

Flawed Framework:

Problems with Viewing China's Rise as a threat to the Liberal International Order (LIO)

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Minerva project: LIO and tools of influence

- Explore the LIO—components and logics
- Evaluate a variety of more specific tools of regional influence
 - Alliances and forward-deployed forces
 - Alliances and multilateral institutions
 - Design of multilateral institutions
 - Military power-projection capabilities
 - Economic policy and spheres of influence
 - Diasporas and regional influence
 - Regime change and international order

What is the LIO?

- The United States need to “protect the international order in East Asia”
 - But what is this?
- International Order: institutions and rules that guide the states that belong to the order
- Liberal international order:
 - Created by the United States after War War II
 - NATO and U.S.-Japan Alliance
 - Open international trading system, including now the WTO
 - Key international financial institutions—World Bank, IMF
 - United Nations , UN

What is the LIO? (cont)

- Sometimes “LIO” is used more broadly
 - Norm to protect and possibly spread democracy
 - Norms requiring the protection of human rights
 - Nonproliferation regime(s)
 - UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS)
 - Regional trade agreements
 - Others...
- A source of confusion—inconsistent usage generates confusion

What is at Stake in the LIO Discourse?

- IR theorists and policy analysts hold that the LIO produced valuable outcomes
 - Cold War peace
 - NATO cohesion
 - US victory in the Cold War
 - Lack of balancing against the US after dissolution of Soviet Union
- Key issue is whether these outcomes are the product of joint impact of the LIO's components or simply of the individual parts
 - If the latter, then the LIO framing offers little insight
 - Moreover, for reasons I will present later, the framing can mislead our analysis and exaggerate the threat China poses to the United States

LIO Concept

- The logics/mechanism that underpins claims about the LIO's explanatory power
- Democracy
- Hierarchy
- Institutional binding
- Economic interdependence
- Political convergence

Problems with the LIO Concept

- Inward looking: does not include the US major-power competitor, so tell us little about the key competition
 - Can tell us little about the Cold War peace and US Cold War victory
- Suffers crippling logical flaws
 - Institutional binding
 - Hierarchy
 - Political convergence

Bottomline and Policy Implications

- The LIO framing has little explanatory value
 - beyond that provided by thinking more directly in terms of basic structural theories, alliances, and institutions
- The LIO discourse clouds/distorts analysis of US policy:
 - Obscures the threatening nature of US policy, by implying that all efforts to preserve the LIO are not threatening
 - Which in turn supports misperceptions of China's policy, which can undermine US policy
 - Builds in an implicit status quo bias, which is especially inappropriate during a major shift in global power

Policy implications (cont)

- Stepping back from the LIO framing could clarify some of the theoretical disagreements that could lead to divergent US policies
- Reframing analysis of US policy in terms of grand strategy would encourage revisiting of basic questions
 - Should the United States maintain its security commitments to East Asia?
 - Should the United States maintain its security commitments to Taiwan?
 - Should the United States adopt competitive policies designed to preserve dominance in NE Asia, but inconsistent with the LIO?
 - Should the United States support changes to the maritime rules in East Asia?