# Introduction: International Institutions and Peaceful Change
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The rise of "the rest," especially China, has triggered an inevitable transformation of the so-called liberal international order. Rising powers have started to both challenge and push for the reform of existing multilateral institutions, such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF), and to create new ones, such as the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB). The United States under the Trump administration, on the other hand, has retreated from the international institutions that the country once led or helped to create, including the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP); the Paris Agreement; the Iran nuclear deal; the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty; the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO); and the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC). The United States has also paralyzed the ability of the World Trade Organization (WTO) to settle trade disputes by blocking the appointment of judges to its appellate body. Moreover, in May 2020, President Trump announced his decision to quit the Open Skies Treaty, an arms control regime designed to promote transparency among its members regarding military activities. During the past decade or so, both Russia and the United States have been dismantling multilateral arms control treaties one by one while engaging in new nuclear buildups at home.

The 2020 COVID-19 pandemic is another blow to the existing institutional order. The World Health Organization (WHO) appeared inadequate in leading the efforts for the global war on the "enemy against humanity."[1] The blame

game between the United States and China has also further crippled the effectiveness of the WHO and international cooperation at a time when they are sorely needed. Although the G-20 convened an unprecedented virtual summit during the pandemic, it remains unclear how these major economies will be able to revive damaged trade, investment, and globalization in general in a post-COVID world. It is clear that no country can fight COVID-19 alone, and multilateralism or multilateral cooperation is the necessary cure for this pandemic. However, how states can cooperate multilaterally and effectively and how international institutions can facilitate such collaborations among states are both unanswered questions.

The world has been changed by COVID-19. So, too, have international institutions. To a certain extent, the ways in which international institutions change will directly contribute to how the world—the international order—will be transformed. The peaceful accommodation of rising powers through institutions may be feasible, as war is not viewed as a legitimate system-changing mechanism, especially in the context of nuclear deterrence. Realists, especially power transition theorists, argue that military conflict is inevitable during a period of international order transition—the so-called Thucydides trap between the ruling hegemon and the rising powers. However, they ignore the importance of international institutions in constituting the international order itself, as well as in shaping the interactions among states during an international order transition.

This roundtable brings together a group of distinguished international scholars to examine the sources, mechanisms, and processes of possible peaceful change of international institutions and by international institutions in the current and future international order. One key normative question that contributors to this roundtable explore from different theoretical perspectives and through various empirical angles is how international institutions can contribute to a peaceful change of the international order.

The six essays in this collection demonstrate that there is no consensus on both the role of international institutions and the future of the liberal international order, which is partially built around these institutions. David Lake suggests that the liberal international order will survive but retract to its original core states, shedding some of its universal pretensions. While international institutions can facilitate cooperation, they will not be sufficiently robust to prevent a new cold war between the United States and China.

Anders Wivel and T. V. Paul argue that under some circumstances, soft balancing through international institutions can be an effective means of peaceful

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change, ranging from achieving minimalist goals, aimed at incremental change without the use of military force and war, to achieving maximalist goals, seeking more profound change and transformation in the form of continuous interstate cooperation for a more peaceful world order. Kai He and Huiyun Feng suggest that the COVID-19 pandemic has pushed the world toward the edge of a cliff in terms of the "Kindleberger trap," a phrase coined by Joseph Nye Jr. referring to the situation in which no country in the international system takes the lead to maintain international institutions. What states, including the United States and China, should do is reembrace and reinvigorate the role of multilateralism in world politics in order to achieve a peaceful transition of the liberal international order.

Toni Erskine focuses on institutional learning as a mechanism of peaceful change that often occurs in response to perceived moral failure and can occur at the level of intergovernmental organizations without parallel learning taking place at the levels of the state or individual human actor. Trine Flockhart examines the role of institutions as agents of peaceful change from a perspective that emphasizes the importance of a wide spectrum of human emotions to better understand the less quantifiable, but nevertheless important, conditions for being able to sustain initiatives for peaceful change. By comparing the experiences of the European Union and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and their institutional offshoots, Mark Beeson suggests that international institutions, especially the EU, have played a pivotal role in transforming the international system and the behavior of policymakers, making war less likely and peaceful change more feasible.

This roundtable collection is part of the Global Research Network on Peaceful Change (GRENPEC), established in 2019 and led by T. V. Paul from McGill University.[2] We hope that this roundtable can help to bridge the gap between theory and practice in understanding international institutions and the future of the international order transition.

NOTES

[1] See Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, "WHO Director-General's Opening Remarks at the Media Briefing on COVID-19—18 March 2020" (remarks, Geneva, March 18, 2020), www.who.int/director-general/speeches/detail/who-director-general-s-opening-remarks-at-the-media-briefing-on-covid-19---18-march-2020.

[2] This research network features a group of prominent worldwide scholars and institutions engaged in the study of peaceful change at the international and regional levels. See www.grenpec.com/about-us/.