

COMMENTHK

US 'liberal int'l order' now in its dying throes

Lau Siu-kai says Washington now repeatedly acts unilaterally without so much as consulting its allies

On Jan 3, the United States invaded Venezuela, bombing key facilities, abducting Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro and his wife, and later placing them on trial under US domestic law. This imperialist action, carried out without authorization from the United Nations or the US Congress, in serious violation of the UN Charter and international law, aims to take control of Venezuela's oil resources, intimidate all Latin American countries, and consolidate US hegemony in the Western Hemisphere. The attack on Venezuela has naturally triggered shock, condemnation, unease, and fear in the international community. However, from another perspective, this action reflects that the US-led "liberal international order" is already on its last legs — if not completely collapsed. In fact, the US has not strictly adhered to the spirit and rules of the "liberal international order" for a long time. Since the end of the Cold War, in a unipolar world, the US has increasingly violated without a qualm the international rules it set, making the "liberal international order" increasingly unsustainable. The attack on Venezuela could be the final straw.

For a long time, Western scholars, such as John Ikenberry, have tirelessly eulogized and promoted the American "liberal international order". Ikenberry believes that this international order is attractive to other countries because it possesses characteristics lacking in past international orders. First, it upholds international openness; different countries can benefit from and achieve peace through free trade and interaction. Second, it embraces multilateralism and rules-based international relations, with the US willing to adhere to these rules. Third, democratic nations tie themselves together and cooperate to increase their security. Fourth, this international order serves progressive social purposes, aiming to promote the rights and well-being of the people of member states and advance social fairness and justice.

Other Western political scientists believe that the reason why the US' "liberal international order" has been popular is because: 1) the US is willing to make concessions to other countries, especially by opening up its market, providing various forms of assistance, allowing other countries to retain some protectionist trade and financial measures, and bearing trade deficits; 2) the US will not use its overwhelming national power to bully others, it will mainly use its power to maintain peace, protect human rights, and prevent humanitarian disasters; 3) the US will not act unilaterally, it will allow other countries to participate in the process of making significant decisions, so they will feel that they are stakeholders in US policies and are respected by the "benign hegemon"; 4) the US, by adhering to free trade and the market economy, will not engage in protectionism, politicize, or weaponize economic activities; 5) the US is willing to provide various public goods to the international community "free of charge" to promote international exchanges; 6) the US will respect the various multilateral organizations, such as the United Nations, the World Trade Organization and the World Health Organization, as well as international agreements it has signed, such as international climate agreements and agreements on the reduction of weapons of mass destruction.

However, the US has increasingly deviated from the principles and rules of that "liberal international order". The most obvious example is that the US has constantly undermined the UN's reputation and operation. The US-led wars in Afghanistan (2001), Iraq (2003), and its significant involvement in NATO's bombing of Serbia (1999) were all conducted without UN authorization. In recent years, embracing unilateralism, the US has repeatedly acted without consulting its allies, even disregarding their opposition and interests. Examples include its overwhelming support for Israel's actions in Gaza, bombing Iran's nuclear facilities, threatening to seize the Panama Canal, Canada and Greenland,



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sanctioning judges of the International Criminal Court, and withdrawing from international climate agreements and nuclear limitation agreements signed between multiple countries and Iran.

The US is increasingly unwilling to make concessions, provide security guarantees, or unconditionally provide public goods to other countries, including allies. Instead, it has resorted to protectionist actions against other countries. Washington is increasingly weaponizing trade, tariffs and the dollar to coerce other countries; it is ruthlessly disrespectful of international institutions such as the UN, NATO and the WTO, and has even threatened to withdraw from them. US international strategy is increasingly driven by the desire to sustain US hegemony and interests, rather than upholding lofty political and moral values. Particularly lamentable is the US' growing tendency to resolve issues by force, disregarding international law and principles, and pushing the world toward a perilous state of jungle law, featuring "might is right" and "survival of the fittest". These are just a few examples, but they are sufficient to demonstrate that the US-led "liberal international order" is a thing of the past.

The next question is, as the US becomes a growing threat to the interests and security of many countries, will smaller nations form alliances to protect their interests? Currently, it seems highly unlikely that smaller nations will form military alliances to counter the US because it possesses overwhelming military power, and even if smaller nations were to team up, they would struggle to cope with the US' military might. Moreover, Washington will inevitably use coercion and inducement to drive a wedge among these countries. That said, in the economic and financial spheres, more and more countries will try to strengthen multilateral cooperation to safeguard their own interests. They are likely to seek greater economic and trade cooperation with China. Of course, the US will try to prevent this. But those countries will try every means to circumvent US obstruction and pressure, including passive resistance and noncooperation. Meanwhile, Washington will also be deterred somewhat by China's countermeasures, and thus will not dare to go too far.

The trajectory of changes foretells that by getting rid of the constraints of the "liberal international order" and indulging in imperialist bullying, Washington will increasingly undermine the foundations of its decades-old hegemony, damage its long-term interests, severely erode its soft power, ignite fierce anti-American sentiment and movements globally, and trigger political protests and sabotage actions targeting US interests around the world. Washington's perverse actions will not only fail in the end but will also backfire, including triggering more severe political divisions and domestic wrangling.

The views do not necessarily reflect those of China Daily.

SAR can learn much from Chengdu's post-earthquake community rebuilding

During his latest visit to China, French President Emmanuel Macron stole the show in Chengdu when, spotting a crowd of students outside Sichuan University, he jogged straight toward them, eliciting shrieks of laughter, outstretched hands, and a reception more often reserved for pop stars than presidents.

What was meant to be a routine campus visit became the liveliest part, with students reaching out for handshakes and recording the moment on their phones as he discussed France-China cooperation, culture, and the significance of young-people exchanges. Looking at those clips, you could almost believe Chengdu had always been this carefree — a city of easy smiles and relaxed crowds — yet beneath that composure lies the shared memory of a devastating earthquake and years of patient work to patch communities back together as meticulously as roads, schools, and homes were rebuilt.

On a recent visit to Chengdu, what stood out most was this quiet transformation: an ordinary city that has learned to make extraordinary use of its social capital. In Yulin East Road, an unassuming residential area, the pavements have become a kind of extended communal space: neighbors linger under the shade of trees, community cadres pause for long conversations, and a resident artist works with families on small displays and notebooks of stories so that even painful memories are talked through together rather than carried alone. These are not grand monuments to resilience, but modest, human-scale spaces that make it easier for neighbors to talk, disagree, reconcile, and ultimately decide together how their community should evolve.

The memory that remains of today's easygoing Chengdu is the earthquake that devastated Wenchuan and much of Sichuan province in 2008, killing tens of thousands, injuring hundreds of thousands, and displacing millions as entire towns were destroyed. Chengdu itself avoided the most severe structural damage, but it swiftly became the main center for rescue and rebuilding — a city where survivors were flown in, volunteer and official teams were dispatched, and, over time, specialists and nongovernmental organizations established a network for long-term reconstruction and psychological support across the quake-affected region.

Nearly two decades later, this experi-



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ence has evolved into a unique approach to urban governance that regards residents not as passive recipients of services but as co-owners of their environment. Along Yulin East Road, this ethos is clear in the way local officials walk the streets, knock on doors, and meet people, transforming consultation from a bureaucratic process into an everyday practice of listening, mediating, and solving problems.

Seemingly small gestures, such as personally addressing a noise complaint or inviting community artists to co-design public spaces, gradually build trust and a sense of ownership that no top-down plan can establish.

Further out at Luh Lake, a relatively new residential area, the same philosophy has been upheld from the beginning. Residents have created a community museum and a children's art festival, supported by a tripartite platform that brings together homeowners, the property developer, and the local party community committee to discuss shared issues and jointly fund local initiatives.

Hong Kong now confronts a crucial moment of social rehabilitation after the Wang Fuk Court fire. The government has responded quickly, providing temporary shelters, deploying social workers and promising long-term rehousing plans. However, for those who saw their homes and memories go up in flames, proper recovery requires more than just compensation or new flats; it involves patient efforts to rebuild confidence, identity and community bonds. This is where Chengdu's experience offers a strong reference point.

The challenge for Hong Kong is not only to reconstruct the housing lost in Tai Po but also to use this moment of disruption as an opportunity to pilot a new model of "co-consultation, co-discussion and co-living" that brings government, businesses, civil society, residents and developers into genuine partnership.

If Wang Fuk Court redevelopment is approached as a dynamic experiment in partnership, with open forums, community archives, cultural initiatives and resident-led committees included from the start, the estate could become a symbol of modern Hong Kong resilience.

The timing could not be more significant. Hong Kong has just completed a new Legislative Council election, returning lawmakers who have emphasized stability, livelihoods and community well-being as their priorities. Several new geographical constituency legislators gained experience in district work by knocking on doors and managing neighborhood disputes, so they are very aware of how often people feel their community has had little real influence on the outcome. The new LegCo has a rare opportunity to foster a culture of deliberation that spans bureaus, district officers, district councilors, and private developers.

Instead of viewing district governance solely through administrative efficiency, Hong Kong can start recognizing each neighborhood as a reservoir of "dormant community capital" — from retired civil servants and professionals to young entrepreneurs, social innovators and cultural workers who are eager to contribute.

The redevelopment of Wang Fuk Court could, for example, include a fund to support local initiatives, participatory design workshops for new public spaces, and transparent platforms that bring homeowners' voices into dialogue with officials and project managers at every stage. Such mechanisms would enable executive leadership to benefit from the creativity and lived knowledge of the community it serves.

Macron's lighthearted visit to the Sichuan University campus captured a Chengdu that seems effortlessly confident, welcoming, and at ease with the world. That atmosphere is the result of years of investment in trust between the government and citizens, and also among neighbors — shaped by the remnants of one of modern China's worst natural disasters.

In the aftermath of the Tai Po fire, Hong Kong has the capacity and the steadiness to chart its own path toward neighborhood-level renewal. What starts with one estate can, over time, ripple across others, restoring a sense of connection and community in the places that people call home.

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HK should energize Kai Tak Cruise Terminal by enhancing partnership with Runway 1331

In my article published last June in this column (June 3, 2025, Time to Set A New Course for the Kai Tak Cruise Terminal), I proposed that we should capitalize on the fantastic location of the Kai Tak Cruise Terminal, which is very close to the Kai Tak Sports Park, a venue "reputed to be the largest sports, entertainment and mega-event complex in Hong Kong's history", whose rooftop garden offers the best vista of Victoria Harbour available in town, and the best pool of talented cultural performers and artists that Hong Kong has. While the West Kowloon Cultural District offers world-class performances, at and around the Kai Tak Cruise Terminal, we can offer unique "grown in Hong Kong" cultural performances. I wrote: "These venues need not be big. Smallish venues accommodating audiences of 100 to 200, with good acoustics and comfortable seating, will do. We should target multiple performances from different sectors each day. Rental charges should be accessible to small-budget troupes. Hong Kong currently sorely lacks such venues. Given the creativity of our local talent, if affordable and accessible venues are available, I am positive that in time the variety of shows will ensure that the cruise terminal will become a lure for both visitors and locals."

Given that Kai Tak Sports Park is the largest sports, entertainment and mega-event complex in Hong Kong's history, and it is in the vicinity of the cruise terminal, the Culture, Sports and Tourism Bureau (CSTB) should have a clear vision of what we can do to make both park and terminal part of an ecosystem to build a brand name for Hong Kong's cultural industry.

According to the tender documents, the next operator of the Kai Tak Cruise Terminal will manage the entire site, including public areas. The winning bidder will manage the facility for 10 years, with an additional five years subject to satisfactory performance. Bidders are warned that underperformance could lead to financial penalties. A set of key



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performance indicators (KPIs) are spelled out. They include: the annual number of ship calls (no less than 85), noncruise events held (no less than 13), number of visitors attending noncruise-related events (6,500), and the occupancy rate of retail and ancillary areas (60 percent).

These KPIs are not particularly demanding. But achieving or overshooting these targets will not mean much if the benefits don't impress visitors and fail to draw them back again in anticipation of "what is new".

After publishing that article, I was excited to read a story about the conversion of the Kai Tak Community Isolation Facility into the "Runway 1331" youth hostel, which officially opened in October. According to one source, this project promises to become the world's largest incubation village for the art and culture industry. Runway 1331 is not merely a youth hostel but will in time introduce various international exchange programs and innovative projects.

Currently, Runway 1331 is operated by Glorise Tourism & Culture, a subsidiary of China Travel Service. The contract is to run for five years. Given that Runway 1331 is adjacent to the cruise terminal, it is incumbent that the cruise terminal work closely with Runway 1331 in order to produce the ecosystem for an indigenous

Hong Kong cultural industry to build a brand name that Hong Kong can be proud of. Runway 1331 must not be just a cheap youth hostel but must also offer easy to access and professional venues for arts and cultural performances, rehearsals and practices, and exhibition halls. While there is not much case for the cruise terminal to offer a lot of retail facilities, it will be important for it to offer restaurants and eateries. Visitors for cultural and arts events will need these facilities.

Talking about access, it is important for Runway 1331 and the cruise terminal to be mutually accessible, and for both facilities to be easily accessible to cruise passengers, other tourists, and locals. In my last article, I proposed that in addition to buses, taxis, and the MTR, access by regular ferry services from Wan Chai and Tsim Sha Tsui would be a great help. In my view, ferries are a great complement to the cruise terminal because they offer a comfortable ride in the attractive Victoria Harbour with no traffic jams. Provided that the cruise terminal and Runway 1331 offer attractive indigenous cultural and arts performances regularly, they will become a draw for tourists from all over the world. If these facilities are well-managed, the ferries will never be short of passengers because their services will be needed by locals as well.

Because the stakes are high, we do need someone with adequate experience to coordinate the working of Runway 1331 and the cruise terminal, and the authority to do so. We cannot assume that Runway 1331 will take off automatically. Nor can we assume that bidders to operate the cruise terminal will be able to turn the vision into a reality. Let's hope the CSTB will take proactive steps to forge a partnership between the two, so we can build a brand name for Hong Kong's cultural industry while energizing the Kai Tak Cruise Terminal.

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