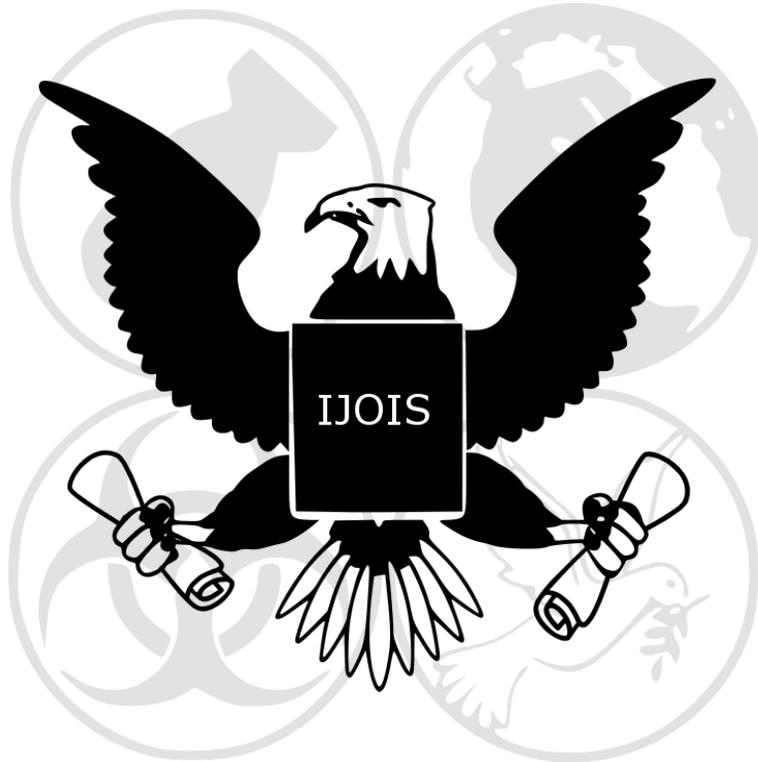


# Illini Journal of International Security

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## Letter from the editor

Dear reader,

On behalf of the Illini Journal of International Security (IJOIS) Editorial Board, the Program in Arms Control & Domestic and International Security, and the supportive academic community of the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, we would like to thank you for reading the seventh issue of IJOIS! IJOIS is a peer-reviewed academic journal that was founded in September 2015 by undergraduate students at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. As with many things, the COVID-19 pandemic put a pause to publications of IJOIS papers. However, we are fortunate to have motivated students who have sought to further explore topics in international security and have put forward papers for publication.

For our seventh issue of the journal, we have three papers covering a variety of topics. In my paper I analyze how Poland's military and national security policies evolved from the Western flank of the Warsaw pact to a cornerstone in NATO's Eastern flank. Kevin Joseph's paper explores how excessive neoliberalism has contributed to the rise in nationalism we see today. Lastly, Caroline Capone looks to how the international community should proceed given the dissolution of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action.

Our goal with the seventh issue is to restart the publication of IJOIS through the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign's library system. Furthermore, we seek to leave a well-structured journal for future of generations of students to explore these interesting and important topics. Thank you for taking the time to read our journal! We hope you enjoy the seventh issue of IJOIS.

Joseph Carr  
Editor-in-Chief

## **About Illini Journal of International Security**

Illini Journal of International Security (IJOIS) is a peer-reviewed undergraduate academic journal that was founded in September 2015 by undergraduate students at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. IJOIS is published biannually through the University of Illinois Library with the support of the Program of Arms Control & Domestic and International Security (ACDIS) and consists of exceptional undergraduate and graduate papers on topics related to international security or foreign affairs. IJOIS utilizes a cross-disciplinary approach and accepts papers from students studying the social sciences, STEM fields, business and the humanities that analyze international security issues from innovative perspectives. While IJOIS is run by students at UIUC, the Journal accepts submissions from students at all University of Illinois campuses (Urbana-Champaign, Chicago, and Springfield).

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## **Evolution of Polish National Security Post-Communism**

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### **Abstract**

Today Poland is a major cornerstone of NATO and one of the largest militaries in the alliance. In this decade, it may become the second-largest military in Europe as it is heavily investing in modernizing its armed forces. I sought to explore how Poland was able to change its force structure, cultural ideology, and institutions after the fall of the U.S.S.R to become this cornerstone of NATO's and the European Union's (EU) Eastern flank. Readers will see how Poland managed to shift with geopolitical tides to further its security interests from admission to the EU and NATO, modernization, and participation, as well as heeding the repeat of history as the largest war in Europe since World War II rages in Ukraine.

The challenges of the post-communist armed forces were multiple. Geopolitical landscapes were shifting, which set off massive economic, political, and strategic changes in post-communist Poland. During the communist era, Poland had the second largest armed forces of the Warsaw Pact and was a massive arms producer in the 1980s. However, the military had a high degree of autonomy after 1956 and took their orders directly from Moscow. The military was also directly involved in politics through institutions like the Main Political Directorate, which influenced the advancement of military officers. Or through the period of martial law in 1981. During the communist era of Poland, foreign policy was shaped by Moscow rather than Poland itself. Nevertheless, today, Poland has the easternmost European United States military base, firmly cemented in NATO, and, despite tension with Brussels, becoming a policy-shaping member of the European Union. I seek to analyze how the Third Republic of Poland transformed its armed forces and national security policies into one of the respected cornerstones of NATO's and Europe's eastern flank.

While modernization of the Polish armed forces is and has been a continuous process throughout the thirty-four years post-communism, membership in NATO and the European Union were the two main goals of Poland after the fall of the Soviet Union. Its size and geographic location have shaped Poland's foreign policy. Poland currently shares borders with the Russian Oblast Kaliningrad, Lithuania, Belarus, and Ukraine to the east, and Germany, Czechia, and Slovakia to the west and south. As always with its history, Poland has been caught between the powers of the East and the West. The 1990s were no different, and Poland had to shape its foreign and national security policies to meet its new situation. Both ends of the political spectrum in Poland agreed that entry into the European Union and joining the transatlantic alliance of NATO were the foundations of establishing its security and prosperity moving forward. However, to join NATO, Poland must undergo sweeping structural changes to its armed forces and political and economic institutions.

The Copenhagen Criteria of 1993 established that new members would need to establish three criteria before joining. First, an acceptance of the community acquis, a functioning economy, and stable political institutions (Gasyna, *Poland and Western Europe* 2023). Finance Minister Leszek Balcerowicz brought forward a package of reforms to establish a free market and tamp down what was then 586 percent inflation in 1989. These reforms inspired the international community; thus, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank granted a combined credit of \$2.2 Billion (Zamoyski, 2018 p. 404). The credit and reforms helped improve the Polish economy with increased industrial output and GDP, increased privatization of companies, and inflation decreased to 35 percent in 1993. Problems such as overregulation still would persist; however, by 2002, inflation was down to 3 percent, the Zloty was rising against the dollar, and the overall economic situation had drastically improved in Poland (Zamoyski, 2018 pp. 404-405). Unlike other former communist states, Poland's transition to democracy was a peaceful process, leaving many of the communist-era institutions and members with considerable power. The Polish Communist Party (PZPR) was reorganized as the Social Democratic Party of Poland (SdRP). It took with it its vast economic power and the security apparatus of Poland was largely unreformed, with extensive Russian troops still in Poland until 1993. Prime Minister Mazowiecki was forced to choose stability as anything too radical could have destabilized the country in a vulnerable period. He then declared a "thick black line" for its country to build off, leaving the past in the past (Zamoyski, 2018 p. 387). Domestic politics improved throughout the 1990s with much reform only occurring once President Lech Walesa handed the Presidency to Aleksander Kwasniewski. President Walesa had helped the Armed Forces General Staff keep much of their autonomy. As the first civilian defense minister, Jan Parys actively challenged President Walesa on

the topic. Parys was not well received by the Armed Forces seeking to de-Sovietize the military at a time when this alienated him from powerful military staff. To join NATO, Poland would need to establish greater civilian control of the Armed Forces, and the Law on the Office of the Ministry of Defense would do just that. However, President Walesa vetoed the measure, which aimed to give greater authority to the Minister of Defense (MoD).

Governments under President Kwasniewski were finally able to push through Civilian Military Oversight with the Law on the Office of the Ministry of Defense. However, this did not occur without the help of the United States and NATO. In 1995, a Congressional Research Service (CRS) report argued that Poland was fit for peacekeeping but not for fighting a war. Two reasons that could be improved were the need for more experience in Polish Officer's strategic planning and poor civilian oversight. Deputy Minister of Defense Andrzej Karkoszka was instrumental in improving civilian oversight. With the help of pressure and guidance of Western military officials, the Dobrzanski/Karkoszka reforms went into effect on February 14, 1996. These reforms restructured the military into land, sea, and air commands, weakening the General Staff's power and increasing the MoD's. All three separate commands would report directly to the MoD. However, with Polish Officers refusing to carry out directives, "NATO deemed General Wilecki's removal from the General Staff the last but crucial change necessary to ensure the continuing reform of the military" (Epstein, 2006 pp. 254-285). With necessary reforms in place and General Wilecki rotated out of his post, Poland was invited to join NATO in 1997 and would join in 1999.

As with the rest of NATO, foreign national security policy would transform after September 11, 2001. Already supporting the NATO intervention in Kosovo, Poland quickly supported the U.S. position in Afghanistan. This was not controversial, as the alliance was in complete agreement. However, in 2002 the question of Iraq would change the atmosphere of the alliance. France and Germany firmly opposed endorsing the U.S. position in Iraq, and Poland had to weigh its policy decision. Ultimately, Poland sided with the United Kingdom and six other NATO countries signing the "Letter of Eight" in January 2003 which supported U.S. military operations in Iraq. This was done without the consultation of France and Germany at a time when Poland was trying to gain membership in the EU. To ease tensions, Poland's Minister of Foreign Affairs would have to set out to ease tensions with France and Germany. Poland would go on to actively participate in combat operations in Iraq, commanding an international division in southern Iraq as well as the elite GROM units conducting combat operations in Um-Qasr (Lubecki, 2005 p. 75). President Kwasniewski cited the invasion of Poland in 1939 when Poland was left to themselves by France and the United Kingdom as a reason to support the U.S. in Iraq. Poland very well saw the U.S. will-to-act and France and Germany's reservation in action as something that could repeat in the future. Therefore, Poland regarded the U.S. as more apt to aid Poland's defense if anything were to endanger Polish sovereignty. However, Poland also recognized its need to rely on both European and Transatlantic support for its security. Thus, as previously stated, Poland would need to continue to balance its Warsaw-Berlin-Paris relations with its support for U.S. military operations.

Warsaw continued to increase its participation in European politics with its improved Warsaw-Stockholm ties. Nevertheless, despite the need for French and German influence in Brussels, Poland remained at odds with Paris and Berlin. Specifically, with the invasion of Georgia by Russia in 2008, Poland urged NATO for a resolute response in a "...unified Europe-Atlantic response..." to "...any attempt to change borders by force..." (Michta, 2009 p. 235). This was opposed by Germany and France, as was the Membership Action Plan (MAP) for Ukraine and Georgia. When Polish Prime Minister Tusk formed his government in 2007, Poland continued the development of their diplomatic service as well as the eastern dimension of their foreign policy

(Ryniak, 2017 p. 85). In December 2008, the Swedish-Polish Eastern Partnership was presented to the public by the European Commission. This was the first Polish initiative adopted into the European Union's foreign relations.

During the first decade of the new millennium, despite challenges in relations with France and Germany and the struggles of the war in Iraq, Poland experienced many national security and foreign policy wins. The Polish military gained valuable combat experience and worked with foreign militaries. Poland also secured a deal for F-16 fighters from the U.S. in 2003 (Lubecki, 2005 p. 77). Equally as important was the gained membership of the EU in 2004. As time passed, Poland gained more diplomatic experience in European and International Politics, further getting more of its agenda pushed through in Brussels, as seen with the Eastern Partnership. Poland also began to contribute to EU military missions in the Congo, Chad, and former Yugoslav Republics. This decade can be marked by Karolina Ryniak (2017) stating that "Poland started to realize that only through active participation may gain various benefits" (p. 95).

In 2011, French President Sarkozy called for a summit in Paris to discuss the European response to events regarding the Arab Spring and, more specifically, Libya. While Poland supported the United Nations (UN) resolution and EU involvement, Prime Minister Tusk stated they would support only non-military means. While this was a stark change from the previous willingness of troop deployment, it was in line with the 'Komorowski Doctrine' being developed at the time. When President Komorowski came into office, he directed a review of national security priorities. In short, the doctrine states that Poland would direct more resources to territorial and regional defense rather than expeditionary missions. Another reason for non-military contribution includes a solid public opinion of 88% against (according to one poll) troop involvement in the region. Lastly, given President Obama's willingness to let France and the United Kingdom lead diplomatic and military efforts, Poland did not believe that non-involvement would harm their relationship with Washington in a significant manner (Reeves, 2019 p. 1154).

It is easily understandable, especially in hindsight given the recent invasion of Ukraine, why Poland wanted to focus more resources on territorial defense. Even under the protection of NATO and the EU, Poland is still at the eastern flank of the alliance and union and would face the brunt of combat at the beginning of war in the Suwałki isthmus. The Suwałki isthmus is the land between the Kaliningrad Oblast and Belarus and is where Lithuania and Poland share their border. With its involvement in Syria, the Russian Federation showed the international community that it was still a significant player on the security and power projection field. During the mid-2010s, critical figures in eastern Europe, e.g., Poland and Lithuania, were more suspicious of Russia than their Western European counterparts. The Russian annex of Crimea in 2014 and the invasion of Georgia only further alarmed Poland, indeed striking a chord of trauma given their similar past as a former state under Russian Soviet control. However, this annexation did heed the importance of the Suwałki isthmus, given that it would be the only land connection to the Baltic states should a conflict with Russia arise. All of this inspired a ramp-up in the modernization and redeployment of the Polish Military. In 2015, Poland purchased 105 Leopard 2A5 tanks from Germany and began to upgrade its 2A4 tanks already in possession. In 2017, Poland purchased the U.S.-made Patriot air defense systems to counter the Russian Su-35 fighters in Kaliningrad (Chang, 2018). Poland also purchased 250 Abrams tanks to replace the 240 tanks sent to Ukraine as well as signed a deal for 42 F-35 fighters (Karnitschnig and Kość, 2022). Moreover, Poland has signed agreements to purchase over \$10 Billion of arms from Korea as well as a request for 96 AH-64E Apache attack helicopters, and \$288 million in Foreign Military Financing approved by the U.S. Congress (*U.S. Security Cooperation with Poland - United States Department of State* 2022). Warsaw has met the NATO goal of 2% GDP for defense, and it seeks to increase this to 5%. Coupling with this lofty goal,

Poland seeks to increase its armed forces to 300,000 troops by 2035 (Karnitschnig and Kość, 2022).

For the existence of the Third Republic of Poland, the state's foreign and national security policies have adjusted with the tides of geopolitics. Once Poland was able to firmly establish itself as a country with the stability and institutions necessary for admission, it was able to secure membership in NATO which, on paper, deters the typical historical intrusions into Poland's National Security. However, Poland recognized that they would get out what they put into these alliances and quickly answered the call to endorse U.S.-led operations in Iraq. While maintaining good relationships with France and Germany, despite differences of opinion, and increased cooperation in Swedish-Polish relations, Poland gained valuable experience in the diplomatic field while assuring through the Eastern Partnership. The 2000s was a period of gaining invaluable experience and showing the international community that Poland seeks to become a strong regional player in central Europe. The 2010s saw a shift in policy towards territorial and regional defense as a more assertive Russian Federation began again to exert influence and power in regions such as Belarus and Kaliningrad. Events such as the Georgia invasion and the Crimea annexation alarmed Warsaw greatly due to its history with Russian Imperialism. In the 21st century, Poland had long been a proponent of bringing Ukraine into the Western Sphere of influence. However, the invasion of Ukraine by Russia greatly hinders Ukraine's chance of gaining membership in NATO or the EU for fear of escalation of the conflict. Poland has still been active in their eastern foreign policy, giving 240 tanks to Ukraine and serving as a gateway for NATO weapons to flow into Ukraine. History has come full circle, and Poland is again at the edge of the conflict between East and West powers. Contrary to 1939, it has secured its western flank and has firm allied support within its borders and the region. Poland has transformed itself into a regional power through the modernization of the armed forces, entry into NATO and EU, and gained diplomatic experience. Poland seeks its security through continued growth and modernization of the armed forces and the continued strength of the EU and NATO.

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**The Liberal Order's Role in the Rise of Populism and Nationalism in the  
United States and Europe**

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**Abstract**

This paper looks at the liberal international order and its guiding principles as potential explanations for the rise in populism and nationalism within the United States and Europe. More specifically, the liberal tenets of economic neoliberalism and free trade as well as liberal institutionalism and multilateralism and its role and expansion within the international order will be considered. I argue in this paper that excessive neoliberalism and free trade as well as institutional overreach by multilateral institutions may help explain the movement towards populism and nationalism in recent years. The case studies of the 2016 election of Donald Trump, the Eurozone Crisis, and Brexit and polling and electoral data surrounding them will be brought up to support this argument.

*Keywords:* Nationalism, populism, sovereignty, Trump, European Union, Brexit, liberal international order, liberalism, free trade, multilateralism, IMF, WTO, USA, UK, China

## **Introduction**

Over the last decade or so, there seems to have been a trend toward populism and nationalism and a general backlash against global elites and institutions. Interestingly enough, this shift in sentiment has especially become pronounced in the very countries that were so instrumental in the creation of the current liberal international order. This was most obviously felt in 2016 with the UK referendum vote to leave the European Union, also known as Brexit, and with the election of Donald Trump to the US presidency. More recently, this trend of populist and nationalist backlash against the global order has accelerated, a fact made evident in various European elections. In 2022, for example, populist parties and coalitions have been winning “larger shares of the vote” in legislative elections and have won governing majorities in countries like Hungary, Sweden, and Italy (Silver, 2022). And in French elections in 2022, despite losing again to the centrist incumbent Macron, the Euroskeptic and nationalist candidate Marine le Pen increased her vote share to 41 percent of the vote by flipping 26 election districts and strengthening her support in the post-industrial northeast, a development that has signaled a growing French “dissatisfaction with the status quo” (Berlinger and Ataman, 2022). All of these changes in political headwinds underscore a clear sense of dissatisfaction with the liberal international order in countries that either helped to create the current world order or are members of its largest institutions like the European Union. “What is the cause of this?”, and “Why is it so prevalent in the West?”, are obvious questions that arise when thinking about this development. To answer them, one must consider the aspects of the liberal ideology that undergird the current international order, namely, economic neoliberalism and integration as well as liberal institutionalism and multilateralism, and how they have been promoted and expanded throughout the years. In this paper, I argue that excessive economic neoliberalism and the negative effects of economic globalization and free trade, as well as institutional overreach by multilateral institutions and the limits they place on sovereignty, help explain why populism and nationalism have seemingly increased in America and Europe. This argument is built upon case studies of the 2016 election of Donald Trump, the Eurozone crisis, and Brexit specifically.

### **Defining Terms**

Populism has various meanings but a “minimal definition” of the term can include an “appeal to the people, a denunciation of the elite, and the idea that politics should be an expression of the general will” (Bergh and Karna, 2021, p. 53). Populists also are known to dislike “limits on sovereignty” and “powerful institutions” (Colgan and Keohane, 2017). Nationalism fits in similarly with some of these attributes as well, especially when it comes to sovereignty and the general will and how it relates to pursuing the interest of the nation and its people. The concept entails an “overriding focus of political identity and loyalty” to the nation and thus “demands national self-determination” in which the desire of national groups to rule themselves takes precedence (Lamy et al., 2021, p.127). These characteristics helped to illustrate why populists and nationalists may tend to oppose international regimes and institutions in general. However, only when looking at some of the defining principles of liberalism that form the basis of the current international order can we attempt to explain the rise in populism and nationalism that is witnessed today.

### **Important Liberal Principles To Consider**

#### **Economic neoliberalism and free trade**

One of the most critical aspects of liberalism, and thus, the liberal international order is economic liberalism, which portends policies that foster free market capitalism, lessens regulation, and facilitates freer trade and economic integration (Lamy et al., 2021, p.92). The specific focus

on free trade aligns itself with the liberal peace theory of economic interdependence that argues that war is less likely between countries that trade with each other. During the Cold War, the US used liberal policies and the Bretton Woods institutions to encourage free trade and economic liberalization in order to increase economic prosperity among itself and its allies, or what John Mearsheimer calls, the US-led bounded order. Additionally, during this time period, governments enacted policies under embedded liberalism which sought to rectify some of the negative consequences that fell on citizens due to more market-orientated decisions, which allowed for policies like limited protectionism. However, things ultimately changed in the 1980s and after the Cold War during a period of hyper-globalization and neoliberalism. The newly created liberal international order now aimed to create “an open and inclusive international economy that maximized free trade and fostered unfettered capital markets”. All restrictions on free trade were to be removed and “the state went from being the handmaiden of economic growth to the principal obstacle blocking it” (Mearsheimer, 2019, p.38-39). The end of the Cold War and the creation of the new global, liberal order brought new challenges to the US specifically. Instead of freeing itself from the “institutional constraints” that it placed on itself during the Cold War as the leader and hub of the Western order, the United States “accepted even more constraints”. This manifested itself in the area of trade with the creation of more free trade agreements such as NAFTA and the World Trade Organization (WTO), which was made from the remnants of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT). The latter specifically expanded economic liberalization throughout the world and caused the US to open its “markets to others without adequate reciprocation”(Dai, 2020, p. 502). A prime example of this opening up of markets is America’s increased engagement with China, after the Cold War, which ultimately led to the granting of permanent normal trade relations (PNTR) with the nation in 2000 and the PRC’s ascension into the WTO in 2001.

### **Liberal institutionalism and multilateralism**

Another important feature of the liberal order is multilateralism and cooperation between multiple states through international institutions. This characteristic, like free trade, falls under another principal liberal theory of peace, this time being liberal institutionalism which posits that cooperation among countries in an anarchic environment reduces conflict (Lamy et al., 2021, p. 98). During the post-Cold War era and the construction of the current liberal international order, the US worked to “expand the membership in the institutions that made up” the previously bounded US-led order. New multilateral bodies and a “web of international institutions with universal membership that wielded great influence over the behavior of the member states” were made (Mearsheimer, 2019). The interconnectedness of these international institutions innately required “countries to curb their autonomy” so cooperation and the solving of “mutual problems” could be realized (Colgan and Keohane, 2017). Therefore, when more power over decision-making is given to institutions or supra-national organizations, as seen with the European Union in the years following the Cold War, it can be understood that the sovereignty of member states will be inherently limited.

### **The Trump Election**

A prime example of the increased economic integration ushered in by the end of the Cold War is America’s increased engagement with China, which ultimately led to the granting of PNTR with China in 2000 and the PRC’s ascension into the WTO in 2001. Despite the cheap imports attained by consumers, this softening of relations brought adverse effects to America in regard to working-class jobs. Between 1999 and 2011, the “China shock” resulted in the “loss of 1 million manufacturing jobs and 2.4 million” jobs in general (Dizikes, 2021). This example of hyperglobalization has led to “entire regions seeing their traditional economic base destroyed” and

jobs disappearing as a result of outsourcing. Those who often fall victim to these developments “have little mobility to find well-paying jobs or any job at all” (Mearsheimer, 2019, p.39). Communities that are vulnerable to this type of trade competition often see a decline in wages and “regional economic activity” that leads to a decline in property taxes” and local public services. Thus, voters in these deindustrialized areas become more likely to “reject the status quo” and “embrace populism” when compared to “more prosperous” areas that benefited from globalization and economic interconnectedness (Broz et al., 2021, p.474). This reality was readily seen in the 2016 US presidential election in which the very economists who researched the China trade shock found that if “Chinese import penetration had been 50 percent lower since 2000”, the states of Michigan, Wisconsin, Pennsylvania, and North Carolina would have elected Hillary Clinton for president and would’ve swayed the election to her favor (Swanson, 2016). In a different study, researchers found that a one-point increase in Chinese import competition in a given American county was “associated with a 2.9 percent increase in support for the protectionist and nationalist candidate Donald Trump vis-a-vis the county’s average support for Republican candidates over the past 20 years” (Cerrato et al., 2016). Additionally, data has shown that among people who switched their vote from Barack Obama in 2012 to Donald Trump in 2016, negative attitudes toward globalization were statistically significant within the switch (Rodrik, 2021). All of this information helps in cementing the relationship between some of the neoliberal policies of the liberal international order and the increase of populism in countries like the United States. In a similar vein, data has shown that communities at the electoral district level in Western Europe that were vulnerable to Chinese import shocks were associated with “an increase in support for nationalist and isolationist parties” as well (Broz et al., 2021).

Once he took power, President Trump seemingly capitalized on the economic backlash that helped him get elected by forgoing economic multilateralism and by adopting “bilateral deals where the United States” could “more effectively capitalize on its preponderant economic power”(Dai, 2020, p.501). The Trump Administration also replaced NAFTA, withdrew from the Trans-Pacific Partnership, blocked appointments to the World Trade Organization, and placed tariffs on China which eventually precipitated a trade war. All these decisions illustrate the hostility that populist and nationalist leaders like Trump have toward certain aspects of the liberal international order such as international institutions and unfettered free trade.

### **The European Union and Limitations on Sovereignty**

Alternatively, the European Union (EU) and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) provide an example of how increasing liberal institutionalism after the Cold War has led to a rise in populism and nationalism in various European countries.

#### **Eurozone crisis**

In the highly institutionalized world of today, supra-national unions are organizations “that operate above the nation-state level” (Lamy et al., 2021). Inherently, these bodies limit sovereignty as states and global actors from one or more countries can make decisions that can affect the citizens of a foreign nation. This has helped to create the impression that “foreign forces are controlling” the lives of citizens (Mearsheimer, 2019, p. 35), a reality that has been proven right by some of the negative effects that prominent liberal institutions like the EU and IMF have on citizens who come under their authority.

An example of this is the case of Greece during the Eurozone crisis in which both the excessive economic neoliberalism and institutional overreach of the liberal order can be seen. During the Eurozone crisis, the European Central Bank, the European Commission, and the IMF

provided monetary relief packages to debt-ridden Greece but on terms of strict conditionality. These conditions entailed pension reductions, bonus cuts, cuts in public investment, labor, and wage reform, and privatization. In the face of a decline in wages, high unemployment, and cuts in well-liked benefits, the austerity-based conditions were soundly rejected by the Greek people during a bailout referendum in 2015. But despite these results, the government in charge reached a new agreement with the creditors that still maintained austerity policies (Kramer, 2019). These sorts of austere conditionalities that are placed on loans from institutions like the IMF, especially after the hyper-globalization of the 1990s, made some regard the organization as an instrument “for the enforcement of classical laissez-faire as a universal governing principle” (Mearsheimer, 2019, p.36). As a consequence, by 2013, 80 percent of Greeks were reported to not trust the European Union and the left-wing populist Syriza became the second-largest party after the 2012 elections (Dokos et al., 2013). The Greek example helps illustrate the overbearing power that institutions like the EU and IMF have on nation-states.

Alternatively, Hungary’s approach to its debt crisis, which took place at the same time as Greece’s, provides an alternative to the Greek approach as the country took a more combative strategy to conditionality with its bailout. After the nationalist and right-wing populist Fidesz party took over in 2010, the Orban administration largely disregarded the austere “fiscal framework agreed to in the previous year” between the IMF and the prior Hungarian government and instead employed a set of “unorthodox fiscal policies” while maintaining fiscal sovereignty. By the end of the crisis, despite “receiving a fraction of the funding Greece did”, Hungary re-stabilized, and its outlook fared much better than Greece's (Kramer, 2019, p. 610-11).

Interestingly enough, it is not only the recipients of funds that often disapprove of the increased economic authority of supra-national institutions like the IMF and the EU but also other member states within the union as well, like the more Euroskeptic parties of the Netherlands and Finland who oppose the costs of bailouts. Furthermore, despite all being critical of the economic powers of the EU, the growing populist movement in different member states focus on separate drawbacks. The National Front in France is concerned with the lack of protectionism, the Communist party in Cyprus is against the Euro, and the Left Party in Germany and the right-wing Fidesz in Hungary think EU policies are too economically liberal in general (Taggart and Szczerbiak, 2018). This all helps to signify the complications that exist when states are conjoined together in a system where sovereignty and autonomy are at best shared, but often severely limited.

## **Brexit**

Under the system of supra-national organizations like the European Union, the national concerns and interests of one country may not be sufficiently addressed as sole autonomy over decision-making is not always existent. When the public feels like they have limited control over their own destiny, it can lead to a populist and nationalist backlash against the institutions that they feel have limited their sovereignty. The 2016 UK EU membership referendum in which Britons voted to leave the European Union exemplified this phenomenon. One of the main motivators in the vote for Brexit was that UK citizens thought “that their country had surrendered too much authority to Brussels and it was time to reassert sovereignty” (Mearsheimer, 2019, p.35-36). More specifically, proponents of the move believed that they had “lost control of trade, human rights, and migration” and felt that “EU law” was supreme “over UK law” (Broz et al., 2021, p.468). On immigration specifically, voters were “unhappy that people from eastern Europe used the EU’s policy of open borders to migrate easily to Britain”. This national sentiment regarding immigration became even more enhanced by the 2015 Middle East refugee crisis as well (Mearsheimer, 2019, p.37).

### **Conclusion**

When evaluating electoral data, survey data, and general sentiment, the role that the liberal international order and its policy prescriptions have played in creating the recent rise of populism and nationalism becomes apparent. In particular, excessive economic neoliberalism, especially in the form of expanded free trade, and institutional overreach on the part of multilateral and supranational institutions seems to be linked with the discontent that is witnessed in various Western countries. The negative effects of increased economic integration and globalization as well as the loss of sovereignty at the hands of international institutions especially seem to be associated with the rise of populist and nationalist sentiment in the United States and Europe. Although there might be other factors and explanations that have caused this rise in anti-establishment and elitist sentiment, like culture, the information provided in this paper shows that the liberal international order has played at least some part in this. However, more research can and should be conducted to help explain this global phenomenon and trend even further.

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**Looming Threats of a Nuclear Crisis: Steps Toward an Improved Iran Deal & The Need for  
Deft Diplomacy**

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**Abstract**

Nuclear weapons threaten the safety of the United States and that of the international community. The Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) was an international agreement that limited Iran's development of its nuclear capabilities. Under the JCPOA, Iran dismantled its nuclear program and opened facilities to extensive international inspections. In 2018, the U.S. withdrew from the deal. In response, Iran resumed enriching uranium at higher concentrations to the point where they have now amassed enough material for several nuclear weapons. There is a dire need for an improved JCPOA-like Iran deal. Realistically, a new agreement will take years to renegotiate. In the more immediate term, the U.S. and international actors should provide Iran with limited sanctions relief in turn for daily monitoring by International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) inspectors, online enrichment monitors, and camera surveillance systems. To prevent a nuclear crisis and ensure stability in the long term, the U.S. should encourage down-blending techniques that reduce highly-enriched uranium to lower levels and limit the amount of highly-enriched uranium gas Iran has at its disposal. Implementing these objectives will prevent conflict and could be used to initiate future talks on a more comprehensive JCPOA-like deal. However, without large concessions from the U.S., there is a high probability of increased tensions between the two. The international community must recognize that any hope of a non-nuclear Iran depends on the country's willingness to comply. Nevertheless, as seen with the past initial success of the JCPOA, this is not entirely impossible.

## **Introduction**

Nuclear weapons threaten the safety and well-being of the United States and that of the international community. In response, many states have signed agreements to restrict their use and the proliferation of nuclear materials. The Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) was an international agreement that limited the development of Iran's nuclear capabilities. Under the JCPOA, Iran dismantled its nuclear program and opened facilities to extensive international inspections. In 2018, the U.S. withdrew from the deal, and Iran began exceeding set limits on its nuclear stockpile, enriching uranium at higher concentrations, and developing new centrifuges to accelerate enrichment capabilities (Masterson & Davenport, 2020). A new nuclear arms control deal will take years to craft. In the interim, the U.S. should take renewed steps toward restricting the development of Iran's nuclear program by incentivizing the Iranian government of Tehran to increase International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) monitoring techniques and reduce levels of highly-enriched uranium the country has at its disposal. Steps toward preventing a nuclear crisis should involve both immediate solutions, as well as additional goals that focus on promoting longer-term stability. By enacting such objectives, the U.S. can prevent a nuclear conflict spiral with Iran, safeguard its own interests, and that of the international community.

## **Threat of Iran's Nuclear Weapons Program & Failed Defense Attempts**

Iran began developing its nuclear arsenal in 1957, after signing a nuclear cooperation agreement with the United States. Under the agreement, the U.S. provided Iran with technical support and several kilograms of enriched uranium for research and peaceful uses of nuclear energy (Bahgat, 2006, 308). In the early stages of the development of its nuclear program, Iran relied heavily on support from the U.S. and Western powers in hopes of modernization. The 1979 Iranian Revolution hindered nuclear development as many Western countries withdrew support for the program (Bahgat, 2006, 310). In the late 1990s and early 2000s, tense relations with the U.S. led Iran to seek out help from China and the Soviet Union (Bahgat, 2006, 310).

In 2002, two previously unknown Iranian nuclear facilities were discovered, which led the European Union to engage in intense negotiations with Tehran to secure their commitment to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), as well as its Additional Protocol. The Additional Protocol verified that Iran was not pursuing nuclear weapons through more aggressive IAEA inspections. In 2006, Iran was referred to the UN Security Council over its failure to comply with NPT guidelines; the Council demanded that Iran suspend its nuclear program and enrichment activities. In 2015, the IAEA stated that after 2009, there was no evidence of nuclear activity in Iran (International Atomic Energy Agency, 2015).

Of late, Iran has been facing intense international isolation and damaging sanctions. In 2015, Iran and several world powers, including the U.S., signed the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA). In response, Iran dismantled its nuclear program and allowed IAEA inspectors to conduct more extensive monitoring and surveillance of its facilities. In exchange, Iran was rewarded billions of dollars' worth of sanctions relief, which helped to rebuild the country's floundering economy (Robinson, 2022). States feared that without a deal, the region would face a nuclear crisis. "Israel had taken preemptive military action against suspected nuclear facilities in Iraq and Syria and could do the same against Iran" (Robinson, 2022). Many also worried that Saudi Arabia would obtain nuclear capabilities in response (Robinson, 2022).

After a smooth start, the deal collapsed in 2018, after President Trump withdrew. As a result, Iran has resumed enriching uranium at higher concentrations to the point where they have now amassed enough material for "several nuclear weapons", according to IAEA chief Rafael Grossi (Alkhalidi, 2023). With the ability to quickly assemble a weapon, the U.S. and the global

community should propose clear policy objectives that prevent any further development. In the absence of a deal, incentivizing Iran to reverse its current nuclear course is the best way to prevent a crisis. Sanctions relief and increased surveillance measures by the IAEA are the most effective diplomatic tools the U.S. can impose. When offering such suggestions, it is important to first analyze limitations of the JCPOA as to not echo policy mistakes.

### **Political Conditions Prior to the Creation of the JCPOA & Limitations**

Understanding the shortcomings of the JCPOA is essential to avoid repeating policy directives of the past. By acknowledging its limitations, policymakers will be better able to propose new amendments that increase the likelihood of future negotiations. The context in which Iran entered the JCPOA also is necessary to understand its initial success. In 2012, the international community placed an embargo on crude oil to coerce Iran into giving up its nuclear program (Kim & Lee, 2019). The government of Tehran was heavily reliant on oil to support the country's economy, as it made up 90 percent of Iran's export revenue (Kim & Lee, 2019). Multilateral sanctions damaged Iran's economy at an unprecedented level. In 2012, Iran's GDP contracted by six to nine percent (Kim & Lee, 2019).

In 2013, the election of reformist president Hassan Rouhani demonstrated the public's frustration with Iran's economic underperformance and international sanctions. This election served as a signal to the international community that Iran was ready to begin negotiations on a nuclear arms deal. Soon after, talks materialized into the basic framework that would later become the JCPOA (Kim & Lee, 2019). With this, multilateral sanctions and corresponding domestic pressure led to the creation of the JCPOA. When proposing new policies, this political context is important to understand as internal domestic pressure could be levied to initiate a new round of talks.

Under the JCPOA, Iran agreed not to produce both highly-enriched uranium and plutonium while certifying that its nuclear facilities were only pursuing research on civilian uses of nuclear materials (Robinson, 2022). IAEA inspectors were given full access to Iran's facilities as well as its undeclared sites, which allowed the international community to guard against potential covert operations to build a weapon, which Iran has been accused of in the past (Robinson, 2022). The deal also limited the number and types of centrifuges Iran could operate as well as its stockpile of enriched uranium. In exchange for nuclear restrictions and monitoring, the U.S. and other signatories provided Iran with sanctions relief by lifting all nuclear-related sanctions, which had devastated the country's economy (Robinson, 2022).

Despite the success of the JCPOA in its non-proliferation goals, many policy experts were quick to identify its shortcomings. Critics claimed that the agreement was problematic as it allowed Iran to maintain its massive nuclear infrastructure, unnecessary for peaceful uses. For example, the deal allowed Tehran to develop advanced centrifuges capable of producing highly-enriched uranium in a shorter time frame (Oren & Halevi, 2021). Some of the nuclear restrictions imposed were also designed to expire in 2024. Opponents of the JCPOA feared that the regime would wait out sunset clauses and emerge from the deal with the ability to produce enough uranium for several weapons (Oren & Halevi, 2021). While such fears were legitimate, this prediction would never come to fruition. Ultimately, U.S. withdrawal from the JCPOA agreement allowed Iran's nuclear program to go unchecked by the international community. While far from perfect, the JCPOA was a substantive starting point toward building a lasting non-proliferation agreement and basis for an improved US-Iran relationship. In its absence, Iran increased its enrichment of uranium, which is extremely worrisome in the context of nuclear assembly.

To make a nuclear weapon, natural uranium must be enriched in Uranium-235. Weapons-usable uranium can be used directly to produce a nuclear weapon. At this level, uranium must be enriched to 20 percent or more Uranium-235 (National Academy of Sciences, 2005, 222). Uranium enriched to more than 80 percent Uranium-235 is weapons-grade (National Academy of Sciences, 2005, 222). For nuclear weapons, uranium enriched to more than 90 percent Uranium-235 is preferred. After the JCPOA collapsed, it has been reported that Iran has “70 kilograms (154 pounds) of uranium enriched to 60 percent purity and 1,000 kilograms to 20 percent purity” which is enough material to make a number of bombs (Alkhaldi, 2023). Iran now has the ability to assemble a single weapon in less than seven days; when the JCPOA was in effect, this period was 12 months (Davenport, 2022).

This is a substantial reduction in Iran’s “breakout time” or the amount of days it would take for Iran to produce enough fissile material for nuclear assembly (Singh, 2020). Smaller breakout windows reduce the likelihood that international actors can interfere before the weapon is made. This is of particular concern in the case of Iran, as the country has been accused of covertly developing weapons. With a smaller breakout time, Iran could potentially assemble a weapon in-between IAEA inspector visits, without the knowledge of the international community. With this, there is a need for concrete policies that prevent Iran from taking further steps toward weapons development.

### **Immediate Steps Toward a New Deal: Sanctions Relief & Increased Verification Measures**

Realistically, it is going to take years to renegotiate a deal. In the more immediate term, it is prudent to initiate talks by offering Iran limited sanctions relief in turn for daily monitoring by IAEA inspectors (Davenport, 2022). Daily monitoring was a requirement of the JCPOA, since its dissolution, Iran has greatly limited access. U.S. officials are worried that Iran will secretly develop a weapon (Robinson, 2022). Daily inspections by IAEA officials would reduce the risk of a covert operation and allow the international community to mitigate this threat (Davenport, 2022).

Iran could also reconnect its online enrichment monitors which track enrichment levels in real time. Iran disconnected these devices after the IAEA censured the country over its failure to cooperate with an investigation. Reconnecting devices would allow inspectors to quickly determine if Iran was enriching uranium at weapons-grade levels. Without live monitors, analysis of enrichment levels can take up to three weeks (Davenport, 2022). This greatly hinders the IAEA’s ability to prevent the covert assembly of a bomb. Lastly, Iran could allow the IAEA to restart its camera surveillance system put in place to monitor facilities that were not being physically inspected by IAEA agents (Davenport, 2022). This would serve as an additional safeguard against Iran’s development of a weapon. All of these steps are impossible without agreement from Iran, but increased transparency measures are of benefit to the country as well.

For one, transparency would verify that Iran is developing nuclear materials for peaceful, medical and industrial uses as the government claims. Increased monitoring also reduces the risk of military action by the U.S. or Israel (Davenport, 2022). Israel is no stranger to using military action to deter Iran’s nuclear program; in November 2020, Mohsen Fakhrizadeh, the head of Iran’s nuclear program was assassinated by Mossad, Israel’s national intelligence agency (Davenport, 2022). Increasing verification would therefore benefit Iran by preventing escalation and sabotage by U.S. or Israeli military agents.

The U.S. could further incentivize Iran to be compliant with verification by providing meaningful sanctions relief to immediately rebuild their economy. Experts have floated ideas such as allowing Iran to sell petrochemical products as well as limited amounts of oil every month, which would provide instant capital and could be easily suspended if Iran became noncompliant

with monitoring (Davenport, 2022). These incentives could be used to increase transparency in the immediate, but longer-term stability requires more comprehensive amendments that go beyond the scope of the original tenets of the JCPOA. Amendments must be cognizant of the current nuclear situation and recognize that Iran has gained knowledge and leverage from its continued enrichment. Two additional policies—down-blending and limiting Iran’s stockpiles of uranium gas—will reduce the threat of a nuclear crisis by increasing Iran’s breakout time (Singh, 2020). However, convincing Tehran to give up its newly attained geopolitical position will not be easy.

### **Additional Steps Toward Long-Term Stability: Down-Blending & Limiting Uranium Gas**

Since the collapse of the JCPOA, Iran has taken steps toward enriching uranium at higher levels. Reimplementing the original 2015 deal would not be sufficient to mitigate the threat posed by Iran’s nuclear program, as the situation has changed. Iran has gained significant knowledge through the enrichment process that it cannot unlearn, more comprehensive policy directives should account for this. In the interim, along with sanctions relief and increased verification measures, down-blending and limiting Iran’s stockpiles of highly-enriched uranium gas will help to ensure stability. These longer-term solutions paired with sanctions relief and increased verification measures will lay the groundwork for policymakers to reinstate nuclear talks.

The quickest way to reduce the threat of Iran assembling a weapon would be to down-blend highly-enriched uranium to lower levels (Davenport, 2022; U.S. Department of Energy, 2009). Currently, Iran has stockpiles of uranium enriched to 60 percent, which can be further enriched to 90 percent, the preferred percentage to create a bomb. Down-blending reduces the enrichment percentage by blending uranium with other materials, converting it to low-enriched uranium, at less than 20 percent (U.S. Department of Energy, 2009). When a country only has stockpiles of low-enriched uranium, it will take longer for them to develop a weapon. When a country's breakout time is small, there is a higher risk of a nuclear crisis. Down-blending seeks to increase Iran’s breakout time by reducing the amount of nuclear material Iran has ready for assembly. Highly-enriched uranium stockpiles are a source of leverage—convincing Iran to down-blend would require deft diplomacy.

A more feasible solution would be to limit the amount of highly-enriched uranium gas Iran has. Most of Iran’s stockpile is stored as gas, which can be inserted into centrifuges and enriched (Davenport, 2022). Limiting Iran’s stockpile would mitigate the risk of further enrichment. Despite the viability of these solutions, it is highly unlikely that the government of Tehran will concede its program as nuclear materials are a main source of leverage. Iran has reached a new geopolitical position due to its nuclear program, the likelihood that the state would trade its elevated status for sanctions relief is far-fetched. Further, Iran may see U.S. concessions as inadequate. Increased monitoring, down-blending, and limiting stockpiles of uranium are large demands for the U.S. to make without equal concessions. As a result, Tehran would likely reject such requests. Tehran’s rejection of U.S. concessions may increase tensions and could cause the government to retaliate by enriching uranium at even higher levels or ceasing relations altogether.

To encourage a return to the negotiating table, the U.S. should grant Iran more freedom to conduct ongoing nuclear activities in return for immediate daily access to facilities by IAEA inspectors, as well as restrictions on advanced centrifuge development. Limits placed on advanced centrifuge development will prevent Iran from furthering weapons development, this would also patch a shortcoming of the JCPOA. Resuming daily IAEA access will ensure that Iran is in compliance with this interim proposal. By allowing Iran to continue its ongoing activities with increased regulations, Tehran will be able to maintain its nuclear infrastructure and therefore, its

leverage. Granting Iran more freedom may be a large enough concession to incentivize their return to the negotiating table.

After daily monitoring is reenacted, the U.S. can then push for the reconnection of online enrichment monitors in exchange for sanctions relief. Once at the negotiating table, longer-term solutions, like down-blending and limiting stockpiles of uranium, can be discussed. To this end, restraining Iran's nuclear program and achieving stability in the region is dependent on Tehran's willingness to comply with policy demands—without this, no deal can be reached.

## **Conclusion**

Since the collapse of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, Iran has amassed enough material for several nuclear weapons. Iran's nuclear development does not only threaten U.S. objectives but those of the international community as well. With respect to the looming threats of a nuclear crisis, it is of utmost importance that the United States and world powers make progress toward negotiating a comprehensive nuclear weapons deal with Iran. A new agreement will take years to renegotiate, in the more immediate the U.S. should propose policy directives to prevent a nuclear conflict from spiraling out of control. By providing sanctions relief for increased verification measures, the U.S. can reduce the risk that Iran will covertly develop weapons, while also preventing the enrichment of uranium at weapons-grade levels. Sanctions relief would allow Iran to immediately rebuild their economy.

To ensure long-term stability, the international community could encourage Iran to down-blend highly-enriched uranium to lower levels and place limits on the amount of highly-enriched uranium gas the country has stockpiled. Both policies would lengthen Iran's breakout time while allowing the country to maintain its nuclear leverage. Implementing these objectives will help to prevent conflict and initiate future talks on a more comprehensive JCPOA-like deal. However, without large concessions from the U.S., there is a high probability that the government of Tehran will refuse U.S. demands, increasing tensions between the two. Allowing Iran to maintain their nuclear leverage in exchange for immediate daily IAEA access and restrictions on advanced centrifuge development may be a large enough concession to encourage Iran to return to the negotiating table. With larger concessions from the U.S., longer-term solutions can then be discussed.

It is vital to recognize that any hope of a non-nuclear Iran depends on the country's willingness to comply. Nevertheless, as seen with the past initial success of the JCPOA, this is not entirely impossible.

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