THE VIOLENCE WITHIN

NADIA KABIR BARB

IF you saw your father hit your mother, how would you feel? Or if you knew that your sister or daughter was being abused by her partner or spouse, what would you do? How about a relative, friend or neighbour? Would you sit back and think it was acceptable due to the fact that it was taking place within the confines of marriage or a relationship and therefore just a 'domestic dispute'? I imagine not. It is a topic that is upsetting and unpleasant but one that needs to be addressed. To illustrate the magnitude of the issue, according to a global estimate published by WHO, about one in three (35 percent) women worldwide have experienced either "physical and/or sexual intimate partner violence or non-partner sexual violence in their lifetime".

That statistic is shocking, but even more so when you consider that domestic abuse is also a crime that is widely underreported as it so frequently takes place behind closed doors. Many victims shy away from going to the authorities for fear of the repercussions of their actions or of not being taken seriously by the authorities. Many are dependent both financially and emotionally upon their partners and feel they have no choice but to keep quiet about the abuse. It may also be a matter of shame, guilt or embarrassment for a victim to admit to a situation which they would prefer to try and hide from their family or friends. On the flipside, many families would rather turn a blind eye to the abuse for fear of the social implications. Maintaining the status quo outweighs the welfare of the victim. There are also cases of abuse that do not get reported purely because the victim is under the impression that physical violence is normal and therefore acceptable. They do not recognise it as abuse. For example, in Mauritania, for some women of Soninké descent, divorce is frowned upon and physical violence within a marriage is ingrained as an act of love by their spouses.

Domestic abuse is not just physical. Sadly, it can also extend, with equally devastating consequences, to both economic and psychological abuse. The United Nations defines violence against women as "any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or mental harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life". Though victims of domestic abuse are predominantly women, it can affect men as well. According to the NHS, "One woman in four (and one man in six) in the UK will be a victim of domestic violence during their lifetime".

The most common forms of physical abuse range from slapping, beating, kicking through to burning, choking or threatening the victim with an object or weapon and can result in broken bones, internal injuries and in some cases, death. In England and Wales alone, on average two women are killed by their partner or ex-partners every week and domestic abuse-related crime is eight percent of total crime (Women's Aid). The Violence Against Women Survey carried out in 2015 by the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS) stated that 80.2 percent of women are victims of spousal abuse.

Psychological abuse is far more insidious and includes behaviour that tends to intimidate and persecute. Quite frequently, abusers use verbal aggression, humiliation or threats of abandonment and physical violence to maintain control over their partners by instilling a feeling of low self-worth. Many women find themselves isolated and confined to the home and unable to break free from the vicious cycle of abuse. Economic abuse is also a way to exert control and dominance over someone. It can include the refusal to contribute financially or provide funds to the victim making them fully dependent on their abuser. This can extend to the denial of food and basic needs.

So it is with growing concern and dismay that we find countries such as Russia, rather than protecting those who are vulnerable, taking a step backwards and on the verge of passing a legal amendment that would decriminalise domestic abuse. The controversial bill will reduce the penalty for a first-time offence against family members including spouses and children as long as it does not cause serious bodily harm or require hospitalisation. The offender or abuser will only be charged a woefully inadequate fine of up to 30,000 rubles (£400), administrative arrest of up to fifteen days or compulsory community service. Previously, the same crime would have been considered a case of battery and been punishable by up to two years of jail time. Yulia Gorbunova of the Human Rights Watch says, "The domestic violence bill would reduce penalties for abusers and put victims' lives at even greater risk." To make matters worse, it seems to me that this bill would normalise violence within the home instead of deterring and criminalising the offender.

Last year, the chairman of the Council of Islamic Ideology in Pakistan, Muhammad Khan Sherani, put forward a proposal to try and make it legal for husbands to "lightly beat" their wives. He suggested that "A husband should be allowed to lightly beat his wife if she defies his commands and refuses to dress up as per his desires; turns down demand of intercourse without any religious excuse or does not take bath after intercourse or menstrual periods." He also claimed that it was "un-Islamic" for women to leave an abusive relationship and seek refuge in a shelter. Despite the proposal being both ridiculed and condemned it exemplifies the concept that women are considered the property of a man and as such accountable to and punishable by them.

Factors such as low education, low income, previous exposure to violence in the family and living in a patriarchal society where gender inequality is perpetuated, all contribute to an increased incidence of domestic violence. However, it is a crime that occurs worldwide irrespective of race, religion and socioeconomic status. It just takes place in varying degrees. Women are vulnerable to different forms of abuse simply because they are women. In a world where women constantly battle misogyny, sexism and gender inequality in the home environment and the workplace, domestic abuse will continue to be an issue unless we can change the attitudes of people through education and social and legal reform.

The writer is a freelance columnist based in the UK. Her short stories have been published in international arts and literary magazines and an anthology.

PROJECT SYNDICATE

What liberal world order?

MARK LEONARD

AFTER the annus horribilis that was 2016, most political observers believe that the liberal world order is in serious trouble. But that is where the agreement ends. At the recent Munich Security Conference, debate on the subject among leaders like German Chancellor Angela Merkel, US Vice President Mike Pence, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi, and Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov demonstrated a lack of consensus even on what the liberal order is. That makes it hard to say what will happen to it.

When the West, and especially the United States, dominated the world, the liberal order was pretty much whatever they said it was. Other countries complained and expounded alternate approaches, but basically went along with the Western-defined rules.

But as global power has shifted from the West to the "rest," the liberal world order has become an increasingly contested idea, with rising powers like Russia, China, and India increasingly challenging Western perspectives. And, indeed, Merkel's criticism in Munich of Russia for invading Crimea and supporting Syrian President Bashar al-Assad was met with Lavrov's assertions that the West ignored the sovereignty norm in international law by invading Iraq and recognising Kosovo's independence.

This is not to say that the liberal world order is an entirely obscure concept. The original iteration — call it "Liberal Order 1.0" — arose from the ashes of World War II to uphold peace and support global prosperity. It was underpinned by institutions like the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development, which later became the World Bank, and the International Monetary Fund, as well as regional security arrangements, such as NATO. It emphasised multilateralism, including through the United Nations, and promoted free trade.

But Liberal Order 1.0 had its limits — namely, sovereign borders. Given the ongoing geopolitical struggle between the US and the Soviet Union, it could not even quite be called a "world order." What countries did at home was basically their business, as long as it didn't affect the superpower rivalry.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, however, a triumphant West expanded the concept of the liberal world order substantially. The result — Liberal Order 2.0 — penetrated countries' borders to consider the rights of those who lived there.

Rather than upholding national sovereignty at all costs, the expanded order sought to pool sovereignty and to establish shared rules to which national governments must adhere. In many ways, Liberal Order 2.0 — underpinned by institutions like the World Trade Organisation and the International Criminal Court (ICC), as well as new norms like the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) — sought to shape the world in the West's image.

But, before too long, sovereignty-obsessed powers like Russia and China halted its implementation. Calamitous mistakes for which Western policymakers were responsible — namely, the protracted war in Iraq and the global economic crisis — cemented the reversal of Liberal Order 2.0.

But now the West itself is rejecting the order that it created, often using the very same logic of sovereignty that the rising powers used. And it is not just more recent additions like the ICC and R2P that are at risk. With the United Kingdom having rejected the European Union and US President Donald Trump condemning free-trade deals and the Paris climate agreement, the more fundamental Liberal Order 1.0 seems to be under threat.

Some claim that the West overreached in creating Liberal Order 2.0. But even Trump's America still needs Liberal Order 1.0 — and the multilateralism that underpins it. Otherwise, it may face a new kind of globalisation that combines the technologies of the future with the enmities of the past.

In such a scenario, military interventions will continue, but not in the postmodern form aimed at upholding order (exemplified by Western powers' opposition to genocide in Kosovo and Sierra Leone). Instead, modern and pre-modern forms will prevail: support for government repression, like Russia has provided in Syria, or ethno-religious proxy wars, like those that Saudi Arabia and Iran have waged across the Middle East.

The Internet, migration, trade, and the enforcement of international law will be turned into weapons in new conflicts, rather than governed effectively by global rules. International conflict will be driven primarily by a domestic politics increasingly defined by status anxiety, distrust of institutions, and narrow-minded nationalism.

European countries are unsure how to respond to this new global disorder. Three potential coping strategies have emerged.

The first would require a country like Germany, which considers itself a responsible stakeholder and has some inter-national heft, to take over as a main custodian of the liberal world order. In this scenario, Germany would work to uphold Liberal Order 1.0 globally and to preserve Liberal Order 2.0 within Europe.

> *The West collectively has the power to uphold Liberal Order 1.0. But if the Western powers can't agree on what they want from that order, or what their responsibilities are to maintain it, they are unlikely even to try.*

A second strategy, exemplified today by Turkey under President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, could be called profit maximisation. Turkey isn't trying to overturn the existing order, but it doesn't feel responsible for its upkeep, either. Instead, Turkey seeks to extract as much as possible from Western-led institutions like the EU and NATO, while fostering mutually beneficial relationships with countries, such as Russia, Iran, and China, that often seek to undermine those institutions.

The third strategy is simple hypocrisy: Europe would talk like a responsible stakeholder, but act like a profit maximiser. This is the path British Prime Minister Theresa May took when she met with Trump in Washington, DC. She said all the right things about NATO, the EU, and free trade, but pleaded for a special deal with the US outside of those frameworks.

In the months ahead, many leaders will need to make a bet on whether the liberal order will survive — and on whether they should invest resources in bringing about that outcome. The West collectively has the power to uphold Liberal Order 1.0. But if the Western powers can't agree on what they want from that order, or what their responsibilities are to maintain it, they are unlikely even to try.

The writer is Director of the European Council on Foreign Relations.

BEETLE BAILEY — BY MORT WALKER

BABY BLUES — BY KIRKMAN & SCOTT