

# ACTIVITY REPORT



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## The Rise and Fall of the Liberal International Order

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Is there a future for the Liberal International Order? Is it truly a changing of the guard? Are threats and promises of a new order creating the illusion that things are changing for the worse? Or is this an exaggerated demise? These questions were central to “The Rise and Fall of the Liberal International Order” event hosted at the Royal Canadian Military Institute in Toronto by the Defence and Security Foresight (DSF) Group and the NATO Association of Canada. This event was also attended by members of the Halifax International Security Forum Peace with Women Fellowship. Speakers and participants engaged in conversations about populism, rapid technological change, unravelling spheres of U.S. influence, new hegemony, replacement of democratic norms, and the rise of authoritarianism in some parts of the world.

In her opening remarks, Lieutenant Governor of Ontario Elizabeth Dowdeswell spoke about Canada’s celebration of 150 years in 2017 as a time when we started talking more openly about becoming vigilant. In 2017 the “Path to Reconciliation” Report was also released, and the Lieutenant Governor said this contributed to an awareness in the coming century of leaving no citizen behind. She said that democracy is about so much more than government. There is concern about resilience and uncertainty brings fear as “protectionism is creeping in” in this “post-truth” era. We are at a time when the media is being questioned, social media is feeding an us vs. them mentality, with “us” being the foreigner, the expert, the immigrant, the other. She championed safeguarding women’s role and questioned how the liberal international order can extend when there is a perpetuation of gender inequality.

I highlight here the themes raised by three speakers from the event: Dr. Bessma Momani from the University of Waterloo, Dr. Stéphanie Martel from Queen’s University, and Dr. Balkan Devlen from the University of Copenhagen. Other speakers and themes addressed include Darrell Bricker from IPSO who spoke on “Global Public Opinion and World Security: What Do the People Think?”, Veronica Kitchen from the University of Waterloo who addressed “Gender and Security in the Contemporary World Order”, and Joseph McQuade from the NATO Association of Canada who presented “Hacking Democracy: Technology, Disinformation, and the

Reshaping of Contemporary Politics”. Representing NAADSN I gave a presentation on “U.S. Arctic Messaging in an Era of Renewed Great Power Competition” (see corresponding NAADSN Policy Brief from November 2019).

## Populists’ Attack on Freedom of Expression, Dr. Bessma Momani

Right wing populism (inherently anti-immigrant and xenophobic) is on the rise, while left-wing populism is on the decline. We have not seen the denoting of “they” in a while – since fascism, and for Canadian multiculturalism, Dr. Bessma Momani warned that this should be worrisome. There are several reasons she pointed to for bringing this on, including rising inequality (in connection with broader international changes), blame of the elite (signing things away and us vs. them), and the 2008 financial crisis and the slow recovery that ensued. In regard to this last point, she posed the question: how do you address that there is no return to the “good old days” of high payment and unskilled labour? This is paired with the rapid influx of immigrants and refugees (many entering homogenous societies), the early language of hate speech, and the idea that newcomers are depleting social welfare. Social media echo chambers reaffirm how the other is viewed. Dr. Momani called attention to how problematic fake news is, as it is in fact old fashioned propaganda. Misinformation is different than disinformation and sowing doubt is enough to create a reality.

## The “Rules-Based International Order” as a Floating Signifier: An “Indo-Pacific Perspective”, Dr. Stéphanie Martel

There is a general consensus over three rules/myths about the rules-based international order: 1) there is such a thing as the rules-based international order, 2) that this order is currently under threat, and 3) the fact it is in crisis is a bad thing. Dr. Stéphanie Martel explained that everyone generally agrees on these ideas, including Russia and China. She likened the rules based international order to a floating signifier. However, while the three ideas are not entirely wrong, they are misleading to a certain extent. Dr. Martel discussed the rules-based international order as posed some basic questions: is it something that is self-evident? Or is there deep confusion about what it is? There are UN definitions and rules that all countries (including North Korea) would agree to and there is a view of this being liberal led. The idea that the rules-based international order is under threat comes from the ideas or myths of internal and external challenges, revisionist states (China and Russia) trying to overthrow and replace the power-based international order, and the rise of populism from within fed by rogue states. But Dr. Martel says this is over simplistic.

It is not clear that state challengers want to overthrow, but they defend wanting a better version. This would make the “us vs. them”, who is in and who is out, much blurrier. The good guys defending vs. bad guys challenging narrative is being used across the divide, but not everything fits in a clear dichotomy of what is good and what is bad. In a sense there is a “me too” movement in the rules-based international world order and Dr. Martel says we have to listen to some of these voices with some sort of reconciliation. She calls on Canada to seize the opportunity to contribute to this reconciliation and have more empathy and humility in how we talk about the international world order. There is room for more of a decentralized view of how we deal with problems.

## Moral Polarization and International Order, Dr. Balkan Devlen

Moral polarization of politics can be described horizontally within the public (from activists to devote conservatives), vertically (within the public and the elite), elite to elite polarization (a man of the people and for the people vs. those saying they are demagogues), and within elite across the world. According to Dr. Balkan Devlen, this makes the idea of global governance very hard. How can you negotiate with evil if your mindset is entrenched in a “good” and “evil” perspective? There is going to be a lack of trust if one party believes it is going to be oppressed and kept down and not get what is owed. Such moral polarization makes dealing with global issues like climate change very difficult.

However, Dr. Devlen reassured that all is not lost and there are things that can be done in terms of decreasing moral polarization. He emphasized the importance of correcting misconceptions by getting people in the same room and dispelling stereotypes. In addition, reducing the salience of moralizing identities and having diverse social networks work to decrease moral polarization. Finally, Dr. Devlen concluded that encouraging in group affection, rather than outgroup, makes people feel secure in their identities.

## Reflections for NAADSN

In a speech in May 2019 Secretary of State Mike Pompeo stated: “The Arctic is at the forefront of opportunity and abundance” and “China’s pattern of aggressive behaviour elsewhere should inform what we do and how it might treat the Arctic.” U.S. messaging forecasts that the immediate prospect of conflict in the Arctic is low, but problematic trends (like increasing military activity, attempts to alter Arctic Governance through economic leverage, and the changing physical environment) could adversely affect U.S. national security interests, promote instability and degrade security in the region. The Congressional Research Service Report: “Changes in the Arctic: Background and Issues for Congress” (September 2019) specifies “tensions” in the Arctic and explicitly frames the region in the “Era of Renewed Great Power Competition” as Russia and China are asserting themselves and staking influence in the region. In addition, melting ice has opened access to untapped natural resources and maritime trade routes. This messaging emphasizes the political and economic influence at stake in the Arctic.

However, such projections of strength in the Arctic and the idea of “competition” with an us vs. them mentality are in contrast to the productive measures discussed above that could be taken to decrease moral polarization and promote humility and empathy in the world order. This prompts several issues for further consideration:

There are economic, foreign policy, and security concerns about being left behind in the Arctic, but how does this notion interact with a more decentralized view of how we deal with problems in the international world order and in the Arctic more specifically?

How do we parse out inclusion and empathy in the international order in one place (the Arctic) and the sweeping assumption of aggression in one place leads to overall challenge to order?

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There is a strong tradition of security and defence narratives that have heroes and villains. In recent history this was the case with the Cold War and made clear in the rhetoric surrounding the War on Terror after 9/11. This us vs. them mentality feeds into the rise of populism. How can we work towards dislodging from a good vs. evil perspective to be open to reconciliation and a decentralized view of how we deal with threats?

The rise of populism is enhanced by the crisis caused by global warming (which is also connected to local and global inequalities). What are the dynamics of the interplay between climate change and populism?

How can we champion gender equality and engage women in northern communities in our work to maintain a focus on women's and gender-related issues in the Arctic?