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The 2019 Council of Councils Annual Conference *Background Memos*

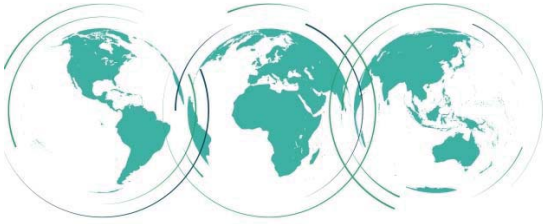
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Session One

*What Should the Future World
Order Look Like?*



Background Memo

Middle Powers in the International Order

Council of Councils Annual Conference

May 5–7, 2019

Council on Foreign Relations, Washington, DC

Michael Fullilove, Lowy Institute

The Fraying of the Order

The United States emerged from World War II in a commanding position. America's economy made up nearly half the global economy; America's scientists alone had mastered the atom. In the years that followed, the United States drew like-minded Western countries around it in order to contain the Soviet Union. Violent conflicts broke out at the peripheries of the international system, but not at the center. Washington built a new kind of order defined by shared norms such as democratic government and economic liberalism, and embedded in alliances, agreements, and multilateral institutions. As historian John Lewis Gaddis observed, the United States established hegemony over half the world not by conquest, but by consent.

Then, in 1991, America's only rival conceded defeat and the world switched from a bipolar system to a unipolar one. The hegemony over the West that the United States achieved during the Cold War became the new world order. The only option presented to China and Russia was to become stakeholders in that enterprise—if they promised to be responsible stakeholders. A liberal international order settled over the earth. Or so it was thought.

Now, a quarter of a century on, the contests between nation-states and between ideologies have resumed. Cooperation between great powers is declining, not increasing. Unipolarity has given way to multipolarity. Geopolitics has returned. Every day, the liberal international order becomes less liberal, less international, and less orderly.

One reason for this trend is the diffusion of power across the international system. For most of the twentieth century, the world was mainly run by the West. During the British Empire era, a quarter of the globe was painted red. Throughout the Pax Americana, the United States was the dominant global power.

There is reason to be skeptical of the more lurid claims about the decline of the United States. America has enduring strengths, including favorable geography, healthy demographics, a formidable military, and an entrepreneurial economy. But it is undeniable that as other nations rise, America's margin of superiority over them shrinks.

Meanwhile, the rest of the West looks set to retire from the global stage—and not only because most Western countries have aging populations. For decades, Europe has spurned power politics in favor of forming an ever

more perfect, peaceful union. The failures in Afghanistan and Iraq, as well as Europe's recent economic debacles and political wobbles, have encouraged this trend toward parochialism. Now, when European leaders come upon an unpleasant scene—such as a neighbor set upon by an aggressor—they, like the priest and the Levite in the parable of the Good Samaritan, prefer to pass by on the other side.

Even the United Kingdom has lowered its international ambitions in recent years, stepping back from the foreign policy front line and cutting the budgets of its armed forces, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, and the BBC World Service. And that was before Brexit! The United Kingdom won't have much time in the next decade to think about the rest of the world.

Japan is a notable exception to this trend as it emerges from its postwar hibernation. But, in general, Western countries are stepping down. By contrast, in each of the three most significant global theaters—Asia, Europe, and the Middle East—strong challengers to the liberal order are stepping up.

The world today is wholly altered from the one created by the World War II generation. It is too early to say the old order is finished—but it is certainly fraying.

How Should the World Order Change?

Revolutions require crisis. In the absence of a global crisis, changes to the world order are likely to be incremental. Eight principles could inform a larger, more creative foreign policy for middle powers, such as those represented in the Council of Councils to help reform the international order in the President Donald J. Trump era.

First, middle powers need to maintain their strong relationships with the United States. In the long run China and Russia, not the United States, pose the greatest challenge to the existing order.

Second, in dealings with Trump, middle powers should stand up for themselves and their values. They should avoid the example of British Prime Minister Theresa May, who displayed unseemly enthusiasm in her early approaches to the president. Like everything else in life, the Trump presidency will pass. Leaders should keep three pieces of advice in mind: don't do something you will regret later. Retain your self-respect. Maintain your independent bearing.

Third, middle powers should call out challengers to the international order—whether they reside in the White House or in Zhongnanhai. Too much is at stake for middle powers to keep their heads permanently below the parapet.

Standing up to Washington when required gives middle powers credibility when they need to stand up to Beijing. They should practice what they preach.

Fourth, middle powers should be exemplars in following international rules and observing international agreements. Middle powers benefit enormously from an international order in which the rules of the road are well established and widely observed. They should, in the words of Ralf Beste, former head of policy planning at the German Federal Foreign Office, “ruthlessly play by the rules.”

One related example is the Paris Agreement. The experts have said what global warming will mean for countries such as Australia: more bushfires, worse heat waves, more droughts and more rains, rising sea levels, and falling agricultural production. It is in the interests of middle powers to play their part in helping the world to

avoid the kind of dangerous warming predicted in the latest report by the UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. Accordingly, middle powers should bolster the Paris Agreement and move to strengthen collective action on climate.

Fifth, middle powers should reinforce their connections to other countries that matter to them. For Australia, this means doing more with regional powers such as India, Indonesia, Japan, South Korea, and Vietnam—but also like-minded extra-regional powers such as France and the United Kingdom.

This is easy to say, of course, and hard to do. Middle powers should aim to build such relationships out. For example, it is important that Australia and Japan conclude an agreement to strengthen defense ties.

French President Emmanuel Macron is to be applauded for his notion of greater cooperation among Australia, France, and India. These three democracies have overlapping interests. Working more closely with each other will open up new avenues of action.

Sixth, middle powers should work with other capitals to support global deals until the fever in Washington has passed. Canberra, Australia is commendable for working with Ottawa and Tokyo to keep the Trans-Pacific Partnership afloat. The Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership is a liberal development in a world that is increasingly illiberal.

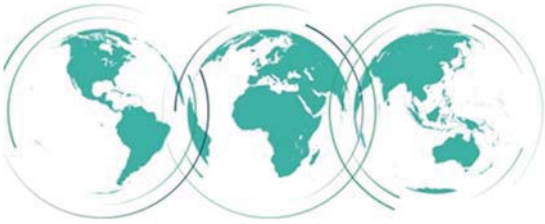
Seventh, middle powers should help stand up a new concert of middle powers—countries that have an interest in supporting the international order and capabilities to help do so. It is past time to institutionalize a group of like-minded middle powers—a “coalition of the responsible.” In an essay in *Foreign Affairs*, Ivo H. Daalder and James M. Lindsay suggest that a “Group of Nine” of middle powers could meet annually at a leader or ministerial level, or form an informal caucus within existing institutions such as the United Nations and the World Trade Organization.

Finally, and perhaps most important, middle powers need to bolster their national capabilities so that they are better positioned to shape their external environment and buttress the international system. If middle powers want the United States to be a responsible partner, then they must be responsible partners too. Middle powers should contribute to international security by investing seriously in defense capabilities.

Middle powers need to rediscover their ambition and revive their history of creative diplomacy. We are all beneficiaries of the international order. From time to time, we must serve in its bodyguard.

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Session Two

Managing Global Catastrophic Risk: Nuclear Weapons



Background Memo

Managing Global Catastrophic Risk: Nuclear Weapons

Council of Councils Annual Conference

May 5–7, 2019

Council on Foreign Relations, Washington, DC

Wu Chunsi, Shanghai Institutes for International Studies

The classic model of arms control and nuclear deterrence faces three primary challenges in the current stage of world affairs.

First, the norms that have framed strategic and global stability among major powers are now in danger. For example, some actors are again exploring the possibility of launching limited nuclear wars. Additionally, it has been publicly argued that countries such as North Korea have the right to possess nuclear weapons. Others appear overconfident in the ability of world leaders to control the scale and destruction of nuclear exchanges. Perhaps this ignorance of the real danger nuclear weapons pose is the result of the long peace and easy life that many in recent history have experienced. Although some might not consider *taboo* a good word, it would be good for mankind if nuclear taboos were to remain in place.

Second, the classic model of arms control faces a challenge from new technologies. This challenge comes not just from new technologies such as ballistic missile defense, anti-satellite weapons, and hypersonic missiles, but also from the new information age the world is entering. The wide use of cyber technology creates new questions on how to maintain nuclear safety and global security. In addition to concerns over nuclear terrorism and irresponsible countries, traditional nuclear powers now have to reconsider the reliability of their nuclear weapon command and control systems. Therefore, in this new information age, discussions on nuclear stability should include elements from cyberspace and outer space.

Third, relationships between the major powers are changing rapidly. Many uncertainties exist in this readjustment. For instance, the old model of managing U.S.-China relations is not as effective as it was, and a new model of interactions has not been established. Therefore, the overall stability of U.S.-China relations is in doubt, which in turn further complicates the process of managing U.S.-China nuclear relations.

In addition, the U.S.-China nuclear relationship is different than that between the United States and Soviet Union during the Cold War. U.S. and Soviet nuclear arsenals, to some degree, were proportionate. In comparison, China's nuclear arsenal is much smaller than that of the United States. Consequently, China's involvement in nuclear arms control negotiations is different from that of the Soviet Union. Furthermore, China has clearly indicated that it does not intend to participate in an arms race with the United States. Thus, the classic model of nuclear competition and arms control, built on the experience of U.S.-Soviet competition in the Cold War, does not apply to U.S.-China nuclear relations.

These new challenges to the classic model of arms control and nuclear deterrence require fresh thinking on how to manage emerging strategic instability of great power relations.

First, managing the current strategic relationship of major powers does not require starting from scratch. Over the past seventy years, a basic foundation for controlling nuclear risks and advocating global stability has developed. Although the international regime of nuclear nonproliferation has many loopholes and is unsatisfactory, the value of maintaining the system is substantial. The global consensus against nuclear proliferation and nuclear war is the best instrument to press major powers to behave responsibly. This system should not be radically overthrown or discarded because of its flaws, but instead upgraded or evolved.

The priority in the near future should be to shape the geopolitical environment in which major countries reconfirm their commitments opposing nuclear proliferation and to prudentially control and manage ties with other countries through arms agreements. For example, international concerns that the management of the North Korean nuclear problem might revert to the “old track” are increasing in frequency. International actors should play a more active role in keeping the attention of major powers on this issue.

Major powers should also commit themselves to maintaining global strategic stability. Given the deepening suspicion in U.S.-China relations and the existing imbalance in their nuclear capabilities, China does not believe it is the time for it and the United States to start a bilateral negotiation on nuclear arms control. However, multilateral platforms in which China can actively participate do exist, including the mechanism under the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons for the five permanent members of the UN Security Council. Such platforms can become at least the initial forum in which nuclear powers can carry out their dialogues on strategic stability.

When major powers begin discussing strategic stability, it would be meaningful to encourage nuclear powers to reaffirm unilateral policy and bilateral interactions conducive to strategic stability. For example, in the Clinton administration, the United States and China agreed to negotiate on standing down long-range missiles targeting each other’s cities. In another case, American and Chinese nuclear experts coedited a book on nuclear terminology, through which the two sides could better understand the other’s nuclear strategy and increase mutual trust. Resuming where previous cooperation stopped might help create an appropriate atmosphere for major powers to negotiate their strategic relationship in depth.

Potential for great progress exists, even if nuclear powers can agree on only some principles in regard to maintaining strategic stability, such as preventing nuclear wars and opposing nuclear proliferation.

A difficult but core issue for nuclear powers is how the emergence of cyber technology affects nuclear stability, because its influence on command and control systems of nuclear arsenals is significant. However, cyber itself is a difficult area to negotiate. Furthermore, experts in cyber and nuclear areas are not the same group of people. The question of how to bridge these two spheres is therefore worthy of further exploration.

On the whole, it is clear that nuclear risks are increasing as important norms controlling nuclear proliferation and use erode. Major powers have not taken full responsibility for preventing nuclear risks. They also remain immersed in great power and geopolitical competition. In the meantime, major think tanks such as those in the Council of Councils can take on the role of setting the agenda and designing a road map to address nuclear challenges. For example, experts could publish a report or document urging major countries to carry out nuclear dialogues and work out a path forward for the great powers. Second, they could organize track 2 or track 1.5 dialogues on nuclear issues when the conditions for formal and official dialogues are not ripe. Third, and more important, real concerns remain that hinder major powers from kicking off nuclear dialogues among

themselves. This will require experts to invest more time and energy on the new questions emerging in the nuclear area and provide intellectual support for the major powers' nuclear dialogues in the new context of the information age.

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Session Three

Confronting the Challenges of a Rapidly Urbanizing World



Background Memo

Confronting the Challenges of a Rapidly Urbanizing World¹

Council of Councils Annual Conference

May 5–7, 2019

Council on Foreign Relations, Washington, DC

Thomas J. Bollyky, Council on Foreign Relations

Urban history reached a turning point in 2017. For the first time, more than half the people in low- and middle-income countries lived in cities. But as urbanization continues to accelerate, particularly in poorer nations, the world will need to work to make those cities livable and healthful for their inhabitants.

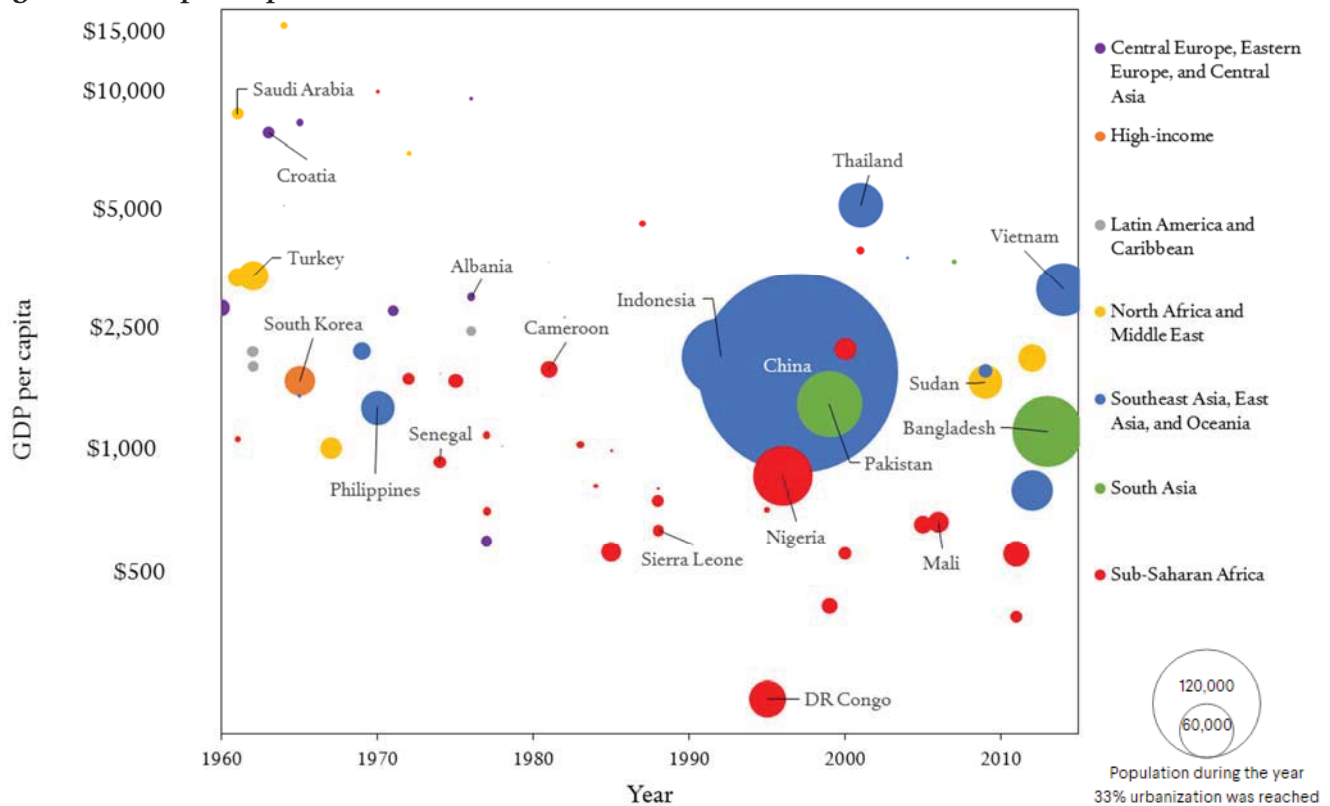
Most of the shift in urbanization to lower-income nations has occurred in the last sixty years (see figure 1).² In 1960, no country with a per capita income below \$1,250 was more than one-third urbanized. Only six nations with per capita incomes under \$2,500 reached that threshold, all in Latin America. By 2016, in fifty-seven of the poorest countries—many of those in South Asia and sub-Saharan Africa—more than one-third of the population lived in cities.

Urbanization in lower-income nations is occurring at record rates. Between 1950 and 2010, the urban populations of Africa and Asia expanded as much as those in Europe did between 1800 and 1910, but in half the time. Indeed, the growth of urban populations is outpacing city infrastructure in the fastest-urbanizing nations, especially in sub-Saharan Africa.³ The availability of piped water in cities in the region fell by 10 percent between 1990 and 2015, and only four in ten new city residents had access to improved sanitation as defined by the World Health Organization.⁴ The construction of adequate housing and paved roads is likewise not keeping up with urbanization in many poor cities.

One worrisome consequence of population growth outstripping urban infrastructure has been the expansion of slums, overcrowded areas with inadequate housing and public services. The United Nations estimates that 881 million people lived in slums in lower-income nations in 2014, roughly one in every eight people worldwide.⁵ In Africa and South Asia, a majority of city residents live in slums. Almost the entire urban population (96 percent) of the Central African Republic lives in similar circumstances.⁶ By 2030, the population of slum dwellers is expected to reach two billion globally.

Evidence is mixed on whether cities can continue to conquer disease as poor nations rapidly urbanize. The slums in lower-income nations today are considerably healthier than were the nineteenth-century cities of the United States and Europe, where between two hundred and three hundred out of every one thousand children under five died.⁷ Health data on modern slums is limited, however, and much progress is reported in averages that could mask disparities. There is some indication that the health benefits of urban life are not equally distributed to the poor residents of cities like Cairo, Egypt; Dhaka, Bangladesh; and Nairobi, Kenya.⁸

Figure 1. GDP per Capita at 33 Percent Urbanization



Sources: World Development Indicators, World Bank; UN World Urbanization Prospects.

Note: Population is measured in thousands. The y-axis scale is not uniform to improve readability.

The challenges ahead are significant. Poor, crowded cities with limited health systems are ideal incubators for outbreaks of emerging infections, like the Ebola epidemics in West Africa in 2014 and the Democratic Republic of Congo in 2018. Such cities today are often larger and denser than were Athens, Greece, and the other urban centers of antiquity, which means that diseases are more likely to spread and more likely to affect more people. Outbreaks that occur in today’s cities can spread internationally faster and more easily with the increased speed and volume of global trade and travel.

Pollution is also a threat. Air pollution is the fourth-leading health risk globally, responsible for killing an estimated 6.1 million people prematurely in 2016.⁹ Sixteen of the world’s twenty most polluted cities are in South Asia.

Many of the cities most exposed to coastal flooding from climate change and suffering water shortages—both of which carry health consequences—are in poor and emerging economies. These cities are located along coasts or in river deltas, which had been beneficial for farming and commerce but now exacerbate the risks of flooding, and therefore of waterborne diseases, for large, poor, and informally housed populations. Many of these cities are also running dry. For example, roughly 90 percent of Dhaka’s water supplies comes from ground reserves that are being rapidly depleted by the demands of its sixteen million inhabitants.

Policy Prescriptions

No quick or ready-made fix exists for creating sustainable urban infrastructure in sprawling, already-built poor world cities, but instituting incentives can help. Many residents of cities in developing countries,

especially those living in slums, do not have clear property titles to their homes. Establishing easily enforceable land rights can promote investment in formal housing, free workers to move to find jobs and get access to city services, and establish the foundation for a property tax system. With the resulting resources and empowerment from national governments, city governments could be more free to do more to improve their business environments, ease bureaucratic constraints on small and midsize enterprises, and attract private infrastructure investment. Municipal governments could also prove more capable than national authorities in responding to the demographic pressures and the health and environmental challenges that poor cities face. A World Bank study of African cities providing the best water services to the poor found that mayors were behind several of the success stories, including those of Durban, South Africa, and Nyeri, Kenya.¹⁰

The role for bilateral or multilateral institutions in addressing international urban challenges will differ from those in the past. Foreign aid initiatives have succeeded in delivering food, cash, drugs, and other technologies to the world's poor, but donors cannot manage urban health-care systems, build city infrastructure, or enforce sensible regulations on land use or air pollution in other countries. But that does not mean that foreign aid officials, policymakers, private industry, and intergovernmental institutions cannot assist the governments of lower-income nations in their difficult tasks.

Goal eleven of the UN Sustainable Development Goals is to “make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable.” The indicators include reducing urban air pollution and the proportion of the urban population living in slums, informal settlements, or inadequate housing.¹¹ Weak municipal governments and financing constraints for adequate infrastructure and services are some of the most significant obstacles to successful urbanization in lower-income nations, especially in Africa.

Supporting municipal governance could start with facilitating the information sharing, data collection, and research that city officials, advocates, and activists need to advance locally inspired change. This effort should include providing the resources and technical support that local researchers and governments need to test their best ideas and working with those local actors to identify implementable, evidence-based programs. Outsiders can, where appropriate, also provide useful services by supporting social reformers in pressing their governments for the adoption of better policies and by monitoring, evaluating, and publishing the results to hold local governments and donors accountable.

Recent efforts to encourage private investors to put their money toward building infrastructure and electricity generation, such as the Barack Obama administration's Power Africa initiative, can make it easier for factories and entrepreneurs to open businesses and hire more young workers in cities. Another potential area of intervention for regional and multilateral organizations involves loan guarantees, risk insurance, and other methods of de-risking and cofinancing the upgrading of municipal infrastructure projects.

The majority of the world's population already lives in urban areas. The population of city dwellers globally is projected to grow by 2.5 billion by 2050, with nearly 90 percent in lower-income nations in Africa and Asia. Urbanization in lower-income nations could offer billions of people both better access to jobs and health-care services and a gateway to the world economy. To reap those benefits, those nations will have to confront the looming health, environmental, and infrastructure challenges of urban life.

Notes

1. This background memorandum is adapted from the CFR interactive report [The Future of Global Health Is Urban Health](#), published January 31, 2019.

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Session Four

*How Do We Ensure Freedom Has a
Future?*



Background Memo

The Global Decline of Democracy and Weakened Human Freedom

Council of Councils Annual Conference

May 5–7, 2019

Council on Foreign Relations, Washington, DC

Sook Jong Lee, East Asia Institute

Over the last decade, literature warning of the crisis, decline, or de-consolidation of democracy in the world has grown in number and scope. According to Freedom House’s “Freedom in the World 2018” report, “Democracy faced its most serious crisis in decades in 2017 as its basic tenets—including guarantees of free and fair elections, the rights of minorities, freedom of the press, and the rule of law—came under attack around the world.”¹ Seventy-one countries suffered net declines in political rights and civil liberties; only thirty-five registered gains. This marked the twelfth consecutive year of decline in global freedom. As a result, forty-five countries today are considered “free,” thirty are “partly free,” and twenty-five are “not free.” Only 39 percent of the global population live freely; 24 percent and 37 percent live in societies that are partly free and not free, respectively. Freedom House’s 2019 report continues to highlight the decline of freedom of expression accompanied by the serious threat to press freedom and infringement of rights of migrants and refugees.²

The Economist Intelligence Unit’s (EIU) “Democracy Index 2017” report recorded the worst decline in global democracy in years; some 89 countries experienced a decline in their total democracy index score compared with 2016, more than three times the number that recorded an improvement.³ Among 167 countries surveyed, only 19 (4.5 percent of the total populations of countries surveyed) can boast a “full democracy;” 57 countries have a “flawed democracy;” 39 are under a “hybrid regime;” and 52 have an “authoritarian regime.” A year later, the EIU’s “Democracy Index 2018” reported a pause in the retreat of global democracy.⁴ Just 42 countries experienced a decline; encouragingly, 48 improved. However, the continued crackdown on civil liberties and free press caused the report’s rating of civil liberties to fall.⁵

Freedom of expression, civic liberties, norms of protecting minority rights, and the rule of law are the crucial elements of liberal democracy. Liberal democracy is drastically declining in established democracies as authoritarian states increase their violations of these liberal elements. Once triumphant, liberal democracy has begun to experience the inherent contradiction between its two pillars: individual rights and popular rule. Anti-globalization and political digitization are pulling these two pillars apart. Individual freedom goes beyond freedom of expression. The shootings at the Jewish synagogue in Pittsburgh and the Muslim mosques in Christchurch, New Zealand, and the recent suicide bombings at Christian churches in Sri Lanka threaten freedom of worship. As seen in Sri Lanka, massive casualty terrorist attacks against a religious minority quickly develop into an internal security matter, and the securitization of society can limit free activities.

The Challenge of Anti-Globalist Populism in Established Democracies

Economic difficulties and migrant and refugee inflows have sparked anxiety in liberal democracies. Many believe these problems are caused by globalization. Unruly global capital and rapid financial integration bore the blame for the U.S.-led financial crisis of 2008 and the eurozone crisis of 2012. The European refugee crisis of 2014 and 2015 and subsequent migratory movements are believed to have resulted from increasing freedom of cross-national movement. Externally, anti-globalist forces favor recovering national sovereignty over major economic and social decisions from the cumbersome governance of transnational bodies such as the European Union (EU). When anti-globalist forces turn their attention to domestic sociocultural affairs, right-wing identity politics tend to flourish. Within the frame of *us* (the “legitimate” majority) vs. *them* (the “polluting” minority groups), hate speech and violence against ethnic and religious minority groups have become common. When populists have power and are able to introduce policy measures against migrants and refugees, violations of human rights become more widespread.

Another visible phenomenon is the rise of populist parties, which gained votes and parliamentary seats in Austria, France, Germany, and the Netherlands during 2017. Although they were kept out of government in all but Austria, their success in their respective elections helped weaken established parties on both the right and the left. In Germany and the Netherlands, mainstream parties have struggled to create stable governing coalitions. In the United States, anti-Semitic and anti-Muslim violence has risen. U.S. President Donald J. Trump’s anti-immigrant posture, including the border wall against migrants and his lukewarm condemnation of racist actions, is not helping protect the freedom and rights of minorities.

Anti-globalist populism is undermining freedom in two ways. First, rejecting the equality and legitimacy of certain ethnic and religious minority groups is counter to the pluralist values of liberal democracy. If national identity is heavily defined by shared ancestry, language, and religion, the human rights of established settlers and newly admitted migrants will be infringed upon. Second, multilateral norms and rules protecting migrants and refugees are also weakened by anti-globalist populism. Governments facing mass migrant groups not only tend to apply the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) refugee status narrowly, but also neglect their duty to support people on the move by slowing down the legal process or providing limited medical and educational services.

The decline of liberal democracy in established Western democracies has dire consequences. First, fewer government leaders are taking the initiative to promote human rights and freedom through multilateral governance. The retrenchment of the United States is responsible for weakening both resources and normative international support. Accordingly, authoritarian states are emboldened to oppress freedom of the press at home and execute democracy activists internally and even externally, such as in the murder of Jamal Khashoggi.

Digital Technology’s Double-Edged Challenge to Human Rights and Democracy

The internet and social media serve many beneficial functions in advancing public goods such as development, education, and public health. Digitization helps aid free access to information and foster connectivity among people. Furthermore, the availability of big data and artificial intelligence machine learning is expected to as-

sist digital innovation for public goods. While no one knows exactly how human life will change after the technological singularity—the irreversible point of technological innovation in artificial intelligence that will change human civilization as we know it—comes about, the most optimistic views anticipate the liberation of humanity from hard or tedious labor so that people can pursue meaningful and creative lives.

The relationship between technology and democracy can be examined in two directions. One is a vertical relationship between the state and people, the other a horizontal one among people. Since the last quarter of the twentieth century, the arrival of information technology has been celebrated as facilitating human rights and democracy in both directions. Digital technology is expected to liberate citizens from authoritarian state control as the state is no longer able to monopolize information. It helps people participate in the governing process, making governments more responsive and accountable. Digital technology also promotes social equality and power devolution by transferring knowledge and decision-making power from elites to ordinary citizens.

This optimistic view on the relationship between digital technology and democracy is challenged by the dark side of political digitization. Many authoritarian states are smart enough to use technology to maintain their rule. Firewalls can be used to block or monitor information inflows from the outside world. Authoritarian states usually employ tactics such as securitizing free flows of information and restricting freedom of expression. Digitally developed authoritarian states are even using big data-equipped artificial intelligence to identify and surveil minority groups and political activists. For example, China is using facial-recognition technology to control the Uighur minority population. Taking advantage of online anonymity, Russia was able to intervene in the 2016 U.S. presidential election. This internal and external exploitation of technology by authoritarian states is shrinking civic space and freedom of expression. Digital technology is also harming horizontal democracy. Due to the availability of cheap smart phones, communication is instant and ubiquitous. The technology speeds up social and political communication among a greater number of people. Individual privacy is encroached upon and character assassination is frequent because news goes viral instantly, without a proper vetting process. Now, deepfake videos are warning us that lenses can lie. When combined with fake or exaggerated news, digital technology can act as an amplifying medium for populism. Recently in India, fake news on social media led to people being lynched. Similarly, digital populism in Myanmar has helped spread violence against the Rohingya ethnic minority. Because cyberspace creates echo chambers, digital tools are serving political factionalism and polarization.

The Role of the Multilateral System in Protecting and Advancing Universal Conceptions of Human Rights

The UN General Assembly's Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948 in Paris is a milestone document that established a common standard of achievement for all peoples and nations. The UNHCR and the UN Human Rights Council, which replaced the UNHCR in 2006, have been the hub of the UN human rights system. The Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) now works to promote and protect human rights; ad hoc tribunals and courts were formed to reinforce the expansion of conventions and international laws. The UN system has played a central role in global human rights governance, and the EU has developed the most advanced regional governance on human rights.

The United Nations and other multilateral organizations, however, are slow to respond to new human rights and freedom issues. To counter frequent human right violations, the responsibility to protect doctrine (R2P) needs to be expanded to allow international actors to intervene more effectively. To mitigate and respond to

threats to human freedom posed by technology, new governance, especially the creation of new principles both at the national and multinational levels, should be established. In terms of personal data protection, it was the European Union that first adopted the Data Protection Directive in 1995 to regulate the processing of personal data. The new EU General Data Protection Regulation provides further protection and exemptions for media companies. In 2014, the European Court of Justice legally solidified the “right to be forgotten” as a human right when they ruled against Google Spain in their case with the Spanish Data Protection Agency and Mario Costeja González. The court did not specify the exact scope of Google’s new responsibilities, however, leaving the company to figure out how to make removal requests work. Because these new threats are so diffused and fragmented with technological components, conventional multilateral and national governmental organizations and international nongovernmental organizations are not well equipped to handle them. Current and future challenges to freedom and human rights require far more innovative policy options beyond the conventional public-private partnership. Regulating fake news is a more urgent issue because it can form biased public opinions and alter election results. Big tech companies’ involvement is critical to mitigate the harmful effects of technology upon human freedom and democracy. The French government’s recent approach to Google to find effective moderating processes to regulate platforms is an encouraging move.

Notes

1. “Freedom in the World 2018: Democracy in Crisis,” Freedom House, accessed April 16, 2019, <http://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/freedom-world-2018>.
2. “Freedom in the World 2019: Democracy in Retreat,” Freedom House, accessed April 16, 2019, <http://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/freedom-world-2019>.
3. “Democracy Index 2017 – Economist Intelligence Unit,” *Economist*, accessed April 16, 2019, <http://eiu.com/democracy2017>.
4. “EIU Democracy Index 2018 – World Democracy Report,” *Economist*, accessed April 16, 2019, <http://eiu.com/topic/democracy-index>.
5. The EIU’s Democracy Index is based on the five categories of electoral process and pluralism, civil liberties, the functioning of government, political participation, and political culture.

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UN Mediation

The Stockholm Agreement of December 2018 fell into a holding pattern in January 2019. But in mid-April it was reinvigorated by a pledge from the Houthis and the Yemeni government to go ahead with the redeployments from Hodeidah, Yemen. This was the first and a necessary step for the agreement to be implemented.

The process stalled because—in short—the Stockholm Agreement had come too early, before the United Nations could work out the details of the steps planned in the agreement and deploy its monitoring mission. The truce in Hodeidah was reached in haste and included obscure ground rules to which the parties did not agree. Hence they each started accusing the other of breaking the truce and the agreement. The Houthis, on whom the burden of the first move rested, used the loopholes in the agreement to argue that they had handed over checkpoints to “local security forces” in Yemen’s three Red Sea ports of Hodeidah, Ras Isa, and Salif. In reality, however, they handed the checkpoints over to themselves. The next step was for both sides to “remove any military manifestations from the city.” The Redeployment Coordination Committee (RCC, consisting of equal numbers of representatives from the Houthis and Yemeni government and headed by a UN general,) was responsible for overseeing the truce and redeployments). The overall goal was to demilitarize the Red Sea trade corridor and facilitate the inflow of goods (including food and medicine), thereby improving the living conditions of a starving and ill nation. Seventy thousand people have been killed, hundreds of thousands injured, three million displaced, and more than two thirds of the population of twenty-eight million are in need of humanitarian aid, including more than eight million suffering from malnutrition.

Mediation efforts can move forward only after the Hodeidah Agreement—one of three components of the Stockholm Agreement—is implemented. However, because the time frame for the agreement was unrealistic (three weeks from the signing of the Stockholm Agreement) and the process interrupted, the United Nations had to accelerate the details of the redeployments, which were missing from the agreement. A detailed redeployment plan was prepared by UN Lieutenant General Michael Anker Lolloesgaard, chair of the RCC and Head of the United Nations Mission in support of the Hodeidah Agreement (UNMHA, established by with SC resolution 2452), who took over from Major General Patrick Cammert in this position on 31 January 2019. In two months’ time, General Lolloesgaard managed to prepare the plan and persuade the parties to agree

to it. The pressure on the Houthis also helped advance the process—the tactic of not letting the RCC enter Houthi-controlled territory backfired as they learned that they could not mislead the United Nations.

Lessons Learned

Take the political opportunity the moment it manifests. The Stockholm Agreement exemplifies how action for peace at a politically ripe time brings benefits even in the most complex of conflicts. The agreement came into being because the sponsors of the warring parties and the parties themselves (including the United States, Saudi Arabia, the Houthis, and the Yemeni government) came under increased international or internal pressure, and because the UN staff and several UN Security Council member states, including Sweden and the United Kingdom, were determined to make it happen.

Define crucial words in the Stockholm Agreement and make a detailed but realistic timetable for its implementation. The Stockholm Agreement does not include a cease-fire definition. It fails to list technical details that would set the scope and duration of a cease-fire, and does not define what activity will be seen as a breach. The Hodeidah Agreement is short and ostentatiously unspecific, except where it outlines the United Nations' obligations. The time frame—three weeks for its implementation—is unrealistic for any conflict, let alone for one as complex as the war in Yemen. Detailing the first step of the Hodeidah Agreement was particularly important considering that it was to be made by the Houthis, a party known to have violated the Peace and National Partnership Agreement in 2014—after it overran Sanaa and refused to withdraw to the mountains—by using deficiencies in the agreement's wording.

The United Nations is capable of resolving conflicts (when UN Security Council permanent members do not obstruct the process). An apt group of people is working on the Yemeni conflict at the United Nations: Martin Griffiths, the UN special envoy for Yemen, General Lollesgaard, and Lise Grande, the UN humanitarian coordinator in Yemen. This team, however, will only be effective with a mandate agreed upon by the Security Council.

International public opinion plays a role in conflict resolution. International public opinion has turned out to be a significant actor in the Yemeni conflict. In particular, the Western public's outrage over the American, British, and French governments' military support or cooperation with the Emirati and Saudi governments leading an offensive in Yemen has added to the pressure to find a viable policy option. The Houthis, too, have tried to use public opinion to their advantage, which convoluted the situation on the ground. Yet, Cammert and Lollesgaard have proven efficient at transmitting factual information to the United Nations, which for now has deprived the Houthis of their propaganda tool.

The United States is a party in the conflict in Yemen. The United States has been involved in Yemen for a long time in various ways, including its controversial use of drones. The Donald J. Trump administration supported the Saudi offensive in Yemen politically and logistically. For the past four years, the operation has proven to be not only a military failure, given the disproportionate advantage of the Saudi-led coalition, but also a humanitarian one. The United Nations estimates that more than 60 percent of civilian deaths in the war in Yemen have been caused by the coalition. On top of that, in October 2018 Jamal Khashoggi, a Saudi journalist working for the *Washington Post*, was brutally killed in the Saudi consulate in Turkey—a murder unequivocally linked to the Crown Prince of Saudi Arabia by mainstream media. These three factors led the United States to rethink the costs of support to the Saudis. It was ultimately a personal action of James Mattis, then U.S. secre-

tary of defense, that changed Saudi Arabia's mind in December 2018 and made it push the Yemeni government to an agreement. However, because the current makeup of the Trump administration is even more focused on countering Iran and President Trump vetoed the congressional resolution to halt U.S. aid to the Saudi-led coalition, a moderated American stance on Yemen could not hold.

Long conflicts outside the West, in which the West is involved in supporting a side, increase anti-Western sentiment and the global north–global south divide. Such involvement makes claims about Western double standards credible. It also hampers north-south understanding, which surfaced recently in the debate after the fire at Notre-Dame in Paris. Al-Jazeera ran an op-ed criticizing Western hypocrisy of grieving over a fire while showing indifference to the suffering of children in Yemen.

Curtailing the Growing Proxy War

The warring parties came to the negotiating table when several conditions coincided. First, Saudi Arabia, the sponsor and supporter of Yemen's government, came under increased pressure over its campaign in Yemen after the murder of Jamal Khashoggi. Second, the Houthis feared the Saudi-led coalition's offensive on their strongholds. Third, the world became increasingly aware of the dire humanitarian situation in Yemen. Fourth, the Trump administration wanted to placate Congress (and public opinion), which was outraged over Saudi foreign and domestic policies. It is evident, then, that concerted international and domestic pressure on the countries that support warring parties and the parties themselves is essential.

The proxy character of the war is disproportionate: Saudi Arabia, backed by the United States, has a direct influence on the government in Yemen; Iran, targeted by the United States, does not have a similarly strong leverage on the Houthis. The political implications of this situation are twofold. First, it suffices to dissuade Saudi Arabia (and its allies) from increased involvement in Yemen to reduce the intensity of a proxy war. The United States, if willing, can provide necessary leverage. Second, the influence on Houthis is trickier: it can be exerted by the European Union (EU), Iran, and Oman, each of which retains contacts with the group. The EU, unlike the United States, has reasonable relations with both warring parties and their sponsors, and it is seen as relatively neutral. At a time when international law and the United Nations have fewer international backers, a greater responsibility rests on the EU.

Yet only the United Nations can devise and oversee the advancement of negotiations. Freedom of travel and access of UN staff ensure that both the United Nations and international media receive accurate information that is difficult to tamper with for both the warring parties and their sponsors. By taking the leading role in the Stockholm Agreement (which is a continuation of UN efforts that stalled in 2016) the United Nations also took on the responsibility for implementing the agreement and ensuring that the war in Yemen does not flare up anew. It will have to expand the UNMHA mandate if the agreement is to be implemented in its entirety and a political process is to ensue. For that to happen, a consensus is needed at the Security Council. In December 2018, that consensus was close to being derailed, not by China or Russia, but by the United States and its disputes with the United Kingdom over the reference language in the resolutions.