

Democratic Peace and International Security in 21st Century: Kantian Political Theory Revisited

Captain Hassachai Mangkang, Ph.D., Royal Thai Navy Reserve ¹

[Received: 07/12/2024 Revised: 04/04/2025 Accepted: 17/04/2025]

Abstract

Three decades into the twenty-first century seems to be a chaotic and desperate moment of international peace and security. Terrorists and rising regional hegemonies with different visions of the new order have threatened the liberal international order, gradually established after the Cold War, with the global war on terror, China's rise, and the war in Ukraine. In the 21st century, some countries are showing decreased receptiveness to democracy and democratic peace theory. In this paper, I examine if the liberal international order is truly declining. By tracing back to the origin of democratic peace theory in Immanuel Kant's "Perpetual Peace" essay, I argue that democracy and democratic peace theory have developed their solid roots in global politics more than any other political theories have.

Keywords: Democracy, Democratic Peace, International Security, Kantian Political Theory

© Published by The Philosophy and Religion Society of Thailand (2024)

Introduction

About a decade after the end of the Cold War, the world appeared to be entering the end of history, as the Western liberal democracies had emerged

¹ Lecturer, Department of International Relations, Chulalongkorn University



victorious. Almost all countries had come to agree that liberal democratic ideology was the best regime. (Fukuyama, 1992) During 1991-2001, international organizations were considered important mechanisms in maintaining peace in the world, along with democratic regimes and economic and liberal systems. It was considered a unipolar moment under the leadership of the United States and countries that shared the same ideology.

However, this period of unipolarity ended along with the dream of liberal peace because of the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, followed by the Global War on Terror (GWOT). China, one of the Communist countries that survived the Cold War, emerged as a superpower in the 2010s. Also, Russia's invasion of Ukraine, which began on the Crimea peninsula in 2014, became a full-scale war in 2022. The question arises as to whether the liberal international order, which is based on liberal ideology and democratic peace theory, is obsolete or not. Is the Western world losing its status as a leader in global governance, which it has created over the centuries? This article will attempt to understand Kantian political theory and how it still influences international relations today through transnational democracy and democratic peace theory.

Kant's *Perpetual Peace* remains a foundational text for understanding liberal approaches to international security in the 21st century. His vision of peace through republicanism, international institutions, economic interdependence, and cosmopolitan law has shaped key elements of the liberal international order, from the United Nations to democratic peace theory and human rights norms. These concepts shape global governance and security, but face challenges from authoritarianism, power rivalry, and new threats like cyber warfare and climate change. Thus, Kant's theory serves both as a guiding ideal and a critical lens through which to assess the progress and limitations of international peace and security today.

Because the focus on Kantian political philosophy is on the international level of analysis, this paper thus portrays international security landscape by looking at states as major actors. This paper focuses on traditional security and major power relations and argues that democracy and democratic peace theory have developed more solid roots in global politics than any other political theories have by tracing back to Immanuel Kant's "Perpetual Peace" essay. To prove this argument, I divide this paper into three parts. The first part discusses continuity and change in international security after the Cold War, until the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2023. The second part analyzes Kant's political

theory in “Perpetual Peace,” which relates to democracy, international security, and democratic peace theory. The final part demonstrates the validity of Kant’s political theory and democratic peace in the 21st century, as his text advocates for the transformation of domestic politics into democracy, followed by the establishment of international institutions with collective security, and the conversion of people’s ideas into the concept of global citizenship.

From the End of the Cold War to Russian Invasion of Ukraine

A period after the end of the Cold War, approximately a decade, was a period known as the unipolar moment. (Krauthammer, 1990/91) Soviet power in Eastern and Central Europe began to decline in 1989, followed by the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. This phenomenon has impacted international political structure, political regime within the state, and individual human lives. At the international level, international politics had changed from bipolarity to unipolarity. As a result, the United States became the world’s only superpower. At the state level, countries recognized that liberal democratic ideology and a capitalist economic system are the best approaches to national development. At the individual level, people acknowledged that human rights became a reality in politics. It was possible to live in a world where everyone was equal and respected as a human being. However, international relations have eventually devolved into conflict again after the 2001 terrorist attacks and the rise of China and Russia’s invasion of Ukraine. International relations appear to have returned to a new Cold War. In this section, I describe international political changes over a period of approximately 30 years, from 1991 to 2023.

The End of the Cold War to the Incident on September 11, 2001

The decline of Soviet influence in Europe and the collapse of the Soviet Union itself had a profound effect on changing people’s political lives around the world. Additionally, it brought about significant changes in the structure of the international order. At that time, scholars of international relations concluded that the international political structure had changed from a bipolar system with two great powers balancing each other to a single power system with the United States completely determining international politics. (Cox, 2019) These events raised several questions. How stable would this emerging international order be? How long would United States hegemony last? What kind of foreign policy should the United States pursue in a world without another opponent?

George H.W. Bush's New World Order speech before a joint session of Congress could summarize the vision of a unipolar international system. (Bush, 1990) In his speech, President Bush introduced the concept of a post-Cold War international system that emphasizes international cooperation to address global problems. He stressed the need for shared security and diplomacy and promoted the idea of a "new world order" founded on the values of democracy, the rule of law, and economic prosperity. Considering the changing global environment, this speech demonstrated a commitment to multilateralism and cooperation to maintain peace and stability. One of the main themes was international cooperation. President Bush emphasized the importance of building a new world order based on shared cooperation and security. The speech highlighted key aspects of cooperation: economic cooperation, the rule of law, multilateralism, diplomacy and dialogue, and the promotion of democracy.

For multilateralism, Bush emphasized the significance of working together through international institutions such as the United Nations. He advocated for a united global effort to address challenges and conflicts, stressing the need for collective decision-making and action. For diplomacy and dialogue, the President emphasized the role of diplomacy in resolving disputes and conflicts. He called for open communication and dialogue between nations as a means of fostering understanding and finding peaceful solutions to international issues. For rule of law, Bush stressed the importance of adhering to international laws and norms. He highlighted the need for nations to operate within a framework of shared values, principles, and legal standards to ensure stability and fairness in the international system. For democracy promotion, the speech underscored the promotion of democratic values as a cornerstone of the New World Order. Bush believed that fostering democratic governance would contribute to a more stable and cooperative global community. For economic cooperation, Bush recognized the role of economic collaboration in building a prosperous international order. Open trade, investment, and economic partnerships were considered as essential components of the New World Order, fostering mutual benefit and shared prosperity.

Bush's New World Order speech emphasized international cooperation based on principles of unity, mutual respect, and shared responsibility. The vision articulated called for nations to collaborate to address global challenges and foster a more peaceful and prosperous world. However, eleven years later, the terrorist incident on September 11, 2001, changed the landscape of

international politics once again. After the event, we faced a new threat of international security, terrorism. The term “Global War on Terror (GWOT)” refers to the international military campaign that the United States, along with its allies, launched in response to the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001. The attacks were carried out by the extremist group al-Qaeda, led by Osama bin Laden. The primary objective of the Global War on Terror was to combat and eliminate terrorist organizations and networks, particularly those associated with al-Qaeda, with the overarching goal of preventing future acts of terrorism. Key actions associated with the Global War on Terror include Afghanistan invasion in 2001, Iraq invasion in 2003, counterterrorism operations, homeland security measures, and international cooperation to combat terrorism.

The first GWOT action was in Afghanistan. Following the 9/11 attacks, the United States and its allies, including NATO forces, invaded Afghanistan in October 2001 to dismantle the Taliban regime, which had provided a haven for al-Qaeda. The second GWOT action was in Iraq. The U.S.-led invasion of Iraq in 2003 was also justified within the context of the Global War on Terror. The rationale included concerns about weapons of mass destruction (WMDs) and potential ties between Saddam Hussein’s regime and terrorist groups, although these claims were later found to be largely unsubstantiated. For counterterrorism operations, the GWOT involved military operations, intelligence activities, and law enforcement efforts to target and disrupt terrorist networks globally. This included drone strikes, special operations, and cooperation with various countries to combat terrorism. For homeland security measures, the U.S. domestically implemented significant security measures to prevent future attacks, including the establishment of the Department of Homeland Security and the implementation of the USA PATRIOT Act. 5. Finally, the GWOT involved collaboration with numerous countries and international organizations to share intelligence, coordinate efforts, and build a global coalition against terrorism. International cooperation was one of the actions which gave the United States and its allies legitimacy to conduct the Global War on Terror.

It is important to note that the term “Global War on Terror” has been criticized for its broad scope and indefinite duration. Additionally, the effectiveness and consequences of the campaign have been subjects of ongoing debate, and the landscape of counterterrorism efforts has evolved over time. While the term itself has become less commonly used in recent years, efforts to combat terrorism persist on a global scale. It was known that the withdrawal of

the U.S. troops from Afghanistan in 2021 marked the end of the GWOT. In August 2021, the United States completed a withdrawal of its military forces from Afghanistan. The withdrawal marked the end of the U.S.'s longest war, which began in response to the 9/11 attacks.

The Rise of China

During the past decade from 2013-2023, two world major powers, China and Russia, have changed their domestic political structures. Xi Jinping and Vladimir Putin, as leaders of China and Russia respectively, have employed various strategies to consolidate and maintain their political power. While their methods differ due to the distinct political systems of their countries, both leaders have exhibited strong authoritarian tendencies. Xi Jinping has concentrated power in his own hands by abolishing term limits for the presidency, allowing him to potentially remain in office beyond the traditional two-term limit. This centralization of power has strengthened his authority across various government institutions. Vladimir Putin has been a dominant figure in Russian politics for several years, serving as both President and Prime Minister at different times. His influence extends beyond formal titles, as he wields considerable power through his control of key institutions and political alliances. Putin has established control over the security apparatus, including the military, intelligence agencies, and law enforcement. (Pringle, 2025) This control ensures loyalty among key institutions and minimizes the risk of internal challenges to his rule. Without any opposition, Putin decided to conduct military operations in Ukraine. On 24 February 2022, Russia invaded Ukraine in an escalation of the Russo-Ukrainian War that started in 2014. The invasion became the largest attack on a European country since World War II. This section discusses the implications of the rise of China and the Russian invasion of Ukraine toward democratic peace and liberal international order led by the West.

The rise of China as a global power is a complex and multifaceted phenomenon with several themes that contribute to its transformative impact on the international stage. These themes encompass various aspects of China's economic, political, and cultural development. Key themes associated with the rise of China include Chinese economic growth and development, globalization and trade, and political governance and Chinese Communist Party rule. China's rapid economic growth over the past few decades has been a central theme. The country has transformed from a primarily agrarian society to the world's

second-largest economy, driven by export-led industrialization, a massive labor force, and market-oriented economic reforms. For globalization and trade, China's integration into the global economy has been a key driver of its rise. The country has become a major player in international trade, establishing itself as the "world's factory" by exporting a wide range of goods. Its participation in global economic institutions has also increased, influencing international economic policies. Domestically, the continuity of the Chinese Communist Party's (CCP) rule has been a defining feature. The CCP has maintained political stability through a combination of economic reforms, effective governance, and the suppression of dissent. China's political system is characterized by a one-party rule with a socialist market economy. These developments defy the United States influence in Asia.

What are the implications of the rise of China on democratic peace and liberal international order? The rise of China has significant implications for the liberal world order, characterized by principles such as free trade, democracy, human rights, and international cooperation. As China becomes an increasingly influential global player, it introduces both challenges and adaptations to this established order. There are many ways in which the rise of China affects the liberal world order, including economic shifts, authoritarian challenge to democracy, shifts in global governance, and human rights.

First, for economic shifts, China's economic ascent challenges the dominance of Western economies in the liberal order. The country's large market, state-led capitalism, and economic practices have led to debates over trade practices, intellectual property rights, and fair competition. China's participation in global economic institutions like the World Trade Organization (WTO) has prompted discussions about the need for reforms to accommodate its growing influence. Second, about authoritarian challenge to democracy, China's rise presents an alternative model to liberal democracy, emphasizing economic growth and political stability under one-party rule. This challenges the traditional Western narrative that economic development and political liberalization go hand in hand. Some argue that China's success may encourage other nations to question the efficacy of liberal democratic principles. Third, concerning shifts in global governance, China's increasing involvement in international organizations and institutions has led to calls for reforms in the existing global governance structures. China has advocated for a more multipolar world, with a diversified power distribution that reflects its own growing influence. This may lead to changes in decision-making processes and

power dynamics within institutions like the United Nations and the International Monetary Fund. Last, about human rights and values, China's rise has led to tensions regarding human rights and values. The Chinese government's approach to issues such as censorship, political dissent, and religious freedom differs from the liberal values championed by the West. This has led to debates and diplomatic conflicts over the promotion and protection of human rights in the international arena.

Russian Invasion of Ukraine

Let us turn to the Russian invasion of Ukraine. The conflict between Russia and Ukraine started in February 2014 when Russian troops wearing disguises invaded the Ukrainian autonomous Crimea. When Russian and local proxy forces seized land in the Donbas region of Ukraine in April 2014, the conflict escalated. During the following seven years, combat in eastern Ukraine would claim the lives of over 14,000 people. Russia began a full-scale invasion of Ukraine on February 24, 2022. (Statista, 2025) Despite considerable Russian successes in the early stages of the conflict, Ukrainian forces repelled attempts to take control of Kyiv and other important cities, and they quickly began attacking Russian strongholds in retaliation. Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu asserted in September 2022 that 5,937 Russian soldiers had died in action during the "special military operation," in the only public declaration issued by the Russian government regarding the casualties incurred. (Reuters, 2022) Western intelligence officials assessed that the Russian military deaths had reached 320,000 killed and wounded just before the invasion's two-year anniversary. This accounted for approximately 90% of Russia's total mobilized force before the conflict. Furthermore, about 20,000 of the 40,000 Wagner Group mercenaries who were wounded also perished. Additionally, according to estimates from Western analysts, Ukraine may have lost 200,000 soldiers. It was visually established that Ukraine had lost around 3,000 armoured vehicles, including about 740 tanks, about two years into the conflict. Russia lost about 8,000 armoured vehicles, according to visually verifiable reports. (*Russia-Ukraine War - Costs and Casualties: The Price of Putin's War* / Britannica, n.d.)

How did Russia's invasion of Ukraine deteriorate liberal international order? The invasion of Ukraine by Russia significantly challenged the liberal international order and led to a deterioration of several key principles and norms. The liberal international order, characterized by respect for sovereignty, territorial integrity, and adherence to international law, was undermined by

Russia's actions in several ways. First, Russia's invasion was a clear violation of Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity. The liberal international order emphasizes the importance of respecting the borders and territorial integrity of nations, and Russia's actions directly contradicted these principles. Second, the invasion violated international law, including the United Nations Charter. The liberal international order relies on adherence to international laws and agreements to maintain stability and cooperation among nations. Russia's disregard for these legal principles undermined the credibility and effectiveness of the international legal system. Third, the liberal international order promotes the idea of resolving disputes through diplomatic means and discourages the use of force to change borders. Russia's military intervention in Crimea, however, set a dangerous precedent by resorting to military force to alter the status quo, challenging the norm of non-aggression. Fourth, the invasion of Ukraine, starting with the annexation of Crimea in 2014, damaged trust and cooperation between Russia and Western nations. The liberal international order relies on mutual trust and collaboration among states to address global challenges. The breakdown in relations between Russia and the West following the events in Crimea hindered diplomatic efforts and multilateral cooperation on various issues. Fifth, the liberal international order is supported by international institutions that are designed to facilitate cooperation and resolve disputes peacefully. Russia's actions in Crimea strained these institutions, particularly the United Nations, by highlighting their limitations in preventing and responding to violations of international law. Finally, the invasion contributed to a shift in global power dynamics, with Russia adopting a more assertive and revisionist stance. This challenged the liberal international order by promoting alternative models of governance and international relations that prioritize national interests over collective norms and values.

In summary, the rise of China introduces both challenges and opportunities for the liberal world order. It prompts a re-evaluation of established norms and structures, encouraging discussions about reform and adaptation to accommodate the evolving global landscape. The dynamics between China and the existing liberal order will likely shape the future of international relations and governance. However, Russia's invasion of Ukraine, from annexation of Crimea in 2014 until special operation in Donbas in 2022, deteriorated the liberal international order by violating fundamental principles, eroding trust, undermining international institutions, and contributing to a more confrontational global environment.

From these international political phenomena during three decades after the end of the Cold War, the question of whether the liberal international order, which is founded on democratic peace theory and liberal philosophy, is still relevant now emerges. Is the West losing the position of leadership in international governance that it has built up over the ages? On the surface, it appears that international peace and security are in a chaotic and desperate state three decades into the twenty-first century. With the global war on terror, China's ascent, the conflict in Ukraine, the liberal international order that was progressively built following the end of the Cold War, and the emergence of regional hegemony with disparate ideas about what the new order would entail. In the twenty-first century, more countries are becoming less receptive to democracy and democratic peace theory. However, I contend that democracy and democratic peace theory have established more firm roots in international politics than any other political philosophy has by going back to Immanuel Kant's "Perpetual Peace".

"Perpetual Peace" Analysis and Democratic Peace Theory

In an essay "Perpetual Peace", Kant crystallized his thoughts on the issue of peace in the world that if various countries truly wished for it to happen. (Scheid, 2011) What are guidelines to achieve perpetual peace? In the first section, Kant proposes six principles as a starting point for perpetual peace between states. The second part is a summary of perpetual peace between states, following the levels of analysis from state to international and finally human beings as global citizens. The rest will be an addition to the guarantee of perpetual peace, reservations for perpetual peace, and appendix on arguments and agreements between ethics and politics. In this section, I briefly summarize the points from the six principles in the opening to the concluding chapters on "Perpetual Peace". In the opening chapter, Kant laid out six rules for achieving peace, including revealing information about war, decolonization, reduction of the size of the army, avoidance of using international debt as a tool in international politics, non-interference in other states' internal affairs, and avoidance of violating the laws of war if states were to declare war among themselves. Kant began the first section by returning to his explanation of the state of nature:

"The state of nature (*status naturalis*) is not a state of peace among human beings who live next to one another but a state of war, that is, if not always an outbreak of hostilities, then at least the constant threat of such

hostilities. Hence the state of peace must be established. For refraining from hostilities does not guarantee a state of peace, and when one neighbor does not guarantee the peace of the other (which can occur only in a juridical condition), the other neighbor who called upon the first to do so can treat him as an enemy.” (Kant, 2006, pp. 72-73 [8:349])

In fact, this passage should have been the opening paragraph of Kant’s essay. However, it is possible that Kant wanted to make a practical point about what foreign policy makers must do to achieve peace. Then, he theoretically discussed why those were recommended. From this paragraph, it is evident that Kant did not begin his political thought in the way that many liberal theorists, such as John Locke and Adam Smith, did. Locke described the natural state of human beings as civilized under God’s natural law. God created human beings to be equal and to have freedom. (Locke, 2003) This is different from Hobbes’s state of nature, which is a state of war. Also, Smith described a liberal economic system as having a natural mechanism in which buyers or sellers cannot control the price of goods. (Smith, 2007) Kant saw that peace was not a natural state, but states must create it together. Therefore, the second part of the essay points out the way for states to transform themselves into constitutional republics or to become liberal states first. Then, liberalism will be gradually extended into international sphere. In the end, cosmopolitanism, an idea that everyone is a member of global citizenship, will be accepted everywhere in the world.

There are similarities between democratic peace theory in the 20th century and Kant’s work in the 19th century. Both theories begin their explanation at the same level of analysis, the state level. Both emphasize the importance of the states as important actors in international politics, but states are not obsessed only with survival. For states to go beyond mere survival, they need to change their own internal political systems or mechanisms to be more liberal. However, the two theories differ in the practical details of being liberal means. During Kant’s lifetime, the word democracy has not yet been materialized. The world in the 18th century had not yet extended political rights to most of the people like today. Therefore, the word democracy was only a theoretical concept. Kant used the term “republic” to denote the liberalism, but the word democracy appears more literally in contemporary practice by absorbing the meaning of the republic into it. However, there are more interesting points Kant’s work. Studies of peace, cooperation and liberalism in international politics usually refer to “Perpetual Peace” as a good starting point.

It is crucial to emphasize that Kant's project of creating perpetual peace begin at the state level. Kant proposed that states must transform themselves into constitutional republics or free states. Kant emphasized that a republic and a democracy are different. A republican state is a government categorized according to the criteria of how to exercise sovereignty. A democratic state is government categorized according to the criteria of the source of sovereignty. When states begin the process of transforming into republics, they will gradually come together to create institutions or international organizations based on liberal principles and agree to live under international law that has been jointly established. States will eventually accept international norms on human rights, with its citizens realizing the value of coexistence as citizens of the world. With this process, perpetual peace is possible.

The first conclusion states that "The model of government of every state should be a republican." Kant proposed that every state design their constitution as a republican form. He gave the meaning of the republican government model as follows. "A republican constitution is a constitution founded on three principles. The first is the principle of freedom as members of society. The second is the principle of dependence upon the same law as citizens of the same state. The last is the principle of equality as citizens. A republican constitution is therefore the only constitutional form that follows the concept of a social contract. It states that all government laws must originate only from the people." (Kant, 2006, pp. 74-75 [8:350])

Therefore, to build perpetual peace, we must begin from within the state first. This is the kind of state that Kant always tried to describe as a civilized state in which the people in the state have freedom in the sense that everyone knows how to use reason, which is the essence of human beings. Everyone lives equally under the same law as citizens under the same principles, not under powerful person. Everyone dedicates herself or himself to the state as every equal citizen. Building such a state is considered the starting point for creating perpetual peace in the world in Kant's liberal theory.

The second conclusion states that "International law should be based on a loose association of free states." Kant argued that states, like individuals, are a kind of human society. They may harm each other just by living together in natural conditions because there are no laws between states to govern behavior. Each state should therefore call on other states to come together under a constitution that is similar to its own national constitution. The goal is to ensure

their own security because under the stated constitution. Each state has its own right to security. Such an association is called a league of nations. This kind of association encourages states to come together to create and international institutions and laws that are modelled on domestic law. In practice, this concept of integration is called federation or federalism, which would gradually spread to all states and lead to perpetual peace. (Kant, 2006, p. 80 [8:356]) Examples of international organizations, such as the United Nations, European Union, or ASEAN arise from the ideas in Kant's second conclusion.

The third conclusion states: "Man's rights as a global citizen should be limited to conditions of universal hospitality," Kant advised. Because the distance between human communities has become wider and wider and has developed so far that the rights of one group of people being violated in one place are felt throughout the world. The idea of global citizenship rules is not a metaphysical or far-fetched idea, but it is an extension of civilized unwritten international law. The principle of human rights will ultimately lead the world to perpetual peace. This suggestion is true by the concept of complex interdependence (Keohane & Nye, 1989), which views the world as having various kinds of actors. Security and military issues do not appear to be urgent government priorities, and there are other priorities like natural disasters or minority rights. Immigration issues have become so important that we must accept that sacred state borders have diminished in the age of globalization. It shows that today's countries are paying more attention to human rights than ever before in history.

In conclusion, Kant's proposal in the essay on "Perpetual Peace" begins by projecting the natural state of human beings who are at war in the sense that everyone is afraid of. They do not trust each other. However, the solution to the problem that Kant proposes is not the establishment of an autocratic monarchy with absolute power, causing all sides to lay down their arms. It is like negotiating a temporary ceasefire after the war between the states ends. Instead, they proposed the creation of a federation of free states, subject to three conditions: The first is creation of a free republic. Then those free republics will be loosely federated in the form of a league of nations. Finally, the league will develop the concept of human rights under conditions of universal hospitality based on the mutual consent of states. The conclusion of these conditions is an important basis for the world order of free countries, which began after World War I and achieved concrete success after World War II on behalf of the United Nations.

Kant's Political Theory and International Security in 21st Century

International political phenomena since 2001 suggests that the world is heading into direction of chaos because of terrorism, Chinese expansion of its sphere of influence, and Russian expansion into eastern part of Ukraine. Liberal international order after the end of the Cold War seems to lose its grip on world politics. However, from a Kantian perspective, it is too soon to conclude that the world is so chaotic that liberal international order does not function at all. There is evidence proving that liberal international order is still influential today. First, at the international level, international organizations for peace, such as the United Nations or the European Union, are still running. There are 42,000 active organizations from 300 countries and territories, including intergovernmental and international non-governmental organizations. (*Yearbook of International Organizations | Union of International Associations*, n.d.) Second, at the individual level, people all around the world connect with one another through social media, and many work in non-governmental organizations, such as Amnesty International or Human Rights Watch. Finally, at the state level, countries become more and more democratic overtime. Electoral and liberal democracy spread to many countries in the 20th century. By the end of the century, they had become common political systems around the globe and could be found across all world regions. (Herre et al., 2013)

The liberal international order remains a powerful force in global politics, shaping international relations, governance, and societal interactions. Three factors make international organizations significant: once they are established, they usually stay in place. They influence how states handle complicated problems. This impacts regional and global stability, and their operations have a growing impact on a wide range of facets of people's lives, extending into domestic political processes in ways they have never had before. (Park, 2023, p.314) At the international level, institutions like the United Nations and the European Union continue to play central roles in maintaining peace, fostering cooperation, and upholding liberal values. The UN, despite its challenges, remains the primary platform for diplomatic engagement, humanitarian efforts, and conflict resolution. Similarly, the EU exemplifies regional integration, demonstrating how states can unite under shared democratic principles and economic cooperation. These institutions uphold the liberal international order by promoting rules-based governance and collective problem-solving.

At the individual level, globalization and digital connectivity reinforce liberal ideals by allowing people to engage with one another across borders. Social media platforms enable individuals to exchange ideas, advocate for human rights, and mobilize support for various causes, often transcending national boundaries. Additionally, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) like Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch work to protect human rights and promote democratic governance worldwide. These organizations exhibit a distinct divergence from sovereign states in that they serve as embodiments of civil society and lack an established international legal persona. The dynamics of their interactions with sovereign states oscillate between complete autonomy and varying degrees of reliance, which are often contingent upon the financial support they obtain or the services they render to governmental entities. (Joachim, 2023, p.348) These organizations embody the liberal belief in individual agency and the power of civil society in shaping global affairs, further demonstrating the continued relevance of the liberal international order.

Alexandre Lefebvre's *Liberalism as a way of life* (Lefebvre, 2024) demonstrates that liberalism is more than just a political theory in the modern world. Liberalism is a religion, no different from Christianity in medieval Europe. Lefebvre uses the metaphor of the water in the sea, comparing liberalism to the sea in which young fish swim without knowing that they are living in it. When an old fish swims by and asks how the sea is, the young fish look at each other and do not understand what the old fish is talking about (Lefebvre, 2024, p. 11). As liberalism has spread throughout society, it has become like a sea where fish swim without knowing what it is. In the rest of the book, Lefebvre details how many people today have adopted liberalism as a way of life, why liberalism has become an important foundation for a positive life, and how we can make our lives happier by being aware of our beliefs. Liberalism in international relations is not so different from Lefebvre's thinking. The rapid changes in international politics after the two world wars were an important context that provided space for liberal theory to emerge as a factor in determining the foreign policies of the great powers.

Today, liberalism has become known as the world order under the leadership of the Western world. At the state level, liberal democracy continues to spread, reflecting the core values of liberalism. While challenges to democracy exist, many countries have adopted democratic institutions, including free elections, independent judiciaries, and constitutional protections of rights. The appeal of democratic governance is evident in nations undergoing

political reforms, where citizens increasingly demand transparency, accountability, and participation in decision-making. Even in regions experiencing authoritarian tendencies, democratic principles continue to serve as a benchmark for legitimacy and political progress, reinforcing the idea that the liberal order remains influential.

Classical liberal theory plays a role in countering the realist view of the world which sees human nature violent and immutable. The liberal view is based on the idea that humans can learn and change. Humans and states can create mechanisms to prevent war, ensuring that war does not repeat itself throughout human history. The democratic peace theory is the most influential theory in classical liberalism in the study of international relations. Modern liberal thinkers such as Michael W. Doyle point to the important foundation of the democratic peace theory in a long essay by Kant, "Perpetual Peace."

The important proposition of the democratic peace theory is that for the world to enter a state of perpetual peace, it is essential for nations to gradually change to become more and more liberal democratic states because this theory is based on the belief that "liberal democratic states will not wage war among themselves" and tend to help maintain peaceful relations among themselves. The following factors explain why democracy influences peace: First, liberalism believes in human reason. Therefore, if the politics of any country allow its citizens to express their opinions and live their lives according to their own reason, it is human nature to avoid war because they do not want to devote the resources of the country they are a part of to create state policies that risk losing, such as worthless and dangerous wars. Second, liberal democratic states will allow citizens to create wealth for themselves. Therefore, citizens will strive to build their own wealth through trade and investment to ensure their own well-being. A free economic system will incentivize private sectors to invest internationally and foster peaceful relationships at the individual level, thereby reducing the likelihood of war between states and facilitating trade between private sectors (Doyle, 1986). Because democratic states emphasize the freedom of citizens and the creation of a regime that allows citizens to express such freedom and reason, Thus, internal state institutions or practices, or simply put, the characteristics of liberal democracy within the state, provide the explanation of classical liberal theory for foreign policy and international peace.

In the essay "Perpetual Peace," Kant crystallized his thoughts on the issue of perpetual peace in the world. What are the guidelines that countries can

follow to achieve perpetual peace? In the first part, Kant proposed six rules as the beginning of the perpetual peace between states. The second part outlines the principle of perpetual peace between states in three additional chapters, extending the analysis from the state level to the international level and concluding with humans as global citizens. The remaining chapters are supplementary chapters with guarantees of perpetual peace, reservations for perpetual peace, argument appendices, and consistency between ethics and politics. In the opening chapter on perpetual peace between states, Kant laid out six rules for the journey to peace: disclosure of information about war, decolonization, reduction of the size of armies until soldiers disappear from the world, no use of international debt as a tool in international politics, non-interference in each other's internal affairs, and non-violation of the laws of war if states have to declare war on each other. Later, in the principle of perpetual peace between states, Kant began the first part by returning to the description of the state of nature as follows: "A state of peace between human beings living together in peace is not a state of nature because this state of nature is a state of war." (Kant, 2006, pp. 72-73 [8:349])

In fact, this should be the opening paragraph of Kant's essay. However, it's possible that Kant intended to articulate a clear practical point about the actions foreign policymakers in states should take to promote world peace, followed by a theoretical discussion of why such actions are recommended. When considering this paragraph, we will see that Kant did not start his political thought in the same way that many liberal theorists did, such as John Locke or Adam Smith. Kant saw peace as not a state of nature, and that states must jointly create it. Therefore, the essay in the second part suggests that states should first transform themselves into constitutional republics or liberal states and then gradually extend liberalism to international politics. Finally, the world will be cosmopolitan, where everyone is a member of the global population.

Comparing the democratic peace theory of the 20th century with Kant's work from the 19th century reveals similarities in the overall picture. In other words, both theories begin by focusing on the state as the central actor in international politics. However, both ideas approach the state from a different perspective, focusing on more than just survival, and emphasize the need for the state to modify its internal political regime or mechanism to become more liberal in nature. However, both ideas have different details in terms of what liberalism means. The word democracy had not gained widespread recognition during Kant's time. At that time, the world did not extend political rights to the

majority of the people as it is today. Therefore, the word democracy was only a theoretical concept. Kant used the word “republic” to show the liberalism of the state. However, in practice today, the term “democracy” has become synonymous with the republic. However, the interest in this work of Kant has not diminished. If we are to consider peace, cooperation, or liberalism in international politics, the essay “Perpetual Peace” is still a good starting point.

As mentioned earlier, Kant’s project to create perpetual peace began at the state level. Kant proposed that states must begin to transform themselves into constitutional republics or liberal republics. Kant emphasized that republics and democracies are different because republics are forms of government divided by the criteria for the exercise of sovereign power, while democracies are forms of government divided by the criteria for the origin of sovereign power. As states embark on their transformation into republics, they will gradually unite to establish international institutions or organizations that uphold liberal principles and consent to the jointly established international law. Finally, once states accept international norms on human rights and their citizens recognize the value of living together as global citizens, lasting peace will become possible.

Kant’s proposal in the essay “Perpetual Peace” begins by projecting the natural state of man in a state of war, characterized by fear and distrust among all parties. However, the solution to the problem that Kant proposes is not to establish an absolute sovereign to rule and make all parties lay down their arms, similar to negotiating a temporary ceasefire after a war between states ends. Instead, he proposes to create a federation of free republics under three conditions: the creation of free republics, the loose association of those republics in the form of a league, and the development of the concept of human rights under the condition of universal reception that comes from the mutual consent of states. Free democracies have considered these conditional principles important in the serious organization of the world since World War I, and they have achieved tangible results in the aftermath of World War II under the auspices of the United Nations.

Conclusion

Bruce Russett summarized the main points of classical liberalism as follows: Kant proposed that a state with republican rules, trade, and exchange embedded in the universal human law, along with a free republic that jointly creates an international legal system, would serve as a solid foundation for

maintaining lasting peace in international relations. In Kant's philosophy, the basis of liberalism includes belief in reason, which is an inherent characteristic of all human beings; belief in the progress and development of social and political life; and even though humans are selfish, they can cooperate to create a peaceful society. International politics elevates this basis of thought to the belief that states can collectively overcome or alleviate conflicts and wars by establishing political institutions both domestically and internationally, thereby paving the way for long-term peace through democratic governance, free trade, and international institutions (Russett, 2016, p. 69).

Despite the inevitability of wars, the three factors of lasting peace will collectively contribute to global peace over time. Each person desires freedom and prosperity, so democracy and free trade will expand, leading to an increase in the number of international institutions and laws that will allow democracy and free trade to continue. As a result, the three factors for peace form a triangular interdependence known as Kant's "Peace Triangle" (Russett, 2016, p. 80). The European Union is a positive example of how the three factors work. ASEAN is following the EU with Kant's model of lasting peace, even though there are many obstacles and the road to an ASEAN peace area is still long.

Acknowledgements

This paper is a part of research project, "Perpetual Peace and International Security in Immanuel Kant's Political Theory", funded by Chulalongkorn University.

Reference

- Bush, G. W. H. (1990, September 11). Address Before a Joint Session of the Congress on the Persian Gulf Crisis and the Federal Budget Deficit. National Archives. <https://bush41library.tamu.edu/archives/public-papers/2217>
- Cox, M. (2019). From the end of the Cold War to a new world dis-order? In J. Baylis, S. Smith & P. Owens (Eds.), *The globalization of world politics: An introduction to international relations* (8th ed.). (pp. 70-83). Oxford University Press.
- Doyle, M. W. (1986). Liberalism and world politics. *The American Political Science Review*, 80(4), 1151-1169.
- Fukuyama, F. (1992). *The end of history and the last man*. The Free Press.
- Herre, B., Rodés-Guirao, L., & Ortiz-Ospina, E. (2013, March 15). *Democracy*. Our World in Data. <https://ourworldindata.org/democracy>.
- Joachim, J. (2023). NGOs in world politics. In J. Baylis, S. Smith & P. Owens (Eds.), *The globalization of world politics: An introduction to international relations* (9th ed.). (pp. 339-354). Oxford University Press.
- Kant, I. (2006). Toward perpetual peace: A philosophical sketch. In P. Kleingeld (Ed.), *Toward perpetual peace and other writings on politics, peace, and history* (D. L. Colclasure, Trans.). (pp. 67-109). Yale University Press.
- Keohane, R. O. & J. S. Nye, Jr. (1989). *Power and interdependence: World politics in transition* (2nd ed.). Harper Collins Publishers.
- Krauthammer, C. (1990/1991). The unipolar moment. *Foreign Affairs*, (70)1, 23-33.
- Lefebvre, A. (2024). *Liberalism as a way of life*. Princeton University Press.
- Locke, J. (2003). *Two treatises of government and a letter concerning toleration*. Yale University Press.
- Park, S. (2023). International organizations in world politics. In J. Baylis, S. Smith & P. Owens (Eds.), *The globalization of world politics: An introduction to international relations* (9th ed.). (pp. 308-322). Oxford University Press.
- Pringle, R. W. (2025, April 1). *Federal Security Service (FSB)*. Encyclopedia Britannica. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Federal-Security-Service>.

- Reuters. (2022, September 21). Russia calls up 300,000 reservists, says 6,000 soldiers killed in Ukraine. *Reuters*.
<https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/russias-partial-mobilisation-will-see-300000-drafted-defence-minister-2022-09-21/>
- Russett, B. (2013). Liberalism. In T. Dunne, M. Kurki & S. Smith (Eds.), *International relations theories* (3th ed.). (pp. 94-113). Oxford University Press.
- Russia-Ukraine War - Costs and casualties: the price of Putin's war | Britannica.* (n.d.). [Www.britannica.com](https://www.britannica.com/event/2022-Russian-invasion-of-Ukraine/Costs-and-casualties-the-price-of-Putins-war). <https://www.britannica.com/event/2022-Russian-invasion-of-Ukraine/Costs-and-casualties-the-price-of-Putins-war>.
- Scheid, D. E. (2011). Perpetual Peace: Kant. *Encyclopedia of Global Justice*, 836–841. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4020-9160-5_763.
- Smith, A. (2007). *An inquiry into the nature and causes of the wealth of nations*. Harriman House.
- Statista. (2025, February 24). *Number of civilian casualties during the war in Ukraine 2022-2025*. <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1293492/ukraine-war-casualties/>.
- Yearbook of International Organizations | Union of International Associations.* (n.d.). <https://uia.org/en/yearbook>.