



Liberal School of IP

A Hopeful Vision of International Politics

The **Liberal School of International Politics** starts from a bold, uplifting belief: human beings are capable of **reason**, and states, too, can use reason to build a more peaceful world. Liberals argue that the international system is not condemned to war. Through **cooperation**, **free trade** and **democratic values**, states can reduce conflict, create prosperity and build durable peace.

John Locke — Reason and Rights

The intellectual roots begin with **John Locke**, who believed human beings are guided not just by self-interest, but by **reason**, which helps them recognise the rights and well-being of others. For liberals, this same principle applies to states — rational states see the benefit of mutual cooperation and peaceful coexistence.

Immanuel Kant — The Idea of Perpetual Peace

Immanuel Kant deepens this vision. In his famous work on **perpetual peace**, he argued that democracy, respect for rights, and **free trade** reduce the incentives for war. Kant believed that if states embrace **republicanism**, end monarchies, and promote interdependence, a peaceful international order becomes possible. His ideas inspired the modern belief that democracies rarely fight each other.

Norman Angel — War Is a Great Illusion

In the early 20th century, **Norman Angel** made a powerful argument: war is economically irrational. In a world interconnected by finance, trade and industry, he said war is the **great illusion** — not beneficial but destructive for all

involved. This idea laid the foundation for modern interdependence theory: the more connected states are, the less likely they are to fight.

Woodrow Wilson — Liberal Institutionalism and Collective Security

Finally comes **Woodrow Wilson**, whose vision after WWI reshaped global politics. He argued that international institutions could transform the world from a jungle into a **zoo** — a rule-governed space with shared norms. Through **collective security**, diplomacy and the **League of Nations**, Wilson believed cooperation could be institutionalised, trust could be built, and conflicts could be prevented.

The Liberal Message

Together, these thinkers built the Liberal School's powerful claim:

reason matters,
institutions matter,
interdependence matters,
democracy matters.

International politics is not doomed to conflict; with the right ideas and institutions, a peaceful world is possible.

Liberal Institutionalism

Woodrow Wilson's Vision — From Jungle to Zoo

At the heart of **Liberal Institutionalism** lies **Woodrow Wilson's vision**. He believed that international institutions can transform international politics from a **state of jungle into a zoo** — a space where states don't behave like predators but follow rules, norms and procedures. Through mechanisms like **collective**



security and the **League of Nations**, Wilson imagined a world where disputes are settled not by war but by dialogue.

Advantages of Institutions

Alternative Platforms for Peace

Institutions give states an **alternative platform for resolution of dispute**. Instead of rushing into conflict, countries can negotiate, mediate and settle disagreements through established rules and processes.

Dialogue Reduces Fear

Regular meetings, summits and diplomatic channels promote **communication and regular dialogue**, which gradually **reduce trust deficit** and soften the **security dilemma**. When states talk, they fear less.

Commitments Create Restraint

Liberal institutionalists also argue that when a country makes a **commitment at international level**, it becomes difficult to break that promise. Violating treaties damages reputation, trust and credibility. In this sense, institutions act as moral and political anchors.

Limitations of Institutions

Arms Race and Nuclear Deterrence

Despite these ideas, institutions often fail to control hard security issues. The **arms race continues**, and states still pursue **nuclear deterrence** as their ultimate safety net. Dialogue cannot replace missiles when survival is at stake.

Legitimacy Crisis and Democratic Deficit

Many global institutions suffer from **lack of representation**, leading to **crisis of legitimacy** and **democratic deficit**. Decisions often reflect the interests of a few powerful states. Even **trusted nations suffer**, such as **India and Ukraine**, who face unequal treatment in global forums.

Weak Mandates and Power Imbalances

Institutions also struggle with **issues in fund, mandate and power**. For example, the **IAEA** finds it difficult to deal with **North Korea, Iran and Pakistan** simply because big powers like **USA and China do not abide** or enforce rules consistently.

Joseph Nye's Insight — Quasi Negotiations

Political scientist **Joseph Nye** notes that many global efforts are just **quasi negotiations** — giving only the **impression of negotiations**, without serious commitment from states. Institutions create meetings, but not necessarily action.

The Liberal Institutional Message

Liberal institutionalism is both inspiring and sobering. It believes institutions can tame anarchy, build trust and sustain cooperation. Yet it recognises their vulnerabilities: power politics, unequal representation, weak mandates and great-power manipulation.

Sociological Liberalism

Shift in Orientation — From States to Societies

Sociological liberalism makes a bold move: it shifts international politics from being **state centric to society centric**. Instead of focusing only on governments, it looks at **people, communities, interactions, and networks** that cross borders every day. It argues that the true drivers of peace are not just treaties and diplomacy, but the living connections between societies.



Karl Deutsch — Security Society

The most influential sociological liberal is **Karl Deutsch**, who introduced the idea of a **Security Society**. This is his alternative to the realist **security dilemma**.

In a security dilemma, states fear each other's moves.

But in a **Security Society**, **members do not feel threatened by each other**.

They share **common security concern**, and their relationships are built on trust, not fear.

Deutsch saw this most clearly in the **EU and ASEAN**, where former rivals gradually created zones of stable peace.

How do security societies emerge?

Through **high level of communication** —
visa-free travel,
student mobility,
letters,
trade,
cultural exchanges.

These exchanges create familiarity and empathy. For Deutsch, the **national state must evolve into a federal form of government** for deeper integration, just like the EU.

John Burton — The Cobweb Model

Another powerful voice is **John Burton**, who rejected traditional realism.

Realists imagine states as **billiard balls** (Arnold Wolfer's model) — hard, separate, colliding.

Burton offered the opposite: the **cobweb model**, filled with **dense interactions** across borders — businesses, NGOs, migrants, tourists, students, digital communities.

In this world, boundaries are not walls; they are **contact points**.

The more connected societies are, the less room there is for hostility.

Issues and Limitations

Despite its promise, sociological liberalism faces practical challenges.

A key obstacle is the **lack of political will in 3rd world countries**.

Deep mistrust, weak institutions, nationalist politics and economic vulnerability make governments cautious about integration.

Yet, there are rare successes — **ASEAN**, and regional examples like **India-Nepal-Bhutan**, which show that when societies connect, peace becomes easier.

Why Sociological Liberalism Matters

It teaches us that real peace doesn't begin in conference rooms.

It begins when societies talk, travel, trade, study and live together.

When people connect, fear dissolves.

When fear dissolves, security societies emerge.

Functionalism

Origins — The EU as a Living Experiment

Functionalism grows directly from the **experiment of the EU**. When Europe emerged from two devastating world wars, scholars and practitioners asked: *How do we build peace that lasts?* Instead of starting with grand political unions, functionalists looked at **everyday cooperation** — electricity grids, railways, coal, steel, trade, science. They realised peace begins not with ideology, but with **practical collaboration**.

Richard Coddin — Kick the Politician Out

One of the early voices, **Richard Coddin**, gave a fiery slogan: **kick the politician out**.



His message was simple:

politicians bring emotions, nationalism and rivalries;
technocrats bring expertise, logic and problem-solving.

So, if you let experts cooperate on technical issues, you get better, smoother, more peaceful results. Functionalism begins with this faith in **technical cooperation**.

David Mitrany — Peace by Pieces

The real architect of Functionalism is **David Mitrany**, who famously promoted **peace by pieces**.

Instead of trying to solve everything at once, he proposed a **sectoral approach** — breaking global problems into:

doable sectors
and non doable sectors.

Start where cooperation is easy: water, transport, health, environment, trade.

These sectors generate trust, which then spills over into harder areas.

The Role of Scientists and Technicians

Mitrany emphasised the crucial role of the **non political section** — scientists, technicians, engineers, administrators. These people don't bother with ideology; they focus on solutions. Their cooperation builds real bonds between societies.

Beyond Territorial Monistic Sovereignty

Mitrany shook the traditional idea of sovereignty. He argued that sovereignty should not remain **territorial monistic sovereignty**, confined to political boundaries.

Instead, **specialised institutions should have sovereignty in their respective fields**.

For example:

the **EU Central Bank** exercises sovereignty over **monetary policy**, even though no single national government controls it.

This creates stability that individual states alone cannot provide.

The Spin-Off Effect — The Heart of Functionalism

The most powerful concept in Functionalism is the **spin off effect**.

When two or more countries cooperate in one functional area — say, energy — this creates **functional linkages** that make cooperation easier in other fields — trade, transport, environment, finance.

This expanding web of cooperation leads to **interdependence**, and interdependence makes war irrational and costly.

The more countries cooperate, the more they become **locked into peace**.

Why Functionalism Matters

Functionalism tells us peace doesn't fall from the sky.

It is built slowly, step by step, through railway lines, visas, laboratories, banks, transport corridors and trade systems.

Technical cooperation becomes political peace. Functional linkages become human bonds. Interdependence becomes a brake on war.

Neo-Functionalism

A Realistic Upgrade to Functionalism

Functionalism dreamed of a world where experts quietly build peace while politicians stay out of the way. But **Ernst Haas**, the father of **neo-**



functionalism, argued that this dream is only half true. You cannot **keep politicians out all the time**. Technical cooperation can begin the process, but when integration gets stuck, and compromises are needed, **political will becomes essential**.

Ernst Haas — The Power of Political Will

Haas observed the European experiment closely. Even though technical sectors created early cooperation, the EU faced many deadlocks — budget issues, trade rules, expansion, and crises. He concluded that **only politicians** have the legitimacy and authority to break stalemates, negotiate compromises and push integration forward.

So neo-functionalism accepts:

experts may start integration,

but **politicians must complete it**.

This pragmatic upgrade is why neo-functionalism is considered **the most successful alternative to realists**. It balances optimism with political realism.

Challenges of Neo-Functionalism

A Slow, Demanding Process

Neo-functionalists openly admit that **functional integration is a slow process**.

It requires **extraordinary patience** and long-term commitment.

Look at the EU — it took **65 years** to evolve from coal and steel cooperation to a full political and economic union with a common market, parliament, central bank and shared norms.

India–Pakistan CBMs — A Hard Reality Check

Neo-functionalism also exposes why integration is difficult in conflict-torn regions.

India and Pakistan attempted **CBM efforts** — the **composite dialogue process**.

CBM on nuclear issues, and **ease of travel** measures.

But these efforts suffered repeated **setbacks** after **Mumbai 26/11, Gurdaspur and Uri**.

Whenever violence erupts, trust collapses, political will disappears, and functional cooperation stalls.

Neo-functionalism reminds us that without stable political leadership and consistent commitment, integration cannot survive shocks.

Why Neo-Functionalism Matters

It teaches us a grounded lesson:

cooperation can expand, spill over and create peace,

but only when political leaders support it at critical moments.

Integration is not magic; it is the result of hard choices, painful compromises, and persistent political commitment.

Interdependence

Economic Interdependence — When Prosperity Becomes a Peace Strategy

Interdependence starts with a simple but powerful idea:

When countries are economically tied together, war becomes too costly, too irrational, too self-destructive.

This belief inspired modern liberal thinkers, and one of the most famous examples comes from **Thomas Friedman's Golden Arches Theory**. He argued that no two countries that both had **McDonald's** had ever fought each other, because each had too much to lose — prosperity, stability, global markets, investment.



But the **Ukraine war** shattered this optimism. Despite deep trade ties and multiple McDonald's outlets, conflict still broke out. Interdependence can reduce war tendencies, but **it cannot guarantee peace** in the face of nationalism, security fears or great-power ambitions.

Free Trade Creates Stakes in Each Other's Stability

The logic of interdependence remains strong in many places.

China–U.S. economic ties are a classic example — trillions of dollars in trade, supply chains intertwined, industries dependent on each other. Economic stakes have helped prevent direct confrontation despite strategic rivalry.

India attempted a similar approach through the **Manmohan Doctrine** toward Pakistan — using trade, transit, and economic cooperation to create mutual stakes in peace. This idea goes back to **Immanuel Kant**, who believed that **free trade reduces incentives for war** by creating shared prosperity.

Richard Rosecrance — Trading State vs Military State

The most insightful contribution comes from **Richard Rosecrance**, who distinguished between two kinds of states:

The Trading State —

Countries like **Japan and Germany**, and even **China during its "peaceful rise"** period, gain power and prestige through **commerce**, innovation, markets, and global integration.

They don't expand through territorial conquest; they expand through economic influence.

The Military State —

Countries like the **USSR**, or moments of **declining U.S. hegemony**, rely more on **force**,

military alliances, and coercion.

For these states, security and influence are achieved through power projection rather than trade.

Rosecrance argued that the future belongs to the **trading state**, because commerce produces wealth without the destructive cost of war.

Why Interdependence Still Matters

Interdependence doesn't erase conflict, but it **changes its logic**.

War becomes expensive, integration becomes rewarding, and states learn that prosperity grows faster through markets than through military conquest.

Complex Interdependence

Joseph Nye's Framework — A New Way of Seeing Global Politics

When we move from ordinary interdependence to **complex interdependence**, the world stops looking like a battlefield and starts looking like a web. **Joseph Nye** argues that modern **globalisation deepens economic interdependence**, making the world more connected — and more complicated — than ever before.

But Nye goes further:

global threats like *terrorism*, *climate change* (CC) and *cyber security* force states to cooperate whether they like each other or not.

This produces a brilliant paradox:

States are often forced to **"love whom you would love to hate."**

Just look at:

India–Canada–U.S. dynamics,
or how the **EU reacts**,



or how even rivals **need China for CC** solutions. Interdependence binds even adversaries together.

Key Factors of Complex Interdependence

Rise of Non-State Actors

Nye emphasises that it is no longer possible to remain **only state centric**.

Non-state actors — MNCs, NGOs, terror networks, global media, tech platforms — shape outcomes as much as states do.

They influence markets, ideas, technologies and even national agendas.

Decline of Military Dominance

In this world, **military security is not enough**.

Missiles cannot stop pandemics.

Tanks cannot reduce carbon emissions.

Armies cannot prevent cyber attacks.

States must cooperate in multiple domains simultaneously — health, trade, climate, technology, finance — where force is either useless or counterproductive.

Simultaneous Cooperation and Conflict

One of the most important insights is that states often **cooperate and conflict at the same time**.

India and China may clash at the border, but they cooperate at the **WTO** or on **climate change**.

Rivalry in one space does not prevent partnership in another.

This is the essence of complex interdependence — a world where relationships are not black and white but deeply entangled.

A New World Order

Because of these factors — non-state actors, multi-dimensional vulnerabilities, and simultaneous cooperation–conflict patterns — the world cannot be understood through traditional realism.

Nye concludes that the global order today is **not anarchical but complex interdependence**.

Power is diffuse, networks matter, and stability depends on managing connections, not simply balancing armies.

Why It Matters

Complex interdependence gives us a realistic yet hopeful lens.

It shows a world where cooperation is not idealism but necessity,

where threats are global and solutions must be shared,

where even rivals depend on each other for survival.

Democratic Peace Theory

Origins and Core Ideas

The **Democratic Peace Theory** grows out of **republican peace theory**, a tradition stretching back to Kant. It suggests that democracies don't fight each other — not because they're perfect, but because their **internal culture and institutions** push them toward peaceful solutions.

Michael Doyle modernised this idea. He argued that **democratic culture creates a zone of peace**.

Democracies share transparency, accountability and respect for rights. These values spill into how they behave externally.

A key institutional feature is what Doyle calls **FOSE — “opportunity to rectify mistake.”**

In democracies, governments can **course-correct** because:

leaders can be voted out,

policies can be debated,

and decisions can be reversed.



This flexibility prevents rash wars.
Most importantly, democracies treat **people as ends, not means**. This makes leaders cautious about sending citizens into war for personal or ideological ambitions.

Practical Implications and Criticism

The U.S. Misuse Problem

No theory has been misused as dramatically as Democratic Peace.

The U.S., especially under the **Bush Administration**, tried to **promote democracy at gun point** in **Afghanistan and Iraq**. Both missions **miserably failed** in creating democracy, exposing the hypocrisy of using force to build peace.

A troubling paradox emerged:

It was **not Iran**, the classic authoritarian adversary,
but the **autocratic Middle East** that became the main target.

Scholars questioned whether “democracy promotion” was just a cover for geopolitical interests.

Obama’s Policy and the Syria Debate

Even **Obama’s policy in Syria** deepened the controversy.

On one hand, he supported democratic movements.

On the other, the U.S. selectively intervened, raising doubts about whether American democracy promotion is principled or strategic.

Is It Democracy That Creates Peace?

While it’s true that **no major wars exist between mature democracies**, critics argue that this is not solely due to democratic norms.

Multiple other factors matter:

nuclear deterrence — which makes war suicidal,
economic integration — especially in the globalised West,

cultural homogeneity in the EU — which reduces suspicion among members.

So the peacefulness of democratic regions may be as much about interdependence and shared culture as about democracy itself.

Why the Debate Still Matters

Democratic Peace Theory is inspiring — it connects governance with global peace. But it is also flawed when used as a political weapon. The lesson is clear:

democracy built internally can sustain peace;
democracy imposed externally often destroys it.

Liberal World Order

A Century-Long Project of Peace, Prosperity and Rules

The **Liberal World Order (LWO)** is the long, evolving project of building a world governed not by raw power, but by **rules, institutions, democracy, trade and cooperation**. Its evolution is best understood through the framework offered by **John Ikenberry**, who divides it into **three waves**.

LWO 1.0 — After WWI

The first version of the liberal world order emerged after World War I.

LWO 1.0 was built on the **League of Nations** and the **utopian/idealist ideas of Woodrow Wilson**.

It was the world’s first attempt to replace war with **collective security**, transparency and diplomacy.

Though it eventually failed, it planted the seeds of multilateralism.



LWO 2.0 — After WWII

The second version, **LWO 2.0**, arose after the Second World War.

This order was far stronger and far more institutionalised. It created an entire architecture: the **United Nations (UN)**, the **Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR)**, the **European Union (EU)**, the **International Monetary Fund (IMF)**, and the **World Bank (WB)**.

This world order remained mostly **limited to the West** because the Cold War created a **bipolar system**.

Still, leaders like **Roosevelt** championed this **new liberal world order**, promoting democracy, free trade and international law.

But it was **challenged** by the **Communist Bloc** and also by the **Non-Aligned Movement (NAM)**, which pushed for autonomy and resisted domination.

LWO 3.0 — After the Cold War

The third wave, **LWO 3.0**, emerged after the **disintegration of the USSR**.

With the spread of the **WTO**, globalisation, and capitalist expansion, liberalism seemed unstoppable.

This period was the **peak** of liberal triumphalism.

H. W. Bush spoke openly of the **victory of the liberal world order**.

Francis Fukuyama declared the **end of history**, arguing that liberal democracy had defeated all ideological rivals.

However, not everyone celebrated.

Scholars like **Soronson** highlighted the **crisis of legitimacy** — caused by **inequality**, with prosperity concentrated in the **Global North** and persistent **poverty in the South**.

There was also a **democratic deficit**, as institutions became powerful but not always accountable.

Challenges to the Liberal World Order

2001 — Non-State Actors Shake the System

The 9/11 attacks were a turning point. They showed that **non-state actors** could challenge even the strongest liberal states. Terrorism, extremism and global insecurity weakened faith in the LWO's promise of peace and stability.

2008 — The Global Financial Crisis

Then came the **2008 financial crisis**, which exposed deep structural flaws in capitalism. This crisis eroded trust in Western economic leadership and opened the door for rising powers — especially China — to challenge the LWO.

Why the Liberal World Order Today Stands at a Crossroads

The LWO is still powerful, but it faces internal contradictions — inequality, legitimacy crises, nationalism, right-wing populism — and external pressures from revisionist powers and non-state threats.

Yet, it remains the most ambitious project humanity has attempted to organise world affairs through **rules, institutions, cooperation**, and **shared values**.

Today's Liberal Order

New Dynamics — A World in Transition

The global order today is no longer the confident, Western-led model of the 1990s.

Farid Zachariah calls it a **post-American world**, marked by the **decline of the West and the rise of the rest**. Power is dispersing. Influence is



shifting. The world is becoming flatter, denser and more interconnected — a true reflection of the **cobweb model** of **complex interdependence**.

Amid this shift, a **China-centred new world order** is emerging. China's Belt and Road Initiative, AIIB, tech dominance and assertive diplomacy reflect an alternative governance vision — one not fully aligned with Western liberal norms.

Earlier Challenges vs Today's Challenges

Earlier, threats to the Liberal World Order came from **outside** — the **revivalist USSR**, **Iran**, and **Islamic fundamentalist movements**, all often linked to Huntington's **clash of civilisations** narrative.

But **today the most serious challenges come from within the West itself**.

The U.S., once the **protector and promoter** of the LWO, has become the force **destroying it** — undermining **WTO**, withdrawing from **UNESCO**, triggering **trade wars**, and embracing rising **protectionism**.

The **EU** is also weakening under internal pressures —

Brexit, the **2008 economic crisis**, and the rise of **right-wing populist parties** that oppose liberal norms.

Robert Kagan — Fragmentation of Order

Robert Kagan warns that the liberal order is **fragmenting** under multiple pressures: economic distress, growing tribalism, populist politics, and a deep **loss of confidence in institutions**.

This fragmentation is no longer theoretical. It is visible in real-world events:

the **attack on the US Capitol** after Trump lost the election,

similar unrest in **Brazil** after Bolsonaro's defeat, and the **Swiss People's Party winning 29%** votes — a shift toward nativist, anti-liberal sentiment.

These events signal that democratic societies themselves are losing faith in the values that built the LWO.

Responsibility and the New Phase

If the Liberal World Order is to survive, **responsibility lies with the U.S. and China** — the two powers that **benefited the most** from it. But both are now unsure whether to protect, reform or replace the system.

This uncertainty leads to what **Ian Brammer** calls a **geopolitical recession** — a phase where the world is stuck between orders. He describes the present moment as the **no-order period**, where no single vision, institution or power structures global rules.

Why This Moment Matters

We are living through the most fluid phase of international politics since WWII.

The old order is fading.

A new one is not yet born.

And the great question of our time is:

Will the future be shaped by cooperation, fragmentation, or great-power rivalry?

Previous Year Questions

1. In what ways does the functionalist approach in International relations help in maintaining peace and order in global politics? 2023, 15



2. What is 'complex interdependence' ? Discuss the role of transnational actors in the international system. 2021, 15
3. Critically examine the Functionlist approach to the study of International Relations. 2018, 15
4. Discuss the main factors that have contributed to the gradual transformation of the world from 'Billiard Ball Model' to 'Cobweb Model'. 2014, 15
5. 'Building ' peace by pieces' is the basis of functionalism.' Elaborate. 2013, 15
6. Explain how far Deutschs model explains the framework international interdependence. Do you think that the processes of interdependence and integration have grown steadily in the post Cold War Globalisation trajectory? 2009, 60

