence of this economic shift has been the transfer of industries and jobs to these rising economies. This has created a backlash against globalisation in parts of the US that relied heavily on traditional heavy industries. Trump was able to exploit this populist backlash against globalisation and free trade to win votes in traditionally Democratic states of the US in the 2016 presidential election.

Another domestic factor was race. The Obama Presidency, the first black presidency of the US with its progressive policy on healthcare and commitment to diversity, paradoxically triggered greater racial consciousness and polarisation in the country. This was exploited by the intellectual defenders of white supremacy which saw the Obama presidency as having empowered black people and other minorities. Trump was unabashed in stoking these sentiments.

A third and closely related factor was the growing political and ideological polarisation within the US, especially between the two dominant political parties. This was fuelled by an increasingly partisan media. This cracked whatever consensus there was on

> The "Multiplex World" concept stresses decentring of power and authority: a world without the hegemony of a single power or a single set of values. Multiplex also implies different layers of governance, global, regional and local, in addition to the traditional national level.

liberal values and created severe divisions over issues such as gun control, immigration and health care.

Among other things, the confluence of these factors contributed to a serious internal crisis of the liberal order in the US. And while contributing to Trump's success (however narrow the margin of his victory might have been), polarising factors were gathering force well before Trump announced his candidacy as President of the United States.

TOVE: In 'After Liberal Hegemony' you describe 'a "multiplex world" in which elements of the liberal order survive, but are subsumed in a complex of multiple, crosscutting international orders'. Does the "multiplex world" you envisage promise more justice and equality? Or will emerging hegemons, unrestrained by liberal multilateralism and the United States, merely rearrange the current shape of global inequality and injustice?

ACHARYA: The "Multiplex World" concept stresses decentring of power and authority: a world without the hegemony of a single power or a single set of values. Multiplex also implies different layers of governance, global, regional and local, in addition to the traditional national level. The rise of non-Western actors (including global and regional powers) and, more generally, the growing importance of regions are hallmarks of the Multiplex World. These developments are bound to reshape the traditional architecture of multilateralism and global governance. This means a growing voice for the new actors. But one should not think only in terms of emerging powers, or even states; the Multiplex World concept also implies the rise of non-state actors and new types of international cooperation and governance mechanisms which are regional or based on hybridity, e.g. partnerships between states, international institutions and private actors.

While I would not draw any necessary correlation between multiplexity and greater justice and equality, the latter could be a possible outcome of the new ordering as the US and Western dominance of the world diminishes and the roles of a range of new actors become more consequential. Not all of them are committed to progressive values; indeed, some of the non-state actors can be reactionary and even destructive. And some of the rising powers could be parochial in defending their interests and values. But the US was not always a defender of liberal multilateralism either. The LIO functioned as a club of the West, rather than a provider of universal public goods. The international institutions of the LIO were dominated by the West; their governance and decision-making were not all that democratic and sometimes not even transparent. So, the weakening of the Club may create more openings for weaker actors, state or non-state, and not just a handful of emerging powers, to play a greater role in global governance.

TOVE: What does the decline of the liberal hegemonic order and the emerging "multiplex world" imply for those states in which democracy is fragile and human rights abuses rife?

ACHARYA: I really don't see a necessary link between the weakening of liberal hegemony and the rise of human rights abuses since these abuses, were fairly abundant during the heyday of the LIO which was rather selective and self-serving in promoting democracy around the world. Some may think that the end of liberal hegemony might embolden autocrats and human rights violators. And this is quite possible. But the logic is not so simple. Some states in the developing world – such as Indonesia and India – have their domestic reasons for adhering to elections and protection of rights; since the probable alternative of chaos and disorder will threaten economic growth and the stability of their governments. Repression has bad political consequences over a period of time, with or without external pressure.

> I really don't see a necessary link between the weakening of liberal hegemony and the rise of human rights abuses, since these abuses were fairly abundant during the heyday of the LIO which was rather selective and self-serving in promoting democracy around the world.

In view of this, one consequence of the breakdown of liberal hegemony might be that the fate of human rights and democracy will be driven more by domestic than international factors. At the same time, norms and pressures for these values may come more from social movements and NGOs than from states. The European Union may be more consequential than the United States in championing these values. But generally, the importance of domestic forces will be stronger.

TOVE: Many fear that the global order is retreating into a state of anarchy or disorder. With the decline of US-assured multilateralism, what new form(s) could global cooperation and governance take?

ACHARYA: As I have already hinted, multilateralism was never US-assured, as you put it. The US pursued it selectively and showed more favour to ideologically like-minded countries and countries that were strategically aligned to it.

I argue that in the new world order, global cooperation will be more fragmented. I have coined the term G-pLus world, as an alternative to G-7, G-20 or G-Zero (to use international consultant Ian Bremmer's term). G-pLus means a more complex form of global governance, where leadership can be exercised by different actors in different issue areas. Traditional multilateral institutions like the UN, World Bank and IMF are joined, but not replaced, by regional institutions such as the EU, the African union, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) as well as newer arrangements such as the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, and the Chiangmai Initiative to

address financial crises. No single country may lead in every issue area. And there could be possibility for joint or shared leadership over issues such as climate change or refugees and global health.

> Nobody can claim that the future will be peaceful, but the possibility of global disorder has been exaggerated by the proponents of liberal hegemony.

Conflict and disorder are not new to our world; the LIO was rife with them, especially when it came to the developing world. And they will rise in some areas or regions and diminish in others. Generally, as I have pointed out in my essays and book (*The End of American World Order, Polity 2014, 2018*), we have a very mixed picture when it comes to armed conflicts. Some forms, such as inter-state war, have diminished; others, such as intra-state conflicts and civil wars, rise and recede. It has become clear, however, that there are some long-term factors that contribute to stability, including economic growth and development, poverty reduction and norms against international violence.

Nobody can claim that the future will be peaceful, but the possibility of global disorder has been exaggerated by the proponents of liberal hegemony.

TOVE: Can the issues around 'identity' and the demand for recognition be considered a norm transforming national and international systems? Is this the form which nationalism takes in the early 20th century?

ACHARYA: One should not forget that identity can manifest itself at different levels; ethnic, sub-state, national, regional and even international. Identity can have positive and negative dimensions and consequences for international order. With the diminishing memory of colonialism, which was a shared basis of common identity in the developing world, national identities can become more forceful. But this is offset by the rise of common transnational challenges, such as climate change, where cooperation is essential to achieve desired outcomes. International and regional norms and mechanisms for "socialisation", as well as transnational social movements, are still proliferating and can foster shared identity and blunt the edge of narrow and competitive national identities. In a Multiplex World, we will see multiple identities, both competing as well as co-existing and overlapping.

TOVE: How do we understand non-alignment in the developments currently taking place in the global system?

ACHARYA: Non-alignment was a response to the Cold War and it cannot exist in the same form now. But one enduring lesson of the non-alignment norm for the developing countries such as those in Africa today is not to take sides in great power competition, such as that between the US and China. In a Multiplex World, we are more likely to see multi-alignment or cross-cutting alignments. The key challenge is to ensure that these alignments do not generate competition or conflict and are geared to protecting the collective interests of the regions and the world.

TOVE: Finally, what are your reflections about Africa's role in the evolution of the international system? Will Africa be a rule taker or a rule maker?

ACHARYA: I believe that Africa has potential to have more agency, or to make a greater contribution in shaping the future world order. The key to this is Africa's economic development and its willingness and ability to carry out regional collective action; whether it is done through the AU or on some other collective basis. Of course, Africa is a vast region, with a tremendous diversity of cultures, and political systems. Generating effective cooperation is never easy, but Africa has much to contribute to humanitarian action, protection of the environment and global health. Africa should embrace G-pLus leadership, and develop greater cooperation involving states, international institutions, regional bodies and non-state actors.