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Cultural Challenges to Liberal World Order

There has surely been liberal progress in the world: more democracies, commitment to liberal market economies, and cooperation through international institutions. But liberal progress is never guaranteed; liberal values must always be able to successfully confront new challenges. I discuss three areas where liberal values are increasingly challenged: (a) there are a number of successful modernizing countries in the world today but their social and political models contain features that are distinctly non-liberal and it is not likely that these features will disappear; (b) the increase of liberal power in the world has led to liberal hubris which has undercut liberal advance. Recent

cases of liberal imperialism will not help increase the standing of liberal values in the world; (c) liberal soft power is endangered because the liberal economic and political model has not been fully able to confront the challenges of a globalized world. An attractive and successful political and economic model is the foundation for liberal soft power.

All this does not mean that the liberal world order is on the verge of breaking down or that chaos and anarchy is in the cards. It does mean that history never guarantees progress in a liberal direction. Each historical phase of liberal development must be able to confront the important challenges that emerge in a given historical period. So far, liberal democracies have not at all been able to convincingly confront the post-

Cold War challenges to continued liberal progress.