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Image: LeeYiuTung

Report

The future of cities, regions and communities

Wednesday 7 – Friday 9 February 2018 | WP1594

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Ministry
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Executive summary

Cities have grown at an astonishing pace over the past century. Even at the height of the British Empire and London's emergence as the world's first modern sustainable megacity, only 3% of the global population was urbanised. The figure is now 50%, and set to increase to 66% by 2050.¹ Therefore, our countries and societies are structured fundamentally differently today than they have been at any other point in history. Much of this growth has occurred organically, with little planning, leading to the development of economically viable but socially and environmentally challenging urban spaces.

This exponential urbanisation contributes to an important trend: the growing role of sub-state actors as sources of power and influence. Some are even arguing that cities will eventually challenge states as the premier source of power on the world stage, though this remains a fringe view. What seems more likely is that cities will steadily gain in influence and power, creating a new form of mutually beneficial cooperation between the city and the state as more equal partners. This rise in significance is not limited to the cities: sub-state actors, in many different forms, are becoming increasingly influential on a global level. This includes local and regional authorities, communities both on- and offline, multinational corporations, extremist groups. Reaching the right balance between the existing rules-based international order and newly empowered cities and other sub-state actors will be one of the big challenges of the 21st century. Within the wider context of perceived threats to the international order, the role of sub-state actors – from supportive liberal cities to illiberal revisionist forces such as transnational terrorist groups – will be increasingly important. It remains unclear which of these actors will more or less enthusiastically 'plug in' to this system. What is clear is that international organisations, and the fundamental mechanics and protocol of diplomacy, need to adapt to the louder voices cities will have in the future. Formalised city-level networks, city to city diplomacy and city to state diplomacy, could, and should, become the norm.

The growth of megacities is likely to be one of the most important stories in this field. To thrive, they will need to get more than just the economy right: well-planned public services, infrastructure, and education systems will be vital, too. This applies to the development of future cities and the retrofitting of existing megacities where planners have often overlooked a human dimension. It is important that planners

¹ <https://esa.un.org/unpd/wup/Publications/Files/WUP2014-Highlights.pdf>

learn lessons from those megacities that are thriving.

In a 'smarter' age, it will become even more important that cities develop structural resilience, including in the fields of smart technology, technology-reliant critical national infrastructure, and social media. There is a lack of governance to one extent or another in each of these. As a result, developers and designers are insulated from the effects of cybercrime, terrorist attacks, and other disruption, while end users feel the pain. That is neither a sustainable nor a resilient solution. The future of these domains must involve greater regulatory oversight, supranational coordination and private sector accountability, without compromising freedom of expression.

It is vitally important that cities form effective networks. In every field – whether tackling violent extremism, countering climate change, or sharing best planning practice – cities cannot afford to stay isolated from their peers. In the increasingly networked 21st century, it will be easier than ever before for cities on opposite sides of the world to establish meaningful connections. Existing frameworks in certain areas provide promising examples of city-to-city networking that must be replicated elsewhere in order to tackle these problems.

Securing cities, as they become more geostrategically relevant entities, raises specific challenges for urban planners and militaries alike. Urban warfare is a great leveller, which neuters some of the advantage of advanced military powers. It is crucial that militaries don't just develop more and more effective technological solutions but also work hard to understand the cultures and societies in which they operate. 'Non-lethal' methods will be an important growth area if militaries are to avoid inherently wasteful and destructive urban warfare.

Introduction

In 2017, the Wilton Park Futures conference looked at the future of the liberal international order. One of the questions asked at that conference was what role cities would play in the future world order. The 2018 Wilton Park Futures Conference was, in part, inspired by that question, and a range of other questions flowing from it. How powerful will the city of the future be? How smart? What sorts of wars will be fought in and over it? In the face of growing doubts about the role of governments both domestically and internationally, the 21st century may be one in which cities rise dramatically as powerful, independent economic and social actors, playing an increasingly important role in the way in which populations conceive identity.

Local, national, global

Empowered cities

1. The problems facing us today, in a contested world where power is increasingly diffuse, go beyond any single organisation's capacity to meet populations' expectations of security and welfare. That includes governments, which are encountering a pace and complexity of change across multiple domains in the modern world: the economy, demographics, climate change, and warfare are just some examples. This is stretching institutional capacities to their limits. Tools and powers that have historically been the preserve of states are spreading to small groups and individuals – whether municipal authorities, terrorist organisations, multinational corporations, or something else completely.
2. These factors have created 'governance gaps' which are being filled in new and surprising ways. In the future, solutions to problems may increasingly often be found at

the lowest levels of government rather than the highest. Given the fundamentals, perhaps this isn't surprising: the greater Los Angeles area contains roughly 15 million people, more than many European countries and some current members of the UN Security Council. Its education budget is larger than some national budgets. These disparities in scale alone help explain why cities are becoming so much more influential. At the same time, there is a growing tendency for some citizens to identify more strongly with their city or their continent than with their country: consider, for instance, the growing number of people describing themselves as 'Londoners within Europe' in the wake of the vote to leave the European Union. There is a growing sense that the problems citizens are most concerned with are best solved at either the local level (e.g. potholes, schooling) or the international level (e.g. climate change).

3. Nevertheless, the state is not dead -- far from it. There will always be crucial services that only national governments can provide, and the state will always play an important role in enforcing macro-level national regulation, such as environmental, safety, and working standards, preventing a damaging race to the bottom. Even if the New York Police Department alone has trained up the police forces of entire countries, there is still little they could do, for instance, in the face of a military invasion: there must be a national defence capability. Likewise, their jobs would quickly become impossible without the baseline level of public order provided by the safety net of national-level social welfare. More fundamentally still, cities rely on the extensive supply-chains and talent embedded in their surrounding countries. Moreover, only states can feed into the multilateral system's extensive web of treaties, which has significant impacts on cities without their direct input.
4. For cities to become global by design there are three vital ingredients: strong leadership, vision, and public buy-in. This renegotiation of the relationship between state and city will present an excellent opportunity to mayors, town councillors, and heads of local movements. They will be able to make their cases on a larger stage and to a more diverse audience than ever before as the developing world is further and further integrated into global networks. We need to think about how best to nurture that new generation of leaders so that they will engage globally, as part of city-to-city networks. These networks will be vital to enable cities to share best practice, in particular in providing support to relatively isolated mayors. On issues such as climate change, immigration, personal freedoms, and trade, cities are often more socially and politically liberal than their host countries. This begs the question; could more networked and globally engaged liberal cities play a mitigating role in the increasingly illiberal, transactional and competitive wider world that has characterised the 21st century so far?
5. There are already good examples of this model working in practice: for instance, standardised risk assessment methods are now in place across many cities, helping de-radicalisation efforts to work in a more targeted, effective and efficient way. As the importance of cities grows, states will increasingly need to encourage and engage in city to nation state diplomacy. On issues such as cultural exchanges, trade, and education, cities are genuine actors with real leverage. It may well be increasingly necessary to formalise city-to-city and city-to-state relations through the creation of new diplomatic norms. A key challenge for foreign ministries will be taking advantage of the opportunities this presents.

Megacities

6. One of the most important stories in this area is the emergence of megacities. These can broadly be defined as cities with populations over 10 million, though the definition is context-dependent. When we talk about megacities, we cannot avoid talking about China: over the past forty years, that country has been urbanising at breakneck speed. Where only 18% of the population was urban in 1978, the figure now stands at 57%. The crucial detail is that 85% of the current urban population live in just 19 megacity regions. Ensuring that these megacities and those of the future are thoughtfully

planned and well developed is crucial.

7. The successful megacity must simultaneously be attractive enough to draw in large numbers of workers from the surrounding country without attracting so many that the rate of expansion is unsustainable. Achieving this balance is a difficult task. On the one hand, the would-be megacity must have high-quality infrastructure, a free and fair market that can provide food and fuel, health and welfare provision, utilities, effective planning laws, educational institutions, and an ample supply of jobs. On the other hand, smaller towns and villages in the rest of the country must have attractive enough education and job opportunities to remain viable.
8. It is also crucial that the city's amenities are in the right places: a good place to start is the "15 Minute Rule" developed in China to retrofit existing cities to make them more liveable, which holds that most public services and community basics such as shopping and leisure facilities should be available within 15 minutes of a citizen's home. This helps build a sense of community, and improves the living experience in previously purely economically driven spaces. One way in which this rule may be advanced is in the development of a new paradigm for office work: rather than commuting across the city to a company headquarters, it will become more and more common for workers to work in local serviced offices where business needs can be met at lower cost and greater convenience for the worker. Another lesson lies in verticality: building high minimises the development of urban sprawl and ensures that local services can be located at convenient distances. Over half, for instance, of the population of Hong Kong lives above the 16th floor.
9. Given the pace and scale of change, China, then, is a good place to look for examples not just of success and failure in this field but also potential structural solutions. The current preferred model of megacity development in China is quite distinctive – rather than a monocentric city developing radially, the Chinese megacity of the future is a polycentric mega-conurbation containing several city-sized boroughs, somewhat akin to the model of Tokyo: a group of several cities with no clear centre, united into a single metropolitan area. The growth of intelligent city networking and enhanced connectivity facilitates this model. That is already the model for Shanghai and Beijing; taking the model even further, the Greater Bay Area Initiative has incorporated Hong Kong, Macau, and 9 cities in mainland China. Their combined population is greater than that of the entire UK. Intelligently connecting these cities is establishing new synergies; and they are all now within one hour's train journey from each other. This trend may result in the extinction of medium-sized cities in China: they will either be absorbed into neighbouring megacities or dwindle in size.
10. Significantly, while improving urbanisation, the Chinese government is now emphasising a policy of rural regeneration, recognising that the current level of migration from countryside to city is unsustainable. It is also widely understood that urban growth must take place in a sustainable, resilient way, and urban planning is becoming one of the most popular academic subjects. It is important to bear in mind that the Chinese experience of megacities is the outlier. In much of the world, they are becoming increasingly violent, unequal places – especially in Africa and Latin America. A challenge for the future will be applying effectively the lessons learnt in China to the megacities of the Global South.
11. In the face of the myriad environmental, political, and military threats that cities across the world will face in the coming decades, it is also vital that municipal governments are structurally resilient and well prepared for crises. Cities need to ensure that they build resilience into their infrastructure through redundant systems and overcapacity: otherwise there is a risk of reactive movement of important resources as crises come up, reinforcing inefficient short-termist tendencies. Governments must ensure that there are multiple channels of communication with citizens and emulate multiple scenarios and drill for more predictable crises to ensure that citizens understand what to do in an emergency. It is clear that as cities and their infrastructure continue to grow in

complexity crises will require long-term, not just short-term, responses.

12. Overall, it is clear that megacities of the future will need more than just a booming economy to survive: careful urban planning is crucial, as is getting the basic infrastructure right.

Tolerance, division, and disenfranchisement

13. The internet and the growth of social media has further empowered sub-state actors. It is now possible for these groups to communicate their messages to far wider audiences than ever before. That is partially because in most of the world the internet has opened up big ungoverned spaces where anonymity enables frank and open conversations. It is now much easier for like-minded citizens to band together and make their voices heard at the highest levels. But this also has its negative side, allowing those who share intolerant or extremist views to come together and support each other.
14. Increasingly, social media platforms are the primary means by which citizens access the media. Rather than browsing a newspaper's webpage, it is far more likely that a user will access individual articles via their Facebook news feed. This carries both opportunities and risks. While in theory this reduces the dominance of any individual news outlet, the way in which news feeds are catered for user interests means that there is a great risk that readers are exposed to far less material challenging to their worldview than before. While partisan newspapers tend to publish journalists who hold a range of political views, the self-reinforcing tendency of the Facebook newsfeed means that users see a curated selection of pieces that tend to fit in with their existing worldview. That also means greater responsibility for the tech companies who create these platforms – the formulae used by Facebook to determine who reads what can have a significant effect on elections, for instance. The growing scandals surrounding the role of Facebook in influencing elections and Western governments' growing willingness to legislate to protect user data may mean that in the coming decades the role of social media platforms as blameless 'paper mills' may fundamentally change.
15. Some of the groups who feel the most benefit from social media hold the most hold extreme views, marginalised by society but reinforced through likeminded virtual communities. The openness and interconnectivity of the Internet, coupled with the fact that fear and anger tend to be the things that generate the most traffic, means that there is an increasing tendency for extremist views to gain disproportionately large audiences. This also presents a clear opportunity to hostile states seeking to spread disinformation. How, therefore, can we counter hate speech, disinformation, and terrorist propaganda without overly restricting free expression? An encouraging trend is the emergence of Internet-enabled fact-checking technology that can use machine learning to pick out and instantly verify fact-claims embedded within articles. The UN-mandated 'Tech Against Terror' initiative, which has support from many major tech companies, encourages firms to employ a range of active countermeasures to online terrorist propaganda. This includes, for instance, technology that ensures rebuttals to extremist ideology are included in web searches on the topic.
16. Compounding this problem, a broader 'digital divide' in access to the internet has emerged, splitting the rich and poor even in the most developed countries. Previously this divide was a simple binary: the rich were more likely to have internet access, the poor less likely. Nowadays the divide is more a spectrum. Internet speed, bandwidth, and mode of access are all greater in the developed world, while connections in the developing world lag behind. That has a significant impact on the benefits developing countries can derive from the internet. Of course, there is another kind of digital divide, too, that has become increasingly apparent in recent years: divide through design. Many countries, most notably China, now systematically block access to certain websites. Facilitated by this policy, there is a growing sense that the internet is segmenting into blocks, divided up between the big tech companies of the US and China. In 2016 the UN Human Rights Council passed a non-binding resolution

condemning governments that try to disrupt free access to the internet; it is likely that in the coming decades a new human right to freely access the internet, will gain recognition among many – though certainly not all – states. This is unsurprising given the astonishing growth in global smartphone usage: in 2017 four billion people owned a smartphone, nearly double the 2014 figure.

17. All the same, it is important not to underestimate the continuing strength of older, more established forms of communication. While the internet will continue to bring massive change, we should understand it as the latest development in an historic trend towards an increasingly networked world, as with the printing press and the development of written language, rather than a radical departure from anything that came before.

Making the city smarter

Smart cities

18. Beyond broader political and demographic trends, new technologies will also greatly alter the urban environment, how we interact with it and with each other. Mobility as a service is a good example of this: driverless cars and buses will bring more efficient mobility options to all. Autonomous taxi services that use machine learning and big data to pool rides between users who need to make roughly similar journeys will enable far more efficient use of roads (the average occupancy of a car in Britain, for example, is 1.2 people). Some of these services are likely to be free at the point of use, the data generated by the journeys alone worth the cost of travel.
19. The second-order effects are worth considering too. Will the city of the future still need the same number of car parks? As we move away from 'One Person, One Vehicle', local authorities may well be set for a windfall as they redevelop land earmarked for car use. It is estimated that, in some cities, as much as two thirds of current road space and 70% of car parks could become redundant. But it is important not to generalise. In many cities – Houston is an example – there is so much space available that the development of this new model is less likely. It would naïve to assume that these trends mean that the roads of the future will be significantly less busy than they are today: while car seats will be used more efficiently, the increased efficiency will in turn lead to increased demand.
20. There is also a big question about the 'human factors' – what unintended consequences might arise out of the introduction of this technology into our everyday lives? There will be a need for traditional planning responses to deal with those consequences. And these new developments bring with them the usual debate about privacy versus convenience: these autonomous vehicles will gather huge amounts of personal user information. There will be the usual trade-off between anonymity and convenience: strong oversight will be needed of who owns what data, and how best to secure vulnerabilities. Blockchain technology may enable a decentralised system whereby we can take advantage of the convenience whilst maintaining a degree of data privacy.
21. Policy makers at all levels must also be keenly aware of the fact that different communities will respond to these developments in different ways. Ideas that seem harmless from the perspective of a liberally-minded urban planner will not always be acceptable to all citizens: for example, a bicycle lane in New York City was protested by some local members of an ultra-orthodox Jewish community who objected to the cyclists' form-fitting garb.
22. It is still unclear how these fundamental changes to the way in which citizen and city interact will affect behavioural psychology. Is it possible that map reading will become redundant? And when this technology rolls out on a larger scale, what unexpected outcomes will arise from the collision between the perfect models, sensors and calculations of autonomous vehicles and the messy world of the individual? These could range from the relatively benign – children playing in front of autonomous vehicles to force them to stop – to the more dangerous: if autonomous cars drive with

just a few inches between each one, then accidents' and attacks' potential for harm is greatly increased.

23. As this new technology develops, interoperability of autonomous infrastructure must be encouraged, and common industry standards developed. This is particularly important in the physical, environmental aspects of the new technology, such as inductive charging for electric cars. If just one provider dominates the provision of infrastructure that is solely compatible with their products then there is a risk of monopoly creation, limiting the competition required to ensure affordability and allow for greater choice for consumers. These developments will, one way or another, bring a number of private sector actors into realms that public service providers have historically dominated.
24. The creation of smarter cities is an excellent opportunity to create more environmentally friendly cities. Unfortunately, it is not clear that opportunity always leads to action. So far, organisations in both the public and private sectors have not taken the action needed to create truly sustainable cities. Part of the problem is that the people who must pay and invest in the new technology are not always the same as those who would benefit. One of the most promising models for a future energy infrastructure is the 'smart grid' concept, which uses new technology to ensure that energy supply is always directed to the places where demand is highest. This creates efficiencies that benefit both consumers and suppliers. But it is not always easy for energy companies to justify investing in technology that appears to threaten their bottom line. Public-private partnerships must also be a key part of the greening of the smart city of the future – we have already seen increasing numbers of wealthy benefactors in the West bankrolling environmental measures.
25. Ultimately, the best way to ensure that our smart cities are green too is to strike the right balance between top-down and bottom-up approaches. It helps that future generations are likely to be increasingly inclined to take action against climate change. The rise in city and regional governments striking out against their national governments' climate policies is also an interesting trend that suggests the unique potential for sub-state government actors to lead global change. With so many cities located in areas vulnerable to rising sea levels and extreme weather, it is likely that they will continue to be at the vanguard of international efforts in this area, which could potentially be an exemplar of cities taking on an increasingly relevant global leadership role.

System vulnerabilities, resilience and cyber security

26. Clearly, then, more and more of cities' critical infrastructure is reliant on the Internet. It is, therefore, increasingly important for cities to have well-planned mitigations against cyberattacks. One way of conceptualising this is to take an epidemiological model, with IT security as a kind of public health issue on par with basic hygiene and vaccination: while we try to prevent people from getting the flu, some will inevitably get it. Minimising the impacts, however, requires more than public awareness. Government and private sector organisations at all levels need to realise, too, that even if they themselves do not value the data they hold too highly, there are almost certainly groups who do. A hacker group or hostile state is equally likely to hack to embarrass as it is to seek to make money or inflict retribution for a perceived slight. What makes this even harder is the basic asymmetry of the threat. Cyberattacks require minimal resources in comparison with the huge sums that cities need to spend to prevent them, including by keeping hardware and software up-to-date. It is also vital that citizens understand the potential connection between cyberattacks and physical harm: an attack on a hospital, or a power plant, for instance, could cause mass casualties.
27. Therefore, as cities become smarter, it will also be important to ensure that planners think hard about where and when to connect critical infrastructure to the web. 'Digital by default' is not always the right slogan: in order to improve resilience, equipment that doesn't require internet connectivity to operate shouldn't be connected to the internet. Hospital equipment, for instance, should probably focus on stability and security rather

than the added convenience of smart features. It is also inevitable that as more and more infrastructure connects to the web cities will acquire numerous superfluous systems, not all maintainable in the long-term as manufacturers drop support or stretched budgets cannot afford software updates. The answer is to identify a core set of critical infrastructure pieces and focus maintenance budgets on those, at the same time as maintaining essential redundant systems, including analogue alternatives, to ensure resilience. There will need to be policy changes that place greater liability on the designers of platforms rather than the end users who typically suffer from design inadequacies. At the same time, it is vital that these risk mitigation strategies take account of the poorest citizen's needs. Making sure that this happens will require a solid partnership between states and technology companies.

28. In the future, we will see two competing strategies for IT security emerge: a hardening strategy, which emphasises strong defence against attacks, and a hack-back strategy, which 'fights fire with fire' and seeks to deter attacks with the threat of greater retaliatory attacks. Particularly in the USA it seems that the latter approach is increasingly being favoured. The difficulty comes in attributing a crime to a given group: it is rarely possible to be certain about the culprit of a cyberattack so the hack-back approach does create the risk of spiralling escalations of conflicts. There is also a more fundamental problem about how best to deter cyber-crime. Kinetic force can deter further kinetic attacks – but it is not clear that the same applies to cyber-attacks. The best approach may well be to work closely with internet service providers to cut off hackers' access to the web.
29. In the longer-term, the best solution may be the creation of a new Geneva-style convention explicitly assigning which actors are responsible and accountable for what in this new domain of warfare. But that requires buy in from virtually all nations, something that seems deeply unlikely in the present day. It may well be that such a convention could only be established in the wake of a truly catastrophic cyber event.

Security and the city

Terror and serious organised crime

30. If we want to understand how terror threats are likely to develop in the future, we must look at two trends. Firstly, the terrorist of the future is likely to be opportunistic, and low-tech to avoid detection, fashioning weapons out of normal, every-day objects. We have already seen this weaponisation of the mundane in recent terror attacks. The cinematic school of terror that defined the first decade of the 21st century has made way for a distinctly low-tech approach. Controlling the supply of weapons will, therefore, only go so far in preventing these attacks. Secondly, terrorists will continue to focus on soft targets and critical infrastructure – in both cases, things cities contain in abundance.
31. A common response to such concerns is a focus on the concept of resilience. Resilience does not mean installing steel barricades on our important streets or an armed police presence at every corner: not only is that level of security unpalatable to the public, but it may be counter-productive. The objective behind these attacks – creating an atmosphere of fear and fomenting divisions in society – are easier achieved in the atmosphere of heightened tension such measures contribute to. Incidents such as the 2017 Oxford Street panic in London, where Christmas shoppers who mistakenly believed a terrorist attack was underway ended up injuring themselves and others in their panicked attempts to flee the scene, may become more common in cities where a visible security strategy is undertaken. Rather, the resilient city is the one that, as New York City did last year, sustains a major terrorist attack in the morning but is able then to send its children out onto the streets to celebrate Halloween later the same day. To a certain extent, this is a basic part of a city's DNA: some have it more than others do. Leaders can still help encourage the right atmosphere through strategic and well-timed communications efforts. It is also possible to create cities that are 'resilient by design', using intelligent design methods to conceal security features by, for instance, preventing car access to key pedestrian chokepoints with aesthetically pleasing

feature, such as trees. The new US Embassy in London is a good example of this approach, creating a positive, open and public space that is nevertheless highly secure. Ultimately, resilience is a multidimensional concept that operates at the national, municipal, community and individual level.

32. Resilience, however, has its limits. The terrorist attacks that continued throughout the Troubles in Northern Ireland demonstrated how even in the face of sustained resilience, terror can persist if grievances run deep. And in some cities initial resilience can ultimately give way in the face of devastating force – we need only look to how effectively Daesh was able to overrun cities in Iraq and Syria for evidence of that.
33. Policy responses must not only emphasise cities' resilience to cope with terror attacks but also the preventive work that identifies and prevents radicalisation and extremism in the first place. It's vital that cities join strong networks to share best practice and provide mutual support at times of crisis. Although a 'one size fits all' approach will never succeed, such networks can still provide significant value in joining up practitioners from diverse fields and emphasising a global agenda of social cohesion and integration. Many risk assessment and identification processes are replicable in all cities, even if the policy responses differ. It is also vital to remember the global picture. While there have been around 4,000 deaths to terror attacks in Western cities over the past decade, 13,000 have died from the same cause in Iraq over the past year. Ultimately, preventing radicalisation will require solid education and career prospects for young people in both developed and developing countries. It is important that we monitor closely those young people most vulnerable to radicalisation from an early age and do all we can to build mutual trust and respect between government and at-risk groups.
34. An interesting case study showing how we can make more targeted, upstream interventions to tackle violent extremism is the antiquities trade. This takes place in Western capitals all the time: ISIS does not only destroy cultural heritage, they also profit from removing and selling individual pieces to finance terrorist activity. Tackling that illicit trade could hamper extremist organisations' capability to threaten cities. We can take inspiration from the aftermath of the Second World War: the trade in artworks and other pieces stolen from Jewish families was shut down after a major communications effort and auction houses became much more thoughtful about what items were and were not appropriate for sale. Similar trends can be witnessed for funding serious and organised crime syndicates with the west being an unwitting partner in 'cleaning' dirty money through antiquities trading and allowing real estate purchases with money gained illicitly.
35. Ultimately, tackling violent extremism is going to require a co-ordinated public security policy, engaging experts, the national security state apparatus, local authorities, developers, policymakers, intelligence agencies, and other stakeholders. The better networked we are, and the less we work in silos, the better we will be able to both minimise its occurrence and mitigate against its effects.

War

36. In an increasingly urbanised world, it is inevitable that a growing amount of warfare will take place in cities. This causes specific problems for military planners, as recent history shows; despite being well prepared for high intensity urban conflict, the US and other Western powers have struggled to fight off low intensity insurgencies among populations more intimately associated with the locality. The problem is that the best tactics tend to be discovered rather than devised. It is likely that in the future militaries will try hard to avoid urban warfare altogether. This is because urban warfare is inherently difficult, bloody and destructive, not least because of the possibility of collateral damage brought by the proximity of civilians and critical infrastructure. Capturing a broken city can be self-defeating if it creates a densely-populated, well-networked community of the aggrieved. Even winning the city back in the first place can be an arduous task. It took four years for the Syrian Army to retake Aleppo – they

had to do it street-by-street. In the process, huge swathes of the centre were destroyed. Another good example is the Battle of Muthur in the Sri Lankan Civil War: once the Tamil army had slammed into the town and seized it, reclaiming it was a gruelling and destructive process.

37. Technology might seem like a promising solution to this problem. Rather than expect battles to be fought remotely, we should understand that the conventional army of the future will emphasise the use of smaller, more deployable units. Autonomous vehicle systems, mini-drones, and smaller, possibly remote-controlled tanks will only ever play a supplementary role. These will surely make it easier to operate in the restrictive environment of the city. But as appealing as it is to put our trust in the next generation of technology, its ability to make a substantial difference to the way we fight in cities is limited. Firstly, enemies often seem to be just as well-versed in digital as modern Western armies, using smartphones and tablets to co-ordinate in sophisticated and tactical ways. In fact, their more flexible organisational structures means they can often adapt to new conditions far more quickly. Technology, despite the obvious asymmetry, is often a leveller. Secondly, and more fundamentally, putting our trust in technology to solve this problem risks reinforcing a damaging tendency in Western militaries to focus on the objective, scientific elements of warfare at the risk of the cultural and societal. The Anglo-American defence establishment runs the risk of being too focused on the ability to win many tactical engagements without achieving strategic objectives. Rapidly procuring and applying new military technology does not automatically lead to better wars. The recent developments in the more psychological, behavioural spheres of warfare are promising, with the British Army's 77th Brigade leading the way in cultivating a sophisticated approach to using non-lethal and non-military levers to change enemy behaviour.
38. One of the most important requirements for a foreign military operating in a city is engaging from the beginning with local municipal leadership. Once a force has taken a city, it is only possible to secure and stabilise with the help and buy-in of local leadership. It does not just offer tactical advantages – allowing an officer, for instance, to co-ordinate operations with local emergency services to minimise civilian casualties – but also more strategic ones: preserving the local leadership helps build a picture of legitimacy, inform operations with local knowledge, and promote civilian buy-in. At the same time, it is important to maintain a clear distinction between members of the military and overseas aid agencies –once the military start delivering aid it is often to the detriment of the reputation of both. It is also vital to make full use of non-lethal military strategies: controlling the periphery, making exaggerated shows of strength, and securing supply lines and exit corridors all help create a sense of stability and control.
39. The most important changes to the way we fight and influence in cities will therefore not be solely technological. Over the past decades states have consistently hollowed out the institutions devoted to long-term dialogue – their foreign ministries. Perhaps one of the most important ways to increase the state's influence in these cities is by reversing that trend, and by tasking foreign ministries to get to know the leadership of key cities as well as they would know the leadership of the national government.

Conclusion

If left unchecked, there could be a growing number of governance gaps over the coming decades between state and sub-state actors: for example between increasingly insular nation states and more liberal and globally active cities; in social media, should platforms fail to control destructive content; and in the accountability gap between smart technology designers and end users. At the same time, the influence, power and geostrategic relevance of cities and regions is only going to increase. Whether that is a positive or a negative development will depend on how well-connected they are, how well-planned they are, and whether states work with or against that development.

Inherent structural vulnerability of smart cities, internet connectivity and social media will also be a key trend. Tackling that vulnerability requires new solutions: public-private partnerships, accountability of private sector suppliers, and a regulatory architecture agreed at the highest intergovernmental level. Resilience will continue to be created through a sense of community, encouraged by good planning, and through structural design protecting spaces in a sympathetic manner. In order to embrace these challenges, it is crucial that cities network with each other and share best practice, standardised analysis and risk assessments. At the same time, solutions must always be tailored to local circumstances and local cultural mores.

While there will always be tensions between more independent cities and their host states, it is possible for them to co-exist in a mutually supportive way that enables each to better achieve their goals. Ensuring that happens will require fundamental changes to how states and sub-state actors interface, and the development of new diplomatic norms in the field of city-to-state and city-to-city diplomacy. In the long run, foreign policy may well become an area that is increasingly devolved to local governments

The new media age will benefit communities by enhancing citizens' abilities to convene and educate, form disparate communities, and help geographically or socially isolated people form likeminded communities. But states will need to strike the right balance between these essentially positive uses of social media and its ability to act as a home for hate-speech, division, serious organised crime, and terrorist recruitment.

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