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COMIC BY COLBI LORANGER, ASSOCIATE MANAGING EDITOR/THE DAILY CAMPUS

Mark Carney says the liberal world order is dead, so what's next?

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Last week, Canadian Prime Minister Mark Carney shook the world with his speech at the 56th World Economic Forum. In outlining his nation's direction amid political tensions, Carney laid down an indictment of the current "rules-based order" in a way scarcely seen from a western leader. Although it was quickly brushed to the side of the news cycle due to exploding tensions in Minneapolis and Iran — understandably so, that is — there exist very few recent events that as clearly illustrate the current political moment. Understanding the context and significance of this speech is key to interpreting the state of international affairs.



FILE LOGO/THE DAILY CAMPUS

The Speech: What Carney did, and didn't, say

The World Economic Forum is a convergence of the most powerful government, business and academic leaders meant to chart out a path forward for global capitalism. Carney's speech was created to address the current existential crisis facing the non-U.S. western powers, who are increasingly caught up in the chaos of the President Donald Trump's second term. Reflecting upon these tensions, specifically over ownership of Greenland and threats of Canada becoming the 51st U.S. state, he said:

"For decades, countries like Canada prospered under what we called the rules-based international order... We knew the story of the international rules-based order was partially false. That the strongest would exempt themselves when convenient. That trade rules were enforced asymmetrically. And we knew that international law applied with varying rigor depending on the identity of the accused or the victim. This fiction was useful[.]"

He went on to condemn the so-called "great powers" (read: United States) who run this system and use their extreme economic and military powers to force others into submission. In response, he urges the "middle powers" (read: Canada and the European Union) to respond, not by falling into isolationism, but by uniting under "value-based realism." This way forward involves moving past the current order and toward a new system of "sovereignty and territorial integrity, the prohibition of the use of force except when consistent with the UN Charter, and respect for human rights."

Is the liberal international order really dead?

For decades, many critics of the liberal international order (LIO) have presented these basic points. The basic idea is that it is mirage through which global superpowers are allowed to act however they'd like, but are still able to maintain legitimacy by obscuring their intentions behind superficial justifications. Iraq and the purported "weapons of mass destruction" are the clearest example of this.

Since the beginning of Trump's first term, his administration's characteristic escalation of unrestrained capitalism and abandonment of international legalistic norms has led to many claims of the LIO's death. In truth, it's at least partially a matter of perspective.

To explain, as the internet has created a democratization of information and "truth" as never before seen in history, this has undercut the ability of dominant narratives put forward by nations to control public understanding of recent events. The post Oct. 7 siege of Palestine has served as a formative event in finalizing this shift. Visuals of extreme violence plastered daily across the screens of an entire generation have revealed inconsistencies in messaging put forth by great powers and caused many to lose faith in the system that's allegedly supposed to prevent such horrors. As these hypocrisies mounted, Joelle Abi-Rached writes that "by underwriting Israel's genocidal onslaught so flagrantly, Western governments have hastened the final discrediting of the legal order the West itself developed after World War II."

On the other side of the aisle, the same polarizing influences have supported the development of a strong alt-right which also rejects the LIO. Whether this be in favor of isolationist or realist tendencies, their importance as a base of political support for the new Trump administration is clear.

Yet, Carney's speech represents, in opposition to this, a continued faith in the establishment. It shows a significant dissonance between elite and popular views right now, because, for all its rhetorical flair, it essentially calls for a return to a former state of affairs. It's romantic for a time before the U.S. began giving the rest of the West the same lack of respect for sovereignty it has typically reserved for the Global South. It shows a timid acceptance of the unequal application of international law, so long as that aggression stays focused on Iraq, Palestine and other non-NATO aligned parts of the world. Essentially, so long as they still have a seat at the table, the LIO can still live on.

Evaluating Carney's way forward

This contradiction inside his rhetoric is best shown by context. Although this speech has taken on a public, international audience, it was ultimately intended for a very specific group. The prime minister, who has spent his entire life in board rooms and corporate high rises, is keeping to his history; he is speaking to the political and economic elite of the World Economic Forum. This speech is not a plea to those who have faced the historical brunt of this order he now condemns, but rather to the nations and companies which have benefited from it. As Matthew Remski puts it, his goal was to "[express] solidarity with fellow leaders and investors who now feel confused and dysregulated because the world's superpower is no longer a dependable trade partner."

This explains the details of his suggestions for the middle powers. He rallies against isolationism not out of altruistic sentiment, but because it is bad for international business and free trade. He advocates for a return to order because that stability and security is beneficial for steady GDP growth. It's also impossible to ignore how this speech itself functions as an advertisement for global investment in the Canadian economy, which Carney is clearly trying to position as a leader in his new world order.

The point is that this represents nothing but one side of an internal struggle between different ruling capitalist interests, which are now, in a rare instance, out of step with each other. It is truly anyone's guess where the Trump administration is taking the world, but Carney's response is a well explored answer. Still, in this "rupture" there is continued opportunity to push for something greater. In the gap between Carney's neoliberalism and Trump's right-wing populism, there must be a renewed push for a progressive internationalism which boldly looks for an alternative to the economic base which has brought the world to this point.

HUSKY TALK

"What is the best thing to do on a snow day?"



"Go ice skating on swan lake."

Lohitaksh
Mechanical Engineering
Fourth Semester



"Stay inside, drink hot chocolate, and watch a movie."

Ross
Robotics with a minor in Computer Science
Fourth Semester



"Sledding and Building a snowman."

Jack
Mechanical Engineering
Fourth Semester



"Ordering DoorDash."

Cole
Computer Science
Fourth Semester