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Session One: The State of the World in Post-Brexit, Post-Trump, Post-Truth Era

- Stimson is a Washington DC-based think tank established 30 years ago to address an array of interconnected threats to international security, development and the global economy.
- Our work is non-partisan, inherently interdisciplinary, and pragmatic in nature.
- You will find our scholars as often in the field operationalizing their ideas as you will at their desks generating the next big idea. For example:
  - Stimson's scholars played a central role in developing the language and provisions of the Arms Trade Treaty and are now working with countries of the Global South to realize its implementation;
  - They became seized with the largescale killing of wildlife in sub-Saharan Africa, adopted a rhino sanctuary, and built a public-private partnership with technology companies to prevent wildlife poaching and trafficking;
  - And they are brokering new relationships between investors, governments, and local fishermen and farmers in Southeast Asia to promote environmental sustainability and food security.
- It is our belief that the artificial divisions that exist between the grand transnational challenges of our time—proliferation, terrorism, environmental degradation, underdevelopment, disease, overexploitation of natural resources—cannot be solved in isolation.
- We therefore have dedicated ourselves to imagining innovative solutions that bring uncommon alliances together—across security/development and public/private divides—then piloting those ideas in the field.

As the title of this session suggests, there are many issues crowding the global agenda at the moment that rightly give us all cause for concern:
- rise of nationalism and nativism;
- retreat from positive forces of globalization;
- terrorism;
- environmental degradation;
- perhaps most worryingly an attack on the fundamentals of democracy and global cooperation that help us address common challenges.

Rather than delving deeply into these issues in my remarks, I'd instead like to set the table for this discussion. Because despite the anxiety that most of us might feel, I continue to harbor a perhaps naïve optimism for the future—and I hope to convince you of that optimism so that we might redirect our anxiety to the practical pursuit of a better life for everyone on this planet.

Despite a growing resistance to the forces of globalization, it is important for us to come to grips with two realities. First, globalization is here to stay—regardless of what any political leader may tell us. Second,

although it has left too many behind, globalization has been an overwhelming force for good for the lion's share of the world's population, making it a far more hospitable place. Consider this:

- In the past 12 years, governments, international organizations, civil society, and industry groups around the globe have helped to cut in half the world's extreme poverty rate.
- Today, millions fewer people live in the grinding poverty associated with living on less than $1.25 per day;
- More girls are in school;
- Fewer children are dying as a result of preventable illness;
- And the world continues to make advances against the scourge of global diseases like malaria and HIV/AIDS;
- Further, despite horrific and headline grabbing conflicts today, the inexorable trend of violent conflict is bending however gradually toward peace.

These accomplishments trace their lineage to our growing global interconnectedness, and successful efforts by this body — and others — to steer the forces of globalization toward universal benefit.

Ultimately, I want to leave you with three messages:

1. It's not as bad as we think;
2. We well understand the drivers behind many of the most worrisome threats to peace and prosperity; and
3. We have a proven toolkit to address those factors—we can make a difference and improve world for ourselves and for future generations.

The future is always scarier than the past. Because our future inherently unknowable, neuroscientists tell us that the human brain conceives of this uncertainty as a lack of safety. Your brain detects something is wrong, and your ability to focus on other issues diminishes. Your brain doesn't like uncertainty - it's like a type of pain—it means danger.

So I am going to suggest to you this morning that our fear of uncertainty may be clouding our collective judgement and shading our conception of the future in overly negative tones.

I'm also going to ask you this morning to place your current fears into a longer historical context.

We need not go back so far in the country that I call home today—the United States—to recall a moment of great uncertainty:
- In 1960s America was wracked with deep civil unrest;
- Violence in the streets saw large swaths of American cities on fire;
- Racial tensions spilled over;
- Political assassinations;
- By late in the decade an overseas conflict was claiming the lives of more than 1000 American soldiers each month, and factors on the ground in Southeast Asia;

- All of this while tens of thousands of nuclear weapons stood poised amidst a global superpower standoff that earlier brought us closer to the brink of nuclear annihilation.

Let's think about that for a moment. Those were scary times from which the United States and the world emerged to better days.

- Violent crime rates would grow through the 1980s only to plummet to historic lows today;
- Tens of thousands of nuclear weapons would be taken offline and ultimately scrapped;
- And in 2008 the United States would elect its first African American president.

The point is that we need to be wary of overinterpreting the worrisome headlines and the cynicism that accompanies.

This brings me to my second point:

Brexit, rise of the far right, terrorist incidents of the sort we saw last week in London, the election of Donald Trump—these are often characterized as alarming indicators of a world in crisis. To be sure, they are creating significant disruption to the status quo. But I will suggest to you that we better understand the often legitimate drivers of these phenomena—which to my mind is a growing sense of inequality and hopelessness.

In this regard:

- the unemployed steel worker in middle America who votes for Donald Trump;
- the out of work longshoreman in England who champions Brexit;
- the young Somali fisherman who turns to piracy on the high seas;
- or the displaced Syrian adolescent who has lost hope, and however irrationally, equates service to Allah with acts of terror

… share more in common at times that we might like to admit. They share a common sense of inequality and of hopelessness.

These millions of citizens around the globe are telling us something. Current trajectories are unsustainable. And in this regard, some level of disruption in the system is needed. It would be folly for any of us in this room to dismiss these trends and the individuals that help drive them as crazy or as unenlightened.

It is true that these shared fears are, in turn, driving a growing "security culture", propelling a hyper-inflated sense of sovereignty, unilateralism, and violence.

For most, I think that symptoms are being driven by fear, rather than a common sense of incivility or intolerance.

Of course, there are those who are driven by the worst of humanity—racism, xenophobia, greed. But that has been true throughout the course of human history—and NOT any more today than at other violent inflection points in our past.

Incumbent upon us to begin to rethink how we address these crosscutting threats to peace and prosperity.

This brings me to my final point. If we can agree that our shared sense of fear of uncertainty is fomenting a negative dialectic, and that it is manifesting in diffuse but ultimately interconnected trends, communities like ours boast effective toolkits that can make a substantial difference in the symptoms of those fears: armed conflict, environmental insecurity, attacks on the global institutions of cooperative security.

Let me end with a few agenda items to help inspire some discussion:

1. Our current architecture to address the grand global challenges of our time are so far out-of-date that we should be ashamed for not having modernized them yet.
2. The state will be the primary and indispensable actor on the world stage, but by the time my children retire, they will look back and ask why their father's generation failed to account for the rise of others with not only the capacity but the willingness to make positive change in the world
3. Corporations, faith groups, civil society associations, and even individuals
4. We need to think beyond our traditional mechanisms and become far more inventive and flexible
5. Many of the world's great movements have flowed from the work of a single individual or committed non-governmental consortium;
    a. A disaffected Tunisian initiates the Arab Spring
    b. A young girl in Pakistan upends years of antiquated thinking about the education of girls and the role of women in society;
    c. A private software magnate systematically ends the scourge of disease for millions through his philanthropy

In each of these cases, and countless others, groups and individuals outside of the state came together for make positive change.

Not all of us will be a Malala, or a Bill Gates, and help alter the course of human history, but we all have a responsibility to continue to work toward mitigating the forces that drive feelings of inequality and hopelessness whose symptoms we gather here to discuss.