

# 1. Introduction: International stability and human security in 2023

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Global security continued to deteriorate throughout 2023, as it has for the past decade. Matters improved in a few areas of peace and security in 2023, but many more showed a marked deterioration.

There are many markers of persistent deterioration. Among them, the full-scale war that followed Russia's escalation of its war against Ukraine in February 2022 continued in 2023; neither side gained a decisive advantage, and no pathway emerged towards a negotiated settlement. On 7 October 2023, the conflict between Israel and Palestine escalated sharply when fighters of the Hamas movement made an incursion from Gaza into Israel, killing civilians and security forces and seizing hostages. By the end of the year, Israel's military response had escalated to a point that was widely regarded as disproportionate. Beyond these two wars—which took centre stage in global news reporting, diplomatic energy and discussion of international politics alike—armed conflicts were active in 50 other states in 2023. In Sudan, 7.6 million people were forcibly displaced by violent conflict during 2023 alone.<sup>1</sup> In the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), 6.9 million people have been displaced by conflict, a total that has accumulated over two decades.<sup>2</sup> In Myanmar there was a significant upsurge in fighting in the final months of 2023. In some Central and South American states, armed criminal gangs are the major security concern; the effective collapse of the state in Haiti unfolded through 2023 and into 2024. Nowhere did it seem that international actors—whether third-party governments, the United Nations system or regional organizations—were able to help manage the conflicts or move them towards termination.

At the same time, contestation continued between China and the United States over the status of Taiwan and more generally the geostrategic situation in Northeast Asia. Among other concerns, in February 2023 Russia suspended its participation in New START—the last remaining bilateral nuclear arms control agreement between Russia and the USA. At the same time, global

<sup>1</sup> United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UN OCHA), Sudan Humanitarian Update, 25 Jan. 2024.

<sup>2</sup> 'Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC)—Conflict and violence', ReliefWeb (UN OCHA), 30 Jan. 2024.

military spending in 2023 grew for the ninth straight year, surpassing the record level of 2022 to stand at US\$2.44 trillion.

All this unfolded against a global backdrop of ecological disruption. The cumulative and continued release of greenhouse gases (GHG) into the atmosphere from industry, transport and agriculture combined with the naturally occurring El Niño Southern Oscillation to make the respective monthly global average temperatures from April through December 2023 the warmest ever recorded. The year was the hottest year on record, with a global average temperature 1.5° Celsius above the average of the pre-industrial era, breaching the limit agreed in the Paris Agreement of 2015 as the desirable target for restricting global warming.<sup>3</sup>

The events of 2023 confirm that the international system is under severe pressure on many fronts. This pressure has been building for at least a decade. Reflecting this assessment, the *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* set its 'Doomsday Clock' at 90 seconds to midnight, the metaphorical hour of the apocalypse, for the second year running. This keeps the clock at the closest it has been to midnight since it was instituted in 1947. It compares to its position at 17 minutes to midnight in 1991 as the cold war ended. The *Bulletin's* editorial board accompanied its January 2024 announcement with a warning that its decision not to change the setting does not reflect stability but, rather, persistent and worrying instability.<sup>4</sup>

With that background, this introductory chapter reviews the implications for the world order—the way in which international relations are arranged through institutions, treaties, law and norms—of some of the key events of 2023. It focuses on the ramifications of recent events and asks: What world are we shaping for ourselves in the coming decades if these trends continue unchanged? It begins by exploring the contested notion of 'world order' and the deficiencies that are creating a disordered world, and then reviews the status of some of the international laws and norms intended to govern and limit armed conflict. There follows an overview of developments in international security and stability in 2023, including the negative impact of climate change on peace and security. The chapter concludes on the need to develop the international habit of cooperation.

<sup>3</sup> Zhong, R., 'Earth was due for another year of record warmth: But this warm?', *New York Times*, 26 Dec. 2023; and Abnett, K., '2023 was world's hottest year on record, EU scientists confirm', Reuters, 9 Jan. 2024.

<sup>4</sup> Starkey, S., 'Doomsday Clock remains at 90 seconds to midnight', *Bullet of the Atomic Scientists*, Press release, 23 Jan. 2024.

## I. World order

Discussion about whether or how the world order is or should be changing has been unfolding for several years.<sup>5</sup> It is in many ways a strange discussion because there is considerable uncertainty about the exact topic. In the West, politicians and commentators often use the expression ‘the rules-based international order’ to describe what is defied by actions to which they profoundly object, such as Russia’s 2022 full-scale invasion of Ukraine. However, it has been pointed out that there is no single rules-based international order but several, along with important non-formalized norms of international conduct.<sup>6</sup> The degree of confusion this can sow is deepened when, as so often, it is unclear whether the discussion is about an arrangement set in place by the most powerful state (or states) for their own benefit, or, rather, a system of rules and norms that is meant to constrain and limit the exercise of power.<sup>7</sup>

Beyond contested definitions, these areas of uncertainty reveal what the discussion is really about: the relationship between the legitimacy of the rules and norms, on the one hand, and the distribution and exercise of power, on the other. This discussion is by no means the preserve of experts and scholars, as is shown by the engagement in it of world leaders, such as presidents Lula, Putin and Xi of Brazil, Russia and China, respectively, Prime Minister Modi of India, and US Secretary of State Blinken, as well as UN Secretary-General Guterres.<sup>8</sup> The impetus behind the discussion can be understood in terms of both power and legitimacy. The exercise of power is generally controversial, while its distribution is always in flux and has been changing markedly in the past three decades.<sup>9</sup> The norms and regulations on which the legitimacy of order is based cover a range of issues—war and peace, trade, environment, human rights, refugees and displaced people, migration, cultural heritage—that is historically unprecedented in its breadth. Most of the UN member states that signed up for these rules respect them most of the time,

<sup>5</sup> See e.g. Kissinger, H., *World Order* (Penguin Books: New York, 2015); Rumer, E., ‘The Primakov (not Gerasimov) Doctrine in action’, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 5 June 2019; and Ero, C., ‘The trouble with “the Global South”’, *Foreign Affairs*, Apr. 2024.

<sup>6</sup> Chalmers, M., *Which Rules? Why There is No Single ‘Rules-based International System’*, RUSI Occasional Paper (RUSI: London, Apr. 2019).

<sup>7</sup> See e.g. Baranovsky, V., ‘A new international order: Overcoming or transforming the existing one’, *Social Sciences* (Russian Academy of Sciences), vol. 50, no. 2 (2019), pp. 7–23; and Rodrik, D. and Walt, S. M., ‘How to build a better order: Limiting great power rivalry in an anarchic world’, *Foreign Affairs*, vol. 101, no. 5 (Sep./Oct. 2022).

<sup>8</sup> Speech by President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva at the second virtual Voice of Global South Summit, 17 Nov. 2023, Planalto, gov.br, Presidência da República; President of Russia, ‘Speech and the following discussion at the Munich Conference on security policy’, 10 Feb. 2007; National Committee of the Chinese People’s Consultative Conference, ‘Xi proposes Global Security Initiative’, 21 Apr. 2022; Parashar, S., ‘PM Modi: Global South must create new world order’, *Times of India*, 13 Jan. 2023; Blinken, A. J., ‘The power and purpose of American diplomacy in a new era’, US Department of State, Speech, 13 Sep. 2023; and UN News, ‘In Munich, Guterres calls for new global order that works for all’, 16 Feb. 2024.

<sup>9</sup> See Kissinger (note 5), pp. 365–72.

but some flout them with discomfiting frequency and little consequence. The motives and goals for change address both legitimacy and power—to change the rules to support changed distributions of power (such as in the debate over whether the UN Security Council should continue to be constituted to give privileges to the five permanent members) or to constrain the exercise of power more tightly, or to rely less on rules and more on pure power relations.

The world order of today started to take shape in the 1940s. That was a different historical era, before decolonization, when there was only one nuclear power, at a time when just 48 states recognized each other as founder members of the United Nations, and when the United Kingdom and France were still global powers, albeit rocked and damaged by World War II. In the eight succeeding decades, the political and strategic contours have changed fundamentally and there has been far-reaching demographic and economic change. The world's population trebled and urbanized at almost twice that rate, while economic output increased more than four times faster than population growth.<sup>10</sup> The accompanying increase in the extraction of natural resources has likewise far outpaced population growth.<sup>11</sup> Human well-being has improved, although not evenly and not everywhere, but the consequence is the multifaceted ecological crisis that the world faces today. For this new epoch, the Anthropocene, it can be argued that the world needs different goals and mechanisms of rule-making and enforcement.<sup>12</sup>

Arguments that the world order is based on anachronistic assumptions, whichever aspect of anachronism is in focus, can only be strengthened by recognizing that its genetic code dates back to 1648 and the Peace of Westphalia.<sup>13</sup> These three agreements ended Europe's Thirty Years War and the century-long mayhem and chaos brought on by religious discord between rival versions of Christianity. The Westphalian order was based on a balance between differently constituted states. It was disrupted by the French Revolution and Napoleonic wars around the turn of the 19th century and restored in 1815 with modifications by the Vienna Congress and Concert of Europe. Following a deeper disruption a century later with World War I and the Russian Revolution, the League of Nations was formed. This was the

<sup>10</sup> UN Department of Social and Economic Affairs, '68% of the world population projected to live in urban areas by 2050, says UN', 2018; and Dasgupta, P., *The Economics of Biodiversity: The Dasgupta Review* (HM Treasury: London, 2021), p. 101.

<sup>11</sup> Krausmann, F. et al., 'Material flow accounting: Measuring global material use for sustainable development', *Annual Review of Environment and Resources*, vol. 42, no. 1 (Oct. 2017), p. 656; and Krausmann, F. et al., 'From resource extraction to outflows of wastes and emissions: The socioeconomic metabolism of the global economy, 1900–2015', *Global Environmental Change*, vol. 52 (Sep. 2018).

<sup>12</sup> The rejection in Mar. 2024 of the term 'Anthropocene' by a committee of geologists does not change the reality it captures: that the greatest impact on the natural environment is human. See Witze, A., 'Geologists reject the Anthropocene as Earth's new epoch: After 15 years of debate', *Nature*, 6 Mar. 2024; and Witze, A., 'It's final: The Anthropocene is not an epoch, despite protest over vote', *Nature*, 20 Mar. 2024.

<sup>13</sup> 'Peace of Westphalia', *Britannica*; and Kissinger (note 5), pp. 2–95.

first effort to generalize the European order into a world order. The League's demise and the yet more profound disruption of World War II motivated a more systematic globalized projection of the European order with the formation of the United Nations.

To identify the European origins and trajectory of the world order is by no means to criticize it; grounds to criticize it, if any, should logically lie in its achievements and failures rather than its geographic and cultural origin. Yet the world order necessarily incorporates and embodies the perspectives of a particular time and region. This is, in itself, a reason for discomfort with the current world order on the part of many important actors in it.<sup>14</sup>

Since the establishment of the United Nations, changes in the order through the accession of three times as many member states as were in at its creation, the accretion of additional treaties to create new responsibilities (such as to care for refugees) and limits on states (such as on what weaponry they may deploy) have all been modifications rather than fundamental change. The longevity and resilience of the world order can be taken as supporting evidence for contrasting views about it. Longevity could be taken to mean either that the system is working well or that it is anachronistic, reflecting things as they were, not as they are and will be. This interpretation of longevity emphasizes the need for change, regardless of the difficulties in working out its terms. Resilience, however, implies an underlying worth, a durability based on the values embodied in the institutions of the world order; this encourages care in making change so that what is valuable is not lost. On the third hand, taken together, longevity and resilience might encourage a considerable degree of scepticism about the likelihood of any real change happening, absent a cataclysmic event on the scale of World War II. Overall, the views and feelings of many opinion makers and leaders that the world order of today is deficient does not mean that it lacks all useful function. It is under challenge but persists.

## II. A disordered world

The international order is to a considerable degree based on UN institutions and agencies, as well as regional organizations such as the African Union (AU) and the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), which were established more recently. For world peace and stability, their core security tasks are to manage and reduce conflict and to establish and build peace. The problem is that for the past decade and more, the overall number and longevity of armed conflicts have increased, and also it would seem their intractability.

<sup>14</sup> See Rennie, D., 'China wants to change, or break, a world order set by others', *The Economist*, 10 Oct. 2022; see also note 8.

Key markers of the current disorder include armed conflicts that seem unaffected by international mediation or conflict management. Perhaps worse, the major armed conflicts active during 2023 showed no signs of being amenable to termination by any means other than victory for one side or mutual exhaustion. It may fairly be argued that many conflicts in which fighting was ended or at least suspended for a period by agreement looked wholly intractable until negotiations were well under way and agreements were imminent or even signed. Relevant examples include Northern Ireland before 1994, Guatemala before 1996 and Sri Lanka before the ceasefire in 2002. It is nonetheless salutary to recognize that the last major armed conflict to be largely ended by agreement was in Colombia in 2016. Today, violent conflicts in Ukraine, Gaza, Sudan, the DRC, Myanmar and the western Sahel, among other locations, show little potential for settlement, and international efforts towards that end appear limited in effect and sometimes in ambition.

The backgrounds to these conflicts vary but have in common that they all run deep. In the case of states that emerged from colonial status during the period of decolonization from the 1940s until the 1970s, all began by facing sharp challenges of governance. They were variously confronted with national borders arranged by colonial powers that had little or nothing to do with the histories and realities of the populations; with deficiencies in state capacity, including poor health and education services; with transport infrastructure that was either rudimentary or shaped almost wholly for military purposes or resource extraction; with an economic structure that emphasized agriculture and the extraction of natural resources and paid little attention to value-added activities in manufacturing; with a system of international trade that favoured the rich countries that had set it up; and, in some cases, with ethnic or religious division hardwired into the distribution of wealth and power. By the 2020s, many countries had emerged more or less successfully. Those that have not face seemingly intractable issues of poor governance, arbitrary rule, intra-elite contestation, economic underdevelopment, weak institutions and, accordingly, persistent violent conflict. The depth of the structural roots of contemporary violence in some of the most conflict-affected countries is an important part of the reason why it is difficult to generate effective international action to help bring these armed conflicts to an end.

Paying attention to the structural causes does not exonerate any state, group or individual of responsibility for starting, sustaining or escalating violence. Indeed, structural explanations may seem to have less to offer in the case of Russia's war on Ukraine and the Hamas–Israel conflict because of the actions of particular prominent individuals. Over time, the actions of individuals, especially political leaders, can themselves become part of the structural foundations of conflict.

Considerable analytical effort has been invested in attempting to understand the true motives and goals behind Russia's war on Ukraine. The questions that are asked in the West boil down to two binaries: is it Putin or something deeper in Russia; and is it relatively short-term and political or does it have deeper historical and structural roots? Perhaps there is no single answer. Overlapping political, strategic and cultural perspectives have been presented by Putin, other Russian spokespersons and unofficial commentators. The political dimension relates to Russia's role in the world and the belief, most fully articulated by Putin in his Munich speech in 2007, that the West was attempting to shape the world order in a way that excluded Russia from its rightful role as a great power.<sup>15</sup> The strategic dimension swings in part on a related question: the post-cold war enlargement of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). Leaving aside the claim that NATO promised not to grow bigger, a claim based on a misunderstanding, it is not strange if there was some alarm within the Russian defence establishment as NATO's borders moved closer.<sup>16</sup> The strategic dimension also involved a Russian calculation—clearly disproven by events since February 2022—that Ukraine represented a relatively straightforward target of opportunity. Thirdly, the cultural dimension relates to a deep sense (primarily among Russians) that Russia and Ukraine belong together, bound by history and cultural similarity. One of the most balanced treatments of this is to be found in an analysis presented by a Chinese think tank, which suggests the core issue is that Russia once dominated the East Slavic cultural and historical space, comprising Belarus, Russia and Ukraine. While Russia cannot accept losing its dominance, Ukraine seeks freedom from domination and increasingly emphasizes Ukrainian difference from Russia rather than similarities.<sup>17</sup>

Reluctance to contemplate the erosion of former dominance is characteristic of all declining powers.<sup>18</sup> The Russian variant of it is generally unstated but nonetheless evident in some of Putin's speeches and in ideological theories of Russia's greatness and its world mission.<sup>19</sup> Russian commentator Sergei Karaganov focuses on 'the accelerating failure of the modern ruling Western elites', which is 'accompanied by rapid changes, unprecedented in history, in the global balance of power in favor of the Global Majority, with China and partly India acting as its economic drivers, and Russia chosen by history

<sup>15</sup> President of Russia (note 8).

<sup>16</sup> See Smith, D., 'Introduction: International stability and human security in 2022', *SIPRI Yearbook 2023*, pp. 22–24.

<sup>17</sup> Yu, Z. and Qi, N., 'Antagonistic historical and cultural factors in the conflict between Russia and Ukraine', *China Institute for International Strategic Studies*, vol. 4 (Dec. 2023).

<sup>18</sup> Kennedy, P., *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers* (William Collins: London, 2017).

<sup>19</sup> President of Russia, 'Article by Vladimir Putin "On the historical unity of Russians and Ukrainians"', 12 July 2021; President of Russia, 'Address by the President of the Russian Federation', 21 Feb. 2022; and Dugin, A., *Last War of the World-Island: The Geopolitics of Contemporary Russia* (Arktos: London, 2015).



to be its military-strategic pillar'.<sup>20</sup> Karaganov's idea that Russia is 'chosen by history' is as fanciful as any arrogation of the right to power in earlier times by figures as different in other ways as European colonists and Chinese emperors. This combination of declining Western power and rising others on the world stage is presented by Karaganov as the 'underlying, and even fundamental cause of the conflict in Ukraine.'

The differences and similarities between these loosely representative views are interesting. In Western eyes, the war challenges the international order; in the Russian understanding, it is the fact that the order is facing challenges that leads to the war. In short, they agree that Russia's war is about much more than Russia and Ukraine. It is also about world order and an effort to change it in Russia's favour. Either way, the result is that the international order is less stable and less effective at conflict management.

In 2005, the *Human Security Report* analysed possible explanations for the welcome decline in the number, length and lethality of armed conflicts in the previous decade.<sup>21</sup> Having tested a variety of hypotheses, the report concluded that the key reason was that the end of the cold war had ended log-jams in the UN Security Council and thus freed up the UN to be a more effective peacemaker and peacebuilder. By this analysis, the degree of consensus in the Security Council is a major determinant of the prospects for peace worldwide. The return of infighting and deadlock in that forum because of growing differences between Russia and the West, and increasingly China and the West, over a range of issues, including arms control and since 2014 Russia's actions in Ukraine, is therefore a major problem for peace and security everywhere.<sup>22</sup>

If the problem of the disorderliness of the world were limited to the UN Security Council, it might be regarded as relatively self-contained. Some argue that the best way forward is through procedural UN system reforms, such as increasing the number of the Security Council's permanent members.<sup>23</sup> This proposal is no longer especially controversial, even among the current five permanent members, although there is no consensus on the details so moving forward is not simple.<sup>24</sup> The effect of enlarging the Security Coun-

<sup>20</sup> Karaganov, S. A., 'A difficult but necessary decision', *Russia in Global Affairs*, 13 June 2023.

<sup>21</sup> Mack, A., *Human Security Report 2005: War and Peace in the 21st Century*, Human Security Centre, University of British Columbia (Oxford University Press: Oxford, 2005).

<sup>22</sup> For a review of the UN Security Council in 2023 see Landgren, K. and Thompson, S. K., 'The United Nations Security Council in 2023', *Lawfare*, 19 Jan. 2024.

<sup>23</sup> German Federal Foreign Office, 'Reform of the United Nations Security Council: Questions and answers', [n. d.].

<sup>24</sup> 'Chinese FM meets co-chairs of negotiations on UNSC reform', *Xinhua*, 29 Feb. 2024; Permanent Mission of France to the United Nations in New York, 'The reform of the Security Council is more essential than ever', 13 Dec. 2023; 'On Russia's approaches to reforming the UN Security Council', Briefing by Russian Foreign Ministry Spokeswoman Maria Zakharova, 6 July 2023; Wintour, P., 'UK foreign secretary calls for expansion of UN security council', *The Guardian*, 29 June 2023; and Xie, J., 'Biden's call to expand UNSC membership likely to go unheeded', *Voice of America*, 21 Sep. 2023.



cil is also debatable as increasing the number of permanent members could make consensus harder to achieve. This raises questions about the acceptability of a few states—even if more than today—having the right of veto. An alternative approach seeks a stronger role for the UN General Assembly, in which decisions are taken by majority with no state having a veto.<sup>25</sup> These issues concern how power is or could legitimately be distributed within the UN. They are therefore unlikely to be resolved quickly. As one analyst has commented, ‘Few topics generate so much talk and so little action as Security Council reform.’<sup>26</sup>

The problem, however, goes wider and deeper than UN reform alone. To understand why, consider Gaza. This is the latest phase of a long-running conflict. Hamas has made clear its view that the October attack was a product of that conflict and a necessary response to its development to that point, in particular to the conflict being side-lined and the rights of Palestinians ignored.<sup>27</sup> There is no moral basis for accepting that Hamas’s response had to take the form that it did, but it can hardly be refuted that the denial of Palestinian rights and statehood is a fundamental part of the conflict. Moreover, the situation of Palestinians in Gaza was increasingly hard to bear and there were warning signs in September 2023 that tensions were beginning to boil over.<sup>28</sup> At the same time, violence in the West Bank was at its highest level since the end of the second intifada in 2005.<sup>29</sup>

In contrast to this picture of a desperate situation in Gaza and rising violence in the West Bank, US National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan contended, just before the Hamas incursion, that ‘The Middle East region is quieter today than it has been in two decades’.<sup>30</sup> As the basis for that conclusion, he cited events relating to Iran, Iraq and Yemen; his remarks seemed to treat ‘tensions between Israelis and Palestinians’ as residual problems, acknowledging their existence but not their depth and urgency. Of course, retrospective know-

<sup>25</sup> Gowan, R., ‘The UN General Assembly eyes a bigger role in international security’, *World Politics Review*, 25 July 2023.

<sup>26</sup> Patrick, S., ‘Cutting the Gordian Knot: Global perspectives on UN Security Council reform’, *UN Security Council Reform: What the World Thinks*, Carnegie Endowment for World Peace, 28 June 2023.

<sup>27</sup> See the interview with Hamas spokesperson Osama Hamdan on Norwegian television (NRK), ‘Her konfronterer NRKs korrespondent Hamas-toppen, NRK’ [NRK’s correspondent confronts HAMAS leader], 16 Nov. 2023; and Hubbard, B. and Abi-Habib, M., ‘Behind Hamas’s bloody gambit to create a “permanent” state of war’, *New York Times*, 8 Nov 2023.

<sup>28</sup> Hendrix, S. and Balousha, H., ‘Tensions “beginning to boil” in Gaza as fears of new conflict mount’, *Washington Post*, 21 Sep. 2023.

<sup>29</sup> Zonszein, M., ‘Settler violence rises in the West Bank during the Gaza war’, International Crisis Group, 6 Nov. 2023; and Mehvar, A. and Khdour, N., ‘The resurgence of armed groups in the West Bank and their connections to Gaza’, Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project (ACLED), 14 Dec. 2023; Freedom House, ‘West Bank’, *Freedom in the World 2024* (Freedom House, 2024); and United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, ‘Data on casualties’ (accessed 11 Apr. 2024).

<sup>30</sup> Beckerman, G., ‘The Middle East region is quieter today than it has been in two decades’, *The Atlantic*, 7 Oct. 2023.

ledge is a wonderful thing. There is nonetheless clear evidence in Sullivan's words of either ignorance or denial at a high level in the US administration of the structural underpinnings of the risk of imminent escalation.

This is only a part of the picture. Reports in Israel indicate that the country's military, intelligence service and government knew for a decade about a Hamas plan to attack Israeli communities and kill and kidnap civilians on the scale seen in October 2023.<sup>31</sup> The apparent failure to act on this intelligence appears in a harsher light when placed alongside reports dating back to 2009 that Israel under the leadership of the current prime minister, Binyamin Netanyahu, actively supported Hamas in order to weaken the Palestine Liberation Organization and the Palestine Authority.<sup>32</sup> Playing one faction against another has been a feature of power politics since antiquity. History provides many examples of this brutal pragmatism turning out to be unrealistic and counterproductive. The Hamas attack on 7 October 2023 is the latest.

The Netanyahu government's assumption was that Hamas was a problem it could manage and control, which turned out to be dangerously untrue. In Russia, President Putin's assumption was that Russia had the right and the means to take Ukraine, which was also untrue and has resulted in a protracted war.

In sum, the current world order is deficient in conflict management not only because of the lack of unity of purpose among its leading powers, but also because of the structure of many of today's conflicts, and because of the way conflict is driven to the point of explosion by misplaced, misdirected and counterproductive actions by key governments and their leaders. It is difficult to see how reform of the United Nations could address these parts of the problem, regardless of its possible desirability for other reasons.

### III. Laws and norms in question

The current international order includes principles intended to govern and limit armed conflict. All states have signed up to them in the UN Charter, in international humanitarian law (IHL), which is primarily but not exclusively embodied in the Geneva Conventions and their Additional Protocols, in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and in other treaties and declarations, such as those on refugees and against genocide. The legal provisions are detailed but the underlying principles are straightforward: they tell states not to go to war, except in self-defence or defence of another against

<sup>31</sup> Weitz, G., "It would be a terrible, demoralizing blow": In 2014, Netanyahu forewarned of a Hamas massacre plot. Nine years later, Oct. 7 happened', *Haaretz*, 26 Jan. 2024; and Levy, Y., 'Israel's illogical response to an evil enemy', *Haaretz*, 30 Jan. 2024.

<sup>32</sup> Higgins, A., 'How Israel helped to spawn Hamas', *Wall Street Journal*, 24 Jan. 2009; Tharoor, I., 'How Israel helped create Hamas', *Washington Post*, 30 July 2014; and Schneider, T., 'For years, Netanyahu propped up Hamas: Now it's blown up in our faces', *Times of Israel*, 8 Oct. 2023.

aggression and, if a state has to do it, to do so with restraint, which includes showing care for the well-being of non-combatants. The strictures against launching a war are largely a product of the modern age. Although it has been a general understanding for centuries that war should only be undertaken for good reason (*jus ad bellum*), there was no legal or binding moral restriction against a ruler launching a war. This lasted until the victors of World War II retroactively applied a legal principle enunciated during the League of Nations period to punish German and Japanese leaders for the crime of launching a war of aggression.<sup>33</sup> Strictures against particular behaviour during a war (*jus in bello*), such as avoiding harm to civilians and disproportionate destruction, go back further. The European model of international order is informed by the Christian tradition of the ‘just war’, but there are counterparts to it in Islam and other religious traditions.<sup>34</sup> It was in the light of this international legal and moral tradition that Western leaders and opinion makers rightly condemned Russia’s aggression against Ukraine, its massive destruction of civilian areas and the atrocities committed by its troops, of which detailed evidence has emerged.<sup>35</sup>

There was therefore no way for many of those same leaders and opinion makers to evade the charge of double standards when they did not take a similarly clear-eyed view of Israel’s actions in Gaza in the last quarter of 2023. The 7 October attack by Hamas has been estimated to be the third most lethal terrorist attack of all time.<sup>36</sup> Its violence against civilians, the kidnappings and other abuses appalled neutral observers and thoroughly violated IHL. Israel’s response began with a bombing campaign that ranks among the most severe civilian punishment air campaigns in history.<sup>37</sup> It far exceeded a proportionate response and started to look more like revenge against Palestinians than retaliation against Hamas. By the end of January 2024, satellite data analysed by the BBC showed that more than half of Gaza’s

<sup>33</sup> MacMillan, M., *Peacemakers: Six Months That Changed the World* (John Murray: London, 2001); and Hathaway, O. A. and Shapiro, S. J., *The Internationalists and Their Plan to Outlaw War* (Penguin Random House: London, 2017).

<sup>34</sup> International Committee of the Red Cross, ‘What are *jus ad bellum* and *jus in bello*?’, 22 Jan. 2015; Holliday, I., ‘Ethics of intervention: Just War Theory and the challenge of the 21st century’, *International Relations*, vol. 17, no. 2 (2003), pp. 115–33; Fixdal, M. and Smith, D., ‘Humanitarian intervention and just war’, *Mershon International Studies Review*, vol. 42, no. 2 (Nov. 1998), pp. 283–312; and Johnson, J. T. and Kelsay, J. (eds), *Cross, Crescent, and Sword: The Justification and Limitation of War in Western and Islamic Tradition* (Greenwood: New York, 1990).

<sup>35</sup> See e.g. United Nations, General Assembly, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on Ukraine, A/78/540, 19 Oct. 2023; and Tétrault-Farber, G., ‘UN decries Russia’s failure to protect Ukraine civilians’, Reuters, 19 Dec. 2023.

<sup>36</sup> Byman, D. et al., ‘Hamas’s October 7 attack: Visualizing the data’, Center for Strategic and International Studies, 19 Dec. 2023.

<sup>37</sup> Frankel, J., ‘Israel’s military campaign in Gaza seen as among the most destructive in recent history, experts say’, AP, 21 Dec. 2023.

buildings had been destroyed.<sup>38</sup> As well as the overall level of urban damage, some observers regard Israel's destruction of health facilities and the refusal of access for humanitarian aid as *prima facie* violations of international law.<sup>39</sup>

By the end of 2023, the International Court of Justice (ICJ) was hearing a case brought by South Africa, charging Israel with breaching the 1948 Genocide Convention. The court's initial judgement assessed the case as having aspects that were 'plausible', meaning worth looking into.<sup>40</sup> In the meantime, the court bound Israel to distinguish between combatants and non-combatants and to permit humanitarian aid to flow. While there is little doubt that Israel's military offensive in Gaza contravenes important aspects of IHL, it is not clear that it breaches the Genocide Convention, in which genocide is defined as a deliberate act to destroy a people. Thus, the key distinguishing characteristic of genocide lies in intention, not in the scale of death and destruction alone. The South African case before the ICJ referenced statements made by prominent Israelis that appear to express or could be interpreted as expressing genocidal intent. A leaked recommendation made within the Israeli government might also seem to buttress that case.<sup>41</sup> It may nonetheless turn out that evidence of intent is insufficient for the ICJ to find South Africa's case proven on genocide. That would not exonerate Israel for breaching IHL, and it would leave standing the charge of double standards against many Western states.

Inconsistency and breaches of IHL damage the world order. The point is well made in *A New Agenda for Peace*, issued by the UN secretary-general in July 2023: 'The United Nations is, at its core, a norms-based organization. It owes its birth to an international treaty, the Charter, signed and ratified by States. It faces a potentially existential dilemma when the different interpretations by Member States of these universal normative frameworks become so entrenched as to prevent adequate implementation'.<sup>42</sup>

In short, the effectiveness of international institutions, especially the UN but also regional organizations such as the AU, relies on an adequate degree of consensus on normative issues; when that diminishes, so does the effectiveness of the institutions.

<sup>38</sup> Palumbo, D. et al., 'At least half of Gaza's buildings damaged or destroyed, new analysis shows', BBC, 30 Jan. 2024.

<sup>39</sup> Sparrow, A. and Roth, K., 'Israel-Hamas war: Destroying Gaza's health care system is a war crime', *Foreign Policy*, 9 Feb. 2024.

<sup>40</sup> International Court of Justice (ICJ), 'Application of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide in the Gaza Strip (South Africa v. Israel)', Order, 26 Jan. 2024.

<sup>41</sup> Abraham, Y., 'Expel all Palestinians from Gaza, recommends Israeli gov't ministry', *+972 Magazine*, 30 Oct. 2023; and Lis, J. and Samuels, B., 'Israeli Intel Ministry suggests relocating Gazans to Sinai after Hamas war', *Haaretz*, 30 Oct. 2023.

<sup>42</sup> United Nations, *A New Agenda for Peace*, Our Common Agenda Policy Brief no. 9 (United Nations: New York, July 2023), p. 8.

## IV. International security and stability in question

Against this background, 2023 witnessed a series of negative developments for international security and stability. They include Russia distancing itself from various arms control agreements: it suspended its participation in New START, the last remaining bilateral nuclear arms control treaty with the USA; formally withdrew from the Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe, a largely symbolic step since it suspended its implementation in 2007 and halted active participation in 2015; and withdrew its ratification of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT).<sup>43</sup> Russia remained a signatory of the CTBT, however, and committed itself to both standing by the moratorium on nuclear testing and operating the CTBT-based monitoring stations on its territory.<sup>44</sup> Taken together, it seems that much of the entire six-decade long arms control enterprise that began with the Partial Test-Ban Treaty in 1963 is at risk of terminating.

Since its inception, arms control has been criticized from different perspectives: for being too slow, too limited, too compliant with the wishes of the military and the arms makers; for being one-sided, ceding advantage to the other side and blocking off promising military technological possibilities; or for locking in the privileges of states that already have nuclear weapons and denying legitimacy to others that seek some degree of parity. Even so, it was for a period a fundamental assumption of international politics that the great powers understood the risks of unfettered military rivalry and chose to restrain their competition in advanced weaponry through arms control agreements. This principle was disseminated more widely, with almost all states forswearing nuclear weapons through the 1968 Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (Non-Proliferation Treaty, NPT), and chemical weapons through the 1992 Chemical Weapons Convention. Both sets of multilateral constraint are now somewhat insecure. The last two NPT review conferences, in 2015 and 2022, have been unable to reach agreement on further steps to counter proliferation.<sup>45</sup> The Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons is under significant pressure, not least in the aftermath of divergent positions on Syria's use of chemical weapons during

<sup>43</sup> 'Putin: Russia suspends participation in last remaining nuclear treaty with US', Reuters, 21 Feb. 2023; Faulconbridge, G. and Kelly, L., 'Russia formally withdraws from key post-cold war European armed forces treaty', Reuters, 7 Nov. 2023; and Bugos, S. and Giveh, M., 'Russia withdraws ratification of nuclear test ban treaty', Arms Control Association, 16 Nov. 2023. See also chapter 8, sections I and II, and chapter 10, section IV, in this volume.

<sup>44</sup> Osborn, A., 'Russia accuses US of nuclear testing site activity, says it won't test unless US does', Reuters, 10 Oct. 2023.

<sup>45</sup> On the NPT see Wan, W., 'The 10th Review Conference of the Non-Proliferation Treaty', *SIPRI Yearbook 2023*, pp. 349–59; and chapter 8, section II, in this volume.

the civil war.<sup>46</sup> This pressure comes despite the welcome completion in July 2023 of the task of destroying all declared stocks of chemical weapons.<sup>47</sup>

As the architecture of arms control has crumbled—or better put, perhaps, as its props have been actively kicked away—it is not simply technical restrictions on weapon types and numbers that have been eroded but agreed restraint on states' behaviour. Although it is Russia that did most to carry on the damage to arms control in 2023, it was the US withdrawal in 2002 from the bilateral 1972 Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty that was the fateful first step.<sup>48</sup>

Behaviour is also changing in regional hotspots. Modifying the studied ambiguity of 50 years of US policy on Taiwan, the Biden administration started to transfer weapons from its current stocks to Taiwan in mid 2023, in the same way as it had been supporting Ukraine against Russia.<sup>49</sup> There are frequent close encounters in the region between the contending powers' warships and aircraft.<sup>50</sup> At the same time, the war in Gaza is generating risks of horizontal escalation. Israeli Defence Minister Yoav Gallant told the Knesset that the country was under attack from Iran, Iraq, Lebanon, Syria and Yemen, as well as from Gaza and the West Bank.<sup>51</sup> There is a crisis in world trade as the Houthis movement in Yemen supports Hamas by attacking Western shipping in the Red Sea.<sup>52</sup> As the negative impact of the war in Ukraine on food security in Africa has shown, the world is interconnected to such a degree that a war is rarely the concern of the conflicting parties alone.<sup>53</sup>

Too often, it seems that great powers prefer to uphold their interests and preferences through pressure and force, rather than through the institutional mechanisms of the international order. In the Red Sea, for example, attacks by the Houthis on the shipping of states identified as pro-Israel in late 2023 led the USA, supported by the UK, to launch missile attacks on targets in Yemen.<sup>54</sup> This came despite a UN Security Council Resolution in January 2024 that called on the Houthis to stop their attacks but gave no authority

<sup>46</sup> United Nations, Security Council, 'Security Council deems Syria's chemical weapons declaration incomplete, urges nation to close issues, resolve gaps, inconsistencies, discrepancies', Meetings coverage and press releases, SC/15220, 6 Mar. 2023. See also chapter 9, sections I and II, in this volume.

<sup>47</sup> Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons, 'OPCW confirms: All declared chemical weapons stockpiles verified as irreversibly destroyed', 7 July 2023.

<sup>48</sup> Acton, J. M., 'The US exit from the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty fueled a new arms race', Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 13 Dec. 2021.

<sup>49</sup> Joe Biden donates weapons to Taiwan, as he does to Ukraine', *The Economist*, 28 July 2023.

<sup>50</sup> Blanchard, B. and Chen, L., 'US & China warships nearly collide in Taiwan strait', Reuters, 5 June 2023; Portugal, A., 'Near collision, tense encounter as Beijing flexes muscles in the South China Sea', Reuters, 6 Oct. 2023; and Bertrand, M., 'Chinese fighter jet got within 10 feet of US bomber over South China Sea, US military says', CNN, 26 Oct. 2023.

<sup>51</sup> McKernan, B., 'Fears of regional escalation as Israel warns of "multi-front" war', *The Guardian*, 26 Dec. 2023.

<sup>52</sup> 'A new Suez crisis threatens the world economy', *The Economist*, 16 Dec. 2023.

<sup>53</sup> Delgado, C., Tschunkert, K. and Riquier, M., 'War in the breadbasket: One year in', SIPRI Commentary, 24 Feb. 2023. See also chapter 4, section II, in this volume.

<sup>54</sup> Sabbagh, D. and Borger, J., 'US and UK strike Houthi sites in Yemen in response to "unprecedented" attacks', *The Guardian*, 12 Jan. 2024.

to any state to launch counterattacks.<sup>55</sup> Given the widely shared interest in freedom of the seas for commerce, not least because China's trade could also be affected, it might have been productive to attempt diplomatic outreach via China to the Houthis' major regional supporter, Iran. Here, of course, the problem is that Iran might well be unsympathetic and unresponsive because it has been labouring under Western sanctions for two decades.

Some of the West's efforts to pressure adversaries serve to further weaken the international order and do not work. The history of the civil war in Yemen since 2004 should have inspired some degree of caution. It includes 10 years of military intervention against the Houthis by Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and others; during that decade the Houthis have grown stronger. It is hard to believe that a few missile strikes would deter them from making their voice heard with their own missile attacks on Western shipping. Similarly, Iran has proved impossible to intimidate in the almost half-century since the Islamic Republic was declared.<sup>56</sup> While Iran signed up to restrictions on its nuclear activities in return for incentives, that was because it was a worthwhile deal on both sides, not a surrender. The track record suggests that attempting to force it into compliance with Western preferences is unlikely to succeed. Likewise Russia, after two years of the strongest set of economic sanctions ever devised, has shown considerable resilience.<sup>57</sup> A period of high inflation has worried economic policymakers in Moscow enough for financial interest rates to be raised to 15 per cent, but so far the economy does not appear to be cracking under the weight.<sup>58</sup> While the budgeted military expenditure for 2024 is high, amounting to 7 per cent of gross national income if oil and gas prices are favourable, and as much as 10 per cent if they are not, Russia's partial shift to a wartime economy has been effective.<sup>59</sup> Many of the West's sanctions have been defeated, or at least circumvented, because of the very economic interconnectedness they seek to exploit. Russia has continued to trade via third parties, with strong demand for its energy exports.<sup>60</sup> The long-term impact on Russia's economic development of both the sanctions and the shift to a wartime economy may yet be serious and negative for ordinary Russians. The government has been calling on its reserves in the National Welfare Fund, which might present severe

<sup>55</sup> United Nations Security Council Resolution 2722, 10 Jan. 2024. See also Svicevic, M., 'Strikes against the Houthis: The relationship between Resolution 2722 (2024) and the right of self-defense', *Articles of War*, 6 Feb. 2024.

<sup>56</sup> 'Why Iran is hard to intimidate', *The Economist*, 6 Feb. 2024.

<sup>57</sup> Abely, C., *The Russia Sanctions* (Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 2024).

<sup>58</sup> Feldstein, S. and Brauer, F., 'Why Russia has been so resilient to Western export controls', *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, 11 Mar. 2024. See also chapter 5, section IV, and chapter 12, section II, in this volume.

<sup>59</sup> Cooper, J., *Russia's military expenditure during its war against Ukraine*, SIPRI Insights on Peace and Security no. 2023/07, June 2023. On Russian military spending see chapter 5, section II, in this volume.

<sup>60</sup> 'Russia's sanctions-dodging is getting ever more sophisticated', *The Economist*, 2 Mar. 2023.



economic challenges in the future.<sup>61</sup> Thus far, however, the sanctions show no sign of yielding policy results, which is no surprise given the poor success rate of this instrument overall.<sup>62</sup>

The USA and its allies are not alone in experiencing the limits of power and influence. While commentators note the US administration's inability to persuade Israel to moderate its offensive on Gaza, the limits of China's influence were also evident as its achievement in brokering an entente between Iran and Saudi Arabia appeared to crack under the weight of the crisis.<sup>63</sup> More broadly, while China has, as befits the rising power of the day, great ambitions to reform the international order, it faces obstacles from other states which, while eager to limit US power, are not keen on the Chinese alternative.<sup>64</sup>

In short, the ramifications of the crisis of world order are deep, broad, urgent, long-term and both diffuse and intense. They will not easily or rapidly be resolved.

## V. International instability, insecurity and the ecological crisis

The negative impact of climate change on peace and security is increasingly recognized, albeit still not universally. The continuing rise in average temperatures and consequent change in climate are therefore of increasing concern. While climate change undermines conditions for peace and security for all, increased conflict, disputation, instability and disorder add to the difficulties of arriving at agreements to slow down global warming.

Surveying climate change in 2023 brings no greater relief than surveying the rest of the international scene. It was the hottest year for at least 174 years for which there are good records, and probably for the 125 000 years since the interglacial period of geological history.<sup>65</sup> The 12 months from February 2023 through January 2024 were the first year-long period in which the global average temperature stayed 1.5° Celsius above the pre-industrial average.<sup>66</sup>

<sup>61</sup> [‘During the two years of war, Russia spent half the money from the main “pot”—the National Welfare Fund: Will the country soon run out of resources for a rainy day?’, *Meduza*, 23 Jan. 2024 (in Russian); and Propopenko, A., ‘Putin’s unsustainable spending spree’, *Foreign Affairs*, 8 Jan. 2024.

<sup>62</sup> Mulder, N., *The Economic Weapon: The Rise of Sanctions as a Tool of Modern War* (Yale University Press: New Haven, 2022).

<sup>63</sup> Kettle, M., ‘Joe Biden’s peace mission to Israel exposed the limits of US global influence’, *The Guardian*, 18 Oct. 2023; and Pomfret, J., Cash, J. and Lin, C., ‘Middle East crisis tests limits of China’s diplomatic push’, Reuters, 10 Oct. 2023.

<sup>64</sup> Xinhua, ‘Full text: Proposal of the People’s Republic of China on the Reform and Development of Global Governance’ 13 Sep. 2023; and Schuman, M., ‘India isn’t signing up for China’s New World Order’, *The Atlantic*, 17 Oct. 2023.

<sup>65</sup> Zhong (note 3); and Abnett (note 3).

<sup>66</sup> European Commission, ‘Copernicus: In 2024, the world experienced the warmest January on record’, EU Climate Change Service, 8 Feb. 2024; and Poynting, M., ‘World’s first year-long breach of key 1.5C warming limit’, BBC, 8 Feb. 2024.

Surpassing the 1.5° limit, set in the Paris Agreement of 2015 as the desirable target for mitigating global warming, seems likely to be but a step along the way towards breaching the 2° limit, which was agreed to be the essential upper limit. The current trajectory continues to be towards approximately 3° above the pre-industrial average before the end of this century.<sup>67</sup> Among the consequences, long before the end of the century, will be an increase in the frequency of deadly humid heatwaves.<sup>68</sup> Extreme effects of climate change are possible in the coming decades: the passing of tipping points such as the big ice sheets collapsing in Greenland and West Antarctica, permafrost thawing, the death of coral reefs and the collapse of an oceanic current in the North Atlantic.<sup>69</sup> Sharp reductions in GHG emissions are needed by 2030 in order to get at all close to the agreed targets; yet the main fossil fuel producers are planning to increase output.<sup>70</sup>

As serious as these consequences of climate change are, the ecological crisis goes beyond the climate issue alone. The 2023 update on the nine planetary boundaries identified in research led over the past decade and a half by the Stockholm Resilience Centre reported that six of the nine boundaries had been breached.<sup>71</sup> Further to research on the peace and security impact of climate change, recent research has begun to identify comparable effects from broader ecological disruption.<sup>72</sup> These include antimicrobial resistance, the physiological effects of different kinds of pollution, loss of biodiversity and biomass, the rise of intrusive species and the impact on livelihoods of local tipping points such as the emergence of dead zones in rivers, lakes and coastal waters.<sup>73</sup>

Despite the continued flow of bad news about the ecological crisis in 2023, environmental regulation was a sphere of activity in which international cooperation remained possible, even though the record is mixed. The 28th Conference of the Parties (COP) to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change in Dubai in November 2023 broke new ground for these annual meetings by recognizing the need to ‘transition away from fossil fuels in

<sup>67</sup> United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), *Broken Record: Temperatures Hit New Highs, Yet World Fails to Cut Emissions (Again)*, Emissions Gap Report 2023 (UNEP: Nairobi, Nov. 2023).

<sup>68</sup> Powis, C. M. et al., ‘Observational and model evidence together support widespread exposure to noncompensable heat under continued global warming’, *Science Advances*, vol. 9, no. 36 (Sep. 2023).

<sup>69</sup> Lenton, T. M. et al., *Global Tipping Points* (University of Exeter, Global Systems Institute: Exeter, 2023).

<sup>70</sup> United Nations Environment Programme (note 67); and Stockholm Environment Institute (SEI) et al., *Phasing Down or Phasing Up? Top Fossil Fuel Producers Plan Even More Extraction Despite Climate Promises*, Production Gap Report (SEI: Stockholm, Nov. 2023).

<sup>71</sup> Richardson, K. et al., ‘Earth beyond six of nine planetary boundaries’, *Science Advances*, vol. 9, 13 Sep. 2023.

<sup>72</sup> Black, R. et al., *Environment of Peace: Security in a New Era of Risk* (SIPRI: Stockholm, 2022).

<sup>73</sup> Schoonover, R. and Smith, D., Five urgent questions on ecological security, SIPRI Insights on Peace and Security no. 2023/05, Apr. 2023.

energy systems'.<sup>74</sup> Those who praised COP28 for that step criticized it for not insisting on the speedy phase-out, or even phase-down, of fossil fuel extraction. Similarly, the conference could be praised for recognizing the linkage between climate change and conflict risk and criticized for not mandating action about it.<sup>75</sup>

The historic agreement at COP27 in Sharm el-Shaikh to establish a loss and damage fund to compensate for the harm done by global warming and climate change had generated contributions by early 2024 amounting to some \$661 million.<sup>76</sup> This sum compares with the estimated total economic impact of extreme weather attributed to climate change in the 20-year period 2000–19, which stands at \$2.86 trillion, an average of \$143 billion per year.<sup>77</sup> In short, the cost per year is over 200 times the total fund that had been committed by early 2024.

The climate crisis is, then, a sphere in which the need for cooperative action is broadly recognized, however hard it remains to act on that recognition. China is the biggest current GHG emitter, while the USA has the biggest cumulative record of GHG emissions.<sup>78</sup> It is a precondition of successful climate negotiations that they can work together.<sup>79</sup> Their return to climate cooperation was signalled first in July 2023, albeit with political contention still in view.<sup>80</sup> In November, the special climate envoys of the two countries agreed to activate the working group on enhancing climate action in the 2020s (the establishment of which was first agreed two years before) and to undertake and accelerate various aspects of climate action.<sup>81</sup> Nothing is settled through this development, but not much that is positive can be done without it.

There are similar possibilities in addressing other ecological challenges. In March 2022, at the resumed fifth session of the UN Environment Assembly (UNEA), it was agreed to develop a legally binding international instrument on plastic pollution by the end of 2024. Whether progress registered to this

<sup>74</sup> Harvey, F., 'After 30 years of waiting, COP28 deal addresses the elephant in the room', *The Guardian*, 13 Dec. 2023.

<sup>75</sup> COP 28 UAE, 'COP28 Declaration on Climate, Relief, Recovery and Peace', Dec. 2023.

<sup>76</sup> United Nations Development Programme, 'Loss and Damage Fund for developing countries', 26 Jan. 2024; and Shawoo, Z., Bakhtaoui, I. and Dinshaw, A., 'COP28 creates fund for vulnerable countries for loss and damage from climate change: But will it reach vulnerable people?', *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, 6 Dec. 2023.

<sup>77</sup> Newman, R. and Noy, I., 'The global costs of extreme weather that are attributable to climate change', *Nature Communications*, vol. 14 (Sep. 2023); and United Nations Environment Programme, 'About loss and damage', [n. d.].

<sup>78</sup> Friedman, L., 'US and China on climate: How the world's two largest polluters stack up', *New York Times*, 19 July 2023.

<sup>79</sup> Pike, L., 'The climate envoys who could', *Foreign Policy*, 8 Dec. 2023.

<sup>80</sup> 'China says it will work with US on climate change as long as political conditions are met', AP, 19 July 2023.

<sup>81</sup> US Department of State, Office of the Spokesperson, Sunnylands Statement on Enhancing Cooperation to Address the Climate Crisis, 14 Nov. 2023.

end in 2023 was adequate to fit that timetable is one test for international cooperation on the environment in 2024.<sup>82</sup> While the UNEA resolution includes the headline call to end plastic pollution, the text calls in non-specific terms for an agreement ‘on’ plastic pollution; it is the negotiating committee established by the resolution that will specify the agreement’s objectives.<sup>83</sup> Thus, the second part of the test for environmental cooperation is where on a spectrum from ending plastic pollution to merely slowing its increase the eventual treaty will land.

There is always the possibility and therefore the hope that cooperation on one set of issues may lead to cooperation on another, through developing the habit of cooperation.<sup>84</sup> This appeared to be part of the approach of John Kerry, the US climate envoy, although China’s position is more reserved on this score, arguing that resolving political disputes is a condition for further cooperation.<sup>85</sup> It would almost certainly be unrealistic to expect that cooperation on climate change would lead to a change of heart and positions on issues such as Taiwan and freedom of navigation in the South China Sea. It might, however, be possible to develop the habit of cooperation on other questions in which there is a shared not to mention global interest.

In addition to the wider aspects of the ecological crisis, one issue that immediately commends itself for improved cooperation is foresight, risk reduction and response in relation to the next pandemic. This would require increased transparency between health authorities and epidemiological experts, compared to the experience of the Covid-19 pandemic. Whatever the origins of the SARS-CoV-2 virus, which remain contested, there is little doubt that early on, the Chinese authorities stepped in to sharply limit the amount of information Chinese doctors could communicate to the World Health Organization and to their colleagues in Europe and North America.<sup>86</sup> Cooperative preparation against the next pandemic could also include laying the groundwork for avoiding the vaccine nationalism, as it was dubbed, that

<sup>82</sup> United Nations Environment Programme, ‘Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee on Plastic Pollution: Notifications’, Updated 30 Mar. 2024.

<sup>83</sup> United Nations Environment Assembly of the United Nations Environment Programme, Resolution 5/14 on ‘End plastic pollution: Towards an international legally binding instrument’, 2 Mar. 2022, UNEP/EA.5/Res14.

<sup>84</sup> Seabright, P., ‘Is cooperation habit-forming?’, eds P. Dasgupt, and K.-G. Mäler, *The Environment and Emerging Development Issues*, vol. 2, WIDER Studies in Development Economics (Oxford Academic: Oxford, 2007); Peysakhovich, A. and Rand, D. G., ‘Habits of virtue: Creating norms of cooperation and defection in the laboratory’, *Management Science*, vol. 62, no. 3 (Sep. 2015); and Koenig-Archibugi, M. and Afnan, M., *Values in International Cooperation* (London School of Economics and Political Science: London, Dec. 2019).

<sup>85</sup> ‘Kerry hopes climate cooperation can redefine US–China ties’, Al Jazeera, 18 July 2023; and AP (note 80).

<sup>86</sup> Dimaneuf, G., ‘Limitations of the official 2019 Wuhan cases based on primary sources’, ‘Paris Group’ presentation, Jan. 2024. For an update on the Covid-19 pandemic and studies on the origins of SARS-CoV-2 see chapter 9, section IV, in this volume.

characterized the policies of many rich countries, with counterproductive results.<sup>87</sup>

The ecological crisis is the superordinate challenge humankind faces. It will be an extraordinary and unprecedented calamity if it proves impossible to generate a world order adequate to meeting that challenge.

## VI. Cooperation and security

It might be that the habit of cooperation could also be redeveloped for other aspects of international relations, such as trade, and especially freedom of navigation. Some 80 per cent of all global trade by volume, 70 per cent by commercial value, goes by sea.<sup>88</sup> Much of it passes through the world's eight maritime chokepoints, narrow seaways such as the Straits of Hormuz, the Strait of Malacca, the Bosphorus and Dardanelles, and the Bab al-Mandeb between Yemen and Djibouti at the mouth of the Red Sea.<sup>89</sup> This century, most of these have experienced disruption linked to extreme weather events, which are becoming more frequent due to climate change and violent conflict.<sup>90</sup> Trade is a basic necessity of economic life and a precondition for prosperity. That there are threats to the security of international trade that go beyond short-term local disruptions is a significant indicator of the current deficiencies in the world order.

Perhaps it can therefore be agreed that an effort to rethink the world order is worthwhile from a variety of different perspectives—whether because it is unfair, anachronistic or simply less effective than is desirable in a highly inter-connected world. However, this does not make the effort of rethinking straightforward. The UN Summit for the Future is scheduled to take place in September 2024. Preparation for it has been packed with reports and position papers on an overall global agenda, on the digital future, on securing peace, on UN reform, on youth engagement, on international finance and on much else besides.<sup>91</sup> Beyond the impressive range of that set of policy briefs, a world order that is fit for purpose in the 21st century must sustain the natural environment and support (if not drive) the innovation that is required to

<sup>87</sup> Eaton, L., 'Covid-19: WHO warns against "vaccine nationalism" or face further virus mutations', *British Medical Journal*, 1 Feb. 2021; and United Nations, Secretary-General, 'Vaccine nationalism, hoarding putting us all at risk, Secretary-General tells World Health Summit, warning Covid-19 will not be last global pandemic', Press release, SG/SM/20986, 24 Oct. 2021.

<sup>88</sup> UN Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), *Review of Maritime Transport 2017* (United Nations: Geneva, 2017); and UNCTAD, *Review of Maritime Transport 2021* (United Nations: Geneva, 2021).

<sup>89</sup> Bailey, R. and Wellesley, L., *Chokepoints and Vulnerabilities in Global Food Trade* (Chatham House: London, 2017), pp. iv–v.

<sup>90</sup> Bailey and Wellesley (note 89); and 'Mayday! War stalks the world's oceans', *The Economist*, 11 Jan. 2024.

<sup>91</sup> See United Nations, *Our Common Agenda* and other Common Agenda policy briefs by theme at <<https://www.un.org/en/common-agenda/policy-briefs>>.

decarbonize economies worldwide. Such an order must also ensure that the socio-economic transformation required for the Green Transition is both just and peaceful.<sup>92</sup>

The scale of the task of drawing up an overall agenda or blueprint for change in the world order is revealed in the preparatory materials for the Summit of the Future. These materials alone could suggest the task is too great. The problem is not simply the complexity of the task and its scale. It is more importantly because those who must agree that the world order needs change and how to change it are the main actors in the tale of the increasing deficiencies of the current order. The great powers' disputes, disharmony and divisiveness are the problem. And to solve the problem, they must solve the component parts that they themselves are generating.

If that solution seems inherently unlikely, the alternative is simply to press for maximal cooperation whenever possible, focusing on specific issues rather than on grand schemes. Achieving something even though the big picture remains deficient may be better than sidelining the details in order to focus fruitlessly on the big picture.

Even this requires something far-reaching in terms of underlying assumptions and approach. International relations today are governed by the assumption that, as the theorist Hans J. Morgenthau put it, 'International politics, like all politics, is a struggle for power'.<sup>93</sup> For Morgenthau and, with nuances and variations, for virtually all great power and middle power leaders at all times, the main task of leaders is to advance national self-interest, with 'interest defined as power'.<sup>94</sup>

The peril of basing national policy on self-interest is that doing so disregards humankind's dependence on the biosphere, of which we are a part, the climate sphere and the rest of the ecosphere. If the natural environment ceases to support humankind, interest based on power becomes a second order concern at best. Accordingly, international politics must increasingly be conceptualized in relation to nature. Basing national policy on the acquisition of as much power as possible in the national interest is entirely outmoded, wasteful and counterproductive because it damages both the shared global interest and the interests of each country's citizens. In this light, preserving the biosphere is a core national interest.<sup>95</sup> While rivalries and contestations will remain, security will not be achieved by pursuing them. Rather, the key element of security in the Anthropocene is cooperation. It is through that recognition that a way may be found for the world order to evolve to meet today's challenges.

<sup>92</sup> Black (note 72).

<sup>93</sup> Morgenthau, H. J., *Politics Among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace*, 4th edn (Alfred A. Knopf: New York, 1968), p. 25.

<sup>94</sup> Morgenthau (note 93), p. 5.

<sup>95</sup> Patrick, S. M., 'The US is waking up to climate change's security implications', *World Politics Review*, 8 Nov. 2021.