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Liberal Institutionalism and Cooperation in the Post-9/11 World

I. Introduction

More than a decade ago, realist and neo-liberal scholars collided over the efficacy of institutions to initiate and sustain cooperation among states. John J. Mearsheimer fired the first shot by publishing his widely read article “The False Promise of International Institutions” in the winter 1994/95 issue of *International Security*. Sharp reactions by liberal scholars to Mearsheimer’s article followed in the summer 1995 issue of the same journal. John Mearsheimer attempted to depict the inherent weaknesses of institutionalist theories, particularly liberal institutionalism. He strongly argued that institutionalist theories were flawed and had minimal influence on state behavior. Historical records to furnish empirical support to institutionalist theories were scant and that the promise of liberal institutionalism to promote cooperation and stability in the post-cold war world was largely unfounded.

In response to Mearsheimer’s scathing critique, Robert O. Keohane and Lisa L. Martin asserted that institutions mattered in the conduct of state behavior and the task was to “discover how, and under what conditions” (Keohane and Martin, 1995:40). Accusing Mearsheimer of privileging his own realist view, Keohane and Martin further claimed that institutionalism could subsume realism by specifying the conditions for cooperation to occur.

This realist versus neo-liberal battle over institutions took place at a time when liberalism had scored a sweeping victory across the globe at the end of the cold war. Francis Fukuyama (1989) already declared the ‘end of history’ meaning the victory of liberalism in the long war of ideas against Soviet communism. Liberalism’s triumphant victory led both policy-makers and academics to proclaim the significance of institutions to hold the post-cold war together while pushing the realist theories down the road of international relations. Former American President Bill Clinton (1992), for example, declared during the 1992 presidential campaign that “in a world where freedom, not tyranny, is on the march, the cynical calculus of pure power politics simply does not compute. It is ill-suited to a new era”. Liberal academics equally projected institutions as a powerful force for stability and order in a world free of cold war politics. Robert Keohane, a leading liberal institutionalist, asserted back in 1993 that “avoiding military conflict in Europe after the Cold War depends greatly on whether the next decade is

characterized by a continuous pattern of institutionalized cooperation” (Keohane, 1993a: 53).

The liberal faith in institutions to promote international cooperation and stability, however, suffered a major set-back after the 9/11 Al-Qaeda attack on America which is widely perceived to have changed the course of world politics for good. President George W. Bush, for example, declared three months after the attack that “My vision shifted dramatically after September 11, because I now realize the stakes, I realize the world has changed” (New York Times, 2003). This changed world had two significant manifestations for American foreign policy – a quick resort to military actions against Al-Qaeda carried out under the rubric of ‘war on terror’, and a disbelief in and gradual drifting away from global institutions to deal with global terror. In other words, militarism and unilateralism quickly replaced Wilsonian and Clintonian belief in multilateral institutions and became the hallmarks of American foreign policy. Furthermore, the neoconservatives in the Bush administration redesigned American foreign policy to thwart potential threats that might challenge American security and vital interests in future. The ‘war on terror’ was thus extended to Iraq to restructure the world toward freedom and democracy. In February 2002, President Bush, while responding to a reporter’s question, said that “history has given us a unique opportunity to defend freedom. And we’re going to seize the moment and do it” (White House, 2002a).

While John Mearsheimer attempted to criticize liberal institutionalism in the post-cold war liberalism-dominated world, the developments in the post-9/11 world render a reassessment of liberal institutionalism quite imperative. That would be, indeed, a gigantic intellectual exercise. This paper has rather limited objectives. It argues that the Bush administration’s policy preferences to wage and win the ‘war on terror’ and carry forward the march toward freedom greatly undermine the potential of international institutions to hold the world together and minimize their effectiveness for sustained international cooperation. It also argues that the neoconservative turn in American foreign policy undercuts the premises of liberal institutionalism and, by implications, confirms the realist argument that power, not institutions, is the central feature of global politics. The paper begins with a brief overview of liberal and neo-realist positions on institutions and institutionalized cooperation and then proceeds to analyze the factors that question the basic premises of liberal institutionalism in the post-9/11 world.

II. Contending Liberal and Realist Positions on Institutions and Cooperation

The liberal scholars usually have a benign attitude towards international institutions and cooperation among states. Institutions, according to them, play the main mediating role and act as the principal means to achieve and maintain cooperation between states. Mutual interests of states minimize differences, pave the avenues for cooperation. States become willing to cooperate once institutions (sets of rules and practices that prescribe roles, constrain activity and shape the expectations of actors) are seen as beneficial. States are rational actors, they maximize absolute gains through cooperation and are less concerned about relative gains made by other states. To put it

briefly, institutions are treated as independent variables having significant impact on state behavior in terms of formulating or reformulating preferences and choices (see, for example, Keohane, 1984, 1989; Keohane and Nye, 2000; Axelrod and Keohane, 1985; Haas, Keohane and Levy, 1993, Lipson, 1984; Milner, 1992).

The realists, in contrast, contend that institutions reflect the distribution of power in the world order and exert little independent effect on state behavior. Depending on their narrowly defined interests, the great powers create institutions to prop up their interests and once interests are achieved, or unlikely to be achieved, they discard or declare the death of institutions. The world is essentially a competitive and conflictual arena where anarchy prevails and inhibits cooperation between states. The realists draw attention to the central role power plays in shaping the calculations and preferences of states. States maintain peace and security based on their positions of power and by forming balances of power. For realists, balance of power is the independent variable while institutions are merely an intervening variable with limited capacity to promote cooperation, peace and security. In brief, institutions as catalysts of international cooperation and peace obviously take a back seat in realist assessments (see, for example, Evans and Wilson, 1992; Kirshner, 1999; Mearsheimer, 1994/95, 1990; Walt, 1987, 1997).

Nowhere do the realists, however, claim that cooperation among states is impossible; rather, the point they emphasize is that international cooperation is difficult to achieve and sustain. There is a serious problem that inhibits cooperation – the problem of relative gains. Joseph M. Grieco (1988, 1990) drew attention to this problem long ago. Liberal institutionalists generally prefer to cling to the naïve belief that institutions promote cooperation by making information available to all parties and reducing the risk of cheating. Grieco argues that the most serious question in any cooperation scheme is how the benefits or gains from cooperation are distributed among the cooperating states. While making gains from cooperation states are naturally concerned about how the gains leave each other better off or worse off over time. Because states operate in an anarchical setting, they are sensitive to the balance of power that might be affected by relative gains. States not only seek to maximize their gains from cooperation, they also want to make sure that their rivals are not left better off in the process.

A good number of other studies (Krasner, 1991; Mastanduno, 1991; Mathews, 1996) dealing with efforts at cooperation in international communications and high-tech industries lend support to Grieco's study on relative gains concerns. These studies find that the participating states were less concerned about cheating and more about relative gains. The point is that cooperation among states may not be impossible but relative gains concerns make cooperation really difficult.

Liberal institutionalists now also take the relative gains problem seriously. Duncan Snidal (1991) and Robert Powell (1991) attempt to show that relative gains problem is not a big issue in cooperation but, in effect, they support Grieco's position. Snider argues that the relative gains problem is more applicable to a two-actor situation or where small or large numbers of states have important asymmetries among

themselves. States having roughly equal power need not be concerned about relative gains. Similarly, Robert Powell maintains that relative gains problem assumes or loses significance depending on aggressive or peaceful situations in world order. Liberal institutionalism works better when the threat of use of force is low or the costs of warfare discourage the use of force. In other words, states cooperate when they are relatively secure and their sensitivity to relative gains problem is low.

Both Snidal's and Powell's arguments are, however, consistent with Grieco's central argument. Like Grieco, they take into consideration the factor of power and analyze how relative gains problem may affect the power of states in different situations. Robert Keohane, a leading liberal institutionalist, later acknowledged that Grieco "made a significant contribution by focusing attention on the issue of relative gains, a subject that had been underemphasized, especially by liberal or neo-liberal commentators on the world economy" (Keohane, 1993b: 283).

John Mearsheimer (1994/95:15-16) further notes that liberal institutionalism has less relevance in conflictual situations where states perceive to gain less from cooperation. The theory may be quite inapplicable in situations involving intense security competition that sometimes leads to violence and war. This explains why liberal institutionalists primarily work in the area of international political economy and have recently penetrated environmental cooperation studies. Charles Lipson (1984: 2, 18) admits that cooperation between states is easy when economic relations are at stake but it is difficult when impoverished security issues dominate interstate relations. Said differently, low politics areas constitute the preferable domain for liberal institutionalism.

The limit of cooperation in low politics areas, as noted above, is also constrained by relative gains problem. Questions might be raised whether institutions can facilitate cooperation at all when relative gains become issues of serious concern to policy-makers. Apparently, institutions matter when relative gains problem is ignored and states with similar power standings concentrate on absolute gains. Realists argue that states rarely commit to cooperation if they are deeply concerned about relative gains (Mearsheimer, 1994/95: 21-22). Duncan Snidal's (1991) projected situation of a multiple system with many states of roughly equal power or Robert Powell's (1991) offense-defense calculations favoring/opposing cooperation among states may not fit that much in real world situation. States would still be concerned about how much gains they make compared to the gains of their rivals.

Liberal institutionalists are now faced with a new problem what Robert Keohane (2002) calls the 'globalization of informal violence'. The Al-Qaeda attack on America on September 11, 2001 epitomizes this informal violence. For the first time, the world is witnessing a large scale war between the world's lone superpower and a non-state shadowy organization. The war has not only changed the course of American foreign policy but also polarized the world along democratic America versus Islamic radicalism lines. The neoconservatives who now control American foreign and defense policy are out to recreate a new democratic world and redefine America's role in this world. It is of

prime importance to examine how liberal institutionalism fares in the post 9/11 world and what challenges it faces in the present context.

III. Neoconservative America and Post-9/11 World

The American neoconservatives were long propagating the idea of a 'heroic' America and they lamented the loss of vigor and 'national greatness' under the former Bill Clinton administration. Instead of sticking to the older conservative ideas of smaller government, they called for an active state to restore 'national greatness' and universalize American values. Writing in the mid-1990s, William Kristol and Robert Kagan asserted that "the principles of the Declaration of Independence are not merely the choices of a particular culture but are universal, enduring, 'self-evident' truths" (Kristol and Kagan, 1996: 32). Efforts at restoring 'national greatness' became a possibility after President George Bush Jr. had come to power in 2000. The neoconservatives occupied positions of power and influence in the new Bush administration.

The September 11, 2001 Al-Qaeda attack brought an unprecedented opportunity for the neoconservatives in the Bush administration who were ready to seize the opportunity to use America's military muscle to universalize American values and democratic way of life. Included in this powerful group of neoconservatives are Vice President Dick Cheney, Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld, Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, former Deputy Defense Secretary Paul Wolfowitz, Undersecretary of Defense for Policy Douglas Feith, and President Bush's advisor Lewis Libby. Charles Krauthammer, the well-known syndicated columnist for the *Washington Post*, has played the role of a spokesperson for this group. The neoconservatives were already known for their hardened attitude towards regimes hostile to American interests and values. They carefully nurtured and still cherish the specific ideology of expanding the American core values worldwide buttressed by unparalleled American military power.

The neo-conservatives first got organized in 1997 through the creation of an organization called 'Project for the New American Century' (PNAC). The major goals of PNAC are: an increase in defense spending to support American global leadership, challenging regimes hostile to American values and interests, promotion of political and economic freedom worldwide, and the establishment of a global order that supports American security, prosperity and principles (see PNAC website, 1997). An analysis of PNAC ideology would reveal that the core objective of the neo-conservative realists is to impose the American form of order on societies averse to American values and thus establish a global American empire.

President Bush, a traditional Republican, was strongly influenced by the neoconservative agenda, and was ready to try it in his foreign policy. This was not surprising exactly because traditionally a Republican foreign policy has been committed to a strong national defense and the use of force abroad to promote America's freedom and security (see Hagel, 2004). The shocking 9/11 attack convinced the President that use of military power was necessary to reorder the world on American lines. Promotion of democracy through the use of force became a defining mission for President Bush. The

mission to promote democracy and the necessity to crush Al-Qaeda forces subsequently culminated in the invasion and occupation of Iraq in March 2003.

Apart from the Al-Qaeda attack, a good number of other domestic and international factors facilitated the penetration of the neoconservative agenda into American foreign policy. In the domestic political arena, the Democrats and the Republicans now share a common view on foreign policy goals and priorities. Congressmen of both parties identified Al-Qaeda and Iraq as major foreign policy problems, passed war resolutions that gave the president enormous powers to use force against Al-Qaeda and Iraq and thus eliminate threats to American life and security. Although the Democrats criticize Bush for isolating the allies, they hardly dispute his attempts to order the world seen through the neo-conservative prism. This stands in sharp contrast to Congressional opposition to former President Bill Clinton's engagement initiatives in Bosnia (Boyle, 2004: 83). The neo-conservatives have exploited the domestic consensus to promote a world order imbued with American values and under complete American management.

The demise of the global communist threats by the early 1990s brought an additional opportunity for the neoconservatives as well. During the Cold war period, the presence of communist threat somewhat compelled America to exercise restraints and a corollary of this position was the propagation of republican promises – the promises of democracy, good government, and peaceful international community. It was impossible for the American leadership in the Cold War-dominated environment to undertake global expansionist designs and isolate the allies in Western Europe and elsewhere. This major obstacle was removed when the communist system suffered an immature death in 1991. At the top of it, the September 11 attack signaled a historic opportunity for the neo-conservatives to capitalize and embark on an expansionist design in the name of a democratic mission and promotion of American security. The shift from the long American commitment to multilateralism to aggressive militarism to unilateralism became the cornerstone of American foreign policy in a quick succession of time (Agnew, 2003: 873).

It is imperative, at this stage of discussion, to identify the principal elements of the neoconservative agenda that characterize American foreign policy. The elements include the following:

- Strengthen American defense to support American global leadership;
- Expand the empire of liberty and freedom, democracy and free market, if necessary by fighting wars of peace;
- Effectively deal with, replace or liquidate regimes or organizations hostile to American values and interests. Initiate and execute preemptive strikes when necessary.
- A belief in unilateralism and, by implication, a drift away from multilateralism.

To put it briefly, promotion of democracy, resort to militarism, and unilateralism or a drift away from multilateralism are the defining characteristics of the

neoconservative foreign policy agenda. Together, these elements also make up what is now widely known as the Bush Doctrine. Each of the elements has important implications for liberal institutionalism and this is examined in the following pages.

a. Expand the zone of freedom and strengthen security

There is a long standing liberal proposition that democracies never fight each other and democratic values and institutions promote cooperation among states. Spread of democracy extends the zone of peace by pushing states away from war. The modern version of this belief is known as the ‘democratic peace theory’. Michael W. Doyle (1995, 1997, 1999), however, warns that, though democracies do not fight each other, the powerful democracies may undertake messianic struggles to make the world safe for democracy. A fight between democracy and authoritarianism might be inevitable.

The former Bill Clinton administration used the democratic peace theory as a justification to aid democratization throughout the world. The current Bush administration espouses a global crusade for democracy. The U.S. *National Security Strategy*, devised in September 2002, singles out democracy promotion as a means of fighting terrorism and promoting peace. President Bush links democracy to America’s security and views it as the best means to ensure survival of liberty at home and the achievement of peace on a global scale. In his second Inaugural Address at White House, he declared that it would henceforth be “the policy of the United States to seek and support the growth of democratic movements and institutions in every nation and culture, with the ultimate goal of ending tyranny in our world” (quoted in Hendrickson and Tucker, 2005:12). A similar tone resonates in the *National Security Strategy* that starts with these words: “The great struggles of the twentieth century between liberty and totalitarianism ended with a decisive victory for the forces of freedom – and a single sustainable model for national success: freedom, democracy, and free enterprise” (White House, 2002b: i). The single sustainable model is open to all nations, and it is expected to make the world safer and better.

The most alarming dimension of the crusade for democracy is the use of force to bring down tyrannical or undemocratic regimes. Late President Ronald Reagan was committed to enlarging the zone of freedom through force but his strategy was to support factions rebelling against communist rule in Eastern Europe and elsewhere. There was no dream of imposing democracy through force. President Bush, in contrast, believes in the forceful imposition of democratic rule and picks up the Greater Middle East as a crucial site of democratic experiment. Reacting to the 9/11 attack the president said that Islamic radicalism was averse to America’s freedom and democratic system. Freedom in the Middle East was the remedy to dispel Islamic hatred (Hendrickson and Tucker, 2005: 16).

Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice bluntly echoed the same theme in the summer of 2005. While addressing an audience at Cairo’s American University, Rice said: “For sixty years, my country, the United States, pursued stability at the expense of democracy in this region here in the Middle East, and we achieved neither. Now we are taking a different course. We are supporting the democratic aspirations of all people”

(quoted in Hendrickson and Tucker, 2005: 16). Rice also noted that the absence of democracy in different Middle Eastern countries was responsible for the outgrowth of radicalism and extremism. Her speech went a long way to justify the American invasion of Iraq and attempted democratic rebuilding in that country.

The question is: Why the Greater Middle East? Charles Krauthammer (2004a, 2004b) provides a sophisticated neoconservative explanation to this question. In a speech at American Enterprise Institute in Washington, D.C. in February 2004, Krauthammer broached the concept of ‘democratic realism’, a concept that supports the use of American military power to promote American security interests and democracy. He does not, however, champion the use of force to support democracy everywhere but advises the Bush administration to be selective in its approach. Democracy promotion, according to Krauthammer, must start from the Middle East. He writes: “*We will support democracy everywhere, but we will commit blood and treasure only in places where there is strategic necessity – meaning, places central to the larger war against the existential enemy, the enemy that poses a global mortal threat to freedom*” [italics in the original] (quoted in Fukuyama, 2004:59).

Krauthammer identifies the Arab/Islamic radicalism as the existential enemy and warns that the march of freedom would stop if the war against this existential enemy is lost. The area where the existential threat counts is the “Islamic crescent stretching from North Africa to Afghanistan” (Krauthammer, 2004b:17). Clearly, Arab/Islamic radicalism now replaces the cold war period existential threat – the former communist Soviet Union. But how threatening is the Arab/Islamic radicalism to American national and security interests? Before the Iraq war, the Bush administration identified former Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein as a mortal threat and justified the invasion in the name of getting rid of Saddam’s weapons of mass destruction. Saddam could definitely pose some threats to Israel and Iran but he had no means of threatening American security and national interests. Similarly, Al-Qaeda is unlikely to pose massive threats to American security other than some subversive acts. The projection of Arab/Islamic radicalism as existential enemy seems overly exaggerated (Fukuyama, 2004:59).

President Bush’s crusade for democracy and freedom is sometimes compared with late President Woodrow Wilson’s propagation for free institutions worldwide. President Wilson held undemocratic nature of international politics and balances of power responsible for world wars and believed that open or democratic governments accountable to the public and international institutions could fill the gap. He championed national self-determination and freedom but did not propagate the use of force to change the political system in another country. Many Republicans cite Wilson’s sending of troops against the Huerta government in Mexico in 1914 as an example of promotion of democracy through force but his original purpose was not to spread democracy through force. In 1915 President Wilson declared: “I hold it as a fundamental principle that every people has a right to determine its own form of government. If the Mexicans want to raise hell, let them raise hell. We have got nothing to do with it. It is their government, it is their hell” (quoted in Hendrickson and Tucker, 2005: 15).

The founding fathers of America, particularly James Madison, Alexander Hamilton and Thomas Jefferson had widespread contempt for the use of force to change another nation's government. Referring to the French Convention, declared on November 19, 1792, that committed to "accord fraternity and assistance to all peoples who shall wish to recover their liberty", Thomas Jefferson said that "the French have been guilty of great errors in their conduct toward other nations, not only in insulting uselessly all crowned heads, but endeavoring to force liberty on their neighbors in their own form" (Hendrickson and Tucker, 2005:13). Departing from this long American tradition President Bush invaded Iraq to promote democracy, and thus overturned international law rules governing relations between states, asserted American military supremacy and bypassed global institutions to deal with Al-Qaeda. This is, indeed, a massive blow to liberalism.

b. 'Going it alone' - the unilateral turn

Shortly after the Al-Qaeda attack, American foreign policy developed a new twist – a decisive shift to unilateralism. Historically, American policy-makers and academics have debated a choice between internationalism and isolationism but after 9/11 the debate has swung between multilateralism and unilateralism. President Bush's approach to deal with terrorism has a more unilateralist bent, although on several occasions his administration went to the United Nations (UN) to seek legitimacy for actions in post-occupation Iraq. The different speeches the president made after the 9/11 attack highlight issues of domestic security, military responses to Al-Qaeda forces, and efforts to build a 'coalition of the willing'. Particularly, Bush's address to the US Congress on September 20, 2001 made no reference to the UN that passed Resolution 1368 condemning the attack the very next day on September 12 but he did praise NATO for its willingness to support the US militarily (Keohane, 2002:83).

The American response to Al-Qaeda attack produced two broad consequences – the choice to walk away from multilateral institutions and treaties, and ignoring allies when there was the perceived need to take actions. The neoconservatives in the Bush administration had planetary goals of democratizing the whole world and reordering all societies on American lines and they sensed quite accurately that their goals were contradictory to the values, norms and goals of multilateral institutions like the UN. Naturally, they were suspicious of positive support from global institutions and preferred the choice of 'going it alone'. This became apparent after the UN Security Council had refused to authorize military actions against the Saddam Hussein regime in Iraq. Kofi Annan, the UN Secretary-General, declared on March 10, 2003 that US military actions against Iraq "would not be in conformity with the [UN] charter" (Taylor and Barringer, 2003) but it did not stop military actions.

The issue of military actions to topple the Saddam Hussein regime produced strenuous objections from European allies, especially France. The allies, except the United Kingdom, refused to endorse the invasion of Iraq and did not want to put themselves on the spot. But, still President Bush insisted on confronting the tyrants hoping that others would get around his historic mission in Iraq.

President Bush, in fact, partially inherited the unilateralist bent in his foreign policy from previous administrations. The Clinton administration was known for its refusal to sign on to the Land Mines Convention, strong opposition to the Rome Treaty establishing an international criminal court and the indecision about the Kyoto Protocol on global warming. The Bush administration carried on the drift away from multilateral treaties further by walking away from the International Criminal Court, the protocol implementing the ban on biological weapons, and the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty creating suspicions in Moscow and Beijing.

Whenever and wherever walking away from multilateral institutions and treaties was deemed harmful to American interests, the Bush administration forcefully tried to remould them. It forced out Bob Watson, head of the United Nations' Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, in 2001 and Jose Bustani, head of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons, in 2002. While Watson's policies to tackle global warming were viewed antithetical to US oil interests, Bustani's proposal to examine chemical weapons in the US was termed outrageous. Hans Blix, the chief of UN weapons inspectorate, was also strongly criticized for his soft approach to deal with Saddam Hussein's so-called weapons of mass destruction that undermined the Bush administration's rationale for the invasion of Iraq (Anderson, 2003:47).

Some commentators believe that, September 11 or not, America would have resorted to unilateralist postures on its own. Robert Jervis (2003:379-384), for example, mentions that a number of structural factors makes unilateralism a policy choice for America in the current unipolar world. The structural factors include absence of external restraints to American power and dominance, the mission to spread democracy and liberalism throughout the world, increased relative power and the necessity to deal with new fears (in this case terrorism while during the cold war period it was Soviet communism), and a general worry about the future. All these four factors have largely shaped the current unilateralist bent in American foreign policy under President Bush.

c. Militarism and the fight against terrorism

After September 11, the US has heavily depended on military response to terrorism and enforcing its own will. Diplomacy received attention but only to prepare the ground for military actions. The way the Bush administration presented the 9/11 event also astonished many observers. The attack on the World Trade Center killed nationals from some eighty countries but the US quickly converted it into an exclusive national event with the ultimate objective of making war on its own terms (Smith, 2001).

The harsh military response against Al-Qaeda and the Taliban government in Afghanistan and thus teach others a good lesson through this response was an integral part of the neoconservative agenda. American global leadership, according to the neoconservatives, depends on economic as well as military supremacy. Military competitors from across the globe must be dissuaded. The peer competitors are Russia, China, and the European Union as a single unit. The draft defense guidance Paul Wolfowitz produced for Vice President Dick Cheney at the end of President Bush's first

term is a clear testimony to it. President Bush also made it clear in his West Point speech for graduating cadets by emphasizing the necessity to keep American military prowess beyond challenge. He said: “America has, and intends to keep, military strengths beyond challenge – thereby making the destabilizing arms races of other eras pointless, and limiting rivalries to trade and other pursuits of peace” (Bush, 2002).

This necessarily rang an alarm bell in Moscow and Beijing as the Russians and the Chinese were already taken aback by the US refusal to ratify the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty and the new plans for missile defense of American borders. Even the European allies who traditionally rally behind America’s dominant role found themselves in an uncomfortable position. At the end of the cold war, the European allies were weighing the possibility of developing an independent European military capability. The concept of a European Rapid Reaction Force gained much currency as the French were strongly pushing for a European force independent of NATO. But for America this was a nightmare and the American leaders wanted to see NATO as the pre-eminent military force in Europe (Anderson, 2003:47).

During the cold war period America had to take the interests of its allies to heart but in the absence of a countervailing threat from Moscow the neoconservatives in Washington were in no mood to pay due attention to opposition by the European allies. The Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld was reported to have said on March 12, 2001 that no matter what the allies thought the United States would move ahead with its own agenda. The policy of defying European allies culminated in America’s run to the Iraq war. Despite vehement French and German opposition, the Bush administration did not stop but went ahead with its war plan drawn up in neoconservative terms.

The resort to militarism required huge defense spending, especially after the invasion and occupation of Iraq. In 2004, the US Congress allocated \$36.8 billion for homeland security, a 10% increase from the previous year. There was also a 7% increase in national defense expenditures in 2004 (Smith, 2004). The total defense spending in the current year 2006 is expected to amount to \$600 billion, the highest defense spending by America in any year since the Second World War. In GDP (gross domestic product) terms, it amounts to only 4.1% compared to a general 7% of GDP devoted to defense during the cold war. But the economy also grew in size and increased defense spending is affordable (Williams, 2006). Moreover, high defense spending to ensure homeland security and fight terror abroad is widely supported by the fears-driven American public (Smith, 2004).

IV. Liberal Institutionalism in the New Context

The current neoconservative agenda in American foreign policy is an antidote to liberal institutionalism. The dominance of neoconservative agenda signifies an erosion of liberal institutionalist logic. Unilateralism, militarism, and the use of force to universalize American style of democracy are significant issues that sound uncomfortable to liberal institutionalists. The post-9/11 proclivities like the quick decision to use force against Al-Qaeda, bypass international institutions and build coalitions stand by the realist logic. Liberal institutionalism took a back seat for the moment. Robert Keohane acknowledges

that “The terrorist attacks of September 11 therefore pose a fruitful test for institutionalist theory” (Keohane, 2002:83).

A significant weakness of liberal institutionalism is its inability to account for power in international politics. Institutional theory does not necessarily overlook power but its emphasis on institutions to change state behavior away from war to peace and stability makes it somewhat indifferent to take power dynamics seriously. This is the case despite the fact that, along with realism, it shares the assumption that the absence of a central authority capable of enforcing binding decisions makes cooperation difficult among states. The realists use this logic to predict the possibility of more conflicts and less or no significant cooperation that continues to characterize international relations. The liberal institutionalists accept the presence of anarchy and conflicts in the global arena but refuse to see them as a central feature of international life (see Jervis, 1999:43-50).

The problems of power, conflicts and wars have acquired a different dimension in the post-9/11 world. At the end of the cold war, the world became unipolar with a single superpower at the top of a pyramidal power structure. The enormous US power and the neoconservative will to translate that power into unchallenged American global leadership and dominance runs counter to the liberal institutionalist hope that “international institutions operating on the basis of reciprocity will be components of any lasting peace” (Keohane and Martin, 1995:50). Few would disagree that lasting peace through international institutions has become a nightmare since lasting warfare between America and its shadowy opponent AL-Qaeda continues to be the dominant feature of the current phase of global politics.

G. John Ikenberry, in a recent study, examined the forms of international order at the end of the hegemonic struggles of 1815, 1919, 1945 and 1989 and found that the most powerful victor in each case depended on the willing cooperation of the vanquished and other states to set up a new international order. Democratic victors, because of their transparency and open society values, score more success in this task (Ikenberry, 2001). George Bush’s America is no doubt more democratic than any other nation on earth but its change in preference (planetary leadership and dominance, no matter what others think) points to a new world order where cooperation would be more difficult to achieve. Instead of willing cooperation through attractive bargain, some sort of forced cooperation is the logic of the Bush administration.

Can institutions play an autonomous role in the changed world context after 9/11? Here, autonomous role of institutions refers to the capacity of institutions to link among interests, policies and cooperation that create confidence among actors that cooperation or agreements will be maintained. Writing in the pre-9/11 context, Robert Jervis argued that liberal institutionalism was strong when institutions played autonomous role in promoting and sustaining cooperation (Jervis, 1999:55). But the problem in the changed context is that global institutions are losing their autonomous roles in the face of unilateral actions by the lone surviving superpower. In terms of its perceived self-interests, the US has withdrawn from the Kyoto Protocol, did not sign on to International

Criminal Court, and has bypassed the UN in its war move against Iraq. The way the Bush administration has turned its back on global institutions has created mistrust around the globe in the efficacy of international institutions as effective mediators of international peace and conflict. It does not mean that institutions like the UN are now irrelevant; the point is that they are effective only when the powerful states decide to use them as tools of cooperation and peace.

The issue of institutional legitimacy, however, remains important even for the most powerful state that acts unilaterally. Before the invasion of Iraq, the neoconservatives in the Bush administration saw the US as the custodian of the global order and were less willing to bother about the legitimacy of actions against Iraq (see Krauthammer, 2004a). Legitimacy may mean the fairness of a purported course of actions or, as Robert O. Keohane puts it, “decisions are legitimate for a given public insofar as members of that public believe that they should be obeyed” (Keohane, 2002:84). Francis Fukuyama thinks that legitimacy “is related to substantive principles of justice, but it is not the same thing as justice” (Fukuyama, 2004:63). He strongly argues that the problem of legitimacy led to American debacle in Iraq. Although the Bush administration, because of French and German opposition, initially gave up the hope of a UN cover to legitimate military actions against Iraq, still the influential neoconservatives were hoping that legitimacy would come *ex post* and help stabilize post-occupation Iraq. It came true when the UN Security Council unanimously passed a resolution legitimizing American occupation of Iraq in 2004 and the UN set up a major mission in Baghdad following American military victory.

The need for legitimacy, *ex post* or *ex ante*, brings home the point that liberal institutionalism remains relevant to some extent even in a world order where the most powerful state disregards others and embarks on a unilateral course of actions to achieve its self-defined interests. This is in line with the liberal belief that collective actions are legitimate when supported by global institutions like the UN. People around the world view the UN and its decisions as legitimate exactly because the decisions are made through a legally acceptable process, although the UN itself is populated by many dictatorial regimes that abuse their own peoples. Still global institutions remain the foci of legitimacy for global actions – a point the American neoconservatives disregarded and subsequently were forced to take to heart.

Despite some relevance of institutionalism, post-9/11 world appears more to conform to the basic tenets of political realism. There are different variants of political realism, such as classical realism, structural realism, offensive and defensive realisms (see Walt, 2002). Each type of realism maintains its own subtlety in the interpretation of real world events but they collectively share a good number of basic postulates that anarchy is a basic feature of the international system and war is a constant possibility under anarchic conditions, states are deeply engaged in a struggle for power and thus improve their relative power positions to ensure their survival, and systemic inequality in power distribution may encourage the great powers to undertake aggressive and costly wars to expand their spheres of dominance. Post-9/11 developments greatly confirm many of these realist postulates. Realists are right to assert that given America’s vast

superiority in economic and military power the invasion of Iraq in the name of fighting terror was not surprising. Again, under neo-liberal globalization, the state appeared to have lost its relevance but in the changed atmosphere there has been a return to state, state borders, security and military power. The western proponents of globalization are now fortifying their own national borders, reinforcing the concept of realist-defined national security, and resorting to militarism to defeat the perceived threats posed by Al-Qaeda forces.

Dominance of political realism does not, of course, mean that it captures the whole dynamics of post-9/11 world. Political realism predicts war between rival great powers. But in this case, the world's most powerful state is waging an unending war against a transnational non-state actor Al-Qaeda. The realist scholars generally de-emphasize the role of non-state actors in global politics whereas the liberal scholars accord some degree of significance to the non-state actors. Realist scholars are still to come up with explanations about the motives and behavior of non-state actors. Another area of weakness for the realist camp, as noted by Jack Snyder (2004:55-56), is its inability to explain coalition-building by rival powers to deter America. France, Germany and a group of other states strongly opposed the American invasion of Iraq but opposition did not automatically translate into the formation of an anti-American alliance, as it did happen against Germany in Europe prior to the First and Second World Wars. Realist theorists also need to provide a solid explanation to this effect.

V. Concluding Remarks

The brief analysis in this paper highlights two points: first, liberal institutionalism, although not irrelevant, has lost considerable rationale to account for international cooperation in the post-9/11 world. The dominant features of current global politics are defined by America's 'war on terror' and the perceived American necessity to establish complete control over global developments. This neoconservative foreign policy agenda thrives on three principal elements – promotion of democracy on a global scale, unilateralism, and a resort to militarism that make things much complicated for liberal institutionalism. Apparently, the Bush administration is undertaking and executing actions in a liberal fashion (such as promotion of democracy worldwide) but its 'liberalism of war' undermines the very basic premises of liberalism. And secondly, the decline of liberalism or liberal institutionalism brings political realism back to the center stage of global politics. As noted above, war on terror, militarism, a disbelief in multilateralism etc., emphasize the realist concepts of power, state, and national security. In conclusion, the problems of power, conflicts, and wars in the post-9/11 world pose a new challenge to liberal institutionalism.

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