

Session: China, Russia and LIO

Date/Time: April 24, 2018 / 16:30-18:00

Rapporteur:

Lisa Collins, Center for Strategic and International Studies

Moderator:

Bonnie S. Glaser, Center for Strategic and International Studies

Speakers:

Kim Taehwan, Korea National Diplomatic Academy

Alexander Lukin, MGIMO University

William Overholt, Harvard University

Vasil Sikharulidze, Atlantic Council of Georgia

Zhu Feng, Nanjing University

Session Sketch:

The panel China, Russia and LIO discussed the role of China and Russia in the current liberal international order. There appeared to be a consensus among the panelists that Russia and China were seeking to change the current world order. However, there was some debate as to how and through what framework China and Russia were pushing for change to reap the most benefits for their national interests.

Broadly framed, it appeared that the panelists approached the core issues from two different perspectives. First, Alexander Lukin and Vasil Sikharulidze seemed to argue that China and Russia were operating primarily outside of the liberal international order,

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including global institutions and norms. The recent withdrawal of global U.S. leadership under President Donald Trump, they indicated, only exacerbated this trend, whereby Beijing and Moscow sought to construct a new order that resembled the more illiberal hegemonic norms and institutions of those two countries. Lukin argued that the liberal international order was, in fact, an illusion and therefore it could not be undermined by Russia. He also suggested that there might be a bifurcation between economic and political issues – Russia might be willing to play by economic rules but not the rule of the liberal political order. Sikharulidze asserted, on the other hand, that the liberal international order was materially real but that Russia and China were operating largely outside of it with virtual impunity for their destructive actions.

A second group consisting of Kim Taehwan, William Overholt, and Zhu Feng, who appeared to argue that China and Russia had adhered to and were working within the bounds of the current international order but that they were trying to reshape and undermine the order from within to establish more control and influence for their respective national agendas. Prof. Kim brought up the concept of “sharp power” (in contrast to soft power) and suggested that China and Russia were using this tactic to achieve material gains in the current liberal order. Bonnie Glaser suggested through a moderated discussion with the audience that there might be a continuing contradiction or conflict between China and Russia’s illiberal domestic structures and norms and those of the global international order.

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