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Report

The future of a liberal international order: trends and challenges towards 2030

Wednesday 1 – Friday 3 March 2017 | WP1534

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We marked the 10th year of Wilton Park's International Futures series at a time of global uncertainty and upheaval, with the potential to significantly undermine the liberal international order that has prevailed for decades. This latest meeting examined a wide range of trends, challenges and opportunities and asked what they will mean for the future of the liberal international order over the next 10-15 years.

This high level meeting convened policy planners and opinion formers, horizon scanners/futurists and academics alongside industry, think tanks and other experts from a range of countries. Through a mixture of plenary and breakout sessions, the roundtable informed policy planning, discussed implications of current trends and provided context for planning and decision-making.

In particular it:

- Challenged senior level officials to consider alternative international mid and long term perspectives
- Provided insights into how different countries, organisations and actors plan for the future
- Tested the possibility of reaching a common understanding of long term trends and their implications for policy formulation and practical application
- Supported national and international policy planning institutions in their contribution to global dialogue in the context of the challenges to existing thinking
- Developed and deepened relationships with international partners, strengthening and consolidating the emerging network of 'futurists'

In a world in which power and the global economy are becoming more contested and multipolar, and liberal rules, multilateralism and globalisation are increasingly challenged, this meeting asked what this means for the future of the liberal international order.

The topic was approached from a range of perspectives, analysing the impact of increasing nationalism, isolationism and protectionism, the transfer of power toward non-state actors, and the increasing regional and global influence of non-

Western states. Is the rules based international system set to unravel? What form will the global political order take in the future? Which actors are likely to gain and lose status? What are the drivers, threats and opportunities? How can international frameworks aim to achieve security in a volatile world?

“Today, the liberal international order looks less liberal, less ordered, and less international”

Executive Summary

- The constantly evolving liberal international order since 1945 has had significant successes in maintaining global peace and enhancing prosperity. Recent developments, however, have meant this system is increasingly under strain. Today, the liberal international order looks less liberal, less ordered, and less international.
- Present challenges faced by the liberal order are both domestic and international. Domestically, the political settlements upon which the liberal international order has been based appear increasingly unstable. Partly in response to asymmetric security threats and unexpected financial shocks, some in the USA and Europe are reassessing their support for further globalisation of trade and people. Internationally, longstanding demands for the opening of the international system to the interests of the Global South are gaining in strength. New fora such as the G20 and the AIIB (Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank) may share the order’s economic aims, but not necessarily its underlying political values.
- Such challenges are both immediate and longer term. Immediately, instabilities of the system include rising geopolitical tensions, particularly in the Asia-Pacific region. Longer terms challenges, including climate change, rising visible inequality with regard to who benefits from the system and the disruptive possibilities of new and evolving technology, may require considering radical change to the international governance system.
- We should not, however, be overly pessimistic. The current period of transition means old structures are open to change and possible improvement. There exists no alternative vision of international order with a global appeal, and the cross-border nature of many threats and opportunities means that there is no viable alternative to a multilateral system.
- The requirements for reforming the international system have not changed significantly - to strengthen regional organisations, democratise international institutions and include more non-state actors. In order to make 2030 a better world than today, bold, forward-looking policy responses and the building of resilience into existing institutions are required. We must be prepared and flexible, not dogmatic, in responding to the threats the system faces.
- The greatest challenge for the international system will be to maintain peace, and to preserve and promote its underlying values of democracy, human rights, the rule of law and multilateralism.

“old structures are open to change and possible improvement”

Introduction

The liberal international order refers to the post-1945 global system of norms, rules, and institutions informing state interaction. This includes global economic and financial integration and stability, underscored by the International Financial Institutions: the World Bank, International Monetary Fund (IMF), and the World Trade Organisation (WTO); and political institutions such as the United Nations (UN), normalising peaceful relations between states. These institutions have been underpinned by shared values of state sovereignty, equality and human rights. Rising global instabilities and inequalities politically, socially, and economically are throwing this liberal international order into question. The objective of the meeting was therefore to reflect on the challenges the system is currently facing and what policy makers can do in response.

“challenges currently facing the liberal international order stem, paradoxically, from its historic successes”

Paradoxes of Success

1. In many respects, the challenges currently facing the liberal international order stem, paradoxically, from its historic successes. The issues faced today should therefore not entirely be a cause for pessimism, but also an opportunity to reflect on the gains made and the possibilities still to come.
2. Economically, the remarkable expansion of global trade over recent decades has been seen by many to have enhanced prosperity for most of the planet. Included in this has been a historic reduction in global poverty levels, with the Millennium Development Goal to reduce extreme poverty by half achieved in 2010. Despite this, the great consequence of rising global economic prosperity has been environmental degradation. The unfolding climate crisis faced today is widely considered a global catastrophic risk, and one of the key challenges to be engaged with up to 2030. In addition, the benefits of globalisation have been unevenly spread, both internationally and within countries. Both real and perceived economic inequalities are seen as leading to increased political and social instability.
3. Politically, growing global prosperity has brought new state actors onto the international stage. The current pressures on the international order for reform and democratisation therefore stem from its economic successes. Nevertheless, as more actors enter the world stage, issues of collective action within international decision-making processes may be compounded as common positions become harder to find.
4. Socially and technologically, great leaps in telecommunications mean the world has never been as connected as it is today. This has opened opportunities for intercultural dialogue and the building of transnational communities. The explosion of information brought through such connectivity has, however, been seen to have driven ‘post truth’ dynamics as it becomes harder to distinguish between facts and fiction. The consequent collapse of shared understandings about world events is impeding problem solving capacities and international cooperation.

The domestic basis to the liberal international order

5. Many of the major challenges faced by the liberal international order stem from tensions within the domestic contexts of its constituent states. Any international order is inherently built on disparate national communities. The liberal international order is therefore only secure if liberal, democratic settlements at the domestic level are ensured.
6. These domestic social contracts underpinning the international order appear, however, increasingly under threat. Trends, such as the move away from mainstream political parties, the rise of non-violent nationalism and populism speak to a broader, structural situation in which the social contracts upon which legitimate power has historically been based are eroding. The promise that new generations will be better off than the last is, for many, proving to be untrue. As a consequence, domestic institutions are currently suffering from a crisis of legitimacy and trust. The precarity of existing social contracts has, for some, been a driver of significant recent political events, such as the UK’s vote to leave the EU and the election of Donald Trump in the US.
7. The 20th century made significant gains in expanding democratic forms of government globally. Today, however, liberal democracy feels more precarious and less able to adapt to a fast-changing world. Democratic institutions across the world (both long established and new) are facing challenges. In particular, the resurgence of nationalism and populism in the West is seen by some to be threatening the integrity of democratic institutions. Increasingly, the rule of law, a free and trusted press, the protection of minority rights and representative political institutions are being taken for granted. Today the ubiquity of liberal, democratic societies across the world no longer seems certain.
8. The divisive rhetoric of many contemporary populist movements risks pitting in-groups

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“today’s populist politics is directed less against other states, than against an amorphous globalisation and other social groups”

against out-groups, whether along ethnic or socio-economic lines. This is challenging central principles of liberal democracy that constitutional and legal limits legitimately constrain the majority. Rather than complex issues being met with targeted and bold policy proposals, the intensification of identity politics offers refuge for people’s concerns in senses of self rather than outcomes. Unlike historic populist waves, today’s populist politics is directed less against other states, than against an amorphous globalisation and other social groups. The growing normalisation of Islamophobia and scapegoating of refugees or foreign-born populations are examples of this.

9. In the US, the inward turn of the Trump administration has been perceived as an unwillingness of the country to continue the global political role it has played since the post-war era. While the US economy remains firmly the world’s largest, the election of Donald Trump as President seemingly signals a direction of travel away from multilateral trade deals. If the US is no longer perceived as a major champion of the existing liberal international order, this will increase the perception that the order is less relevant today.
10. The Middle East is a region in which the consequence of a collapsing domestic settlement, without an alternative arrangement, has been felt most painfully. The Arab Spring marked a moment where a historic social contract based on restricted freedoms for expansive welfare proved no longer tenable. A viable alternative has not filled this vacuum, triggering a significant rise in regional instability, most notably through the ongoing conflicts in Syria and Libya. Any resolution to the conflict in Syria, and other countries in the region, necessarily requires a political settlement and a remaking of the basis for domestic legitimacy. For inspiration, we may look towards Tunisia. Since 2011, the peaceful transfer of power has established a pluralistic political system, albeit with entrenched socio-economic issues still requiring work.
11. In the coming years, Africa will be a region of growing importance. Significant projected population increases and urbanisation could potentially drive growth and development. Conflict and food security on the continent remains a continuous issue and major barrier to development. Strategically unlocking resources beyond ODA, from remittances or private finance, will be central to development in the region.
12. The domestic foundations of the liberal international order across the world are therefore in a moment of profound volatility. Societal change usually precedes institutional reform. Nevertheless, looking towards 2030, significant institutional shifts are likely to be needed to remodel the social contracts which underpin domestic institutions. Past institutional transformations have frequently been the consequence of war or revolution. The central challenge today is to reconstruct democratic legitimacy domestically, while preserving an increasingly fragile peace internationally.
13. Any shifts necessarily take place in a vastly different context to the past. Economic interdependence is undermining states’ capacities to control economic relations within increasingly porous territorial boundaries, while rapid technological innovation is transforming our perceptions of work and social interaction. Many have highlighted new solutions which could possibly deliver key socio-economic outcomes for people. These include a Universal Basic Income, or alternative taxation models in response to the rise of automation. These have to be taken seriously if domestic social contracts are going to respond to today’s challenges. How nation-states respond to these challenges will have major consequences for the future shape of the international system.

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International challenges to the liberal order

14. The 20th century was dominated by the global economic and military power of the US. The country’s leadership largely set the direction and terms of international relations within the liberal order. Increasingly, however, there is uncertainty surrounding the US’s political appetite and ability to play a leadership role. Domestic polarisation and declining relative influence mean the US is constrained at home to act internationally, and has less influence on the international stage. President Trump is a continuation,

rather than originator, of this trend. The new principle notion of 'America First' poses key questions concerning the extent to which the US will continue performing a leadership role in the international system or be restricted to protecting its own immediate interests. Proposed cuts to the State Department and USAID, along with an increase in military expenditure, may suggest the latter. A withdrawing US puts an international system based on multilateralism and liberal values into question.

15. A major outcome of the liberal international order has been the economic rise of India, China, Brazil and other large countries, as well as the political rise of some, most notably China. This Eastward and Southern shift of the global balance of power poses challenges and opportunities for the liberal international order. These actors are taking up new roles in upholding the existing international system. Democracy is thriving in India, while China has become an active player in the international order: expanding its role in peacekeeping operations, combating climate change, and defending an open global trade system. This was evidenced most notably by President Xi Jinping's 2017 speech at the World Economic Forum. Nevertheless, the involvement of new state actors in the liberal international system has not precluded parallel international governance structures being created, including new organisations such as the AIIB or the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO).
16. The actions of new states in engaging with the international system stem largely from shared strategic goals – such as combatting terrorism or climate change. There is more disagreement, however, as to whether an international system based on shared, 'liberal' values is one in which all states feel represented. Indeed, longstanding questions continue to be raised as to whether the liberal international order can work equally for all states, or whether it entrenches the interests of the Euro-Atlantic West at the expense of the Global South. Military interventions and the expanded use of drone warfare, the historic experience of painful 'structural adjustment' from International Financial Institutions, and unbalanced trade rules on intellectual property or agriculture imply for some countries that the international system is loaded against them.
17. Tensions concerning the representativeness of the international system are perhaps most pronounced in the longstanding issue of UN Security Council (UNSC) reform. The intractability of achieving not only reform but agreement at the UNSC is testament to the growing difficulties of collective action internationally. A modernisation of the UNSC, leading to a multiplication of actors involved, would likely only compound these problems. Nevertheless, reform to the UNSC remains a high priority for all; despite being a difficult task given the inability to reach a consensus between members of the P5.
18. The value of the UN is recognised by all. While it cannot offer easy solutions to the world's problems, it is a vital space for international cooperation and the peaceful expression of differences. Its role as a long-term partner in peacekeeping and humanitarian efforts serves a crucial purpose in providing basic support to the most unstable regions of the world. A potential decrease in the amount of financial support from the US for UN programmes may raise questions concerning the future stability of UN funding. China has increased financial contributions to the UN. Whether such contributions from new actors like India and China will make up any potential financial deficits remains to be seen.
19. In the absence of reform to existing international institutions, alternative systems have emerged. As the current unipolar world is increasingly challenged, an international system based on 'spheres of influence' is potentially unfolding. Such a system may have the advantage of providing regional stability by accommodating competing rising global powers. However, the risk of undermining global governance institutions which have a broad international membership is a concern. 'À la carte internationalism', whereby states selectively engage in multilateral efforts, undermines the integrity of the liberal international order. Given the transnational nature of problems such as climate change or financial crises, 'spheres of influence' are seen by many as no substitute for

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broader multilateral cooperation. In addition, the possible further splintering of the global order increases the chances of misunderstanding between regional systems and, potentially, interstate conflict. In a possible future international system based on spheres of influence, the peaceful, rather than competitive, interaction between parallel international regimes will therefore be essential.

20. In the coming years, Africa will be a region of growing importance. Significant projected population increases and urbanisation could potentially drive growth and development. Conflict and food security on the continent remains a continuous issue and major barrier to development. Strategically unlocking resources beyond ODA, from remittances or private finance, will be central to development in the region.
21. The future of the EU will be crucial to the longevity of the liberal international order. As an intense system of international cooperation, it may offer a model for achieving peaceful relations between historically antagonistic states. The series of crises faced by the EU in recent years, such as the sovereign debt crisis, large movements and influxes of people, deteriorating regional security, and the UK's decision to leave, have posed the Union serious challenges. How the EU responds to these challenges in the coming years will be a key test for defending an international system which is built on cooperation.
22. Looking towards 2030, the nature of a global order based on nation-states is being called into question. The longstanding trend of urbanisation is resulting in cities becoming increasingly important players on the global stage. Whereas the 20th century was dominated by the nation-state, many challenges today require more localised responses, possibly beyond the capacity of larger national authorities. In contrast, cities are considered by some to possibly offer more targeted and flexible responses to global problems, while being potentially perceived as more legitimate because of their closer geographic proximity to citizens. Empowering cities and giving them a seat at the international table would require rethinking predominantly inter-governmental global decision-making structures. The addition of cities to global governance structures would, however, potentially exacerbate existing collective action problems by multiplying the complexity of decision-making processes.

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Rising challenges

Security

23. Many observe that global crime and conflict has been on a downward trend in recent decades. Since 2010, however, this trend is considered by many to have reversed. Recent failures of the international order in resolving regional security tensions (e.g. in Libya, Ukraine, and Syria) have undermined the integrity of the order's ability to maintain peaceful relations between states. Increasingly, it is observed that states are regarding global political and diplomatic systems as ineffective in mediating disagreements. The actions of some states suggest that aggression is coming to be seen as a viable alternative. As a consequence, interstate conflict has become a greater threat.
24. Escalating tensions in the Asia-Pacific region pose a threat to global stability. The Democratic People's Republic of Korea's (DPRK) missile testing programme is increasing tensions in the region. Simultaneously, overlapping territorial claims and the close proximity of US and Chinese military activities in the South China Sea are significant sources of regional pressure. It could take only a small moment of misunderstanding for this to precipitate conflict.
25. Regarding NATO, US President Trump's demand for the 2% rule to be honoured by all member states as a condition for mutual defence means the future of the Alliance is more open than since the 1990s. This comes in the context of growing tensions between NATO and Russia in the Baltic and Black Sea regions.
26. Nuclear proliferation will continue to be a pressing global challenge. While the world

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has succeeded in preventing the use of nuclear weapons since 1945, their non-use in the future is not guaranteed. The missile programme of the DPRK is a major source of instability here. The major success in agreeing the Iran nuclear deal needs continued support to ensure its future.

27. The nature of conflict is changing considerably, with the line between war and peace becoming blurred. Non-conventional forms of warfare are increasing, with civilians increasingly a target, and political and social instability a strategic goal. Furthermore, the diffusion of military hardware across the world has enabled non-state actors to become a major participant in conflict, particularly through the growing threat of terrorism. The likely military defeat of the so-called ‘Islamic State’, and the consequent disintegration of the so-called ‘caliphate’, poses acute security challenges through the potential diffusion of terror threats, notably surviving so-called ‘Islamic State’ fighters moving across the region and beyond.
28. The rise of cyber warfare adds a new dimension to security issues. The digitalisation of key infrastructure, such as the energy sector or financial system, introduces new vulnerabilities to cyber-attack. These systems are unlikely to be wholly under state control, and may operate across borders, making international norms and collaboration vital. The rise of cyber warfare may require us to rethink the ethics of war for a digital age. The possibility of a ‘Digital Geneva Convention’ is an issue to be explored.
29. Resurgent terror threats risk provoking illiberal responses from some states, such as the disproportionate use of surveillance powers or undermining the rights of minorities. Lessons from past militarised/secured responses to terrorism, and the prospect of reinforcing senses of grievance, must be learned. Instead, counter-terrorism strategies must have a strong development component. Counter-terrorism must build on what works based on a reflection of past experiences, not be reactionary military responses.
30. The state of the International Criminal Court (ICC) is a cause of concern for international justice. Threats of withdrawal from the ICC and general attacks on its integrity as an institution undermine the legitimacy of international criminal justice mechanisms. A less legitimate or strong ICC would have disastrous consequences for those who are victims of atrocities worldwide.

Economy

31. The decades since 1945 have brought a vast increase in levels of global trade and financial flows. Economic globalisation has made the world more interconnected. Value chains operate across borders. The opening of trade barriers through the WTO and other agreements has been widely seen to have made an overall positive contribution to global growth. Nevertheless, recent developments have meant the liberal economic trading system is under question. President Trump’s criticisms of international trade and his rejection of the Trans-Pacific Partnership, as well as the growing disquiet in Europe surrounding the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership, mark a possible shifting mood towards protectionism.
32. Despite significant increases in global prosperity, economic growth has been divided highly unequally within countries and internationally. The previously expected gains of a knowledge based economy have not been evenly distributed. Significantly, increases in wages have not kept pace with growth, resulting in stagnant living conditions for many. While official inequality levels have recently been decreasing, the balance of distribution between capital and labour continues to be felt as unequal both across countries and within. Disquiet surrounding the fair distribution of the gains of globalisation is a major driving force of the political instabilities experienced today. This is true both within the Euro-Atlantic heartlands of the liberal economic order and in the demands of the Global South. There is, therefore, a general demand for a more inclusive form of globalisation, built on fairer trading relationships and greater distribution of the fruits of growth.

“Despite significant increases in global prosperity, economic growth has been divided highly unequally within countries and internationally.”

“the expansion of the G8 to the G20 offers an opportunity for a greater number of countries to have a seat at the highest table”

33. The shifting centres of global economic activity, and emergence of new players like China and India, have meant the frameworks and rules of global economic governance are becoming increasingly contested. Growing pressure for and dissatisfaction with, the pace of reform of International Financial Institutions has led to new frameworks and institutions for cooperation being created. The expansion of the G8 to the G20, for example, offers an opportunity for a greater number of countries to have a seat at the highest table. Concerns remain, however, as to whether the G20 can transition from an ad hoc forum into a major site for policy coordination on global macroeconomic issues. The emergence of the AIIB challenges the dominance of Western states in international financing. Such parallel institutions potentially fragment existing global economic governance structures and the values that underpin them. Nevertheless, new, parallel financial and economic institutions open opportunities for cooperation which acknowledge changing balances of global power.
34. Ten years on from the Global Financial Crisis, global financial stability remains a high priority. The opening of international capital markets in recent decades, while expanding global investment opportunities, has also precipitated a large increase in financial crises. Global economic governance frameworks are yet to catch up with the enormous expansion of financial flows across the world, which are likely to continue expanding. The US in particular has a special responsibility for maintaining global financial stability. Its structural, global economic and financial position means the actions of the Federal Reserve have ramifications across the international system.
35. Looking towards 2030, old economic models will likely require reassessment. In the past, growth has been achieved through militarisation or mass production and consumption. Today, this is no longer viable. The threat of climate change demands that we must find ways to secure economic prosperity without depleting natural resources or precipitating war. New opportunities for productive investment have been suggested in green industries, education, and culture. Furthermore, resource efficiency offers a huge opportunity for future productivity gains that respects limited environmental resources. Finally, new technologies are likely to have a continued influence on economic transformation. The full impact of e-currencies and cryptocurrencies on financial flows and markets is likely to become a major issue in the years to come.

Technology

“the commercialisation and personalisation of algorithmic news via social media is polarising communities as people become trapped in informational echo chambers”

36. Technological innovation and change is currently on the upsurge. The information revolution, greater connectivity, developments in Artificial Intelligence, and automation will have a growing relevance as 2030 approaches. With such changes come both great opportunities and great challenges.
37. Technological shifts have played a notable role in facilitating the political polarisation and democratic vulnerabilities we are witnessing today. New media has had a major impact on how news and information is produced and consumed. Positively, this has democratised national and global conversations. Anyone with an open Internet connection can now potentially be heard across the world. The possibilities this provides, for example, in reporting abuses in real-time are immense. Conversely, however, the commercialisation and personalisation of algorithmic news via social media is polarising communities as people become trapped in informational echo chambers. Whether for monetary gain, or strategic disinformation, the ease of access to media distribution is undermining journalistic integrity – the rise of ‘fake news’ and dynamics of ‘post-truth’ being illustrative of this. Historically trusted news sources, where journalistic standards are higher, have been pulled into these dynamics as a general climate of informational mistrust builds. This has profound implications for political institutions, as polarisation feeds a broader legitimacy crisis. Looking forward, strategies to make media platforms accountable for their content, and create imaginative ways to foster cross-community conversations, will be required to restore

the social trust necessary for a functional democracy.

“Past experiences with mechanisation teach us that new jobs will potentially replace the old”

38. Impending automation will potentially shift our conceptions of work and the nature of employment. Whole industries in manufacturing, logistics, and clerical work are expected to be affected by automation, possibly with significant losses to existing jobs. Past experiences with mechanisation teach us that new jobs will potentially replace the old. This does not mediate, however, the significant social restructuring that is likely to take place, feeding into the necessary renegotiation of existing domestic social contracts. A targeted response will be necessary to handle this transition, whether this is a shift in how work is taxed (e.g. a ‘robot tax’) or intensive reskilling programmes.
39. The amount of data in the world is increasing exponentially. A future world where everything is potentially quantified requires a response. This includes measures to control the integrity of data, ways to verify non-tampering, and controls on data’s legitimate use. Data ownership will also be a key issue. With large technology companies increasingly drawing their value from data ownership, questions of political economy surrounding information will become more important – potentially challenging our existing understandings of property rights. Furthermore, as social interaction and even conceptions of self shift through digitalisation, new norms and codes of behaviour will need to be developed, having wider ramifications for political and economic relations.
40. Governments are not powerless in the face of technological change. Public institutions have played a crucial role in incubating major innovations and in expanding telecommunication infrastructures. Nevertheless, regulatory structures built for an analogue age may need reassessing in the face of digitalisation and automation. Crucial issues surrounding tensions between privacy and security, reforming taxation for the digital age, and new norms for online behaviour require consideration. Work has already begun in these areas and is likely to become more pertinent in the coming years. The idea of ‘algorithmic government’ potentially offers great improvements in efficiency, but will raise profound questions concerning the nature of the state and democratic legitimacy. In this period of transition, a central task for state institutions, civil society and the private sector will be to build resilience to address what may come and make the future work in everybody’s interest.

“Governments are not powerless in the face of technological change”

Conclusion

The liberal international order today faces major challenges both domestically and internationally, immediately and in the longer term. Domestically, the current dissatisfaction among populations is shaking the established settlements in the Atlantic heartland of the liberal international order, most visible through seismic political events such as the UK Brexit vote and Trump’s election in the US. Internationally, rising powers and increasing regional tensions mean global peace is now more precarious. Reactions to perceived and real economic inequalities are feeding a growing opposition to the globalisation of trade. Technological innovation, demographic shifts, and a changing climate pose acute future challenges to the liberal order.

Nevertheless, while the liberal international order appears increasingly precarious, there exists no alternative vision with a global appeal. Furthermore, the nature of the global challenges being faced today means there is no viable alternative than to continue striving for a multilateral system built on international cooperation. We should, therefore, not be overly pessimistic. While we are certainly in a time of transition, such times offer great opportunities for productive change. New technologies are disrupting old modes of governing and organising. Rising powers are bringing new perspectives and resources to bear on global problems. Achieving productive change will require radical and bold thought and action. A major priority in managing any transition will be to ensure liberal values of democracy, human rights, and multilateralism remain at the heart of any future international system.

While high ambitions are important in looking towards 2030, we must acknowledge that

politics will likely constrain achieving them. The list of desired reforms to the international system is relatively unchanged from preceding years: to strengthen regional organisations, democratise international institutions, and include more non-state actors. These remain important, but we must acknowledge that any structural reform will be pragmatic, piecemeal, and at times chaotic. A key recommendation is therefore to be prepared and flexible, not dogmatic, in confronting the threats the international system faces. This will include maintaining old tools for longstanding problems, such as the importance of inter-state diplomacy for conflict resolution and regional security, and UN programmes for humanitarian assistance and development. But also embracing new methods and technologies to handle the challenges of the future, including automation, climate change, or demographic shifts.

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