

## Arms Control and World Order<sup>1</sup>

Sverre Lodgaard

### Abstract

On the way to a new world order we do not yet know, disorder is the new normal. The world is in a state of flux. Six features are particularly noteworthy:

- (1) Sovereign states are re-emphasised and reconfirmed as the basic building blocks of international affairs.
- (2) Trade and technology wars and economic sanctions have moved to the top of the international agenda.
- (3) International norms, institutions, and agreements are falling apart.
- (4) Geopolitically, the tense relationship between the United States and China is increasingly dominant.
- (5) New technologies nurture new forms of influence and capacities for violence.
- (6) Inherent in all of this, international affairs have become more unpredictable.

Such a world does not leave many options for cooperative action. In the military field, states have returned to unilateral security policies as primitive as those of the Cold War. There is one overriding common concern, however: to avoid nuclear war. To this end, stability measures—the primary objective of arms control—are of the essence. The need for a global framework for responsible nuclear conduct, arms control, and disarmament, realistic enough to gain traction while capturing the aspiration of a world free of nuclear dangers, is at least as strong as 60 years ago, when arms control was first introduced.

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## The Question

This commentary starts with the regression of security mind-sets and the unravelling of the arms control architecture. In a replay of the classical security dilemma, states engage in action-reaction cycles only to find that their security diminishes. It goes on to review current world order changes. There is no longer consensus on the basic premises of global governance; international norms are increasingly questioned; multilateralism and the institutions upholding it are under pressure; arms-control and disarmament agreements are unravelling; and big-power relations are strained by arms modernisation and expansion. Zero-sum thinking is gaining ground and negotiated solutions for the common benefit are a rare commodity. In such a turbulent world, where big powers compete for positions and influence in the face of an unpredictable future, what are the prospects, if any, for cooperative security policies, arms control, and disarmament?

## Common Security, Cooperative Security, and Arms Control

When the “International Commission on Security and Disarmament Issues” (also known as the Palme Commission after its chairman, Swedish Prime Minister Olof Palme), introduced the concept of common security in the beginning of the 1980s, the security establishments were intensely occupied with the dangers posed by nuclear weapons.<sup>2</sup> The commission took issue with prevailing policies: the major powers acquired new weapons in search of unilateral advantage, only to realise that the gains were short-lived and that the long-term effect was more tension and diminished security. Common security pointed to a way out of this security dilemma, emphasising that in the nuclear age, security cannot be obtained unilaterally, but has to be built together with one’s adversaries. It has to be a win-win activity. During the 1980s, the message gained ground in Europe and the Soviet Union, but in this century, the big powers have reverted to the old logic. And this time, it is more difficult to chart a way out of it because there are more powers involved and more conflicts of interest. Complex deterrence equations are the name of the game, and common endeavours are, at best, mere add-ons.

Common security is a generic concept. In the period of opportunity after the end of the Cold War, it inspired the concept of cooperative security, defined as a “strategic principle that seeks to accomplish its purposes through institutional consent rather than through threats of material or physical coercion”.<sup>3</sup> Another definition says that the central purpose is

to prevent war and to do so primarily by preventing the means for successful aggression from being assembled, thus also obviating the need for states so threatened to make their own counter-preparations. Cooperative security thus displaces the centrepiece of security planning from preparing to counter

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<sup>2</sup> International Commission for Security and Disarmament Issues. 1982. *Common Security: A Blueprint for Survival*. New York: Simon and Schuster.

<sup>3</sup> Nolan, J. E. 1994. “The Concept of Cooperative Security.” In *Global Engagement, Cooperation and Security in the 21st Century*, edited by J.E. Nolan, et al., 4–5. Washington, DC: Brookings Institution.

threats to preventing such threats from arising – from deterring aggression to making preparations for it more difficult.<sup>4</sup>

Cooperative security became an important principle of European security policy enshrined in CSCE/OSCE documents.<sup>5</sup>

The opposite of cooperative strategies is noncooperative ones. The latter are typically zero-sum exercises; the former, positive sum. Noncooperative strategies aim to deter premeditated attack; in order to be credible, the parties have to be prepared to go to war. Cooperative strategies aim to reduce the risk of inadvertent escalation and depend on the willingness of all to cooperate. They are essentially preventive in nature. Noncooperative and cooperative strategies therefore address two fundamentally different scenarios. Similarly, they are relevant to different parts of an escalatory process: cooperative strategies can be effective at early stages of the process, to stop further escalation, but if this does not succeed and one of the parties is unwilling to cooperate, noncooperative strategies of deterrence come into play. Seen this way they are not opposites, but complementary.<sup>6</sup>

The concept of arms control was introduced around 1960, as an enlargement of the scope of military strategy. It rests on the recognition that big-power relations are not ones of pure conflict, but involve strong elements of mutual interest in the avoidance of war that none of them want; in minimising the costs and risks of arms competition; and in limiting the destructive effects of war in the event that it occurs.<sup>7</sup> Different from disarmament agreements, which aim at reduction and elimination of weapons, arms-control agreements encourage countries to manage their weapons in limited cooperation with each other. The key objective is stability, which comes in different versions: strategic stability, crisis stability, and arms-race stability.<sup>8</sup>

The Cuban missile crisis of 1962 boosted practical applications of the concept. The twin negotiations of the Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) Treaty of 1972 and the Strategic Arms Limitation Talks (SALT) Treaty of 1972 were conducted in the spirit of stability. Nationwide ballistic-missile defences were considered destabilising. Three years later, military confidence-building measures were introduced in Europe. The first generation was largely symbolic—little more than expressions of good will—but the second-generation Stockholm conference confidence- and security- building measures (CSBMs) were militarily significant. They built trust, became stepping stones to substantial disarmament agreements, and helped to end of the Cold War. In this increasingly benign security environment, the major

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<sup>4</sup> Carter, A., W. Perry, and J. Steinbruner. 1992. *A New Concept of Cooperative Security*. Washington, DC: Brookings Institution.

<sup>5</sup> Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe, later the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe. ["Cooperation" typically isn't spelled this way, but the rule I generally follow for organisation names is to use the spelling on the organisation's website, letterhead, or other official place.]

<sup>6</sup> For a comprehensive, in-depth analysis of the concept of cooperative security, see Vetchera, H. n.d. "Cooperative Security – The Concept and its Application in South Eastern Europe." [http://www.bundesheer.at/pdf\\_pool/publikationen/10\\_wg13\\_aacs\\_40.pdf](http://www.bundesheer.at/pdf_pool/publikationen/10_wg13_aacs_40.pdf)

<sup>7</sup> Schelling, T., and M. Halperin. 1961. *Strategy and Arms Control*. New York: Twentieth Century Fund.

<sup>8</sup> Crisis stability and arms-race stability may be seen as subcategories of the comprehensive concept of strategic stability.

disarmament treaties—the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty, the Conventional Armed Forces in Europe Treaty (CFE), the Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START) and the Presidential Nuclear Initiatives (PNIs)— became possible. Later, nuclear disarmament continued, half-heartedly with the Strategic Offensive Reductions Treaty (SORT) of 2002 and more substantially with the New Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (New START) of 2010. The CFE Treaty, which eliminated tens of thousands of battle tanks, armoured combat vehicles, artillery, aircraft and combat helicopters, was shaken by the break-down of the Soviet Union and finally came to an end in 2007.

Since New START, there have been no negotiations between the two leading nuclear powers. Instead, 122 states negotiated the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW). Similar to nuclear-weapon-free zones, which ensure the absence of nuclear weapons in regions without a “nuclear shadow,” the signers of the TPNW all were non-nuclear-weapon states. The treaty aims to stigmatise nuclear weapons, strengthen anti-nuclear sentiments around the world, and hold the nuclear-weapon states accountable for their disregard of international obligations.

The relationship between cooperative measures and the political environment is a two-way street. On the one hand, the Stockholm Conference CSBMs (1986) were made possible by the thaw in East-West relations made possible by Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev. On the other hand, agreements on these measures did much to further improve international relations. Disarmament became possible on their heels as the Cold War drew to an end, and a period of opportunity opened up. The CSBMs were precursors of those momentous developments.

In recent years, international relations have been fast deteriorating. The new normality is characterised by big-power competition and arms buildup. Another ingredient is economic warfare in the form of trade and technology disputes and prolific use of economic sanctions. In addition, cyber warfare and new military technologies have opened new threat horizons, poorly understood so far but potentially monstrous. In such an environment of unpredictability and disorder, existing agreements on arms control and disarmament have crumbled and cooperative solutions to security problems have yielded to noncooperative strategies.

### **The Dwindling Arms-Control Architecture**

The unraveling of the arms-control and disarmament architecture is a mixed story of geopolitical change, technological pressures and the recent deterioration of international relations. The first geopolitical victim was the CFE Treaty between NATO and the Warsaw Pact; the first victim of technological change was the ABM Treaty. The rationale of that treaty was admirably simple and easy to understand: if you have a shield, it is easier to use the sword. Nationwide ballistic-missile defences are destabilising, for they stimulate competitive acquisitions of offensive and defensive capabilities and obstruct the search for arms control and disarmament. However, by the turn of the century, the US ballistic-missile defence (BMD) program had come to a stage where testing—prohibited by the treaty—was needed, and in 2002, President George W. Bush withdrew from it. Other agreements such as the Outer Space Treaty of 1967 and the Seabed Treaty of 1971 were of marginal importance

from the beginning and have since been relegated to the archives of history. The Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT), which was opened for signature in 1996, is still not in force, and the negotiation of a fissile-material cut-off agreement never started.

If the INF Treaty disappears, which it almost certainly will, and New START comes to an end in 2021 with no extension in sight, we are almost back to the first years after World War II when no rules had been agreed for the new nuclear age. What remains, then, are the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW, also known as the ban treaty), and the Open Skies Treaty. The NPT and the TPNW are mutually reinforcing, however annoyed the nuclear-weapon states are with the latter, which does not recognise them as legitimate nuclear powers.

The NPT has proven its resilience. The bandwagon effect of the so-called Swedish lesson from the 1960s accounts for much of it: regardless of what the NWS are doing, it is not in Sweden's interest to acquire nuclear weapons. However, this treaty also is under stronger pressure than ever before. In its advisory opinion of 1996, the International Court of Justice said that there is an obligation to negotiate and to bring the negotiations to an early conclusion.<sup>9</sup> Since 2010, the nuclear-weapon states have not even negotiated.

The CSBMs negotiated by the Stockholm Conference in the mid-1980s have unravelled too. These measures built confidence by enhancing transparency and predictability. In the static East-West setting of the time, that was possible. The CSBMs encouraged participants to negotiate disarmament agreements and wind down hostilities. Without them, we might have seen not the end of the Cold War, but an early end of Gorbachev.

In this century, new uncertainties have been created about the redlines of European security affairs. The Russian annexation of Crimea in 2014 and the war in Eastern Ukraine made a long-lasting difference. Big-power tensions grew at the cost of transparency and predictability, not only in Europe but worldwide. In a turbulent and rapidly changing world, confidence must be promoted in other ways than by Stockholm-type CSBMs.

## Political Order Changes

The concept of "international order" refers to the fundamental rules, principles, and institutions that make up the governing arrangements among states.<sup>10</sup> It can be based on hegemonic coercion, on convergence of state interests, or on more or less formalised norms, regimes, and institutions.

Throughout modern history, new orders have typically been formed after major wars. After the Peace of Westphalia in 1648, relations between states were for the first time organised on the basis of state sovereignty. In the nineteenth century, after the Napoleonic Wars, the "Concert of Europe" shaped interstate relations on the basis of mutual respect and self-

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<sup>9</sup> International Court of Justice. 1996. "Legality of the Threat or Use of Nuclear Weapons." Request for Advisory Opinion of the General Assembly of the United Nations, July 8.

<sup>10</sup> Ikenberry, G. J. 2001. *After Victory: Institutions, Strategic Restraint, and the Rebuilding of Order after Major Wars*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

restraint, which kept the peace for many decades. Liberal internationalism can be traced back to the end of World War I and the League of Nations, which underperformed. It was reinvigorated after World War II with the United Nations and the Bretton Woods institutions—the World Bank, International Monetary Fund (IMF), and General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT)—as primary governing bodies. Over time, many more agreements and organisations were added to it. The liberal world order, with democratic countries at its core, became an increasingly institutionalised order. Distinctly Western from the beginning, the driving force and undisputed leader was the United States.

### **Global Governance**

In 1945, the UN Charter defined three basic principles of international relations: state sovereignty, non-interference in internal affairs, and territorial integrity. The first two were increasingly challenged by key tenets of liberal internationalism such as global civil society, development aid tied to good governance, and by the doctrine of Responsibility to Protect (R2P) adopted at the UN World Summit in 2005. However, the first application of it was in Libya in 2011, where it was misused for the purpose of regime change.

By this time, the liberal challenge to the Charter principles had begun to dissipate. In Asia, in particular, states tend to behave the way the authors of the UN Charter said they should behave back in 1945 – less so in the case of India, more so in China and Russia. Recently, US President Donald Trump has tipped the scales in the same direction. For the BRICS states (Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa) and others, sovereign states determine their own domestic order while dealing with each other on a market basis. Communal rather than individual traditions are strong. State stewardship of the economy is the dominant ideology. International institutions have no legitimate business other than to serve and facilitate these ends. For BRICS and many other countries, the Charter principles fit their interests hand in glove: non-interference facilitates cooperation with others while the principle of non-intervention can be invoked to keep Western rivals out.

### **International Law**

When Russia annexed Crimea (2014), it violated all relevant international law: the UN Charter, the Helsinki Final Act, and the Budapest Memorandum of 1994, in which Russia, the United Kingdom, and the United States extended security guarantees to Ukraine. Foremost among the critics were states that usually violate international law when they go to war, which they frequently do. It is hard to escape the conclusion that on questions of war and peace, international law is increasingly ignored and used as matter of convenience, even in Europe.

Other examples are equally unnerving. When the International Court of Justice ruled that China's claim to historic rights in the South China Sea was "extinguished" by the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea, which China had ratified, China reacted with contempt. The disputed area covers 90 percent of the South China Sea, an area of the size of Mexico. The Philippines, which had filed the case, won on virtually all points by unanimous decision. In the Chinese narrative, however, control of the South China Sea is an essential part of the restoration of the country to global greatness after the century of humiliation (1839–1949).

International law, however unambiguous, was brushed aside.

When the United States withdrew from the nuclear deal with Iran (the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA)) and announced that it would reimpose the highest level of international sanctions, this was a blatant violation of international law. The agreement was negotiated by Iran and the big powers (United States, United Kingdom, France, Russia, China, Germany, and the European Union) and unanimously endorsed in UN Security Council Resolution S/RES/2231, so it was binding on all member states. The withdrawal was made without any mention of international law or, for that matter, of the United Nations.<sup>11</sup>

The United States used to be the champion of liberal internationalism – in principle, that is. In practice, the values underpinning it were often put aside. Trump has abandoned the principle as well. Today, the remaining bulwark of liberal internationalism is the European Union. The Europeans, too, are bound to make compromises. Hard economic and political interests sometimes take the front seat. However, being based on international rules, norms, and standards, the European Union is programmatically committed to them in its external affairs. Other countries join in, but there is no denying that in recent years, defence of international law has become a more demanding task.

### **Multilateralism**

To help countries recover from the ruins of World War II, multilateralism grew out of a clear objective: to avoid another devastating war and raise living standards. Progress was measured in reference to wars not fought and lives not lost, and in terms of the well-being of people.

Seventy-five years later, multilateralism for the sake of peace does not have the same appeal. The war generations are gone, so first-hand memories are no longer available. Multilateralism for the sake of welfare is questioned as well. Significant population segments have lost faith in it for a variety of reasons, most notably the growing inequalities of income, wealth, and opportunity. Globalisation has been a blessing for macroeconomic growth, but the distributional effects have not been addressed. Moreover, new technologies hitting the work force unevenly make people fear for their jobs, and in many Western countries, immigration pressures and fear of “the other” have inspired nationalist and autocratic movements. The culture wars that make many feel disrespected nurture scepticism and negative attitudes of multilateralism.

Sparked by the Trump administration, economic protectionism and trade wars are taking a heavy toll on multilateralism. At the centre of it is the power struggle with China, and the essence of that struggle is not about unfair trade conditions and gross US deficits, but about technological leadership. The United States wants to limit technology transfers to China, and

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<sup>11</sup> The United States also left important international agreements under George W. Bush. Unilateralism and exceptionalism were in high gear. However, if the agreements had a withdrawal clause, the administration withdrew the way the clause prescribed. Trump’s unilateralism and exceptionalism represent a more naked exercise of power.

on this the EU cooperates, for many Chinese practices are detrimental to European economic interests as well. In particular, the United States is taking aim at “Made in China 2025,” which is a program for a comprehensive innovation-driven upgrade of Chinese industry.<sup>12</sup>

Trump has withdrawn from the Trans-Pacific Partnership, the Paris climate accord, and the Iran deal. He has negotiated bilaterally with Mexico and Canada to adjust the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), and he has put the World Trade Organisation (WTO) and other international institutions under pressure. These were low-hanging fruit, however. The economic costs to the United States were modest, remote, or hard to calculate, and by picking them he delivered on his “America First” election promises. Withdrawing from WTO, NATO, or the UN would cost much more both economically and politically. None of them are “sacred,” however. US withdrawal from the WTO is by no means excluded and if Trump is re-elected, NATO’s continued existence cannot be taken for granted either. The European Union can be counted on to protect multilateralism as best it can.

The BRICS summits also promise to be vigilant in guarding against inward-looking policies and to oppose protectionism. Clearly, the EU, China, and others have common interests in this regard. However, as long as the Europeans feel heavily dependent on the United States for their own security and economic well-being, the transatlantic bonds are major constraints on common action.

The United States is substituting bilateral deals for multilateral agreements. It is in bilateral settings that big powers can become the most effective and, in relation to much smaller partners, be overwhelming. Conversely, small states usually prefer to handle important matters in multilateral frameworks. In the presence of many others it is easier to resist undue pressure and forge coalitions against the big states.

### **Geopolitics: Growing Bipolarity in a Multipolar Setting**

In his 2012 book *Strategic Vision*, Zbigniew Brzezinski describes the multipolar world of big powers, noting that small states in their neighbourhoods are “endangered species”.<sup>13</sup> Two years later, it seemed prophetic: Russia’s renewed claim to spheres of interest was exercised at Ukraine’s expense. China is expanding into the South China Sea, disregarding the interests of its smaller neighbours. India’s interventions in Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, and the Maldives are manifestations of the same phenomenon. Today, Trump is following suit, abandoning the liberal internationalist world order and claiming instead a right to influence that is commensurate with US power. The United States has become more like other big powers, only the most powerful among them.

In the days of the British Empire, London had its eyes fixed on the “second country” – that is, on the one(s) next to it in the international hierarchy of power, which might be able to

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<sup>12</sup> Its guiding principles are to make manufacturing innovation driven, emphasise quality over quantity, achieve green development, optimise the structure of Chinese industry, and nurture human talent. Scott Kennedy, Center for Strategic and International Studies, Washington 1. June 2018. <https://www.csis.org/analysis/made-china-2025>.

<sup>13</sup> Brzezinski, Z. 2012. *Strategic Vision: America and the Crisis of Global Power*. New York: Basic Books.



overtake it. For the United States, the “second country” is China. China is growing faster than its competitors, but will not be on a par with the United States for many years to come. The growth of its comprehensive national strength has slowed down, and the rate of growth may continue to decrease, but the gap between China and those next to it in the hierarchy is also growing. The United States and China will make up an increasingly dominant bilateral dimension in the wider multipolar setting.

The contours of a revived Middle Kingdom emerge with heightened clarity, located midway between the mighty American competitor and the world’s largest trading bloc on the European side of the landmass. Historically, China stayed in Asia while Western empires took control of other regions by military means. In classical geopolitical parlance, contemporary China is reaching out economically to the World Island<sup>14</sup>—the Eurasian landmass and Africa —by means of the gigantic Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). This effort, which is laying the groundwork for comprehensive cooperation, initially aroused enthusiasm along its routes. But conflict as well as cooperation is unavoidable on its heels, in a mix that cannot be foreseen.

The United States and China are facing a classical dilemma, last illustrated by the nuclear competition between the United States and the Soviet Union in the 1970s. The Soviets said they were aiming for no more than parity, but the United States saw a rising curve threatening to overtake its own – and in the beginning of the 1980s a formidable arms race followed. That time, the world escaped Armageddon. Historically, however, power shifts at the top of the pyramid often ended in war. Graham Allison identified 16 such shifts over the latest 500 years and found that 12 of them ended in war.<sup>15</sup> The outcome of the US-Chinese rivalry is not a given and, in the USA, the theoretical debate between those who believe it can be managed peacefully and those who believe it will end in war continues. Opponents meet in discussions of hedging, of what is enough and what is excessive – that is, provoking a war that should be avoided.

The worrisome state of the multipolar setting appears very clearly when juxtaposed with the Concert of Europe. Henry Kissinger, an authority on concert diplomacy, described it as a system in which,

the great powers work together to enforce international norms ... Power emerges from a sense of community and it is exercised by an allocation of responsibilities related to a country’s resources. It is a kind of world order either without a dominating power or in which the potentially dominating power leads through self-restraint.<sup>16</sup>

Kissinger believed that the Obama administration favoured some kind of concert diplomacy.

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<sup>14</sup> Mackinder, H. J. [1919] 1962. *Democratic Ideals and Reality*. New York: W.W. Norton. Mackinder’s basic reasoning was as follows: Who rules Eastern Europe rules the Heartland (the Eurasian landmass); who rules the Heartland commands the World-Island; who commands the World-Island commands the World.

<sup>15</sup> Allison, G. 2017. *Destined for War: Can America and China Escape Thucydides’s Trap?* New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt.

<sup>16</sup> Kissinger, H. 2009. “Obama’s Foreign Policy Challenge.” *Washington Post*, April 22.

Today, there is no common willingness to enforce international norms and no allocation of responsibilities in this respect. Mutual respect and self-restraint are rare commodities. The dominating power strives to maintain its dominance and other powers try to reduce it. The sense of community that characterised concert diplomacy is totally absent. In the big-power dyads, conflict of interest is the rule and conflict manifestations flourish. Common interests are at best of a tactical nature.

## Sanctions

Imposition and threats of sanctions are a much-favoured US foreign policy instrument. The president's authority to issue sanctions rests on the International Emergency Economic Powers Act (IEEPA) of 1977 and the main implementing body is the Treasury Department's Office of Foreign Assets Control. Since 2000, Presidents have used IEEPA in more than 400 executive actions. Not all of them were new; some extended the timetable or expanded the scope of previous orders.<sup>17</sup>

The United States has imposed sanctions on Iran, North Korea, Russia, Syria, South Sudan, Venezuela, Cuba, and many others. Among the stated reasons are threats of terrorism, proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, human rights violations, narcotics trafficking and money laundering. In some cases, the EU, other Western countries, Japan, and others in East Asia have joined in and taken similar action. The selection of targets is guided by real-politik and has become a foreign-policy tool of choice.

Sanctions are a humiliating, top-down form of conflict manifestation and they seldom work as intended. Rather than giving in, states mobilise to stand up to the pressure. The topical cases of the day have proved it beyond doubt. In the case of North Korea, the world witnessed the same sequence over and over again: North Korea tests, the world condemns, the UN Security Council meets, the United States proposes more sanctions, China negotiates to dilute them, and North Korea continues – till serious negotiations began. Similarly, with the case of Iran: from 2006 to 2013, more sanctions and more enrichment. The lesson is clear: for sanctions to work as intended and lead to conflict resolution, they must be combined with good-faith negotiations and realistic prospects of sanctions relief.

Generally, states that stick to the letter of the UN Charter of 1945 disapprove of unilateral sanctions because they violate core principles such as sovereign equality and non-interference. Only the Security Council has the right and obligation to take such measures to maintain international peace and security. Secondary sanctions are particularly objectionable. Strength decides, however, and the United States is quick to exploit its dominance of the international financial system.

The comprehensive imposition of sanctions, like those against Iran, is a burden on international affairs that poisons the atmosphere for cooperative ventures. However, to what extent this happens automatically or is neatly controlled by national governments is hard to say. In

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<sup>17</sup> Arnold, A. 2018. "Where Does Trump Get the Power to Reimpose Sanctions?" *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, August 15.

a sense, it is analogous to the debate about spillover in international integration theory, the one being about the spread of conflict and the other about the spread of cooperation.<sup>18</sup>

### **Hidden Warfare: From Covert Operations to Cyber**

All powers of some size engage in covert operations, which represent a third category of foreign-policy activity between ordinary diplomacy and the use of force. The definition differs among countries, but covert operations are all about efforts to influence the course of events in a foreign country without the identity of the sponsor being known, or else to permit the sponsor's plausible denial of operations. The means are economic, political, informational and physical, ranging from provision of funds and advice to the use of paramilitary force. In the United States, which is best known for covert operations, such actions were left to the CIA to execute from the early years of the Cold War. Their scope and scale have been enormous, but their effectiveness has been mixed.<sup>19</sup>

President Eisenhower was attracted by the flexibility and versatility of these instruments. He was used to sending large numbers of soldiers into bloody wars: covert operations could achieve a lot in less brutal ways. As the world became more interconnected and the US global reach increased, the range of such actions increased as well, and new technologies offered new options.

One of the latest additions to the toolbox is cyber warfare. The Stuxnet attack, known by the code name Olympic Games, opened the floodgates. This was the first truly sophisticated state-on-state attack. The United States, in cooperation with Israel, smuggled malware into Iran's uranium-enrichment facility in Natanz and affected the software so that hundreds of centrifuges spun out of control and collapsed. President Obama reportedly gave the green light for the operation in order to stop Israel from going to war, which would very likely have drawn in the United States as well. Literally understood, a covert cyber operation substituted for regular warfare on a scale that had never been seen before.

In *The Perfect Weapon*, David Sanger outlines four categories of cyber warfare: espionage, which today means doing much more effectively what opening of letters, tapping of phones, and observation by satellites had done in the past; data manipulation, such as tapping banks and rerouting money to one's own accounts; attacks for destructive purposes, such as Stuxnet; and information warfare – that is, disinformation campaigns for whatever purpose.<sup>20</sup>

Two predictions appear plausible. First, since cyber warfare can be conducted by both state and nonstate actors and by small as well as large states; since the world is interconnected

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<sup>18</sup> Neofunctionalism holds that integration within one sector will tend to generate its own impetus and spread to other sectors, while intergovernmentalism argues that national governments control the level and speed of integration.

<sup>19</sup> Examples from the first postwar decades are efforts to influence the outcome of elections in Western Europe during the early Cold War years, the 1953 overthrow of Mossadegh in Iran, the 1954 overthrow of Arbenz in Guatemala, the 1963 attempt to kill Castro in Cuba, the 1963 overthrow of Bosch in the Dominican Republic, the 1965 propaganda campaign to overthrow the Sukarno government in Indonesia, and the 1967 provision of aid to overthrow Papandreou and install Colonel Papadopoulos in Greece.

<sup>20</sup> Sanger, D. 2018. *The Perfect Weapon: War, Sabotage and Fear in the Cyber Age*. New York: Random House.

and modern societies, in particular, are very vulnerable; and since it may be hard to trace attacks back to their sources, these covert actions are likely to grow in scope and intensity.

Second, the growth of cyber warfare will make the world even more unpredictable and chaotic.

### **Mirror Images: Changes in the World Order and the Fate of Arms Control**

In the above analysis, six features are particularly noteworthy. First, *sovereign states* are re-emphasised and reconfirmed as the basic building blocks of international affairs. Second, *trade and technology wars and economic sanctions* have moved to the top of the international agenda and become major sources and expressions of conflict. Third, *international norms, institutions and agreements, are falling apart*. The glue is wearing thinner and the world is fragmenting. Fourth, international affairs have become more *unpredictable*. Unpredictability has become a part of US strategy. Fifth, in the multipolar geopolitical setting, *the bilateral relationship between the United States and China is increasingly dominant*. The United States perceives China as an adversary and enemy, not as a partner. Sixth, *new technologies nurture new forms of influence and capacity for violence*—disinformation, cyber warfare, military applications of artificial intelligence and hybrid warfare—posing new threats.

These changes in the world order are mirrored in the unraveling of the arms-control architecture. The relationship between the United States and China is particularly worrisome. Economic warfare, geopolitical rivalry, technological change, and unpredictability coalesce into an atmosphere that militates against cooperative security ventures. The essence of common security—that security is something you have to promote in tandem with your adversary, not pursue unilaterally—is further away from big-power politics than ever since the darkest days of the Cold War.

### **Will Liberal Internationalism Strike Back?**

Hegelian dialectics says that in all social processes, there are contradictory elements. It is the tension between these elements that create the dynamics of developments. Taken to the extremes the pendulum may swing, in due course leading to new syntheses.<sup>21</sup>

Some observers caution that another US administration may try to revive liberal internationalism and its own leadership role in it, and that the European Union—which stays committed to multilateralism, international, law and liberal values—will not crumble, but carry the integration project forward and grow stronger. If so, transatlantic bonds and liberal internationalism may be revived.

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<sup>21</sup> On Hegelian dialectics, see e.g. Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/hegel-dialectics/>.

## The US after Trump

The experiences and beliefs that leaders bring to their high offices have a distinct tendency to stick and to shape their working mode, the recruitment of advisers, and ultimately the decisions that they make.<sup>22</sup> This is the intellectual capital they will consume as long as they stay in office. One year before Trump's inauguration, Thomas Wright argued that Trump had three distinct beliefs – against trade (that is, free trade), against alliances, and in favour of strongmen abroad. In a follow-up article, he argues that during the first two years of Trump's presidency, many of his closest collaborators tried to tone down his most extreme inclinations in order to make administration policies more broadly acceptable while today his team is composed of people who try to elaborate on his ideas and take them forward.<sup>23</sup> The president himself has stayed true to his beliefs and promises.

New leaders will bring new ideas. Much depends on whether Trump will win a second term, but his successor may not revert to liberal internationalism. But far from being a one-time exception to the rule of liberal governance, Trump may personify longer-lasting economic, cultural and political trends.

Technological change may be the most inexorable of them. Its speed, its uneven effects on the workforce, the inequalities it produces, and the uncertainties it creates threaten key elements of the liberal order. Open economies are among the victims. Brakes on globalisation are deemed necessary to preserve national identities, and enhanced border control is called for to protect against terrorism. For some time, nationalism and populism have been on the rise. Much of this is seen both in the United States and in other parts of the world. The liberal order is threatened both from within and without. It strains the imagination, therefore, to believe that the United States will go back to liberal internationalism once Trump is out of office.

America First is a national platform for pursuit of national advantage – not on the basis of norms and institutions, but bilaterally, selectively, and pragmatically as opportunities arise. For big powers to extricate themselves from international obligations in order to be free to use their assets at will is nothing new, but Trump is taking it further in his own peculiar way.

This is not to say that the United States is reverting to isolationism. More than ever before, national economies are interwoven with each other. Production chains have been internationalised. The privileges the United States enjoys in the international financial system and the foreign-policy tools that they offer are precious assets. The unwavering commitment to military superiority and its global military reach leaves the same message: isolationism is not an option.

## The European Integration Project: Under Pressure, but Resilient

The European Coal and Steel Community—the path-breaking initiative that developed into

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<sup>22</sup> Saunders, E. N. 2018. "Is Trump a Normal Foreign-Policy President?" *Foreign Affairs*, January 18.

<sup>23</sup> Wright, T. 2019. "Trump's Foreign Policy is No Longer Unpredictable." *Foreign Affairs*, January 18.

today's European Union—was established in the belief that mutual dependence between old enemies, particularly, Germany and France, could prevent future wars between them. From this starting point, an integration project took shape, coordinating national policies and ceding state sovereignty to common institutions.

When the Cold War was over, the European Union expanded to include Central and Eastern European states on the condition that they would settle their bilateral conflicts. Keen to place their civilisational anchor in the West, they largely succeeded in doing so. In retrospect, the European Union has been a formidable peace project, for which it was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 2011.

Other regions have created institutional arrangements facilitating cooperation between sovereign states, but without aiming at political integration. The European Union remains an exception. Growing interdependence has been a trend for decades, but this is no guarantee against armed conflict. In the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, trade between European states was comprehensive and growing – right up to World War I. A century later, trade between India and China has been skyrocketing, but their security problems seem unaffected by it. It is as if there is a firewall between the economic sector and the security field. Much the same applies to the relationship between China and Japan.

In recent years, two classical questions in integration theory have come to the fore. First, is there a point at which the European integration process can stop and stay, or does standstill mean regression? The European Union is the strongest and most ardent supporter of liberal values, but the combination of enlargement and anti-liberal winds from Poland, Hungary, Romania, and significant minorities in other member states have put the integration project on the defensive. Will they destroy it? Second, will external pressure, notably from the United States, lead to deeper integration to stand up to the challenge, or will the pressure from Trump be so strong that more cracks open up? The challenge is manageable for now, but it may come to a dramatic test if Trump is re-elected. Should Trump turn his back on NATO, what better choice does the European Union have than trying to provide for its own defence?

The Europeans are increasingly torn between China and the United States. To the east, relations with China are growing more substantial as the Silk Road enters Europe, although closer contact means more conflict as well. To the west, the transatlantic bonds are getting weaker. US and European political cultures have become much different, but economic interdependence remains tight. Trump sees the EU as an economic foe, however, and is disposed to zero-sum thinking, while the EU and China are seeking cooperation for mutual benefit. Arms-control discussions between the Europeans and the Chinese have barely started and so have an untested potential.<sup>24 25</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Sputnik. 2018. "German Foreign Minister: Berlin to Press China on 'Space, Robotic Weapons' Rules." *Sputnik*, November 7. <https://sputniknews.com/world/201811071069577639-heiko-maas-china-arms-control>

<sup>25</sup> Going to China in February 2019, German Foreign Minister Heiko Maas said he would advocate for greater transparency and arms control, mentioning space weapons and robotic weapons.

## Implications for Arms Control

What are the prospects of common security thinking and cooperative security policies in the world described above? What is the role, if any, of confidence building, arms control, and disarmament?

The transitional nature of world affairs, where big powers compete for positions and influence in the face of an unpredictable future, leaves little space for such policies. For the time being, cooperative security policies are modest exceptions to the rule of unilateral, competitive arms buildups.

There is one overriding common concern, however: *to avoid nuclear war*. To this end, stability measures are needed, and stability is the number-one objective of arms control. The need for arms control is at least as strong as when it was introduced 60 years ago, but can it be revived?

The superpower rivals of the Cold War adopted a number of measures both bilaterally and domestically to reduce the risk of Armageddon. They were two countries, 5000 kilometres apart, and they had no territorial conflict with each other. When the Cold War ended and the rivalry stopped, they no longer had any incentive to resort to nuclear weapons. The smaller nuclear-weapon states—the United Kingdom, France, and China—had no such incentive either. Except for the residual risk of unintentional use, nuclear stability had been achieved.<sup>26</sup>

In today's world of nine nuclear-armed states, this is much different. In many dyads among these countries, stability concerns are not confined to nuclear forces. Conventional forces have assumed a larger role in nuclear calculations. Rather than accept defeat, the weaker state may feel compelled to resort to nuclear arms. Border skirmishes and clashes that do not raise the spectre of regime collapse or territorial disintegration may not lead that far, but even such cases can put the parties' capacity to exercise restraint to a severe test. The Asian triangle—China, India, and Pakistan—is particularly complex and delicate in this respect, for these countries are not only bordering on each other, but also have unresolved territorial conflicts.

In a sense, we are back to the logic of the Russell-Einstein Manifesto of 1955,<sup>27</sup> which said that agreements reached in time of peace would no longer be considered binding in time of war. Both sides would set to work to manufacture H-bombs as soon as war broke out. In the starkest of terms, the manifesto therefore presented two alternatives: find a way to abolish war, or the human race will come to an end. Today, abolishing war between the nuclear-weapon states is a long shot, but confidence-building measures and arms control can reduce the risk of conventional conflicts breaking out and escalating to nuclear warfare.

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<sup>26</sup> Trenin, D. 2019. "Strategic Stability in the Changing World." Moscow: Carnegie Moscow Center, March 21.

<sup>27</sup> Russell-Einstein Manifesto, issued in London on 9 July 1955. <http://umich.edu/~pugwash/Manifesto.ht ml>.

## Confidence- and Security-Building Measures

Transparency leads to predictability, which in turn inspires confidence. This was the rationale for military confidence-building measures, first introduced at the Helsinki Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe in 1975 and further developed at the Stockholm Conference a decade later.

When the Cold War was over, Russia adopted a policy of *glasnost* (openness), but the window of opportunity was short-lived. By the middle of the decade it was closing, and renewed tensions developed to the detriment of transparency. Still, disarmament agreements provided for comprehensive information exchanges and detailed verification procedures, but these gains are now getting lost as agreements unravel.

The second element of the confidence-building equation—predictability—has been undermined for other reasons as well. Big powers want to be free to apply their superior strength at will and are therefore leery of international constraints. Having abandoned leadership of the liberal world order, Trump is no exception, but takes it a step further. Having declared America first, he recommends the same precept for others.

For Trump, unpredictability is a favoured way of doing business, and he applies the same approach to the conduct of foreign affairs. Under this approach, to be predictable is stupid; not to let the others know what to expect is advantageous. Unpredictability can deter others, small states in particular, from taking issue with US policies because it is hard to calculate the consequences.

All of this—the lack of transparency and the appreciation of unpredictability—undermines confidence. The equation is therefore failing in both respects – the predictability element because of the United States and the transparency part because of the Asian powers, Russia included.

In the social sciences, all laws are qualified in some way:  $x$  relates to  $y$  if (a) and (b) apply. The confidence-building equation rests on the premise that none of the parties harbour any intention to change the territorial status quo by military means. In Europe of the Cold War, that seemed to be the case. Crises were followed by normalisation of relations. The most recent example was the events in Georgia in 2008; a few months afterward, the United States and Russia pushed the reset button. However, after the Russian territorial encroachment on Ukraine in 2014, suspicions and sanctions have substituted for good-faith cooperation, making Stockholm-type CSBMs unfeasible.

South Asia is well known to be in a similar state because of the territorial conflict in Kashmir. Confidence building has been tried by India and Pakistan, but it has turned out to be a frustrating activity, climbing up the mountain and sliding down again. In East Asia, the situation is similar: the territorial conflicts in the East and South China Seas are major obstacles to confidence-building measures in the region. None of this excludes initiatives to build confidence in other security-related fields: for instance, institutionalised political dialogue can do much to reduce uncertainties and alleviate tensions.



## Arms Control

In an unpredictable world of suspicions and distrust, states address their perceived security needs by enhancing their own relative strength. Cooperative arms control draws little attention, for such policies depend on a business-like atmosphere in which mutual understandings can be developed in good faith.

States therefore prepare for wars they do not want and that they usually do not wage. Wars are costly, and war between the nuclear-weapon states must by all means be avoided, so they look for less dramatic substitutes. The world's leading military power—the United States, which is by no means unfamiliar with the use of force—prefers covert action, economic sanctions, and cyber warfare to make others accommodate, but keeps the military option “on the table”. The role of diplomacy has shrunk dramatically.

The field of cyber security is completely unregulated. The United States may be the technological front-runner and leading agent of offensive cyber operations, but US society is also among the most vulnerable to attack by others. It is not far-fetched, therefore, to imagine that broad common interests in international regulations may emerge, however complex the issues. Tentative suggestions have been made for some kind of Geneva Convention to regulate the field, as a starter.<sup>28</sup> Enforcement of rules is beyond the horizon, but an international initiative may help recognise the seriousness of the problem and put innovative minds on a constructive cooperative track.

During the Cold War, arms control to reduce the risk of inadvertent escalation became a much-emphasised and sorely needed addendum to nuclear arms racing, for the stakes were the highest: all-out nuclear war. Today, the probability of nuclear-weapon use may be higher than ever before, but recognition of the dangers has slipped. Not only have arms control agreements disappeared, but the lines of communication have also deteriorated. This should be remedied as a matter of priority. Technical arrangements to reduce the risk of an inadvertent slide to war are low-hanging fruit that would serve the common interest.

As the fate of the INF Treaty has amply illustrated, arms control has become more of a global proposition. The structural problems are formidable, however. In terms of military strength, the United States remains the undisputed leader and is determined to maintain that position. To be serious, presidential candidates have to commit to it. In 2018, the US military budget stood at \$649 billion and was 2.5 times that of China; China's was more than 4 times that of Russia, the United Kingdom, or France.<sup>29</sup> The US and Russian nuclear arsenals are an order of magnitude larger than China's. Still, Trump has aired the idea of a three-way deal with Russia and China, raising some fundamentally important issues of sequencing. The best approach may be extension of New START; US-Russian reductions of deployed nuclear warheads to three-digit figures with special limits on tactical weapons and missile-defense systems and maybe on other assets as well; and, on that basis, an invitation to China to join a subsequent phase of negotiations.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Sanger, D. 2018. *The Perfect Weapon: War, Sabotage and Fear in the Cyber Age*. New York: Random House.

<sup>29</sup> SIPRI. 2019, April. “Military Expenditure Database.” Stockholm: Stockholm International Peace Research Institute.

<sup>30</sup> Burt, R., and J. Wolfsthal. 2019. “How Trump Can Transform Nuclear Arms Control.” *The National Interest*, May 10.

## **A Code of Nuclear Responsibility**

What might a global framework that is realistic enough to gain traction while capturing the aspirations for a world free of nuclear dangers look like?

Starting from the assumption that there is a common interest in avoiding nuclear war, John Gower has introduced the concept of nuclear strategic stability (NSS) as a metric of international relations. NSS is high where the risk of any conflict being initiated using nuclear weapons, or of a conventional conflict escalating to the nuclear level, is low. Every posture, capability, or declaratory change should be assessed against this metric with a view to reducing the risk of nuclear weapon use.<sup>31</sup>

Gower identifies six components of NSS that the nuclear-weapon states should use to guide their current and future actions, amounting to a code of nuclear responsibility. It starts with restraint in rhetoric, posture, activity and readiness; unambiguous communication pathways at the level of national control authorities; and abstention from using nuclear weapons as levers of statecraft except as strategic deterrents. It ends on a plea for nuclear-weapon states to sketch out reduction paths toward less complex, maximally stable strategic systems on the way to zero. The code therefore comprises the whole range of measures from declaratory policy to arms control and disarmament.

Confidence-building measures, arms control, and disarmament in the conventional field should be built into it as well, with a view to reducing the risk of conventional war between nuclear-weapon states and to avoid escalation to the nuclear level should it nevertheless occur. Such measures must be tailored to regional specifics.

The idea rests on the assumption that enhanced stability to reduce the risk of nuclear war can be discussed without linkage to other areas of contention, and that the recommended changes can stay clear of ongoing power struggles. If not, the idea would be dead on arrival.

The NPT is an appropriate setting for elaboration and discussion of such a code. Article VI of this treaty clarifies that nuclear disarmament is a shared responsibility of all member states. Action items from previous review conferences may be drawn upon. Proponents of the ban treaty can be expected to join in; measures to reduce the risk of nuclear war have always been high on their list of practical follow-up actions.

## **Common Security Thinking and Cooperative Security Policies**

The concept of common security was a reaction to the second wave of the Cold War. At the 1986 summit with President Ronald Reagan in Reykjavik, Gorbachev applied common security thinking throughout. The concept did not gain favour in the United States, but the policy-oriented derivative—cooperative security—originated there. Today, however, all the big powers prioritise deterrence and arms buildups. Cooperative measures have been

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<sup>31</sup> Gower, J. 2018. "Framing 21st Century Arms Control: Nuclear Strategic Stability & an Arms Control Pathway." Draft Working Paper for the Toda/NUPI conference on Exploring New Approaches to Arms Control in the 21st Century. Oslo, October 21.

reduced to a mere footnote in their statements, if at all mentioned – except for China.

In a speech to the Conference on Interaction and Confidence Building Measures in Asia, Chinese President Xi Jinping took exception to the zero-sum thinking of the Cold War and emphasised that nobody should try to dominate at the expense of others.<sup>32</sup> He went further: security should not be pursued through unilateral action, but should be built on a cooperative basis. He explicitly used the term “common security,” very much the way the International Commission on Security and Disarmament Issues had presented it. Declaratory policies seldom tell the full story, however: big-power actions may not be in conformity with the public statements of their leaders.

In a major departure from Deng’s advice to lie low while concentrating on domestic growth, Xi has emphasised that it is not enough to earn money. Rejuvenation also means that China has to win friends, and the preferred means of doing so is cooperative win-win projects. The formidable Road and Belt Initiative is promoted on this basis. China’s rise makes the basic tenets of its security thinking and its actual behaviour all the more important to watch.

All members of the NPT are legally obliged to push for nuclear disarmament through negotiations, that is, through cooperative action. Governments and civil society can do much to turn current mind-sets away from unilateralism by using the full potential of modern media to debate, argue, and urge a shift to common security thinking. For China and the Europeans, win-win is known ground. For Russia, where geopolitical thinking based on zero-sum assumptions is commonplace, there is a longer way to go. The bottom line is that unless there is a change of security thinking in the United States—the leading military power—nuclear arms control and disarmament has a bleak future.

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<sup>32</sup> Jinping, X. 2014. “New Asian Security Concept for New Progress in Security Cooperation.” In *Remarks to the Fourth Summit of the Conference on Interaction and Confidence-Building Measures*, May 21. [https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/zxxx\\_662805/t1159951.shtml](https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/zxxx_662805/t1159951.shtml)

## The Author

**Sverre Lodgaard** is senior research fellow and former director (1997–2007) of the Norwegian Institute of International Affairs (NUPI). He is also a senior research fellow of the Toda Peace Institute in Tokyo. Before joining NUPI he directed the United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research (1992–1996). His work in the public sector includes the following: member of the UN Secretary-General’s Advisory Board on Disarmament Matters (1992–1999); member of the Norwegian government’s Advisory Council for Arms Control and Disarmament (1972–1985; 1989–1992; 1998–2009; and advisor/member of Norwegian delegations to international conferences on arms control and disarmament matters. His most recent books are *External Powers* and *The Arab Spring* (Scandinavian Academic Press 2016) and *Stable Nuclear Zero* (Routledge 2017).

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### Contact Us

Toda Peace Institute  
Samon Eleven Bldg. 5<sup>th</sup> Floor  
3-1 Samon-cho, Shinjuku-ku, Tokyo 160-0017, Japan  
Email: [contact@toda.org](mailto:contact@toda.org)