

Carnegie Council Activity on the Liberal World Order: Preservation or Evolution? (60 minutes)

Overview

This classroom activity engages students with the Liberal World Order that emerged after World War II. It asks students to question whether these principles still hold up today. Students will examine whether the world order is shifting with new rules, institutions, and norms. By the end of the activity, students will examine if the international world order should be preserved, or if it needs to evolve.

Learning Outcomes

As a result of engaging in this activity, students will:

- Identify the Liberal World Order that emerged after World War II.
- Critique the rules, institutions, and norms that shaped the Liberal World Order and those shaping our world today.
- Reflect on whether the Liberal World Order should be preserved or evolved.
- Construct their own ethical frameworks to guide the World Order that they see emerging.

Carnegie Council principles that the activity addresses:

- **The commitment to international cooperation** is a moral proposition because it goes to the essence of ethics—recognizing what is common for all, while managing the intrinsic and inevitable differences between and among people.
- **The defense of democracy in the U.S. and globally** requires confronting autocrats who discriminate based on ethnicity, gender, and religion, and who deny basic freedoms to their citizens.
- **Fidelity** means honesty, integrity, and a good-faith effort at serving the truth. Rhetoric certainly matters, and in an age of disinformation, leaders must fight against lies, willful deception, and deliberate misrepresentation of facts.
- **The humanitarian imperative** is the duty to save lives and alleviate suffering through humane and equal treatment. As violence and cruelty abound in conflict zones around the world, mounting effective humanitarian responses remains the essential moral imperative of our time.

1. Intro Video (7 minutes)

Share the following introductory video created by the Council on Foreign Relations to frame the Liberal World Order.

- [What Is the Liberal World Order?](#)

2. Introduce the Pillars of the Liberal World Order (10 minutes)

Go through the Five Pillars of the Liberal World Order:

1. **States are sovereign and equal:** Under international law, all countries have equal legal rights, duties, and standing regardless of their size, wealth, or military power.
2. **The right of self-determination:** This is the belief that people within an established nation have the right to freely pursue their own political, social, and cultural development.
3. **Non-intervention:** Countries should avoid interfering in the internal politics, civil wars, or conduct of other sovereign nations.
4. **UN Charter and UN System:** Countries should follow the foundational rules, purposes, and structure of the United Nations, for establishing international peace and security, human rights protection, and global cooperation.
5. **Universal Declaration of Human Rights:** This document enshrines the belief in the protection of every human's basic freedom and core needs, such as the rights to life, liberty, and education, and freedom from torture and slavery.

3. The Liberal World Order (20 minutes)

In small groups, ask the students to work together and answer the following questions. Allow time for students to share their answers with the entire group:

1. Where do you see the Five Pillars of the Liberal World Order holding up today? Where do you see evidence that the world is evolving into something different?
2. If we are moving into a new World Order, what rules, institutions, or norms appear to be shaping it?
3. What values or principles are at stake if:
 - a. You believe the World Order is evolving?
 - b. You believe the Liberal World Order should be preserved?
4. Based on your answer to the previous question, what factors could be causing this?
5. Should the Liberal World Order be preserved or evolved? If so, how?

4. Final Step: Preservation or Evolution (20 minutes)

- Now it is your turn. Write your own three pillars to guide a World Order that could last for the next 80-100 years.

Post-Activity Reading

- ["A New International Order Is Emerging, We Must Bring Our Principles With Us,"](#) Joel Rosenthal, Carnegie Council, November 21, 2024
- ["Ethics in a Post-Liberal World,"](#) Joel Rosenthal, Carnegie Council, August 27, 2025
- ["A Moral Rupture,"](#) Joel Rosenthal, Carnegie Council, February 10, 2026