RECONSTRUCTING LIBERAL CYBERSPACE: HOW CAN LIBERAL NATIONS RESPOND TO CONTESTATION IN INTERNET GOVERNANCE?

By

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Abstract

With the increasing prevalence of post-liberal challenges within the domain of internet governance, it has become increasingly clear that the multistakeholder model which has been hegemonic within cyberspace for decades is incommensurate with the current de facto cyber balance of power. As countries from the 'non-likeminded' sovereigntist sphere of internet governance continuously look to challenge and contest liberal hegemony, which in this thesis is defined by the acceptance of the multistakeholder model, countries from the liberal international order are consequently put into a circumstance as to where they must defend such power in order to attempt to upkeep their values and principles within cyberspace. Consequently, in making references towards how states can deal with such contestation in the realm of the internet, this thesis will look to establish which scenario response employed by liberal nation's has proved the most fruitful for the preservation of the multistakeholder model's hegemony, and therefore the prevalence of liberal values and principals in internet governance.

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Introduction

Of increasing international significance, the concept of "internet governance is now an active topic of international discussion"[1] in policymaking and academic circles alike. The roots of internet governance are formulated and predisposed from within the 'liberal order' meaning that the formation of protocols and institutions to consolidate this untested, yet swiftly evolving hotbed of social, political, and economic activity globally were centralised by 'the West'. However, from the 1980s, the liberal hegemony of cyberspace shifted, as the status quo manifested that "internet governance should be built on democratic multistakeholder processes, ensuring the meaningful and accountable participation of all stakeholders, including governments, the private sector, civil society, the technical community, the academic community and users"[2] creating the liberal "underlying ideology of a combination of free market and pluralist civil society thinking"[3]. In highlighting how this model represents how internet governance has come to fruition, we must question its authority in cyberspace today. Acknowledging the multistakeholder model as being "strong in technical authority but weak in legitimate political authority"[4], we can conclude that this model of governance is intrinsically dependent upon the predominance of the liberal international order and the acceptance of its principles.

However, questions have arisen in respect of the power and ordering of cyberspace, as it is "widely agreed that we have, or are now making, the transition from a liberal international order into a new reality"[5]. Barrinha and Renard, thrusted the concept of 'post-liberal cyber space' into the limelight highlighting that multipolarity of the world within the cyber realm is

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[1] Savage, John E., McConnell, Bruce W. 2015. *Exploring Multi-Stakeholder Internet Governance. New York: EastWest Institute.* P.2

[2] *Ibid.* P.3

[3] Flonk, Daniëlle., Jachtenfuchs, Markus., Obendiek, Anke S.. 2020. *Authority Conflicts in Internet Governance: Liberals vs. Sovereigntists?. Global Constitutionalism 9(2). pp.364–86.* P.366

[4] *Ibid.* P.380

[5] Ikenberry, John G.. 2018. *The end of liberal international order?. International Affairs 94(1) pp. 7–24*

progressively apparent as "it's becoming increasingly clear that the US unipolar moment is over"[6]. Scholars like Segal recognise that "China and Russia are progressively catching up and are relatively more powerful than in any other domain"[7], preponing for alternative modes of governance concentrated upon cyber sovereignty whereby nation states centrally enact "control over the domestic information sphere internally, and strict adherence to the principle of non-intervention and self-determination externally"[8]. Flonk, distinguished how such conditions have fashioned two rival spheres within internet governance, *the liberal sphere,* and *the sovereigntist sphere*, who compete in a de facto multipolar cyber balance of power, whereby despite the apparent predominance of the multistakeholder model which advocates for liberal normative and institutional principles, "intense norm collisions, and strategic attempts at competitive regime creation and regime shifting towards intergovernmental structures by the sovereigntist sphere"[9] take place.

Such means of contestation is comparable to that of contested multilateralism, in which all stakeholders compete to shape norms and govern activities through the pursuit of strategies within existing or newly created multilateral institutions. This in turn "challenges the status quo of the multistakeholder model"[10] and creates the tone, and the core tension that will be explored in this thesis, that liberal democracies are operating as though there is consensus on liberal governance of the internet which equates with the rules-based international order. Milton Mueller illustrates how "a state-centric approach to global governance cannot easily co-exist with a multistakeholder regime. Fundamentally, they are in competition; one or the

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[6] *Barrinha, Andre., Renard, Thomas. 2020. Power and diplomacy in the post-liberal cyberspace. International Affairs 96(3). pp.749–766. P.752*
[7] *Segal, Adam. 2016. Hacked World Order: How Nations Fight, Trade, Maneuver, and Manipulate in the Digital Age. New York: Public Affairs*
[8] *Broesders, Dennis., van den Berg, Bibi. 2020. Governing Cyberspace. London: Rowman & Littlefield. P.8*
[9] *Flonk, Daniëlle., Jachtenfuchs, Markus., Obendiek, Anke S.. 2020. Authority Conflicts in Internet Governance: Liberals vs. Sovereigntists?. Global Constitutionalism 9(2). pp.364–86. P.364*
[10] *Barrinha, Andre., Renard, Thomas. 2020. Power and diplomacy in the post-liberal cyberspace. International Affairs 96(3). pp.749–766. P.759*

other must prevail in the domain of Internet governance"[11]. Such tensions highlight how current international governance practiced by the 'liberal sphere' in cyberspace is one of "'norms-based approach' to cyber deterrence which is intended to deliver deterrent effect"[12] to prompt a global culture of cybersecurity, and to develop 'rules of the road' for military and offensive uses of cyberspace. However, this model ultimately depends upon the prominence of states acting in a likeminded fashion and as we head towards a 'post-liberal' multilateral cyberspace, the prevalence of this undefined and unembedded mode of governance is in question, presenting the current liberal positioning as conflictual in its conceptions.

The fact that the current liberal ordering of cyberspace is "superior in authority, but does not have the coercive power to enforce its decisions and grants it this power insofar as the pact of obedience has entrusted the use of legitimate force to it and to it alone"[13] presents issues for these nations, in that their positioning is incommensurate with the cyber balance of power, as more states adopt sovereigntist sentimentalities within their regime complexes "seeing the internet as a threat rather than an opportunity"[14]. Challenges to the multistakeholder model may not be entirely detrimental, the model being equated as obsolete in commanding cyberspace, and "intrinsically riven with asymmetric power and special interest capture"[15]. While such distinctions are valid, they ignore that without the conferring guarantor and accepted principles of the multistakeholder model within internet governance, regime shifts towards the sovereigntist model place the integral liberal normative values and principles such as human rights, freedom of expression, and the free flow of information in incremental

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[11] Mueller, Milton. 2017. *Will the Internet Fragment?: Sovereignty, Globalization and Cyberspace. Cambridge: Polity. P.117*

[12] Stevens, Tim. 2012. *A Cyberwar of Ideas? Deterrence and Norms in Cyberspace. Contemporary Security Policy 33(1). pp.148-170. P.149*

[13] Bobbio, Norberto. 1995. *'Democracy and the International System', in Cosmopolitan Democracy. eds. Archibugi, Daniele., Held, David. Cambridge, MA: Polity Press. P.25*

[14] Flonk, Daniëlle., Jachtenfuchs, Markus., Obendiek, Anke S.. 2020. *Authority Conflicts in Internet Governance: Liberals vs. Sovereigntists?. Global Constitutionalism 9(2). pp.364–86. P.366*

[15] Scholte, Jan Aart. 2020. *Multistakeholderism Filling the Global Governance Gap?. Stockholm: Global Challenges Foundation. P.22*

danger internationally. Consequently, the question is posed what can liberal nations do to ensure that such normative principles and values are upheld in a system that lacks authority and legitimacy in governance?

Such questions serve as the key premise of this thesis, which will firstly distinguish how and why scenarios of contestation within internet governance have resulted in either the upkeep or erosion of liberal normative liberal values and principles within the outlook of cyberspace. Furthermore, such an evaluation will be followed by empirically analysing which situation response enacted by the liberal nations is the most effective to counteract contestation of their principles and values. To establish this, Miles Kahler's 2016 framework which recognises the three possible scenarios for states to confront contestation in the kinetic world, in accommodation, disengagement, and fragmentation, will be employed to differentiate which of these decipherable retorts to post-liberal challenges in cyberspace has provided preservation to the essential normative standards that coexist within the multistakeholder model.

To establish these formulations, this thesis will firstly seek to determine fundamental theoretical considerations surrounding the conflictual positioning of liberal nations and their beliefs within the multistakeholder model. Secondly, the thesis will seek to formulate how a lack of legitimate authority has presented openings for the contestation of intrinsic liberal values and principles through contested multilateralism within internet governance, which has in turn been met by distaste in western nations who can no longer overwhelm differential transformation of normative boundaries. To decipher how these values have most effectively been upheld within the unprotected multistakeholder model of the post-liberal environment, a methodological investigation will be conducted to decipher which of Kahler's three possible responses to contestation has resulted in the peaceful co-existence and maintenance of liberal principles within cyberspace. This will be enacted by observing instances of contested

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multilateralism within selected state-centric forums of internet governance, before

recognising the effectiveness of the responses, using Kahler's framework.

Chapter 1- The Multistakeholder Model is Incommensurate with the Cyber Balance of Power

To establish how and why the perceived liberal hegemony of internet governance and the acceptance of values, interests, norms, and ideas have become subject to contestation within cyberspace, we must firstly conceptualise and establish the key theoretical and literary considerations surrounding why such contentions have come to fruition. It is recognised across academic literature that internet governance, defined as "the application by governments, the private sector and civil society of principles, norms, rules, procedures and programs that shape the evolution and use of the Internet"[16], has become susceptible to quarrels between nations "becoming a new arena for competition among states"[17], perpetuated through numerous conceptual disputations across domains including "constitutionalisation"[18], "norm construction and evolution"[19], and "state interests"[20].

How these tensions have mirrored wider frictions within the international arena, as "pundits see this emerging world order as a return to multipolarity"[21] has been a focus of recent academic examination. Barrinha and Renard looked to establish such a relationship, highlighting how the transition from the liberal world order to a new actuality "is clearly mirrored in cyberspace"[22] through conceptually "focussing on the dimensions of power,

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[16] *WGIG (Working Group on Internet Governance). 2005. Report of the Working Group on Internet Governance. http://www.wgig.org/docs/WGIGREPORT.pdf.*

[17] *Flournoy, Michèle., Sulmeyer, Michael. 2018. Battlefield internet: a plan for securing cyberspace. Foreign Affairs 97(5) Sept.–Oct. pp.40–46. P.40*

[18] *Celeste, Edoardo. 2019. Digital Constitutionalism: A New Systematic Theorisation. International Review of Law, Computers & Technology. 33(1). pp.76–99. P.77*

[19] *Finnemore, Martha., Hollis, Duncan B.. 2016. Constructing Norms for Global Cybersecurity. American Journal of International Law 110(3). pp.425–79. P.477*

[20] *Drezner, Daniel W. 2007. All Politics Is Global: Explaining International Regulatory Regimes. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press. P.136*

[21] *Acharya, Amitav. 2017. After Liberal Hegemony: The Advent of a Multiplex World Order. Ethics & International Affairs. 31(3). pp.271–285. P.276*

[22] *Barrinha, Andre., Renard, Thomas. 2020. Power and diplomacy in the post-liberal cyberspace. International Affairs 96(3). pp.749–766. P.751*

values and institutions"[23]. This thesis will build upon and converge these claims by underscoring how the transition to a post-liberal world within cyberspace is demonstrated within the tensions and contestation sanctioned against multistakeholder governance, as a representation of the liberal international order. Conceptually establishing how and why multistakeholder arrangements are intrinsically linked to 'the West' and its liberal values we can denote that nations supportive of the concept of 'cyber sovereignty' undermine and contradict multistakeholderism, eroding the liberal hegemony of internet governance. This chapter will contend that the liberal backed multistakeholder model, cannot claim predominance and the upkeep of its values within the international arena without the balance of power swinging in its favour. Consequently, the administrative and political circumstances affirm for greater contestation of liberal values and principles beyond the governmental structures of the multistakeholder model, as "many of the multilateralist countries that promote a state-governed Internet through notions such as 'cyber sovereignty' remain critical of human rights"[24].

1.1: The Multistakeholder Model

Although this concept has been argued to be "underdeveloped and susceptible to use in attempts to conceal or advance particular interests or agendas"[25], as a mode of governance, multistakeholderism has become an increasingly popular alternative to traditional multilateralism in tackling global threats. Multilateralism is defined by Ruggie as "an institutional form which coordinates relations among three or more states on the basis of 'generalized' principals of conduct… without regard to the particularistic interests of the

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[23] *Ibid. P.751*
[24] *Klimburg, Alexander., Faesen Louk. 2020. 'A Balance of Power in Cyberspace'. in Broesders, Dennis., van den Berg, Bibi. (Eds) Governing Cyberspace. London: Rowman & Littlefield. P.159-160*
[25] *Raymond, Mark., DeNardis, Laura. 2016. 'Multi-Stakeholderism: Anatomy of an Inchoate Global Institution'. in Research Volume Two Global Commission on Internet Governance: Who Runs the Internet? The Global Multi-Stakeholder Model of Internet Governance. Waterloo, Ontario: Centre for International Governance Innovation and the Royal Institute of International Affairs. P.20*

parties or the strategic exigencies that may exist in any specific occurrence"[26], converging

upon cooperation between nation state actors as means of deliberation to enact policy, while

multistakeholderism looks to assemble envoys from numerous state and non-state

constituencies who have a stake in deliberation process, consenting to regulate policy

challenges through "transplanetary, transcultural, transactional frameworks with processes

that moreover often side-line the state"[27]. As posited by Scholte, this binarily comes through

multistakeholder global governance's 'ancillary', "which brings nonstate actors into its

regulatory processes"[28], and 'executive' which "formulates and carries out global regulation,

autonomously from intergovernmental agencies"[29] formats, in turn fundamentally

challenging the authority of the multilateralist approach, and the "precept that rules

established by states should be equally applicable to all like cases"[30]. The motivating

principle of multistakeholder governance is that merging varied pools of knowledge and

insight can offer a more efficient platform for the resolution of global issues. Furthermore,

proponents of multistakeholderism maintain that multistakeholder arrangements attract higher

levels of investment and resources than multilateral institutions, as well as offering an

alternative basis for "global democracy and justice"[31], with individuals represented though

functional affiliations, rather than through their nation states.

However, what is distinctive about literature on multistakeholder global governance is that

analysis of such models is limited. Accounts of individual case studies where

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[26] *Ruggie, John Gerard. 1992. Multilateralism: The Anatomy of an Institution. International Organization 46 (3). pp.561–98. P.571*
[27] *Scholte, Jan Aart. 2020. Multistakeholderism Filling the Global Governance Gap?. Stockholm: Global Challenges Foundation. P.4*
[28] *Ibid. P.4*
[29] *Ibid. P.4-5*
[30] *Reus-Smit, Christian. 1997. The Constitutional Structure of International Society and the Nature of Fundamental Institutions. International Organization 52 (4) pp.555–89. P.559*
[31] *Doria, Avri. 2014. 'Use [and Abuse] of Multistakeholderism in the Internet'. in Radu, Roxana., Chenou, Jean-Marie., Weber, Rolf H. (Eds), The Evolution of Global Internet Governance. Heidelberg: Springer pp.115-138. P.117*

multistakeholderism has risen to prominence, have been applied to rapidly developing contemporary issues, where demands for governance have developed at a faster rate than traditional multilateralism has been able to respond to, being recognised as "effective in many social, political, economic and technical contexts, especially when the problems that arise are new, fast changing and complex with important social and cultural dimensions"[32]. This partially explains why multistakeholder governance has become viewed as the primary mechanism by which the internet has become regulated. While it is pivotal to stress that it is far from a monolithic enterprise, the consensus-based model responses to these challenges are sufficiently enabling for the primary goal of the Internet community to take place through the "distinct coordinating and administrative tasks that cumulatively keep the internet operational"[33]. Consequently, the apparatus for these tasks has developed within technical bodies and private firms with states "being generally uninvolved or involved as participants without superordinate decision-making authority"[34]. Furthermore, it has been recognised by Raymond and DeNardis that multistakeholderism has produced a decision-making process "driven by technical and market considerations"[35], which corroborating parties argue, has created a "a robust, open platform for innovation, investment, economic growth and the creation of wealth throughout the world, including in developing countries"[36].

While such factors offer a fractional account of why multistakeholderism rose to prominence as the model by which the internet would be governed, such interpretations fail to recognise how it's expansion and impermeant domination, has created "a multifaceted and sprawling

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[32] *Savage, John E., McConnell, Bruce W. 2015. Exploring Multi-Stakeholder Internet Governance. New York: EastWest Institute. P.4*
[33] *Raymond, Mark., DeNardis, Laura. 2016. 'Multi-Stakeholderism: Anatomy of an Inchoate Global Institution'. in Research Volume Two Global Commission on Internet Governance: Who Runs the Internet? The Global Multi-Stakeholder Model of Internet Governance. Waterloo, Ontario: Centre for International Governance Innovation and the Royal Institute of International Affairs. P.26*
[34] *Ibid. P.27*
[35] *Ibid. P.27*
[36] *Strickling, Lawrence. 2013. Moving Together Beyond Dubai. The National Telecommunications and Information Adminstriation. http://www.ntia. doc.gov/blog/2013/moving-together-beyond-dubai.*

international order, organized around economic openness, multilateral institutions, security cooperation and democratic solidarity"[37], where policy was "shaped to its own interests"[38].The original technological advancements of cyberspace facilitated uncontested regulation within 'the West', amidst technological hegemony. While the open and transparent manner of multistakeholderism was initially employed to promote technical advancement, web protocols and standards were fostered under the same protocol, as "credible participation required in-depth knowledge of the technologies in question"[39]. A decentralised approach to decision making therefore aided the initial formulation of this "new space of social, political and economic activity globally"[40], allowing multistakeholderism to become the prominent, coin by which the liberal international order governed the internet. Multistakeholderism, much like the liberal international order, became accepted as the status quo following the end of the Cold War and the bipolarity it brought about, as the means of a viable alternative of governance and authority for non-committal states was limited. Furthermore, as "the balance of technological innovation tipped away from the public sector to the private"[41], decision-making power passed to western corporations allowing us to understand how on several levels multistakeholderism has become bound to the liberal international order.

However, what is understated is how multistakeholderism's implementation was postulated parallactically within the liberal "underlying ideology of a combination of free market and pluralist civil society thinking"[42]. The enactment of the multistakeholder model of internet

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[37] Ikenberry, John G.. 2018. The end of liberal international order?. International Affairs 94(1). pp.7–23. p.7
[38] Mearsheimer, John J.. 2019. Bound to Fail: The Rise and Fall of the Liberal International
Order. International Security 43(4) pp. 7–50. p.20
[39] Savage, John E., McConnell, Bruce W. 2015. Exploring Multi-Stakeholder Internet Governance. New York: EastWest Institute. P.4
[40] Barrinha, Andre., Renard, Thomas. 2020. Power and diplomacy in the post-liberal cyberspace. International Affairs 96(3). pp.749–766. P.750
[41] Singer, Peter W., Friedman, Allan. 2014. Cybersecurity and cyberwar: what everyone needs to know. Oxford: Oxford University Press. p.14
[42] Flonk, Daniëlle., Jachtenfuchs, Markus., Obendiek, Anke S.. 2020. Authority Conflicts in Internet Governance: Liberals vs. Sovereigntists?. Global Constitutionalism 9(2). pp.364–86. P.366

governance was initially informed and dominated, by the liberal international order, but it is also inherently related to the normative values and principles. The open and inclusive nature to deliberations, decision-making, and accountability of Multistakeholderism has been recognised as being motivated to produce "effective, democratic and fair outcomes"[43], but as Hemmati argues, it is actually "based on democratic principles of transparency and participation"[44], a cornerstone of the liberal international order. Such circumstances in turn allow for "the multistakeholder model to promote freedom of expression, both online and off"[45], which Asmal denotes as being "more often, (than not) … a messy, loose-knit, exasperating, sprawling cacophony. Like pluralist democracy, it is the absolute worst form of consensus-building except for all the others"[46]. Further comparisons between the normative principles of multistakeholder internet governance and the liberal international order can be established by its context to contemporary neoliberal capitalism. The rise of multistakeholderism within internet governance coincided with a particular historical moment where liberalizing, privatising, and globalising were fundamental characteristics of the liberal world order as "corporatism went global"[47]. These conditions, as well as the nature of multistakeholderism, facilitated a globalised and digitalised disposition centred around liberal capitalism with the "global village"[48] developing as such. Such sentiments extended to critical literature as Hill enquired "whether multistakeholderism might be a new guise of

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[43] *Scholte, Jan Aart. 2020. Multistakeholderism Filling the Global Governance Gap?. Stockholm: Global Challenges Foundation. P.12*
[44] *Hemmati, Minu. 2002. Multi-stakeholder Processes for Governance and Sustainability: Beyond Deadlock and Conflict. London: Earthscan Publishing. P.2*
[45] *Strickling, Lawrence. 2013. Moving Together Beyond Dubai. The National Telecommunications and Information Adminstriation. http://www.ntia. doc.gov/blog/2013/moving-together-beyond-dubai.*
[46] *Asmal, Kader. 2000. First World Chaos, Third World Calm: A Multi Stakeholder Process to "Part the Waters" in the Debate over Dams. Le Monde. 15 November.*
[47] *Ottaway, Marina. 2001. Corporatism Goes Global: International Organizations, Nongovernmental Organization Networks, and Transnational Business. Global Governance 7(3). pp.265-92. P.265*
[48] *McLuhan, Marshall. Understanding Media. Boston: MIT Press.*

colonialist-imperialist world order"[49]. This tone of comparability is emphasised further once

we consider how the multistakeholder model emphasised the normative principles of "human

rights, freedom of expression and a limitation of state control"[50] as incremental values within

cyberspace, conditions that are the foundations of liberal societies.

Of paramount importance in delineating the connections between multistakeholder internet

governance and the liberal international order is how participation and approval of the two

entities are dependant upon being "accepted as an international norm"[51], with mutual

prevalence and power within the international arena being dependent upon states acting in

subscribing to both entities in a likeminded fashion. Nothing officially binds states to

involvement within, or accession to these bodies individually, therefore, in highlighting this

factor and the connected relationship between the two, we can come to understand how and

why, the multistakeholder model of internet governance serves as an inherent representation

of the liberal international order and its hegemony within cyberspace.

1.2 Postliberal Cyberspace

While we can understand how and why the multistakeholder model has come to embody the

liberal international order and its forays within internet governance, we can discern patterns

of contestation of its supremacy within cyberspace, academic and policy debates postulating

that the "hegemony of the liberal world is over"[52]. Considered by some to be the "fall of the

liberal international order"[53]. Viewpoints expressed in global governance literature have

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[49] *Hill, Richard. 2014. Internet Governance: The Last Gasp of Colonialism, or Imperialism by Other Means?. in Radu, Roxana., Chenou, Jean-Marie., Weber, Rolf H. (Eds). The Evolution of Global Internet Governance: Principles and Policies in the Making. Heidelberg: Springer. pp.79-94. P.83*
[50] *Flonk, Daniëlle., Jachtenfuchs, Markus., Obendiek, Anke S.. 2020. Authority Conflicts in Internet Governance: Liberals vs. Sovereigntists?. Global Constitutionalism 9(2). pp.364–86. P.368*
[51] *Internet Society. 2016. Internet Governance Why the Multistakeholder Approach Works. April 26. https://www.internetsociety.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/IG-MultiStakeholderApproach.pdf.*
[52] *Duncombe, Constance., Dunne, Tim. After liberal world order. International Affairs 94(1). pp.25-42 p.25.*
[53] *Mearsheimer, John J.. 2019. Bound to Fail: The Rise and Fall of the Liberal International Order. International Security 43(4) pp. 7–50. p.7*

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increasingly suggested that despite the early successes of the US and its allies, "we are now moving away from that order, towards a post-liberal context"[54].

Multiple accounts in the last decade have analysed components of the multilateral system underscoring a transition away from the hegemonic liberal order to a "post-Western"[55] era of uncertainty. While such challenges, as delineated by influential scholars including Ikenbury (2018), Mearsheimer (2019) and Acharya (2017), have produced conflicting views of the balance and ordering of the world today, what has remained prominent in all interpretations is how Russia and China as well as other "likeminded authoritarian regimes"[56], have sought to undermine and contradict the sustainability of liberal power and it's so called "universal values"[57], in the name of their own interests. While such moves have yet to convert into a viable substitute for the liberal international order it is delineable that opposing spheres of influence and authority have developed. Defined as an informal international group "which is delimited by the involved actors' perception of a common good or goal at a given level of governance"[58], we can understand how Russia, China, and other likeminded states, have developed a relative sphere in this abstract concept, becoming united on several divisive issues. These nations have "formally and informally aligned on a number of policy objectives"[59], and "committed to preserving their sovereign freedom of action at almost any cost"[60]. While disparities persist in Sino-Russian relations, what remains clear is that "both countries feel disenfranchised by a US-dominated system that imposes strict conditions on

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[54] *Barrinha, Andre., Renard, Thomas. 2020. Power and diplomacy in the post-liberal cyberspace. International Affairs 96(3). pp.749–766. P.752*
[55] *Stuenkel, Olivier. 2016. Post-western world. Cambridge: Polity.*
[56] *Götz, Elias., Merlen, Camille-Renaud. 2019. Russia and the question of world order. European Politics and Society 20(2). pp. 133-153. P.136*
[57] *Acharya, Amitav. 2017. After Liberal Hegemony: The Advent of a Multiplex World Order. Ethics & International Affairs. 31(3). pp.271–285. P.276*
[58] *Kreuder-Sonnen, Christian., Zürn, Michael. 2020. After Fragmentation: Norm Collisions, Interface Conflicts, and Conflict Management. Global Constitutionalism 9(2). pp.241–67. P.255*
[59] *Broesders, Dennis., van den Berg, Bibi. 2020. Governing Cyberspace. London: Rowman & Littlefield. P.8*
[60] *Lo, Bobo. 2020. The Sino-Russian partnership and global order. China Int Strategy Rev. 2. pp.306–324. P.306*

their participation"[61], unifying them in calling for structural reform to make the world order less imperial and more pluralistic.

Such challenges to the liberal international order have inevitably been reflected in internet governance, and the perceived Western hegemony of this domain. Barrinha and Renard, sought to frame how trends within the broader 'post-liberal' context, are echoed in cyberspace, through the employment of contestation within the virtues of power, values, and institutions, using cyberspace "to achieve goals in the kinetic realm"[62] allowing us to understand how "cyberspace itself is evolving to become less western-centric, and more 'postliberal'"[63] with individual actors maximising cyber proficiencies to influence the broader agenda in line with their own interests, creating an increasingly diluted Western hegemony allowing "cyber capabilities to become an increasing means by which countries can compensate for their lesser power in other domains"[64], and creating a new order in which "internet infrastructure and users are increasingly located outside the West"[65].

Nations like China and Russia have colluded to model control over the internet within their own ideologies and interests. The institutional and normative preferences of such nations "rally around the complex idea of 'cyber sovereignty' as the main organizing principle for interstate relations in cyberspace"[66]. Defined as a nations right "to choose its online development path, its network management model and its public Internet policies, and to equal participation in international cyberspace governance"[67], 'cyber sovereignty' is primarily motivated by the underlying ideology that "governments should decide about

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[61] *Mazarr, Michael J.. 2017. The once and future order. Foreign Affairs 96(1). p.27*
[62] *Barrinha, Andre., Renard, Thomas. 2020. Power and diplomacy in the post-liberal cyberspace. International Affairs 96(3). pp.749–766. P.755*
[63] *Ibid. P.756*
[64] *Ibid. P.755*
[65] *Ibid. P.756*
[66] *Broesders, Dennis., van den Berg, Bibi. 2020. Governing Cyberspace. London: Rowman & Littlefield. P.8*
[67] *Creemers, Rogier. 2020. China's Conception of Cyber Soverigty. in Broesders, Dennis., van den Berg, Bibi. (Eds) Governing Cyberspace. London: Rowman & Littlefield. P.109*

domestic policies without external intervention and constraints and enter into international agreements on the basis of sovereign equality"[68]. Such a concept has enormous institutional and normative consequences for cyberspace, as not only does it wrestle back regulatory power from the liberally dominated multistakeholder model granting more power to states through intergovernmental institutions like the UN agency of International Telecommunication Union (ITU), but it also endows nations with the capability to impose their own normative identity upon their 'closed' internet spaces, as "sovereigntist contenders see the content of internet-based communication as a threat to domestic values and domestic stability that needs to be controlled rather than encouraged"[69]. These circumstances have led internet governance to become increasingly competitive, fragmented and vitally disordered, with Flonk suggesting that such conditions have led to the creation of an alternative 'sovereigntist sphere' within cyberspace to counter the liberal international order's domination of this domain.

However, given its pre-conceptualisation in this paper, the multistakeholder model serves as a symbolic representation of the positionality of the liberal international orders in internet governance, and the wider world, allowing us to understand how challenges made by non-liberal nations who endorse 'cyber sovereignty', serve as a potent depiction of the erosion of the liberal international order.

1.3 Contestation

In order to understand how countries supportive of 'cyber sovereignty' have brought about a post-liberal ordering within internet governance and the wider diminishment of the liberal international order, it is pivotal to acknowledge that the decentralised grounding of decision-

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[68] *Flonk, Daniëlle., Jachtenfuchs, Markus., Obendiek, Anke S.. 2020. Authority Conflicts in Internet Governance: Liberals vs. Sovereigntists?. Global Constitutionalism 9(2). pp.364–86. P.366*
[69] *Ibid. P.368*

making in multistakeholderism, is riddled with inconsistencies amongst post-liberal

challenges. Backers of multistakeholderism argue that it produces more democratic and

pluralistic results to governance through it's entrenched liberal values, and through the

delegation of central authority away from states that may be "subject to tyrannical and

partisan tendencies"[70]. It is however essential to denote that states are not bound to the

exclusivity of this model, as fundamentally "states remain sovereign and have not yet

abandoned their monopoly of force to a common authority endowed with exclusive rights of

coercive power"[71]. This is because within the multistakeholder model, there is "no unitary

system that oversees and coordinates the internet"[72] as its nature and liberal grounding

endows those with an investment, outside of the traditional multilateralist system, with a

voice based upon the assertion that governments have neither the capacity nor the right to

monopolise authority. Consequently, the upkeep of power in the multistakeholder model is

dependent upon nation states acting in a likeminded fashion and pledging to its normative

guidance through a 'pact of obedience'. In this sense, acting in a likeminded manner requires

the predominance of hegemony for the liberal international order, as "a fully democratised

international society presupposes that all the states that compose it are democratic"[73].

However, the predominance of such hegemony is lacking in the post-liberal trend of 'cyber

sovereignty' which has been "promoted by China and Russia and has expanded to countries

such as Brazil, India, and Turkey"[74]. While this divergent model differs from state-to-state, it

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[70]*Reagle, Joseph. 1999. Why the Internet is Good: Community Governance That Works Well. https://cyber.harvard.edu/archived_content/people/reagle/regulation-19990326.html.*
[71] *Mouffe, Chantel. 2009. Democracy in a Multipolar World. Millennium: Journal of International Studies 37(3). pp. 549–561. P.554*
[72] *Raymond, Mark., DeNardis, Laura. 2016. 'Multi-Stakeholderism: Anatomy of an Inchoate Global Institution'. in Research Volume Two Global Commission on Internet Governance: Who Runs the Internet? The Global Multi-Stakeholder Model of Internet Governance. Waterloo, Ontario: Centre for International Governance Innovation and the Royal Institute of International Affairs. P.28*
[73] *Mouffe, Chantel. 2009. Democracy in a Multipolar World. Millennium: Journal of International Studies 37(3). pp. 549–561. P.555*
[74] *Shahbaz, Adrian., Funk, Allie., Hackl, Andrea. 2020. Freedom House Special Report 2020 User Privacy or Cyber Sovereignty?. https://freedomhouse.org/report/special-report/2020/user-privacy-or-cyber-sovereignty.*

is generally recognised that its approving nations are united in direct convergence to undermine the multistakeholder model's key liberal components and Western influence, by essentially removing themselves from this deliberation process, operating chiefly through intergovernmental organisations, and by 'closing' their internet spaces in a bid to " protect sovereignty and core domestic values and goals against domestic or international actors empowered by the internet"[75]. Therefore, such contestation of the hegemony of multistakeholderism, denotes the current positioning of liberal nations within internet governance as being incommensurate with the cyber balance of power, delusional to the reality that they are no longer operating in a hegemonic environment.

However, it is equally important to denote that the incompatibility of the multistakeholder model and the cyber balance of power enabled through contention by sovereigntist nations, has left the positioning of the liberal international order both contradicted and conflicted. Defined broadly as "all instances of a questioning and/or rejection of norms and institutions in discourse"[76], contestation has become a critical issue for liberal nations .Generally practiced by revisionist challenger's, contestation has generally been seen as "aiming at rolling back progressive normative developments"[77]. Given how in many ways such a definition represents the motivations of countries practicing 'cyber sovereignty' which diminish the multistakeholder model and its normative function, we can correspondingly see how the nations of the liberal international order have been forced into a position where contestation has become repressed and reproached. This is highlighted through the enactment of their own individual resistance and political backlash which "can be understood as a sub-type of contestation that is extraordinary in its claims and focused on reverting to a prior

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[75] Flonk, Daniëlle., Jachtenfuchs, Markus., Obendiek, Anke S.. 2020. *Authority Conflicts in Internet Governance: Liberals vs. Sovereigntists?. Global Constitutionalism 9(2). pp.364–86. P.366*
[76] Deitelhoff, Nicole. 2020. *What's in a Name? Contestation and Backlash against International Norms and Institutions. The British Journal of Politics and International Relations 22(4). pp.715–27. P.718*
[77] *Ibid. P.717*

social condition"[78], which in this case comes in the form of the acceptance of continued exercise of the multistakeholder model. However, practicing such repression leads to a contradictory positioning for liberal nations as in a system of contestation, "'democratic communicative action' is a necessary condition for norms, rules and principles to be considered as appropriate and legitimate"[79]. Therefore, given how "the normative observation maintains that if contestation is a necessary condition for norm validity, norms must in principle be contestable"[80], we can understand how resistance to 'cyber sovereignty' by the liberal international order is in fact inconsistent with the values and identity they are looking to promote in the multistakeholder model, prioritising their own interests over the broader internet community.

Yet, it important to distinguish how rapprochement of contestation is permissible in the eyes of likeminded governments as they have come to see 'cyber sovereignty' as merely "a shibboleth to justify of authoritarianism"[81]. "Taboo-breaking behaviour and emotive appeals to achieve their mission"[82] through resistance is motivated by distrust and admonishment of sovereigntist regimes, as to accept their principles in cyberspace, would undermine their positionality in a broader sense, giving legitimacy to nations who actively look to repress human rights, freedom of expression, and freedom of information. While contestation of multistakeholderism would not generally be detrimental to liberal governance as "not all norms are worth preserving and most normative progress proceeds by way of contestation"[83],

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[78] Alter, Karen J.., Zürn, Michael. 2020. *Conceptualising Backlash Politics: Introduction to a Special Issue on Backlash Politics in Comparison. The British Journal of Politics and International Relations 22(4). pp.563–84.* P.563

[79] Wiener, Antje. 2007. *Contested Meanings of Norms: A Research Framework. Comparative European Politics 5. pp.1–17.* P.6

[80] Ibid, P.13

[81] Creemers, Rogier. 2020. *China's Conception of Cyber Soverigty. in Broesders, Dennis., van den Berg, Bibi. (Eds) Governing Cyberspace. London: Rowman & Littlefield.* P.117

[82] Deitelhoff, Nicole. 2020. *What's in a Name? Contestation and Backlash against International Norms and Institutions. The British Journal of Politics and International Relations 22(4). pp.715–27.* P.718

[83] Ibid. P.716

the multistakeholder model is crucial to the upkeep of liberal values and principles threatened by a shift in the balance of power in cyberspace, and as such we can come to understand why resistance to contestation has become permissible within the liberal international order. Consequently, in acknowledging this, we can appreciate how resistance to contestation manifests because the genuine alternative the sovereigntist sphere of governance offers to liberal hegemony is such that shallow contestation can no longer be afforded.

We are therefore presented with a scenario of two competing spheres of authority within internet governance, who have contrasting views of how cyberspace should operate. Given how such circumstances bring about structural challenges to the liberal values of multistakeholderism, we can understand the need for these nations to utilise a credible response to contestation in the post-liberal internet, to ensure that their values and principles are upheld in cyberspace.

1.4 Methodology

To evaluate which scenario responses utilised by the liberal international order to deal with contestation of internet governance have best enabled liberal states to maintain their values and principles in cyberspace this study will use a scenario construction methodology, borrowing the framework proposed by Miles Kahler in his 2016 work *'The Global Economic Multilaterals: Will Eighty Years Be Enough?'*. Kahler highlights three possible scenarios for states to deal with contestation in the shifting world order, coming in the form of accommodation, disengagement, and fragmentation. These concepts can be defined as follows:

Accommodation means "that a compromise is found between the main powers of the international system, essentially preserving the existing institutions but providing more space for rising powers"[84].

Disengagement means "that rules-based multilateralism loses traction, and the international system becomes a zero-sum game"[85].

Fragmentation means that "rising powers grow frustrated with the lack of, or slow pace of, accommodation from established powers and decide to create their own institutions, underpinned by their own values and interests, to compete with western-led ones"[86].

While Kahler used this model to make predictions for global ordering following engagement between economic multilaterals in this post-liberal environment, this thesis will frame this model through the proposals made by Barrinha and Renard, who classify how such a model for evaluating scenarios is not limited to economic multilateralism, but to multilateralism in general, making the topic of cyberspace and internet governance valid for such an evaluation.

Giving prevalence to these "three main possible responsive scenarios to deal with this contestation in the kinetic world"[87], this thesis will give reference to three institutional case studies to examine the responses employed by liberal nations following instances of contestation against their values and principles as depicted through the multistakeholder model, to investigate which scenario has best resulted in the upkeep and contention of these standards. Using institutions as the principle mode of study to reflect how the liberal international order is focussed upon preserving the multistakeholder model, whilst sovereigntists pursue separate institutional arrangements not subjugated by authoritative

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[84] *Barrinha, Andre., Renard, Thomas. 2020. Power and diplomacy in the post-liberal cyberspace. International Affairs 96(3). pp.749–766. P.765*
[85] *Ibid. P.765*
[86] *Ibid. P.765*
[87] *Ibid. P.765*

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Western states and firms to gauge the prevailing levels of contestation before and after the employment of a response, this empirical evaluation will utilise contested multilateralism as a measurement, whereby states dissatisfied with the status quo use "multilateral institutions, existing or newly created, to challenge the rules, practices, or missions of existing multilateral institutions"[88], either through 'regime shifting' or 'competitive regime creation'. This will be demonstrated by gauging the level of contestation faced by the liberal international order at an individual conference, and thereafter by examining which scenario response was employed by liberal nations to counter this, and how effective that response was.

Additionally, to delineate which nations can be assigned the label of liberal in the realm of cyberspace, this thesis will borrow the concept of spheres of authority as proposed by Flonk et al. While these authors noted that such categorisations "are not meant to be an accurate representation of a complex reality but rather constitute an abstraction from this reality in order to use them as analytical concepts"[89], distinguishing between these two key spheres of authority in the this area of contestation will enable us to make the necessary deductions about the posturing and responses of liberal as well as the reactions from non-likeminded nations. Such understandings will be referred to as *the liberal sphere,* who believe that the internet should be "mostly be governed by private self-regulation based on voluntary participation and substantive expertise"[90], whereby institutions are flexible and stakeholder-based and their "social purpose is to encourage the development of the internet as much as possible by giving individuals, firms and civil society organisations as much freedom as possible"[91]. Contrastingly, the *sovereigntist sphere* sees the internet as a danger rather than as

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[88] *Morse, Julia C.., Keohane, Robert O.. 2014. Contested multilateralism. The Review of International Organizations 9. pp.385–412. P.385.*
[89] *Flonk, Daniëlle., Jachtenfuchs, Markus., Obendiek, Anke S.. 2020. Authority Conflicts in Internet Governance: Liberals vs. Sovereigntists?. Global Constitutionalism 9(2). pp.364–86. P.366*
[90] *Ibid. P.366*
[91] *Ibid. P.366*

a prospect and therefore believe that it should be "governed by intergovernmental institutions in order to respect sovereignty and avoid external encroachments"[92]

In formulating how liberal nations have positioned themselves, this study will highlight the effect this had upon the contention of these values and principles at the following conference and will seek to illustrate which of these scenarios has proved most effective for liberal states, therefore serving as a practical illustration of how they could engage negotiations and disagreements on internet governance in years to come, as "it is not possible to establish a perfect concept that truly captures the essence of what is going on in empirical reality"[93]. This will be incrementally tested against the variable of the increasingly contested multilateral internet governance in cyberspace which relevant academic literature almost universally accepts as being "inevitably becoming affected by post-liberal trends"[94]. Consequently, this study will look to establish how the prominence of the recognition that in "a state-centric approach to global governance cannot easily co-exist with a multistakeholder regime"[95], the pursuit of accommodation offers the most likely route forward for the liberal international order.

1.5 Data

To determine the contestation of the liberal values and principles of cyberspace as presented through the multistakeholder model, we must define what we regard this to be. Guaging the level of contestation liberal nations face from the sovereigntist sphere prior to, and following the enactment of one of Kahler's three scenario responses at a preceding conference, this thesis will measure the levels displayed in two key variables of contested multilateralism,

[92] *Ibid. P.366*
[93] *Swedberg, Richard. 2018. How to Use Max Weber's Ideal Type in Sociological Analysis. Journal of Classical Sociology 18(3) pp.181–96. P.184*
[94] *Ibid. P.755*
[95] *Mueller, Milton. 2017. Will the Internet Fragment?: Sovereignty, Globalization and Cyberspace. Cambridge: Polity. P.117*

coming in the form of regime shifting, "which occurs when challengers to a set of rules and practices shift to an alternative multilateral forum with a more favourable mandate and decision rules, and then use this new forum to challenge standards in the original institution or reduce the authority of that institution"[96], and competitive regime creation, "which occurs when the coalition of dissatisfied actors creates a new institution or establishes a new informal form of multilateral cooperation to challenge the existing institutional status quo"[97].

In order to trace these developments over time and analyse on what front liberal values and principles have been challenged following the enactment of one of Kahler's three scenarios, this paper will provide three key case studies of individual institutional conflict, highlighting firstly the response deployed by liberal nations in a distinct institutional setting towards contestation of their ideals of internet governance, followed by an evaluation of how this response in turn shaped the posturing of their sovereigntist counterpart at a subsequent forum. The case studies will initially gauge the responses of liberal nations at the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) and the Tunis Agenda from 2003 to 2005, the 2012 World Conference on International Telecommunications (WCIT-12), and the debates in the fifth session of the United Nations Group of Governmental Experts on Developments in the Field of Information and Telecommunications in the Context of International Security (UNGGE) in 2017. These cases were selected because they display moments of contestation and intense debate surrounding the upkeep of liberal norms and values in cyberspace, as well as a wide scope of actors, but also because they each demonstrate one of Kahler's three response scenarios to contestation. In order to determine how effective these responses were, this thesis will then look at each of the institutional settings following conferences and proceedings, coming in the form of WSIS+10, WTDC-14, and the 2018 UNGA First

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[96] *Morse, Julia C.., Keohane, Robert O.. 2014. Contested multilateralism. The Review of International Organizations 9. pp.385–412. P.392*
[97] *Ibid. P.392*

Committee. In giving prevalence to these and measuring the contestation of liberal values and principles at the following conference, such inferences will allow us to display a constant pattern of which response can be deemed most effective to achieve a desired governance of cyberspace over an extended period of time.

Chapter 2- Contestation and Response

An empirical investigation and subsequent analysis will now be employed utilising secondary data surrounding authority conflicts within individual internet governance, to illustrate two fundamental distinctions. Firstly, in evaluating the individual case studies of the 2003-2005 WSIS and the Tunis Agenda, 2012 WCIT-12, and 2017 UNGGE, this assessment will look to highlight varied instances where contestation, as depicted through contested multilateralism, has been instigated against the prevalence of the multistakeholder, which as established serves as a representation of the liberal international order's hegemony, by the 'aggressing' sovereigntist nations. Subsequently, these considerations will then highlight how liberal nations responded in the same proceedings to post-liberal challenges, positing how in each individual circumstance, one of Kahler's three scenarios to deal with contention in the kinetic world was enacted as a countermeasure. Such portrayals will in turn serve as the preliminary framework to gauge which of these scenario responses proved the most effective for the liberal international order in upkeeping the predominance of their principles and values within internet governance.

2.1. 2003-2005 World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) and the Tunis Agenda: Accommodation

The first example of Kahler's scenario response being pursued by the 'liberal sphere' came in the form of 'accommodation', being deployed at the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS), which originally began at the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) in Geneva in 2003, before continuing in Tunis in 2005. This summit was "the first major United Nations event devoted to the potential of ICTs, which have had a marked impact on humanity over the past two decades"[98], and allows us to distinguish how instances of

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[98] *Johnson, Omobola. 2015. Implementing WSIS Outcomes: A Ten-Year Review. Geneva: UNCTAD. P.3.*

contestation occurred between both liberal and sovereigntist actors from the beginning of internet governance's presence on a multilateral stage, this conference looking to address the perceived "regulatory void"[99] within cyberspace, and develop directive principles, as well as a definition for internet governance.

Initial contestation, as demonstrated through an attempted, but ultimately unsuccessful regime shift, was etched from the opening of proceedings, as different perspectives emerged which looked to challenge the dominative multistakeholder model, which was "perceived as unilateral American control of the Internet"[100] by a group of sovereignty-oriented actors. While backing for the US-centric system of governance was supported by a "multiplicity of rather informal, technical bodies, such as the Internet Engineering Task Force (IETF), private actors, and ICANN"[101] which multistakeholderism empowered, a countermovement emerged within internet governance as actors including China, Brazil, South Africa, and the ITU, who "favoured a more intergovernmental model"[102] lobbied against the status quo. However, what is distinctive about contestations in this regard is how this formulation of a competitive sovereigntist regime was further enabled by the unexpected support of European Union member states, who saw how the continued enactment of multistakeholderism was riddled with contradictions, given how much of its leadership, and oversight was consolidated in the US, and therefore in alignment with their interests and not those of the wider world. This in turn meant that a "power battle emerged between the US and ICANN on the one side and

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[99] Hofmann, Jeanette. 2005. *Internet Governance: Zwischen Staatlicher Autorität und Privater Koordination. Internationale Politik und Gesellschaft 3.* pp.10–39. P.10.
[100] Raymond, Mark., DeNardis, Laura. 2016. *'Multi-Stakeholderism: Anatomy of an Inchoate Global Institution'. in Research Volume Two Global Commission on Internet Governance: Who Runs the Internet? The Global Multi-Stakeholder Model of Internet Governance. Waterloo, Ontario: Centre for International Governance Innovation and the Royal Institute of International Affairs.* P.8
[101] Flonk, Daniëlle., Jachtenfuchs, Markus., Obendiek, Anke S.. 2020. *Authority Conflicts in Internet Governance: Liberals vs. Sovereigntists?. Global Constitutionalism 9(2).* pp.364–86. P.372.
[102] Wright, Tom. 2005. *EU Tries to Unblock Internet Impasse. The New York Times. 30 September.* https://archive.nytimes.com/www.nytimes.com/iht/2005/09/30/business/IHT-30net.html

both non-Western and European states on the other"[103]. Such an alignment was not to last at the WSIS as although the European Commission proposed a new cooperation model which looked to establish a "more solid, democratic, transparent and multilateral basis with stronger emphasis on the public policy interests of all governments"[104] which inherently defied the current multistakeholder model through granting more power to governments and therefore enriching the sovereigntist sphere, through coercive diplomatic efforts, the European and typically liberal democratic countries soon altered their orientation due to normative concerns surrounding their otherwise 'likeminded' compatriots in China, Saudi Arabia and Iran. This in turn presented a scenario where a credible threat to multistakeholderism was emerging. Contestation between these spheres of authority was not limited at the WSIS, divergences being found in individual responses to the emerging domestic significance of the internet. While representatives from sovereigntist delegations such as the Chinese, looked to "stress the social responsibility and obligation"[105] of state actors in internet governance, proprietors from the liberal sphere emphasise threats to freedom of expression and participation, as well as other fundamental values and principles enabled by the current multistakeholder hegemony.

However, amongst such instances of contested multilateralism, we can see how to deal with contestation in the 'kinetic world', multistakeholder backing of the liberal sphere enacting the interpreted scenario response of 'accommodation' in reprisal. Throughout two years' worth of corroboration within the WSIS forum, compromise between major players was the fundamental reaction implemented by the actors of the liberal sphere to influence the

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[103] Mueller, Milton. 2010. *Networks and States: The Global Politics of Internet Governance. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press. P.67*
[104] *European Commission. 2005. Press Release- Commission Outlines EU Negotiation Principles for the World Summit on the Information Society in Tunis. IP/05/672.*
https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP_05_672.
[105] *Ju, Huang. 2005. Statement by Vice Premier Huang Ju, The State Council of The People's Republic of China presented at the WSIS. 17 November. https://www.itu.int/net/wsis/tunis/statements/docs/g-china/1.html.*

outcome of future proceedings. The concluding leg of the WSIS at the Tunis Agenda and the supplementary Tunis Commitment instrumentally served as a cooperating function with the Tunis Agenda permitting for both factions needs to be partially met, through agreement that "authority for Internet related public policy issues is the sovereign right of states"[106] in turn bringing governments to an equal role of responsibility to other stakeholders, as well as contrastingly legitimising and entrenching the current commitment to multistakeholderism in cyberspace, giving prevalence to the "important roles"[107] played by private and civil society actors. This compromise enacted by the then hegemonic liberal sphere, came in the form of the establishment of the UN Internet Governance Forum (IGF), which emanated in Tunis "from an impasse over UN and governmental calls for a diminishment of US coordination of certain Internet administrative and resistance towards American recommendations"[108]. Such a move consolidated the creation of an international space for multistakeholder dialogue for internet policy that was no longer dominated by the West. While the technical authority of the IGF was limited, such a move to pursue this working agreement with non-likeminded sovereigntist parties portrayed a willingness and accommodating approach to the institutional challenges they were faced with through this initially unsuccessful attempt at regime shifting in internet governance. Such observations leave us with the preliminary framework by which the effect of the enactment of 'accommodation' on the liberal sphere can be viewed.

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[106] *WSIS. 2005. Article 35a. in WSIS-05/TUNIS/DOC/6(Rev. 1)-E Tunis Agenda for the Information Society. Tunis: World Summit on the Information Society. https://www.itu.int/net/wsis/docs2/tunis/off/6rev1.html.*
[107] *Ibid. Article 35b.*
[108] *Raymond, Mark., DeNardis, Laura. 2016. 'Multi-Stakeholderism: Anatomy of an Inchoate Global Institution'. in Research Volume Two Global Commission on Internet Governance: Who Runs the Internet? The Global Multi-Stakeholder Model of Internet Governance. Waterloo, Ontario: Centre for International Governance Innovation and the Royal Institute of International Affairs. P.9.*

2.2. 2012 ITU World Conference on International Telecommunications (WCIT-12): Fragmentation

The second example by which we can decipher where one of Kahler's three scenario responses was employed by the liberal sphere comes in the form of fragmentation, which was practiced at the ITU's 2012 World Conference on International Telecommunications hosted in Dubai and attended by 193 nations. This conference arose as several dissatisfied states sought to amend the International Telecommunication Regulations (ITRs) 1988 treaty, which was viewed as unfit for purpose. Whilst little contestation arose in preliminary negotiations, harmony was not to last coming under the pretence of contested multilateralism, in the form of competitive regime creation. By the end of the conference 89 nations, including sovereigntist Russia, China, and Iran, became signatories of the revised ITR treaty, which operated in direct contradiction to the liberal values and principles of the 1988 treaty. With liberal states refraining from signing the revised treaty, this created a situation whereby the domain of internet governance was subjected to nations operating within two differing, and in many ways competing, institutional structures. Such circumstances prevailed as during the conference there was strong disputation surrounding "to what extent internet governance should be bought under UN auspices"[109]. Inherently liberal nations were eager to minimise the power of the ITU, while sovereigntist states looked to replace the multistakeholder model as the defining mechanism of internet governance, transferring authority to states with the ITU becoming the principal regulator of the internet. Such moves created anxiety for liberal nations such as the United States who would be affected by such proposals, the US reiterating to attendees that "centralised control over the Internet through a top-down government approach would put political dealmakers, rather than innovators and experts, in charge of the

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[109] *Nocetti, Julien. 2015. Contest and Conquest: Russia and Global Internet Governance. International Affairs 91(1). pp.111–130. P.125*

future of the Internet"[110]. These state-centric proposals in the revised ITR were not limited here, as sovereigntist states submitted further proposals to wrestle power away from the multistakeholder model, as depicted by the non-binding Resolution 3, which looked to establish that "all governments should have an equal role and responsibility for international internet governance and for ensuring the stability, security and continuity of the internet"[111]. While proponents of the liberal sphere including the US, EU member states, and Australia, made their concerns clear in arguing "that this would increase the role of the ITU and move internet governance more towards an intergovernmental model instead of the multistakeholder model"[112] gaining the support of 55 countries in rejecting the revised treaty, nothing could be done, as a majority of ITU member states voted in favour of the resolution, drawing the lines for contestation between the two spheres, as a competitive regime had successfully been created.

With a competitive regime created, general consensus in the international arena shifted away from liberal nations and the multistakeholder model, their central outlook subscribing to the notion that they "cannot support a treaty that is not supportive of the multistakeholder model of Internet governance"[113]. While initially they attempted to come to some understanding with sovereigntist nations contending "whether this process counted as an official and authoritative vote"[114], the overall impression was that internet governance was left in a fragmented environment, enabled in part by liberal nations. The European Parliament passed a resolution urging its members to prevent WCIT-12 activity as it would "negatively impact

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[110] *Verveer, Philip. 2012. Testimony, Hearing on International Proposals to Regulate the Internet. https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/CHRG-112hhrg79558/html/CHRG112hhrg79558.htm.*
[111] *ITU. 2012. Final Acts of the WCIT. https://www.itu.int/en/wcit-12/documents/final-actswcit-12.pdf.*
[112] *Hill, Richard. 2013. WCIT: Failure or Success, Impasse or Way Forward?. International Journal of Law and Information Technology 21(3). pp.313–328. P.325*
[113] *Pfanner, Eric. 2012. US Reject Telecommunications Treaty. The New York Times. December 14. https://www.nytimes.com/2012/12/14/technology/14iht-treaty14.html*
[114] *Maurer, Tim., Morgus, Robert. 2014. Tipping the Scale: An Analysis of Global Swing States in the Internet Governance Debate. Internet Governance Paper Series 7. P.3*

the internet, its architecture, operations, content and security, business relations, internet governance and the free flow of information online"[115] as the ITU is not the appropriate body to assert regulatory authority over the internet. Such observations therefore establish the tone that liberal nations and the multistakeholderism model faced intrinsic contestation in the form of competitive regime creation, which was in turn met with the pursuit of fragmentation within this domain of internet governance. While such fragmentation has continued to this day, with no change in signatories on either side, such an analysis leaves us with the groundwork to distinguish how these obvious tensions came to impact the ITU's following conference, coming in the form of World Telecommunication Development Conference (WTDC-14).

2.3 2017 United Nations Group of Governmental Experts on Developments in the Field of Information and Telecommunications in the Context of International Security (UNGGE): Disengagement

The final pre-emptive evaluation used to determine how Kahler's scenario responses were employed by the liberal sphere amongst contestation in internet governance, comes in the form of 'disengagement', which was applied following proactive attempts at competitive regime creation at the fifth United Nations Group of Governmental Experts on Developments in the context of International Security, in Geneva from 2016 to 2017. While contestation at this conference was a departure from three prior UNGGE's which became the primary multilateral institution for debates over cyber security, we can distinguish how conflict came to fruition, as proponents of the liberal sphere disagreed with the sovereigntist sphere on a number of normative and institutional issues, most notably "how international law applies to

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[115] *European Parliament. 2012. B7-0499/2012. European Parliament resolution on the forthcoming World Conference on International Telecommunications (WCIT-12) of the International Telecommunication Union, and the possible expansion of the scope of international telecommunication regulations. https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/B-7-2012-0499_EN.pdf*

the use of information and communications technologies by states"[116], eventually leading to attempts to consolidate a new binding regime for states under the domain of the UN. Though such contestation does not on the surface necessarily apply to the variable of the multistakeholder model, as this UN conference was principally for nation-state actors, it is pivotal to distinguish that such challenges through the creation of a new state-centric intergovernmental regime would work to undermine its wider applicability in cyberspace, by setting a precedence in transferring decision-making power to a competing domain where stakeholder principles cannot be maintained.

Nonetheless, the issue of international law and its application within cybersecurity became a major standoff between the two spheres, threatening the established institutional environment. Liberal nations wanting to apply active international law to cybersecurity without the creation of a new intergovernmental regime, sought direct statements on how international law applies to states' use of cyber warfare in regard to international humanitarian law, the right to self-defence, and laws of state responsibility and countermeasures, sovereigntist nations balked at the inclusion of such procedures, instead seeking the development of "a new binding intergovernmental regime"[117]. Proponents of the liberal sphere resisted these attempts being "unwilling to initiate such a negotiation process in the UN"[118], the core tension of these disagreements giving reference to the application of international law in cyberspace bringing about a militarised situation, as depicted by the sovereigntist Cuban representative, that would "legitimise.. unilateral punitive force actions, including the application of sanctions and even military actions by states claiming to be the

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[116] UNGA. 2015. A/RES/70/237. *Resolution Adopted by the GA on 23 December 2015. https:// unoda-web.s3-accelerate.amazonaws.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/A-RES-70-237- Information-Security.pdf.*
[117] *Tikk, Eneken., Kerttunen, Mika. 2017. The Alleged Demise of the UN GGE: An Autopsy and Eulogy. New York and The Hague: Cyber Policy Institute. P.16*
[118] *Rodriquez, Miguel. 2017. Declaration by Miguel Rodriguez, Representative of Cuba, at the Final Session of Governmental Experts on Developments in the Field of Information and Telecommunications in the context of International Security. June 23. https://www.justsecurity.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/Cuban-Expert-Declaration.pdf.*

victims of illicit use"[119]. Therefore , given how "the US has superior conventional and cyber capabilities", the inclusion of the right to self-defence and countermeasures proved to be extremely problematic for the sovereigntist sphere who would be likely to be subjected to attacks by likeminded liberal nations, leading to the retraction of "their support for the applicability of international law made in the previous UNGGE's"[120]. Consequently, such disagreements brought about a scenario where conflicting views between the two spheres continued to the extent where both attempted, but ultimately failed, to consolidate their own competitive security regimes amongst a lack of consensus at the UNGGE, indicating that the conflict between liberals and sovereigntists over cybersecurity continues.

In giving reference towards these distinct instances of contestation, coming in the form of "proactive attempts to create a competitive regime with the support of a considerable amount of countries, looking to move debates to a new venue"[121], we can come to decipher how the scenario response enacted by liberal nations in this example came in the form of disengagement with the sovereigntists. Giving reference to the fact that they primarily came to view the events of the UNGGE as a symbolic representation of the broader fragile relationship between the two sides in internet governance, the overall tone of liberal deliberators became one of lost patience with intergovernmental organisations, seeing that "continuing to do the same thing and expecting a different outcome is a sign of madness"[122]. In order to counter events of contestation, liberal nations enacted the scenario response of disengagement, whereby despite continued presence at UNGGE their subscription to its agreements was limited, acting on their own accord and calling for "the establishment of a

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[119] *Ibid.*
[120] *Segal, Adam. 2017. Chinese Cyber Diplomacy in a New Era of Uncertainty. Aegis Paper Series 1703. P.7*
[121] *Flonk, Daniëlle., Jachtenfuchs, Markus., Obendiek, Anke S.. 2020. Authority Conflicts in Internet Governance: Liberals vs. Sovereigntists?. Global Constitutionalism 9(2). pp.364–86. P.377.*
[122] *Ibid. P.377*

new UNGGE"[123]. Whilst conflicts continue internet governance in this regard becomes a zero-sum game.

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[123] *Ibid. P.377*

Chapter 3- Response in Practice

Establishing the level of contestation, as represented through contested multilateralism, in each of the three analysed institutional settings and highlighting the level of contestation faced in successive institutional environments, this chapter will conclude with an evaluation to define which scenario proved the most fruitful for liberal nations, in the upkeep of their values.

3.1. Post-Accommodation at the 2014-2015 World Summit on the Information Society +10 High Level Event (WSIS+10)

Building upon the previous analysis of contestation and the enacted scenario response of 'accommodation' that was employed by the liberal sphere at the WSIS and Tunis Agenda, the following evaluation will establish the effectiveness of the response, distinguishing the degree to which liberal principles and values were challenged at this conference's immediate heir – the World Summit on the Information Society +10 High Level Event (WSIS+10). Taking place officially from June 2014 to December 2015, the principle goal of this event was to review progress made in the implementation of the pre-established WSIS' outcomes under the mandates of participating agencies and to determine a clear vision of how stakeholders should proceed beyond 2015.For empirical purposes, it must be noted that in the time between the original WSIS and Tunis Agenda, and the WSIS+10 annual WSIS forums were enacted as progress reports on the initial goals set out from 2005. However, it wasn't until the WSIS+10 conference that the overall impact of the agreements set out 10 years prior could be reflected upon and debated within this intergovernmental, and critically multistakeholder environment.

While as established in the second chapter ,contestation was clearly voiced from the sovereigntist sphere following dispute against the perceived US-dominated multistakeholder

model of internet governance, we can come to understand how the employment of 'accommodation' in this scenario had a positive effect upon the proceedings a decade after. The fundamental question of whether internet governance should be multilateral or multistakeholder had largely faded by the time WSIS+10 took place, the outcomes of the deliberations depicting how all 193 state actors within this domain came to the agreement that the "Internet as a global facility includes multilateral, transparent, democratic and multi-stakeholder processes, with the full involvement of Governments, the private sector, civil society, international organizations, technical and academic communities, and all other relevant stakeholders in accordance with their respective roles and responsibilities" [124]. Such agreements surrounding the acceptance of multistakeholderism served in direct contrast to proceedings ten years earlier, which had been dominated by disputes in this subject area. Furthermore, this tone is established further in giving reference to how key challengers at the WSIS had largely changed their attitude at the WSIS+10 following the accommodating approach enacted by the liberal sphere which through diplomacy brought states to an equal footing in this mode of governance. This can be distinguished as vitally the ITU Secretary General Hamadoun I. Touré, lauded the multi-stakeholder process urging all actors, especially governments, to "let the UN General Assembly know that the multi-stakeholder model works for Internet governance at all levels"[125]. Such events are in stark contrast to the highly conflictual WSIS, with support for multistakeholderism coming from sovereigntist actors such as China stating the need in their government position for "a multi-stakeholder

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[124] UNGA. 2015. A/70/L.33. Resolution adopted by the General Assembly on 16 December 2015. https://undocs.org/en/A/RES/70/125.
[125] Touré, Hamadoun I.. 2015. WSIS+10 High-Level Event Multistakeholder Preparatory Platform (MPP). https://www.itu.int/en/council/cwg-wsis/Pages/MPP.aspx

governance model that brings together governments, the private sector & NGOs, all of which contribute in their own distinct way to the joint governance of the Internet"[126].

Consequently, given what appears to be overarching consensus surrounding states subscription to multistakeholderism in this domain, we distinguish how at the WSIS+10 no instances of contestation, as illustrated through contested multilateralism, were enacted against liberal nations and their principles, as in a rare instance within internet governance, agreement has been reached. It is however important to denote that while challenges did continue to persist in some form or another here, with authoritarian states including Russia, China and Egypt continuing to call for the recognition of "the sovereign rights of states"[127], we can denote how these calls were respected within the gaze of the WSIS+10, as its power was relatively limited due to the fact that "a substantial chunk of the actual decision-making that shapes the Internet and its use at both the national and global levels remains outside the ambit of the model of multistakeholderism"[128], and was therefore respected by likeminded actors, being left to their own accord. Nonetheless, given how the issue of multistakeholderism was the underlying contention at the previous WSIS, we can come to understand how the liberal sphere's employment of 'accommodation' in this regard through including states on an equal footing in proceedings within this organisation, produced a scenario by which their fundamental values and principles, as depicted through the multistakeholder model were protected, and even became more prominent and widely accepted within internet governance.

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[126] *Internet Society. 2015. WSIS+10 Review Process 2015: Government positions on WSIS implementation. October 16. https://www.internetsociety.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/ISOC-WSISplus10-matrix-government-positions-201510_v16.pdf.*

[127] *Ibid.*

[128] *Drake, William. 2011. Multistakeholderism: External Limitations and Internal Limits. MIND: Multistakeholder Internet Dialog, Co:llaboratory Discussion Paper Series No. 2, Internet Policymaking. pp.68-72. P.68*

3.2 Post-Fragmentation at the 2014 ITU World Telecommunication Development Conference (WTDC-14)

Given how the predecessor for this conference- the WCIT-12 –"led to fragmentation of internet governance within this specific sector"[129], the rejection of the revised ITR treaty and the dominative role the ITU would take in proceedings, leading to 55 liberal countries rejecting the proposal leaving liberal influence dwarfed in this particular domain, there was much intrigue leading into the first ITU conference since this event. The 2014 World Telecommunication Development Conference (WTDC-14), sought to establish "a blueprint for telecommunications/ICT development over the next four years"[130] with "more than 1300 participants, including over 1100 government delegates from 137 countries"[131] seeking to principally agree upon the central result of this conference, in the Dubai Action Plan which "reaffirmed ITU's commitment to the delivery of universal and affordable access to telecommunications and information and communication technologies (ICT) as an essential element of socio-economic advancement in an increasingly interconnected world"[132].

Whilst almost universal affirmation towards the Dubai Action Plan was unsurprising given how at the WCIT-12 there was mostly magnanimous support for technical arrangements, with "about 90 percent"[133] of amendments in this area passing uncontested, what was unexpected about the outcomes of this conference was the growing consensus for the need for a multistakeholder environment to manage such proceedings. This was a significant move away from the results of the WCIT-12 which saw 89 countries reject multistakeholderism, instead looking to move towards an intergovernmental model, with the ITU having

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[129] Flonk, Daniëlle., Jachtenfuchs, Markus., Obendiek, Anke S.. 2020. *Authority Conflicts in Internet Governance: Liberals vs. Sovereigntists?. Global Constitutionalism 9(2)*. pp.364–86. P.375.
[130] ITU. 2014. *WTDC-14: Special Report from Dubai.*
http://search.itu.int/history/HistoryDigitalCollectionDocLibrary/4.295.57.en.101.pdf.
[131] *Ibid.*
[132] *Ibid.*
[133] Hill, Richard. 2013. *WCIT: Failure or Success, Impasse or Way Forward?. International Journal of Law and Information Technology 21(3)*. pp.313–28. P.317

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authoritative power. However, within this technically-centric environment, where the resolve

and knowledge of individual governments and representatives from these break away

countries could be tested, the overarching unanimity of the WTDC-14 became "to

recommend measures within their competencies for cooperation with academia, civil society

and other interested and involved stakeholders, under a multistakeholder approach"[134]. This

was a departure from the levels of contestation enacted in the previous conference as it

became clear that any move to an intergovernmental forum was outside the abilities of the

sovereigntist model, given how many countries who signed up to the revised ITR such as

"emerging economies like Argentina, Brazil, Indonesia and Mexico"[135] who were members

of this form of competitive regime creation, would largely be beneficiaries of agreements

which looked to globalise and make ICT's infinitely more acceptable for under developed

nations. While it must be denoted that contestation was not completely limited at the WTDC-

14, as disagreements emerged regarding the proposed Resolution 9 which stated that it is "the

sovereign right of every State to manage spectrum use within its territories"[136] which was in

turn met with reproachment by the United States and it's likeminded allies, the threat of a

potential breakaway countermovement as depicted in the previous ITU conference meant that

this was eventually absorbed into the final outcomes of the conference, embracing mutual

'accommodation' in turn.

However, the question remains, to what extent the primary upkeep of liberal values and

principles as presented through the lack of contested multilateralism against the

multistakeholder model, resulted from the fragmentation following the WCIT-12? The

answer is mixed. Given the technical nature of this conference, contestation was bound to be

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[134] *ITU. 2014. Final Report. World Telecommunication Development Conference. Dubai: ITU. P.529*
[135] *Flonk, Daniëlle., Jachtenfuchs, Markus., Obendiek, Anke S.. 2020. Authority Conflicts in Internet Governance: Liberals vs. Sovereigntists?. Global Constitutionalism 9(2). pp.364–86. P.375.*
[136] *ITU. 2014. Final Report. World Telecommunication Development Conference. Dubai: ITU. P.212*

limited, however, it is equally important to note that without the technological apparatus that liberal nations possess, as enabled by the multistakeholder model, the overall goals of the WTDC-14 would become difficult to achieve. Consequently, given that it was pre-established that the liberal sphere were not afraid to walk away from treaties or agreements, as seen at the WCIT-12, we can interpret the significant threat that continued fragmentation played in the unexpected positioning of sovereigntist nations at this conference. Furthermore, this tone is established further once we consider how given that the US and its allies would not support any form of internet governance that did not include multistakeholderism, we can understand how this instruction played a fundamental role in coordination at this conference. Though such a scenario response is the most extreme and risky of Kahler's three despite applying well to the environment of Western technical hegemony, it's threatening nature to upset the sovereigntist sphere ultimately exposed the hills they were willing to die on, portraying how the intergovernmental institutional threat of the ITU as a principal regulator was nothing more than a 'paper tiger'.

3.3. Post-Disengagement at the 2018 United Nations General Assembly First Committee (UNGA)

While it has been denoted that the previously evaluated 2017 UNGGE brought about the scenario response of 'disengagement' by the liberal sphere, as amongst contestation as illustrated through the attempted sovereigntist regime shift, the liberal consolidation of the existing regime equally failed, meaning that they saw this rules based multilateral order as having lost traction, we can correspondingly come to distinguish how this approach ultimately has a negative impact for them upon future proceedings, as such an approach largely permitted for the establishment of a successful regime shift from the sovereigntist shift in the following year. This is observable as while normative divisions centred upon the application of international law had come to plague the 2017 UNGGE, such conflict carried

through to the First Committee of the UN General Assembly in 2018, which brought about

the enshrinement of two contrasting "UN processes dealing with the issue of responsible

behaviour in cyberspace"[137]. This came in the form of the creation of a US resolution, which

created the "establishment of a new UNGGE to further study norms and to discuss how

international law applies to cyberspace"[138], and an analogous Russian resolution which

"established an open ended working group (OEWG) to further develop the norms of the

fourth UNGGE and to discuss models for regular institutional dialogue under the UN"[139].

With the creation of these "two parallel processes that have a 90 per cent overlapping

mandate, but a very different membership"[140], we can come to distinguish how this shows

both resolve by the liberal sphere, to protect their values and principles in cyberspace that had

been intrinsically challenged at the 2017 UNGGE, and the sovereigntist sphere, in making

"proactive attempts to create a competitive regime with the support of a considerable amount

of countries and to move debates to new venues when they are considered unfruitful in other

fora"[141].

While the effects this alternative OEWG body has upon liberal values and principals are yet

to be deciphered clearly due to it is birth only coming in recent years, it is the potential threat

that this UN sanctioned organisation has that has caused dismay for likeminded nations. This

comes not only due to the heavy overlap in mandates between the two bodies, with both

looking to create dialogue surrounding norms and the applicability of international law in

cyberspace, but also because of their potential to establish their own confidence building

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[137] *Broeders, Dennis. 2021. The (im)possibilities of addressing election interference and the public core of the internet in the UN GGE and OEWG: a mid-process assessment. Journal of Cyber Policy. P.2*
[138] *UNGA. 2018. A/C.1/73/L.37. Advancing Responsible State Behaviour in Cyberspace in the Context of International Security. http://undocs.org/A/C.1/73/L.37*
[139] *UNGA. 2018. A/C.1/73/L.27/Rev.1. Developments in the Field of Information and Telecommunications in the Context of International Security. http://undocs.org/A/C.1/73/L.27/Rev.1.*
[140] *Broeders, Dennis. 2021. The (im)possibilities of addressing election interference and the public core of the internet in the UN GGE and OEWG: a mid-process assessment. Journal of Cyber Policy. P.2*
[141] *Flonk, Daniëlle., Jachtenfuchs, Markus., Obendiek, Anke S.. 2020. Authority Conflicts in Internet Governance: Liberals vs. Sovereigntists?. Global Constitutionalism 9(2). pp.364–86. P.377.*

measures, which could directly undermine the multistakeholder process, in turn transferring decision making power back to a multilateral venue.

Consequently given these distinctions, we can come to understand how the enacted policy of 'disengagement' to deal with the previously failed contestation at the 2017 UNGGE ultimately resulted negative consequences for the liberal sphere. While the full effects of the OEWG are yet to be felt within internet governance, and many liberal nations such as the United Kingdom, France and Australia are active participants in the body, which could work in the general liberal spheres favour, the creation of this alternative multilateral means of decision-making has in turn had contradictory results for the liberals.

Conclusion

In conclusion, from the empirical analysis displayed in the second and third chapters, we can primarily come to understand how in these particular institutional formats, the deployment of 'accommodation' and 'fragmentation' as a means to respond to contestation in the 'kinetic world' have proved the most fruitful for the nations of the liberal international order in preserving their core mode of governance in the multistakeholder model, which serves as a wider representation of their central principles and values. While the employment of 'disengagement' had a negative effect upon proceedings, as it brought about greater instances of contested multilateralism, the prior engagements serve preliminary framework by which liberal nations can interact within internet governance in this increasingly post-liberal world.

However, it must be stated that these institutional examples only present a limited outlook of the diverse fora of internet governance, as its functions are spread across many different bodies and actors, and as such this thesis should be viewed in an abstract context, though can be built upon in future studies with further evaluation of contestation within these regimes. Furthermore, to say that the influence of liberal nations to persuade sovereigntists to act in a cohesive manner only tells one part of the story, as the shifting global order presents varied opportunities for challenges to be enacted or contested. Additionally, it is pivotal to acknowledge how the primary concerns of sovereigntist actors such as China and Russia, who were largely motivated in their activities by threats of the domestic instability that the internet can cause in their initially analysed contestation, had these concerns addressed by the implementation of their own domestic policies coming in the form of China's 2016 Cybersecurity Law and Russia's 2019 Sovereign Internet Law, perhaps serving as a representation as to why their contestation of the multistakeholder model decreased in recent years.

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