Toward a Better Security Order

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Better Order Project
A Quincy Institute Initiative

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Beginning in mid-2023, the Quincy Institute's Better Order Project brought together more than 130 experts, scholars, and practitioners from over 40 countries, spanning the Global North and South and including all permanent members of the U.N. Security Council, to collectively develop a package of proposals aimed at stabilizing an international security order in transition.

The impetus behind this initiative was simple. As the world transitions away from unipolarity, a dangerous competition over norms and rules is emerging that risks splitting the world into competing orders. Rather than a multipolar world, a multi-*order* world may emerge, resulting in intensified zero-sum security competition and scant platforms for effective global cooperation.

We propose that the way forward is neither the promotion of a so-called rules-based international order — whose "rules" are all too often vague — nor the embrace of increasingly unconstrained great power competition. Rather, for the sake of peace, stability, and a fighting chance against transnational existential threats such as climate change and pandemics, we need enhanced norms and laws to rejuvenate an inclusive global order rooted in international law, multilateralism, and the ability of states to participate on an equal basis.

Some fear that the transition away from unipolarity will be inherently unstable. Others welcome what they see as an opportunity to create a more equitable international order. Few, however, have prepared detailed reforms aimed at making the laws and norms of the future adequate and adjusted to the realities of post-unipolarity.

This package of 20 proposals and reforms aims to fill the gap in a way that is advantageous to all — smaller states and middle powers, along with the United States and other major powers:

An improved U.N. Security Council

To strengthen its perceived legitimacy, the U.N. Security Council would be made more representative and more effective. It should be expanded to 24 members, including four new permanent seats — two from Africa and one each from Latin America and Asia — to be elected by the U.N. General Assembly. A new category of five semi-permanent members should also be created, drawn from an elected pool of 15 countries, to offer middle powers a more prominent role and make it easier for smaller countries to get elected. To empower the wider U.N. membership even further, we also propose specific circumstances under which a two-thirds majority of the General Assembly would be able to overturn a veto cast by a permanent member of the Security Council. Finally, an automatic U.N. Charter review should take place each quarter century to ensure regular opportunities to reform and upgrade the architecture of the international order.

Tightening norms around the use of force

We propose new norms and pacts to strengthen *jus in bello*, including codifying the principle of proportionality in greater detail, charting international humanitarian law (IHL) in emerging technological domains, and placing stronger limits on providing military assistance to parties violating the laws of war. *Jus ad bellum* should also be tightened by further clarifying the instances in which states can legitimately invoke the right of self-defense.

Avoiding nuclear war

Alongside conventional arms control and efforts to improve political relations between great powers, we propose new measures to reduce the likelihood of a nuclear clash, whether deliberate or accidental. These include moves toward de-alerting nuclear arsenals; commitments to avoid cyberattacks on nuclear command, control, and communications systems (NC3); limiting the degree to which artificial intelligence (AI) can be integrated into NC3; forging a multilateral no-first-use agreement; and mandating a recurring study on the effects of nuclear use to raise public awareness.

Rules of the road for economic sanctions

While the use of economic sanctions, including extraterritorial sanctions, is likely to grow over the next decades, there are currently few laws or norms regulating their use or impact. An International Court of Justice (ICJ) decision should determine the legality of extraterritorial financial sanctions to establish whether these are violations of state sovereignty or applications of domestic law. Moreover, we propose the adoption of new best practices, drawn conceptually from IHL, to minimize the impact of sanctions on civilian populations. An alternative path is for the United States and China to secure a bilateral "arms control–style" agreement to regulate their respective use of coercive economic measures, which can help inspire a broader, multilateral agreement.

Climate, peace, and security

We call for a U.N. General Assembly resolution that, while recognizing the complex and contingent linkages between climate and security, explicitly rejects military intervention in the internal affairs of states on the grounds of climate security. A new grouping of states, the Planetary 20 (P20), should also be established to enable speedier action on issues lying at the nexus of climate and security. These should include the pioneering of a global compact on the resettlement of residents of Small Island Developing States (SIDS) and the creation of a fund to empower regional organizations in the most climate-vulnerable areas of the planet.

A last line of defense against rogue AI

We propose the establishment of a new organization to serve as an emergency first response force for global AI threats and emergencies that no single country could adequately respond to on its own. While this organization will add to other efforts to prevent the dangers of rogue AI, its critical added value is the fail-safe measures it would establish. The organization will monitor for global AI emergencies, prepare countries and private companies for how to best respond, and coordinate their responses — particularly when it comes to rogue generative AI that has escaped or eluded built-in controls and regulation at the national and international levels.

Buttressing order and stability in Europe and the Middle East

Conflicts currently raging in Europe and the Middle East risk triggering and deepening global instability. We call for several measures to strengthen order in these regions. In Europe, we propose a crisis consultation mechanism to allow actors to game out crises in advance and reduce their negative impacts, should they erupt, by providing a less public-facing setting for adjudicating competing norms. In the Middle East, we present a plan for the establishment of a Palestinian state within three years, to be endorsed by the U.N. Security Council through a Chapter VII resolution. Moreover, we propose the establishment of a regional security architecture that would include Israel once the de-occupation of Palestinian lands has occurred.

These proposals are aimed at beginning a discussion over what the international community needs to do to bring a modicum of stability to an increasingly post-unipolar world. They are not a panacea. But if pursued, they would build upon the foundations of the existing order and help to avoid some of the greatest perils we face, creating a better international order in the process.

INTRODUCTION

The world is moving toward three major crises that put the future of international peace and stability at grave risk.

First, the global power balance has shifted rapidly over the last several decades, but the institutions and mechanisms of global governance have not changed to reflect this reality. As a result, the coming decade will see increasingly fierce competition between major powers, along with heated disputes between established and rising powers and the global majority.

> **'' *Rather than a multipolar world, a multi-order world may emerge...*

Second, the world faces a new set of interconnected challenges in various transnational domains. These call into question traditional understandings of self-interest, security, and sovereignty — and will require new forms of collaboration and governance to address them. These include climate change, AI, and other emerging technologies as well as aspects of the global commons likely to fall victim to "weaponized interdependence," such as financial systems.

Third, the reaction of the United States to its fading dominance has oscillated between denial, bloc formation to prolong America's dominant position (e.g., the "autocracies vs. democracies" framing and the "rules-based international order"), and increasingly assertive policies such as tariffs, aggressive military posturing, and frontal assaults on multilateral institutions and international norms.

If left unresolved, these crises are likely to yield an increasingly fragmented and insecure world that prioritizes coercion over cooperation, is prone to dangerous escalation and arms races, and remains unequipped to manage the major transnational and planetary challenges of our time.

This could lead either to the collapse of critical elements of the multilateral system and international law or to the birthing of a multi-*order* (rather than multipolar) world. In such a world, states will no longer differ over competing *interpretations* of laws and norms but instead will proffer competing *sets* of rules and norms altogether. Both scenarios would put at risk the ability of states to interact with one another on the basis of universal norms, laws, and multilateral institutions, even those that are limited and focused. This would gravely weaken or even eliminate the constraints that have helped make conflicts less likely.

The multi-order outcome would arguably create a more dangerous and unpredictable situation than what humanity faced during the Cold War. Although the Cold War featured what were, in effect, two separate international orders, this was

accompanied by a burgeoning (if imperfect) superstructure accepted by both camps in the form of the United Nations, along with a growing body of international law and norms. A multi-order reality in which that superstructure is decaying, but that nonetheless remains nested within an integrated and globalized world, could prove even more unstable and difficult to navigate.

Enter the "rules-based international order"

Prior to the reelection of Donald Trump to the U.S. presidency, these emerging crises manifested through the heated debate over the Western–favored "rules-based international order," or RBIO. Although a relatively new term, the RBIO had already become the subject of controversy and diverging interpretations. Observers in the West, especially in Europe, tended to view it as a neutral description of the post–World War II order centered on proliferating norms and international institutions. U.S. strategists viewed the RBIO as the only construct preventing the disintegration of inter-state relations into chaos and disorder.[1]

> *[The RBIO] has been invoked in ways that attempt to contradict and even supersede international law in the service of Western prerogatives and interests.*

Outside the West, however, the RBIO was often seen as synonymous with efforts to reverse the political trends that would allow for a more equitable order, better reflecting an increasingly diffuse balance of power.

These subjective perceptions of the RBIO obscured even more profound conceptual flaws. While proponents of the RBIO may view it as complementary to international law, in practice, it has been invoked in ways that attempt to contradict and even supersede international law in the service of Western prerogatives and interests.[2]

As such, the RBIO did not necessarily represent continuity but, rather, an effort to replace an international *law-based* order with one based on often vaguely defined and subjectively interpreted *rules*. Presumably, the RBIO existed as a distinct term partly because it was meant to imply something other than mere adherence to international law; otherwise, it would not need to exist.

This is not a trivial matter. The process of promulgating international law is formal, less ambiguous, and consists of verifiable customary practices or legal agreements that states voluntarily agree to. Instead, what we have seen is an international

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1As Secretary of State Antony Blinken told Chinese officials in 2021: "The alternative to a rules-based order is a world in which might makes right and winners take all, and that would be a far more violent and unstable world for all of us." Government of the United States, "Secretary Antony J. Blinken, National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan, Director Yang and State Councilor Wang at the Top of Their Meeting," U.S. Department of State, March 18, 2021, https://2021-2025.state.gov/secretary-antony-j-blinken-national-security-advisor-jake-sullivan-chinese-director-of-the-office-of-the-central-commission-for-foreign-affairs-yang-jiechi-and-chinese-state-councilor-wang-yi-at-th.

2 John Dugard, "The Choice before Us: International Law or a 'Rules-Based International Order'?" Leiden Journal of International Law 36, no. 2 (June 2023): 223–32. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0922156523000043.

discourse based on "rules," formulated by a subset of states with the power and intention to impose them on others, which has inevitably led to instances of political manipulation and double standards. Every international order relies, to a significant extent, on informal rules of the game. But one cannot forge an international order based on "rules" conceived by a small group of like-minded states and assert that they have the force of binding norms and laws.

> *Precisely because the RBIO had become a contested concept, its dogged pursuit was likely to engender the very chaos its advocates sought to avoid.*

Given the negative perception of the RBIO in many parts of the world, including some democracies in the Global South, aggressively promoting it helped create profound splits in the international community. Precisely because the RBIO had become a contested concept, its dogged pursuit was likely to engender the very chaos its advocates sought to avoid.

The RBIO would likely have, for instance, morphed into a bloc rather than a global system of norms, principles, and institutions. Alarmingly, the Biden administration's 2022 National Security Strategy appeared to have already conceived of the RBIO as a *nonuniversal* bloc of states, asserting that the United States would "support and strengthen partnerships with countries that subscribe to the rules-based international order" and would "make sure those countries can defend themselves against foreign threats."[3]

The White House ostensibly framed the RBIO as a kind of defensive alliance that countries could "subscribe to," at which point they would have been given security assistance against foreign threats. But, just as Washington perceived Beijing and Moscow as seeking to "remake the international order to create a world conducive to their highly personalized and repressive type of autocracy,"[4] other actors in the international community viewed the RBIO as an instrument to preserve U.S. primacy.

In other words, the RBIO's primary purpose as a rhetorical tool and strategy was to preserve the West's status as the world's preeminent term-setter; otherwise, its remit was decidedly focused on shaping the order of the future rather than defending the institutions and mechanisms of the past. In a less and less unipolar world, the latter can only be achieved by constructing a more inclusive order.

The Trump factor ... and beyond

The return of Donald Trump to the White House in 2025 and his disregard for international norms and laws have obscured the structural factors as well as policies that had already put the United States increasingly at odds with the very same multilateral system it once played an instrumental role in establishing.

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3 Government of the United States, "National Security Strategy," The White House (2022): 42.
4 "National Security Strategy," The White House (2022): 8–9.

When the narrative a superpower tells itself is one of fading dominance, anxiety follows. Confronting growing multipolarity and reckoning with decline are, by all accounts, difficult and have rarely occurred smoothly historically.

While the personality of a leader like President Trump certainly matters and, at a minimum, shapes style, the contours of U.S. foreign policy are largely conditioned by structural shifts. Systemic decline — manifested in overcommitment, fiscal strain, and technological rivalry — creates a feedback loop of anxiety. This anxiety drives reactive and sometimes incoherent policy choices, as leaders attempt to compensate for diminished authority on the world stage.

The Trump administration's assertive policies — tariffs, military posturing, territorial expansion, and withdrawal from multilateral institutions — should consequently be understood not solely as a manifestation of the president's personal whims but also as a national overreaction to strategic erosion.

Both the Biden administration's bloc formation strategy and Trump's America–alone approach have flowed from a broader reckoning with this reality. Decline, accompanied by the loss of unipolar control, has arguably bred a posture of insecurity — manifesting itself in a retreat from multilateralism and, as time has progressed, intensified norm violations and unpredictability.

Understanding this is essential: policy solutions should focus not merely on the need for leadership but on building a more resilient international order. An American shift away from the current assault on or retreat from multilateralism, and back toward coalition-of-the-willing bloc formations *à la* the RBIO, would only swap one hostile reaction to America's relative decline with another. These reactions are two sides of the same coin. And both pose, in different ways and to different degrees, critical challenges to today's universal order based on multilateralism and international law.

A changing security order will create new incentive structures for all actors, giving root to new modes of thinking and redefining the ways in which states conceive of their interests. For instance, while it may have served the interests of the great powers thus far to favor a strategic posture that maximizes their room to maneuver and allows them to bend or even break international law when their interests dictate, a world of more diffuse centers of influence will raise the costs of such conduct.

The freedom to disregard norms and laws is more attractive when only a few states can do so. When a larger number of states enjoy that freedom, collective lawlessness risks becoming a threat even to the most powerful. The Trump administration has already recognized the multipolar character of the world and declared the unipolarity of recent decades to have been an aberration.[5] As it gradually ceases to be a unipolar power, the United States may soon discover the value that a universal, law-centered order has had for its security.

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5 Trita Parsi, "What Rubio Said about Multipolarity Should Get More Attention," Responsible Statecraft, Feb. 3, 2025, https://responsiblestatecraft.org/marco-rubio.

America's ability to constrain rival powers will continue to wane as its relative power declines. This will fuel the need for alternative instruments to bind rival powers, of which an upgraded multilateral system is the most obvious and readily available. In short, as the global balance of power continues to shift, the bargain of international law — that is, a state's acceptance of constraints on itself in return for identical constraints on other states — will become more and more attractive to the United States. These dynamics must be taken into account when considering the political viability of deep-seated reforms to the international order's institutional architecture.

Participants in the Better Order Project

EUROPE

Belgium
Bulgaria
Denmark
Finland
France
Germany
Italy
Poland
Russia
Serbia
Sweden
Switzerland
Ukraine
UK

MIDDLE EAST

Egypt
Iran
Israel
Jordan
Oman
Palestine
Syria
Türkiye

ASIA

China
India
Indonesia
Japan
Malaysia
Pakistan
Philippines
Singapore
S. Korea

NORTH AMERICA

Canada
Mexico
USA

SOUTH AMERICA

Brazil
Chile
Ecuador

AFRICA

Burkina Faso
Kenya
Niger
Nigeria
South Africa
Zambia

AUSTRALIA & OCEANIA

Australia

Back to basics

The profound changes and challenges facing the world today require a rejuvenated, inclusive global order with enhanced norms and updated principles for governance and novel mechanisms to enhance stability. Such an order should be rooted in international law, multilateralism, and the ability of states to participate on an equal basis, regardless of their internal political makeup. In the words of U.N. Secretary-

General António Guterres, the current shift away from unipolarity can, in fact, create "important opportunities for balance and justice, and for new leadership on the global stage."[6]

A revised international security order must be adjusted to the realities of an increasingly post-unipolar world and foster positive-sum thinking. It should also enable policymakers to transcend security dilemmas and address existential, transnational threats, while leaving all actors — large states and small — content with the revised global governance social contract.

An effort is required to close the gap between the reality of an integrated world and the rise in normative contestation witnessed over recent years. Relying on a limited set of common global norms (e.g., respect for sovereignty and the facilitation of trade) will likely prove insufficient in slowing the drift toward a multi-order world, as sub-global institutions and blocs will continue to grow more robust. Rather, what is needed is a series of face-saving and politically viable yet ambitious and forward-looking reforms to strengthen the universal international order centered on the United Nations.

While many norms and institutions of the postwar order are increasingly disregarded or dysfunctional, constructing an alternative *ex nihilo* risks creating an order rooted in political commitments weaker than those found in the U.N. Charter. The fiction of the RBIO was that if the United States and its allies did not make the rules, then the world would be subject to the law of the jungle. This has proven manifestly untrue. A post-unipolar world can — and, indeed, must — find ways to accommodate diverse perspectives, if we wish to preserve viable avenues for global cooperation and conflict prevention.

Formulating a coherent response to crises

To begin the arduous work to create this rejuvenated and updated security order, the Quincy Institute's Better Order Project brought together more than 130 leading scholars, experts, and former officials from more than 40 countries in 2023 and 2024 to develop a package of proposals and updated principles for international conduct, adjusted for the realities of our changing world. A diverse coalition — including participants from the political East and West and the Global North and South as well as from all five permanent members of the U.N. Security Council (P5) — have signed on to indicate their broad support for the package, recognizing that the proposed reforms to international law, norms, and institutions will benefit all countries, including the United States and other major powers.

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6 United Nations, "Secretary-General's Remarks to the Munich Security Conference: Growing the Pie: A Global Order that Works for Everyone (as Delivered)," Feb. 16, 2024, https://www.un.org/sg/en/content/sg/statement/2024-02-16/secretary-generals-remarks-the-munich-security-conference-growing-the-pie-global-order-works-for-everyone-delivered.

These proposals balance a forward-looking character with an acknowledgment that idealism must be tempered by political realism. In crafting this package, our intellectual starting point was not current realities and their inhibiting political limitations. Instead, we envisioned a scenario around 2040 in which states have adjusted their conduct and perception of self-interest to a series of profound systemic changes. In this scenario, the world has become undeniably post-unipolar, erstwhile cardinal norms and facets of international law are disregarded as a matter of course, and the institutions of the international order have been profoundly damaged.

From there, we sought to devise mechanisms and reforms to prevent the worst aspects of this scenario by updating international institutions, norms, laws, and compacts to better reflect emerging power realities. This mental exercise enabled the project participants to muster the required political will for systemic reforms that all too often appear lacking today. Though some of the proposals may not become politically feasible for some years, articulating them today strengthens the possibility that states can begin to prepare for the changes that lie ahead.

Proposed package of reforms

REGULATION OF FORCE AND COERCION	TRANSNATIONAL AND PLANETARY THREATS	REGIONAL FLASHPOINTS AND ORDERING
VARIABLE 1 U.N. Security Council Reform	**VARIABLE 5** Climate, Peace, and Security	**VARIABLE 7** Great Power Flashpoints and Regional Ordering
VARIABLE 2 Use of Force	**VARIABLE 6** Artificial Intelligence and Cyber	
VARIABLE 3 Preventing Nuclear War		
VARIABLE 4 Economic Coercion and International Security		

Twenty proposals along seven variables

More specifically, this package of reforms contains 20 proposals aimed at stabilizing an international security order in transition, distributed across three categories and containing a total of seven variables that will shape the future of peace and security in this century.

Under the category of **Regulation of Force and Coercion**, we present 12 proposals that address U.N. Security Council reform, buttress norms and laws surrounding the use of force, strengthen nuclear risk reduction and disarmament, and regulate the use of economic sanctions and coercion.

The **Transnational and Planetary Threats** category includes five proposals addressing the nexus between climate and security as well as the unintended security implications of AI and emerging technologies.

Finally, under the **Regional Flashpoints and Ordering** category, we present three proposals to stabilize existing flashpoints in Europe and the Middle East. Both of these regions are currently home to hot conflicts that are further destabilizing the international security order and will do so at an exponential rate if left to fester.

Other aspects of the international order are also in need of reform, from trade and finance to public health. However, given the focus and expertise of the Better Order Project participants, this report specifically addresses the international *security* order without denying the importance of these other policy areas. We hope the report will inspire decision-makers and experts of diverse backgrounds to imagine and pursue equally creative and forward-thinking solutions in other dimensions of the international order.

While not a panacea, the Better Order Project's proposed reforms would significantly contribute to upholding peace and stability as the world transitions further away from unipolarity. They would constrain the scope of great power competition while fostering norms and institutions that would help make an increasingly complex world more predictable, peaceful, and stable for the benefit of all.

CATEGORY I:

REGULATION OF FORCE AND COERCION

VARIABLE 1: U.N. SECURITY COUNCIL REFORM

Proposal 1: Reforming the composition of the U.N. Security Council

Proposal 2: Limiting the veto

Proposal 3: Automatic Charter reviews

VARIABLE 2: USE OF FORCE

Proposal 4: Reinforcing international humanitarian law

Proposal 5: Constraining interpretations of self-defense

VARIABLE 3: PREVENTING NUCLEAR WAR

Proposal 6: Preventing the accidental use of nuclear weapons

Proposal 7: Preventing the deliberate use of nuclear weapons

Proposal 8: Revitalizing the global commitment to nuclear disarmament

VARIABLE 4: ECONOMIC COERCION AND INTERNATIONAL SECURITY

Proposal 9: An ICJ advisory opinion

Proposal 10: Risk reduction and de-escalation

Proposal 11: Norms and best practices

Proposal 12: Bilateral U.S.–China agreement

VARIABLE 1:
U.N. SECURITY COUNCIL REFORM

Based on current trends, relations among the P5 risk moving from dysfunction to total paralysis over the coming years. Besides their opposing interests in the realm of high-level geopolitics, the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) may prove consistently unable to adopt resolutions on issues such as peacekeeping, sanctions, and punishment

> "*Established powers have an interest in preserving the Security Council, given the avenues of influence it provides them.*

for war crimes. Cardinal norms of international peace and security (e.g., sovereignty, territorial integrity, and respect for international law) appear likely to remain subject to contested interpretations, even if they continue to enjoy nominal support.

The world is currently witnessing the proliferation of armed conflicts, a descent into great power competition, and mounting violations of international norms. Under these conditions, prospects for a universal order based on shared principles of global governance will become increasingly remote. And as mutual recriminations mount, there is a growing sense that the international order is reaching a tipping point.

Yet despite the sharp — and seemingly sharpening — differences exhibited in today's international community, we must not forget the extent to which states still hold shared interests when it comes to preserving multilateralism and the role of the U.N. Security Council. Established powers have an interest in preserving the Security Council, given the avenues of influence it provides them. For their part, rising powers adamantly demand Security Council reform but still prefer it to be preserved as a forum for advancing their interests and mitigating conflict rather than have it drift into irrelevance. But structural and working methods reforms are urgently needed if the United Nations is to preserve its status as the premier forum for upholding international peace and security.

To that end, **at the opening of the 82nd session of the U.N. General Assembly in 2027**, after a consolidated model for reform has been presented in the Intergovernmental Negotiations framework (IGN) and text-based negotiations have begun, U.N. member states should vote to initiate a review of the U.N. Charter. According to Article 109 of the Charter, the decision to hold such a review can be taken with the support of two-thirds of General Assembly members and any nine Security Council members and is not subject to a veto.

Both the drafting process and the adopted text of the Pact for the Future have made clear that reforming the Security Council remains a priority for member states. The proposals outlined below carry forward several priorities identified during

> *...the purpose of this reform is to create a 'win-win-win' formula through which countries of global influence, countries of regional influence, and smaller countries can all improve their positions...*

negotiations over the draft, including improving the representation of Asia and the Pacific, Latin America and the Caribbean, and especially Africa; enlarging the Council in a fashion that improves the representation of small- and medium-sized states; finding an agreement on the question of the categories of membership; balancing representativeness and effectiveness; limiting the scope and use of the veto; and including a review clause to ensure that the Security Council remains fit for purpose over time.

The formula we have developed in Proposal 1 would render Africa and Asia the **two most represented regional groupings** on the Council, ahead of the Western European and Others Group (WEOG).[7] Our model gives Africa *and* Asia each more than 26 percent of the seats on the Security Council. No other existing model offers both Africa and Asia that high a level of representation at the same time. Moreover, unlike other models, the distribution envisaged by the Better Order Project offers Africa and Asia **equal representation**.

In addition to the proposals outlined below, amendments to the U.N. Charter should explicitly account for the importance of issues of planetary concern, making clear that the remit of the international community's most inclusive body is no longer limited to issues of international or even global scope.

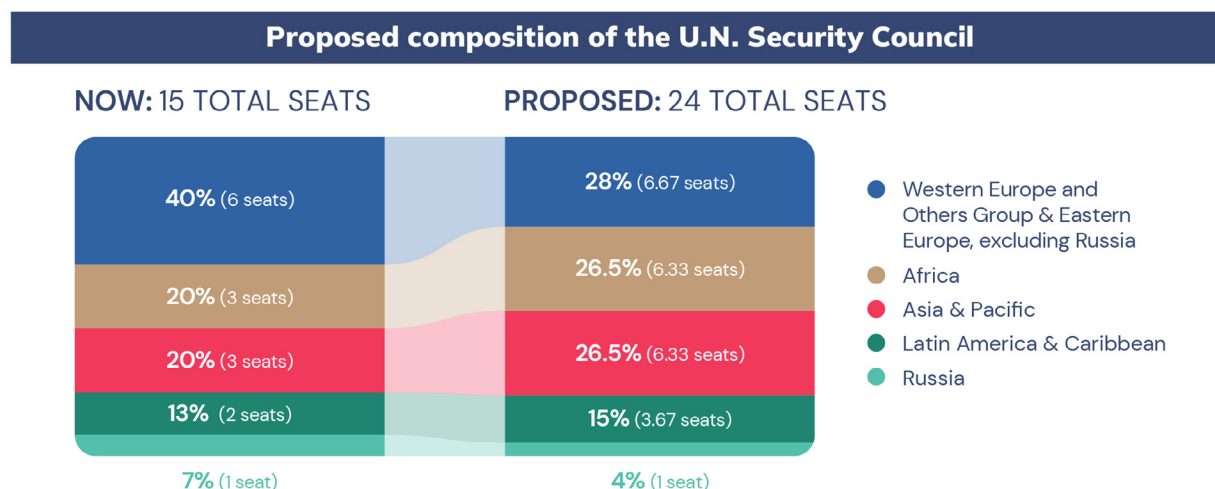## Proposal 1: Reforming the composition of the U.N. Security Council

Two specific reforms to the composition of the UNSC should be envisaged. First, given the growth in the number of countries of global influence since 1945, the number of permanent members should be increased. Second, a new semi-permanent category of members should be created to reflect the proliferation of countries of regional (and transregional) influence. The existing category of 10 elected members would remain untouched.

The creation of three categories of states on the Security Council does not signal that multipolarity should be equated with hierarchy. Rather, the purpose of this reform is to create a "win-win-win" formula through which countries of global influence, countries of regional influence, and smaller countries **can *all* improve their positions** in the institutional architecture of the international order.

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7 The Better Order Project's model offers additional benefits for Asia and Africa as well. For example, with seven semi-permanent seats (two or three of which would serve on the Council at any given time), our proposal provides Asia with a greater degree of representation as the up to four additional non-permanent seats offered by the Uniting for Consensus model. As for Africa, the G4 proposal is the only model that may marginally provide more representation for Africa than the Better Order Project's proposal — and this only if Africa is offered two non-permanent seats instead of one. But when factoring in the four-year term length of semi-permanent seats in the Better Order Project's model, it is more advantageous for Africa to obtain four semi-permanent seats (one or two of which would serve on the Council at any given time) than to obtain two non-permanent seats.

The proposed reforms would result in a **total of just 24 seats** on the Council — **nine permanent, five semi-permanent, and 10 elected members** — a manageable number not considerably higher than the current 15 and therefore more likely to win political approval. Of these 24 members, 15 affirmative votes should be required for the adoption of a UNSC resolution — a roughly equivalent share to the current nine out of 15.

Proposed composition of the U.N. Security Council

NOW: 15 TOTAL SEATS   PROPOSED: 24 TOTAL SEATS

- 40% (6 seats) → 28% (6.67 seats)
- 20% (3 seats) → 26.5% (6.33 seats)
- 20% (3 seats) → 26.5% (6.33 seats)
- 13% (2 seats) → 15% (3.67 seats)
- 7% (1 seat) → 4% (1 seat)

Legend:
- Western Europe and Others Group & Eastern Europe, excluding Russia
- Africa
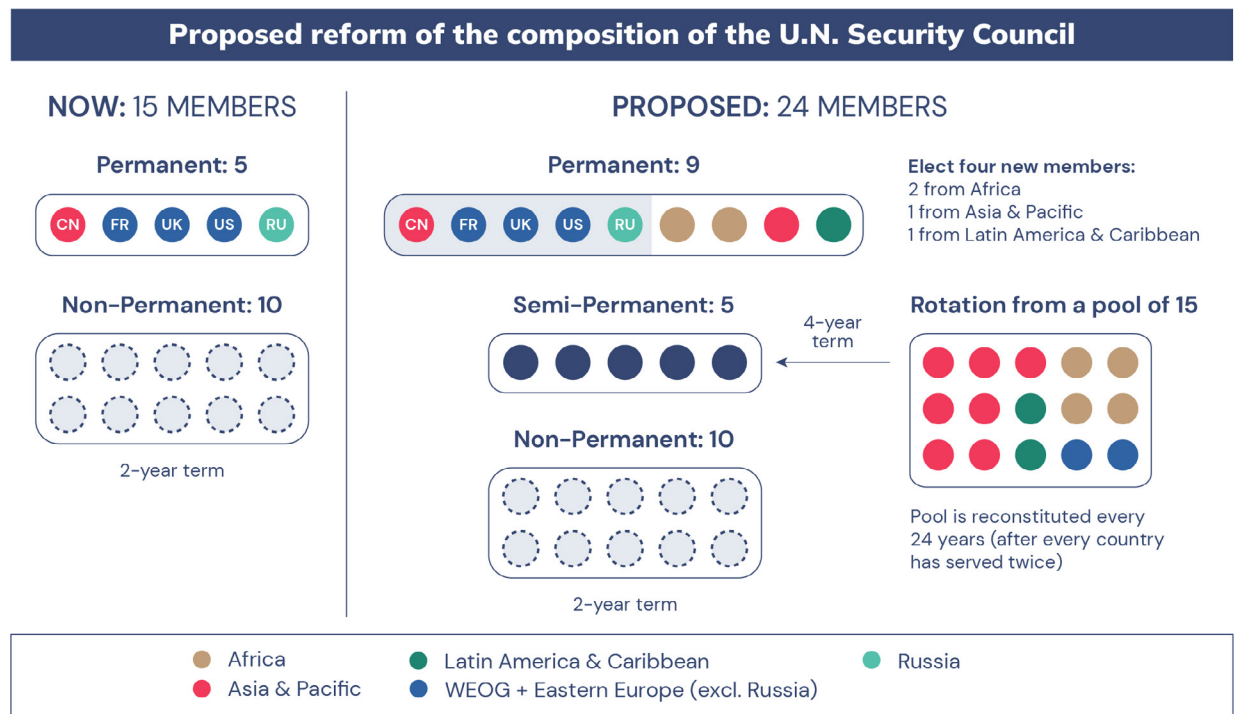- Asia & Pacific
- Latin America & Caribbean
- Russia

- First, **four new permanent members** should be added to the Security Council: **two** from Africa, **one** from Asia and the Pacific, and **one** from Latin America and the Caribbean. This formula is in line with the Pact for the Future's recommendation under Action 39(a) to "[r]edress the historical injustice against Africa as a priority and, while treating Africa as a special case, improve the representation of the underrepresented and unrepresented regions and groups."[8]

  o These new permanent members should be **elected by the General Assembly** in a vote held two years after this formula is agreed upon, before the completion of the ratification process. Allowing the General Assembly to elect new permanent members strengthens the likelihood that they will be chosen for their positive contributions to international peace and security.

  o The question of whether new permanent members will be afforded veto powers is addressed in Proposal 2. However, it is worth noting that the process of electing new permanent members in the General Assembly will, on its own, likely reduce veto usage. A country that promises (including through legally binding mechanisms) never to cast a veto — or to resort to one only in

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8 That said, it is worth noting the ways in which the Better Order Project's proposal also stands to benefit the WEOG and Eastern Europe. For example, although the model presented by Mexico at the IGN offers these two regional groupings more combined relative representation than any other model, it only sets aside one long-term seat for the WEOG, whereas our model sets aside two such seats (represented on the Council for eight out of every 12 years) and also allows Eastern European countries to compete for these seats.

exceptional circumstances — will increase its chances of being elected to the Security Council.

o The African Group would be able to decide whether it wanted the occupants of its permanent seats to serve on a rotating basis, based on a formula agreed upon among its members.

Proposed reform of the composition of the U.N. Security Council

NOW: 15 MEMBERS

Permanent: 5

CN FR UK US RU

Non-Permanent: 10

2-year term

PROPOSED: 24 MEMBERS

Permanent: 9

CN FR UK US RU ● ● ● ●

Elect four new members:
2 from Africa
1 from Asia & Pacific
1 from Latin America & Caribbean

Semi-Permanent: 5

● ● ● ● ●

4-year term ←

Rotation from a pool of 15

Pool is reconstituted every 24 years (after every country has served twice)

Non-Permanent: 10

2-year term

● Africa
● Asia & Pacific
● Latin America & Caribbean
● WEOG + Eastern Europe (excl. Russia)
● Russia

o The existing P5, in fact, have an interest in growing their own ranks. By agreeing to extend permanent membership on the Council to regions that are currently underrepresented (or not represented at all), the P5 would strengthen the legitimacy of a body in which they would continue to occupy privileged positions.

o An expanded Council may also be a more effective one, as a permanent member may be more reluctant to bear the political costs of casting a lone negative vote in the face of opposition from an even greater number of permanent and non-permanent members. This would further increase the likelihood that vetoes are cast solely on issues of international peace and security or where a permanent member's core interests are concerned.

o To avoid setting a potentially destabilizing precedent in which a permanent member is stripped of its seat, the current P5 should retain their status as permanent members of the Security Council.

• Second, once the election of the four new permanent members has been completed, the General Assembly should elect a **pool of 15 semi-permanent**

members, five of which would serve on the Security Council at any given time.[9] U.N. members elected to this category are likely to be countries of regional or transregional influence with a demonstrated record of contributing positively to international peace and security. These 15 countries would rotate on and off the Council, **automatically serving for four out of every 12 years**.

o These 15 countries should be distributed across the U.N.'s regional groupings as follows: **seven** should be drawn from Asia and the Pacific, **four** from Africa, **two** from Latin America and the Caribbean, and **two** from Eastern Europe and WEOG combined. This formula is based on an approximation of the population of these respective U.N. groupings and the number of countries of regional influence each possesses, weighed against the need to improve representation for underrepresented regional groupings. That said, altering it as circumstances demand would not require a Charter amendment.

o After two rotations of 12 years (i.e., 24 years), the pool of semi-permanent members would be subject to review by way of fresh elections in the General Assembly.

o Having an extended turn on the Council once every 12 years — serving a guaranteed eight years out of 24 — would represent a marked improvement for countries of regional influence in comparison with the status quo. It would also offer compensation for those that fail to be elected to a permanent seat. With advanced knowledge of when their tenure will take place, semi-permanent members would be well prepared to make the most of their time on the Council.

o By diversifying the Council's composition, the creation of the semi-permanent category would offer the 10 elected members of the Council more space to pursue their own agendas. This would be further facilitated thanks to the lengthier, four-year terms that semi-permanent members would serve, which (alongside the election of new permanent members) would ensure that more members than just the P5 possess a high degree of institutional memory and fluency in Council business. Smaller countries would also benefit from no longer needing to compete against 15 influential semi-permanent members (along with the four new permanent members) for an elected seat on the Council.

o Building on the existing practice of ensuring Arab representation, at least one of the Asian and one of the African seats in the semi-permanent pool should be reserved for an Arab country. However, given the number of Arab states that hold significant regional or transregional influence, it is likely that more than two total Arab states will be elected to the semi-permanent pool. If three Arab states are elected to the pool, it would amount to a *de facto* permanent seat for at least the next quarter century (albeit without veto privileges), with the possibility of reelection.
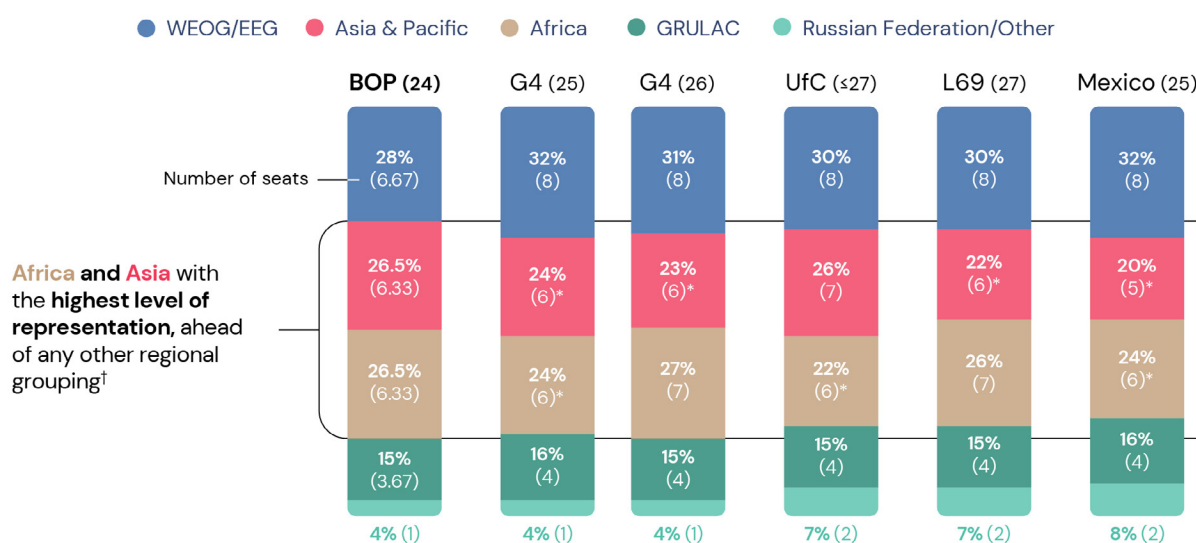
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9 A variation of this idea was first advanced by Better Order Project participant Kishore Mahbubani.

o Regional groupings should also consider whether to set aside one of their semi-permanent seats for a Small Island Developing State (SIDS). For example, the Latin American and Caribbean states could set aside one of their two semi-permanent seats for a SIDS country, given that 16 of the 33 member states in this grouping fall under this category. Asia and the Pacific could also set aside one of its semi-permanent seats for this purpose, which would be open to African SIDS as well. Having two SIDS countries as part of the semi-permanent pool would only guarantee SIDS representation on the Council for eight out of every 12 years; however, it would ensure that a small number of SIDS will develop the strong institutional memory necessary to advance the political agenda of all SIDS more effectively.

To empower the 10 elected members of the Council even further, UNSC members should consider rotating the chairmanship of its subsidiary bodies annually. Such a reform to working methods would not require a Charter amendment. But even without this change, the expansion of the UNSC's membership would, on its own, offer more opportunities to increase the number of resolutions tabled by members with no veto, as well as to reduce the extent to which established powers wield control over chairmanships and penholderships.

Comparison of proposed reform with other models

● WEOG/EEG ● Asia & Pacific ● Africa ● GRULAC ● Russian Federation/Other

	BOP (24)	G4 (25)	G4 (26)	UfC (≤27)	L69 (27)	Mexico (25)
Number of seats	28% (6.67)	32% (8)	31% (8)	30% (8)	30% (8)	32% (8)
Africa and Asia with the **highest level of representation,** ahead of any other regional grouping[†]	26.5% (6.33)	24% (6)*	23% (6)*	26% (7)	22% (6)*	20% (5)*
	26.5% (6.33)	24% (6)*	27% (7)	22% (6)*	26% (7)	24% (6)*
	15% (3.67)	16% (4)	15% (4)	15% (4)	15% (4)	16% (4)
	4% (1)	4% (1)	4% (1)	7% (2)	7% (2)	8% (2)

† Ahead of WEOG, if considered separately from the Eastern European Group.
* The Better Order Project's model provides higher representation in both absolute and relative terms.

Proposal 2: Limiting the veto

As relations between the great powers have deteriorated over recent years, the Security Council has become increasingly paralyzed. Although the veto's purpose is to provide great powers with a stake in upholding the international order and to

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encourage them to remain invested in its institutions, it has also called into question the legitimacy and effectiveness of the primary body tasked with upholding international peace and security. Securing sufficient support from U.N. member states for reforming the Security Council will be very difficult without visibly addressing the question of the veto.

> "*...we propose several limited yet ambitious ways in which veto use could be reduced or restricted.*

Any changes to veto privileges should be careful not to encourage further dissociation from multilateralism. Such an outcome may present itself if certain great powers conclude that the United Nations can no longer be trusted as a vehicle for upholding their core interests. Moreover, the employment of a veto can sometimes have positive effects: for example, protecting the sovereignty of smaller states by refusing to authorize a military intervention.

Nonetheless, we propose several limited yet ambitious ways in which veto use could be reduced or restricted. These changes should aim to enhance the body's efficiency and thus support the interests of the international community, including the interest that the permanent membership have in preserving a functional and legitimate Security Council.

The following recommendations are the product of a compromise between project participants who defended the veto as a necessary prerogative and those who demanded restrictions on its use:

- First, the following restriction on veto privileges should be codified in the U.N. Charter. The strength of the limitation should be dependent on whether new permanent members are given veto privileges:

  - In the event that new permanent members agree to forgo their veto privileges voluntarily, this should be done in exchange for the implementation of a "one-plus-one" mechanism, namely: an original permanent member of the Security Council casting a veto will need to secure **at least one negative vote from any other member of the Council** for the veto to be secure from potential override. If, by contrast, the permanent member is the lone country casting a negative vote, then a **two-thirds majority of the General Assembly** can overturn the veto through the adoption of a GA resolution. This mechanism will help to level the playing field between the P5 and new permanent members, while also ensuring the latter do not obtain unqualified veto privileges at a later date.

  - In the event that new permanent members do obtain veto privileges, then there is a risk of more veto use and more paralysis on the Council. In this scenario, there will be a need for a stronger veto restriction: one veto **plus two other negative votes** should be required to insulate the veto from being vulnerable to a review by the General Assembly. Should such a review occur, in this case, it should take place by secret ballot. (If discussions in the IGN settle on other

accountability mechanisms to constrain new veto-wielding seats, such as subjecting the holders of those seats to fixed terms with the possibility of re-election, then a "one-plus-one" formula may prove sufficient.)

- o In the context of an expanded Security Council membership, a country of global influence should be encouraged — and should easily prove able — to secure the support of just one (or two) of the other 23 Council members for its position. The overturning of a veto would be an exceptional development — one that is likely to occur only when an isolated great power has manifestly failed in its commitment to uphold international peace and security.

- Second, a new prerogative should be extended to the permanent Security Council members, allowing them to vote "no" on a resolution without exercising a veto. This would offer them a new way to respond to domestic political pressures while, at the same time, acting constructively in the face of a pressing need from another U.N. member state to pass a Security Council resolution. It would also raise the political cost of casting a full-blown veto, thereby disincentivizing permanent members from blocking resolutions in instances where the primary considerations are political and do not directly relate to the task of upholding peace.

- Third, the Peacebuilding Commission, which currently focuses on post-conflict peacebuilding and recovery, should be elevated within the U.N. system and be assigned some of the current responsibilities of the Security Council. One way to achieve this might be for the Trusteeship Council to be *de facto* transformed into a Peacebuilding Council. This development would foster a more democratic and a more efficient international order, while also helping to limit use of the veto to genuine and unquestioned issues of peace and security.

- o Cases that do not directly involve a threat to international peace and security should ideally be transferred to the Peacebuilding Commission, allowing the UNSC to tackle a more focused agenda. This should be accomplished by way of a joint decision of the General Assembly and Security Council case by case.

- o The General Assembly and Security Council might also consider empowering the Commission to select the cases it chooses to take on independently, including cases taken on at the request of an affected U.N. member state. It should be stipulated that this would not alter the current prerogatives of the Security Council under the U.N. Charter, up to and including the responsibility for authorizing the use of force.

- o Topics that an elevated Peacebuilding Commission should address include environmental issues, health issues, education, and infrastructure, all of which fall under a broad definition of peacebuilding that includes sustainable development. Neither peace operations, arms embargoes, sanctions, nor military interventions are pertinent to these issues, making the Security Council a less suitable forum for addressing them. Moreover, the permanent members

of the UNSC do not hold special veto privileges on the Commission, and the affected country can be present.

  o Resource allocation within the U.N. system should reflect the Commission's higher caseload, and countries should be reassured that their cases will remain just as "high profile" on the Commission as they were on the Security Council, given the redistributed workload. One might also consider adopting changes to the Commission's voting structure, which currently operates on consensus, as it acquires a more robust mandate. If a country that does not pose a manifest threat to international peace and security (as determined in consultation with its immediate neighbors) wishes to remain on the UNSC agenda, it should be required to provide compelling arguments for this choice.

- Fourth, going forward, the process for electing a Secretary-General should begin with the selection of a candidate by the General Assembly, followed by the UNSC's assent. This could allow for a stronger and more representative Secretary-General to emerge.

- Finally, certain changes to working methods aimed at reducing veto use and strengthening accountability can also be envisaged.

  o Building on Liechtenstein's veto initiative, which allows the General Assembly to convene within 10 working days of a UNSC resolution being vetoed, the GA should proactively make recommendations to UNSC members on how to avoid the disputes and disagreements that led to the casting of a given veto. This would strengthen intra-body dialogue at the U.N. and help ensure that the casting (or threat) of a veto does not entirely shut down debate.

  o Relying on legal advice and drafting assistance provided by the Secretariat, a special working group should be established to draft General Assembly resolutions in advance on issues that are frequently subject to UNSC vetoes. This would allow the GA to act swiftly when needed in the context of a veto initiative meeting. The working group should be established — and its members selected — by way of a two-thirds majority vote of the General Assembly.

Proposal 3: Automatic Charter reviews

An amendment to the U.N. Charter should stipulate that a Charter review will be automatically held every 24 years. This would coincide with the conclusion of two cycles of semi-permanent members rotating on and off the Security Council, an appropriate juncture at which the entire package of reforms proposed above can be revisited. Those recommendations listed above that fail to garner the requisite support could be revisited during the next Charter review, by which point the diffusion of power and influence in the international order would have become even more manifest.

Automatic Charter reviews would render the task of Charter reform less politically charged, thereby enhancing both democracy within the U.N. system and the resilience of the organization (and, by extension, the international order) as a whole. Individual member states would be given the right to table amendments for debate, subject to existing adoption and ratification procedures.

VARIABLE 2:
USE OF FORCE

With the horror and devastation of the Second World War set to fade entirely from living memory over the coming years, the taboo on the use of large-scale aggressive force will continue to come under considerable strain. As the open invasion of Poland, the firebombing of Dresden, the siege of Leningrad, and the atomic strikes on Hiroshima and Nagasaki fade into the distant past, the temptation of war grows ever stronger, and restraints on its conduct risk growing weaker.

Inter-state violence — from Ukraine to the Middle East to the Great Lakes region of Africa — is already becoming an increasingly salient feature of global politics. If U.S.–China tensions continue to mount, the South China Sea may be another addition to this list. The same is true of violence between states and non-state actors.

> *…we are witnessing a trend of lax interpretations and implementation of international humanitarian law. Left unaddressed, civilians will experience even worse consequences in the future.*

Moreover, we are witnessing a trend of lax interpretations and implementation of international humanitarian law (IHL). Left unaddressed, civilians will experience even worse consequences in the future. Protracted conflicts will continue to produce long-term instability and suffering, reducing the prospects for reconciliation and durable peace. While IHL may continue to be regularly invoked by name, the manifest lack of respect for it threatens its relevance and protective power.

What is more, the grounds of what constitutes self-defense have expanded over the past three decades. Under the guise of defending against terrorist organizations, the use of kinetic force has increased between countries that are not formally at war, often without the consent of the targeted state. While the great powers have primarily undertaken this invocation of self-defense, rising middle powers are increasingly modeling their behavior — and legal justifications — on such conduct.

The double standards and recklessness on display today, repeatedly justified through alleged "non-precedents" or appeals to universal principles, have set *de facto* precedents. This has engendered a tit-for-tat process that continually erodes norms surrounding the use of force, both in respect of *jus ad bellum* and *jus in bello*.[10] The current conflicts in Gaza and Lebanon, which have led to a direct clash between Israel and Iran, reveal the dangerous escalatory potential of this dynamic, underlining the need to prevent lax justifications and behavior where military action is concerned.

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10 *Jus ad bellum* concerns the body of law that pertains to justifying resorting to the use of force, whereas *jus in bello* refers to the law governing the conduct of wars that are already underway.

Limiting the scourge of war

JUS IN BELLO	JUS AD BELLUM
Codify universal and public **standards for incidental harm assessment**, including strengthening the principle of proportionality	Clarify in international law when and how **a cyber operation** would amount to a use of force or armed attack
Clarify that **IHL applies to cyber operations** and that protections afforded to civilian objects apply to digital civilian objects	Pass a UNSC resolution **prohibiting states from invoking self-defense against a non-state actor** operating in another state without the consent of either the second state or the Security Council, unless it is being explicitly hosted by the second state's government
Develop new legally binding rules on **autonomous weapons systems**	
Set up a dedicated forum for ongoing dialogue on the intersection between **IHL and artificial intelligence**	
Strengthen Common Article 1 to the four Geneva Conventions by not furnishing military assistance to states engaged in wide-scale violations of IHL, among other measures	

For more than 75 years, we have operated from the starting premise that it is forbidden to threaten or use force against the territorial integrity or political independence of a state unless specific restrictive criteria are met. The use of force is only permissible in self-defense or when authorized by the U.N. Security Council, never in retaliation or as revenge. It is unacceptable to let this commitment erode. To avoid a far more violent and unstable world, the international community must tighten and breathe new life into norms surrounding the use of force while reaffirming the U.N. Charter. Decisive and far-reaching (yet targeted) actions will be necessary to preserve the credibility and universal legitimacy of norms whose purpose is to limit inter-state violence and uphold IHL, especially given the exponential multiplication of abuses that we will likely witness as a larger set of countries feel emboldened to skirt these norms and laws.

Many other variables addressed in this project seek to constrain or impose agreed-upon limitations on inter-state behavior, especially between great powers. This section of the report is limited to addressing other outstanding issues related to the use of force, such as exploring ways to restrict a particularly frequent justification for the use of force and to strengthen limits on the conduct of hostilities. In doing so,

we aim to provide an added — and necessary — modicum of predictability to a changing international order. The proposed measures below, which aim to render select international norms more robust, remain compatible with the emergence of a more decentered or region-centric international order — and with a world in which the most influential countries agree to share power.

While it is the lack of adherence to law rather than the absence of law itself that lies at the heart of many transgressions, we recognize that further constraints are necessary to strengthen the likelihood of compliance, given that existing frameworks have failed to prevent the highly consequential violations witnessed to date. Pursuing the adoption of these constraints will become even more important in a world that increasingly features war against non-state actors *and* armed conflict at the inter-state level.

Proposal 4: Reinforcing international humanitarian law

Recent conflicts, technological advances, and changes in the nature of warfare are fueling the proliferation of war in scale and scope. In response, this report advances three recommendations: developing a new additional protocol to the Geneva Conventions to codify a more detailed definition of **proportionality** in armed conflict, clarifying how IHL relates to emerging domains such as **cyber and autonomous weapons**, and forging an additional set of tacit norms aimed at building a more substantive global **culture of accountability and compliance** with IHL.

While it is undeniable that the rules and principles of IHL have been violated since their inception, these violations themselves should not be considered as eroding the power of this legal regime. Rather, IHL is, at times, consecrated in the breach — it is strengthened and reaffirmed when atrocities are widely recognized as violations of the law. Nonetheless, today, the world is witnessing increasingly elastic interpretations of what is permissible under IHL beyond what is tolerable to humanity or militarily necessary.

By reaffirming their commitment to abide by the rules of warfare and further developing key IHL norms, states can underscore the importance of adhering to the principles of *jus in bello*, even in situations where resorting to war may be justified under *jus ad bellum*. Moreover, political measures taken alongside this process can also reduce the likelihood of such wars erupting and contribute to reducing their duration or severity.

To that end, this report proposes the following course of action:

1. Pursuant to Article 7 of Additional Protocol I to the Geneva Conventions, High

Contracting Parties should agree to convene to explore how to strengthen adherence to the letter *and the spirit* of the Conventions. This process should not be directionless but instead have the express intention of strengthening the protective nature of the Conventions. Specifically, the mandate of this process should be for states to commit themselves to adopting strengthened interpretations of the fundamental principles of distinction, precaution, and proportionality that are rooted in the protective nature of IHL by way of a new, additional protocol.

- High Contracting Parties should develop and codify universal and public standards for incidental harm assessment. These should take into account, among other things, the types of weapons (i.e., accuracy, yield, and secondary effects); the context in which such weapons are used; the location, concentration, and vulnerability of civilians and civilian objects present; and the short- and long-term public health and environmental consequences of a given attack.[11] Decisions should address how to apply these standards to state and non-state actors.[12] This would increase protections for civilians, help to overcome existing double standards, and, therefore, avoid the fragmentation of the paradigm.

- In addition to issuing statements endorsing their collective interpretation of the principle of proportionality in a way that places a high value on civilian life and objects, which have merit in themselves, states should take concrete steps in this direction. Such steps should include making explicit, for those states that have not done so already, the notion that a party must consider both direct *and indirect* effects on the civilian population. These indirect effects, particularly of attacks on infrastructure, frequently have severe, widespread, and lasting consequences for civilians and do not currently carry sufficient weight in proportionality assessments by various armed actors. Any harm, no matter how indirect, that is *reasonably foreseeable* must be considered, including, for example, downstream effects of disruptions to energy infrastructure, effects on the natural environment itself and as it relates to civilians, and the ability of humanitarian actors to deliver necessary assistance. Such considerations are particularly relevant when engaging in target analysis and selection before and in preparation for armed conflict, not merely during ongoing operations.

2. As part of this process, states should also ensure that international law is up to the task of regulating twenty-first-century warfare, particularly relating to cyber operations and the use of autonomous weapons and AI.

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11 Such standards must not adversely distinguish on the basis of race, color, sex, language, religion or belief, political or other opinion, national or social origin, wealth, birth or other status, or any other similar criteria. See Geneva Convention Relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War (Fourth Geneva Convention), Aug. 12, 1949, 75 UNTS 287, arts. 3, 13; Protocol Additional I, June 8, 1977, 1125 UNTS 3, art. 75, 1125 UNTS 609, art. 4.

12 See Won Jang, "For Whom the Bell of Proportionality Tolls: Three Proposals for Strengthening Proportionality Compliance," International Review of the Red Cross 102, no. 914 (2020): 629–57. https://doi.org/10.1017/S181638312100062X.

- Whether by adopting national positions that interpret IHL more broadly or by developing new standalone legal standards, High Contracting Parties should clarify that IHL applies to cyber operations and that the protections afforded to civilian objects apply equally to digital civilian objects, such as computer networks and data. The Parties should also clarify when and how a cyber operation can trigger an armed conflict and when it would amount to a use of force or armed attack under *jus ad bellum* to avoid a scenario in which state behavior that is misunderstood or misinterpreted by the other side erupts into war.

- In line with the joint call by the U.N. Secretary-General and the president of the International Committee of the Red Cross, states should develop new legally binding rules on autonomous weapons systems (AWS). These rules should prohibit unpredictable AWS and antipersonnel AWS. In addition, there is a need to establish clear regulations for the use of all other types of AWS, for example: limiting the types of objects they can target to only those that are military by nature, limiting the circumstances in which AWS can operate, limiting the number of engagements or amount of time such systems can operate before requiring reauthorization by human users, or ensuring the ability for a human user to supervise and, if necessary, deactivate operation.

- The use of AI in military decision support systems (DSS) raises further concerns about the genuine level of human decision-making in the use of force. AI comes with all the biases of its developers, and it can develop new, unexpected ones. What an AI is going to do can also be difficult to predict, as can understanding why it did something. Additionally, humans are susceptible to falling into the "rubber stamp" trap, where we place too much trust and faith in the output of an automated process. AI DSS can also increase the pace of warfare to speeds that humans cannot meaningfully keep up with. Some AI tools may legitimately aid in the goals of complying with IHL and reducing humanitarian risks, but the issues that come with their adoption cannot be ignored. States and other relevant actors should set up a dedicated and inclusive forum for intensive and ongoing dialogue about (a) best practices for implementing IHL in relation to the use of AI, (b) whether existing IHL addresses all relevant concerns, and (c) how to fill any identified gaps, adapting, as needed, to new developments in the technology. Such a forum should be convened under U.N. auspices, taking the (2021–25) Open-Ended Working Group on the security of and in the use of Information and Communication Technologies as a possible structural inspiration, with all states as decision-makers and other actors — such as academia, civil society, and the private sector — as consultative stakeholders.[13] This would contrast with existing fora, which often exclude key actors or are not structured as a standing forum focusing specifically on AI.

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13 United Nations, "Open-Ended Working Group on Information and Communication Technologies," U.N. Office for Disarmament Affairs, 2021, https://meetings.unoda.org/open-ended-working-group-on-information-and-communication-technologies-2021.

3. An additional goal should be for states to strengthen their collective interpretation of Common Article 1 to the four Geneva Conventions to "ensure respect" for their provisions through tangible actions. This stronger interpretation would center on an "external" obligation to seek compliance with IHL from all other states and parties (which is the way most, but not all, states interpret it) instead of only an "internal" obligation asserting that one must only ensure respect on the part of its own population. By developing common understandings on reducing the human costs of war and reducing the supply of arms to IHL violators, states could strengthen Common Article 1 without altering its text. Suggested measures include:

- A joint declaration by all members of the Group of 20 (G20) not to furnish military assistance to states engaged in wide-scale violations of IHL. This would be aimed at fostering common behavioral norms between established great powers and rising middle powers.

- The establishment of — and political commitment to maintain — dedicated bilateral channels, especially between great powers, whose purpose is to deliberate whether the actions of one or the other interlocutor rise to the level of abetting or supplying states engaged in mass atrocities or aggression, the aim of which would be to replace coercive diplomacy with dialogue.

- A public commitment among the United States, Russia, and China — which other rising powers would be free to join — not to instigate and enable indirect wars against one another.

Proposal 5: Constraining interpretations of self-defense

The contested nature of sovereignty has led to a deterioration of the international order over recent decades. It will be necessary, therefore, to impose further constraints on the use of force on the territory of another sovereign state. Through a U.N. Security Council resolution, adopted under Chapter VII of the U.N. Charter, the international community should clarify that **the Charter prohibits any state from invoking self-defense against a non-state actor operating in another state without the consent of either the second state or the Security Council** unless the second state's government is hosting the non-state actor in question as a matter of explicit policy.

Article 2(4) of the U.N. Charter prohibits the use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any state or in any other way inconsistent with the purposes of the United Nations. However, the Charter also recognizes the right of self-defense under Article 51 if an armed attack occurs. Article 51 confers the right to launch a necessary and proportionate response to an armed attack that has already occurred, and it is generally also considered to permit a state to prevent an imminent armed attack. The right to self-defense does not permit purely retaliatory, tit-for-tat strikes.

States have taken different and, at times, permissive interpretations of what these two articles have to say about the lawfulness of responding with force to an armed attack launched by a non-state actor from the territory of a second state without that state's approval. Clarifying this distinction through a new resolution would raise the bar for intervention.

The proposed resolution would reaffirm the centrality of the U.N. Charter and international law in regulating state conduct and the use of force. Given that many states already endorse this legal reading, the adoption of such a resolution is not unprecedented but rather a crucial step toward ensuring global stability. This resolution neither condones the harboring of terrorist organizations nor does it make it less dangerous for states to allow armed groups to operate in their territory. Rather, it limits the path to use force in these situations, requiring either Security Council authorization or consent from the second (host) state.

We assess that the adoption of this resolution would likely lead to the following shifts in state conduct:

- States would likely reassess their military doctrines and operational practices, shifting toward greater emphasis on intelligence gathering, surveillance, and reconnaissance to enhance situational awareness and early warning capabilities.

- Though this measure would likely have a lesser impact on the conduct of great powers compared to middle powers, it would nevertheless raise the cost for great powers to engage in unauthorized military strikes, which could cause great powers to recalibrate their strategies and put greater emphasis on diplomacy, deterrence, and international cooperation.

- Harboring terrorist organizations, even if done short of explicit state policy, would carry greater risk in terms of international isolation and being subjected to multilateral military action under Chapter VII of the U.N. Charter. The international community should consider consequences for states that harbor violent non-state actors or arbitrarily deny consent for an aggrieved state to use force to counter such a threat. Such consequences could include, for example, multilateral sanctions or even the loss of some rights and privileges of U.N. membership for persistent failure to uphold international peace and security.

The adoption of this resolution would reaffirm the legally binding obligation of the international community to prioritize and enforce sovereignty and the rule of law in addressing transnational security threats. It would delineate the legal parameters surrounding preemptive military interventions and establishes a foundation for the enforcement of accountability against states found to be in breach of international law. And crucially, it would aim to reduce the scope for inter-state violence and reaffirm the importance of the norm of sovereignty in an increasingly unpredictable world.

This proposal attempts to reduce instances in which states use force as a first resort in response to an armed attack by a non-state group. It is complemented by this

report's proposals on U.N. Security Council reform, which, if implemented in the short term, would bring about a less gridlocked Security Council with new learned habits of behavior.

> **"The contested nature of sovereignty has led to a deterioration of the international order over recent decades. It will be necessary, therefore, to impose further constraints on the use of force on the territory of another sovereign state.**

First, an expanded group of permanent members would be less likely to resort to the veto, given the increased political costs of casting an isolated negative vote in the face of opposition from seven other permanent members and 15 non-permanent members (at least five of which are likely to be significant regional powers). Second, we have proposed measures that aim to reduce the ironclad nature of the veto, rendering isolated and frivolous vetoes subject to a potential General Assembly override.

This proposal carefully balances the legitimate right to self-defense with the principle of state sovereignty while leaving sufficient room for flexibility in state action and decision-making, including, for instance, the question of how precisely to determine whether a state hosts a group as a matter of explicit policy. That said, although adherence to this new norm risks being selective, a state attacked by a non-state actor will have greater reason to trust the Security Council to act and, by doing so, tie the application of self-defense more closely to the goal of preserving international peace and security.

VARIABLE 3:
PREVENTING NUCLEAR WAR

The world is living through its most dangerous moment in decades, on the verge of a renewed arms race, with the threat of nuclear war at its highest since the Cold War. Increased reliance on nuclear weapons for security remains both a source and symptom of heightened great power tension. Averting nuclear war — a moral imperative — requires restraint and de-escalation among great powers in the conventional and nuclear realms, including reducing the risk of military clashes between nuclear-armed states.

A new nuclear arms race creates incentives that run counter to nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament obligations under the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT). By doubling down and recommitting to nuclear weapons within their security strategies, nuclear weapon states (NWS) increase the value attached to them, encouraging their pursuit and acquisition

> " *Averting nuclear war — a moral imperative — requires restraint and de-escalation among great powers in the conventional and nuclear realms...*

by non-nuclear weapon states (NNWS). Without tangible progress toward nuclear disarmament, the shared non-proliferation obligations underpinning the NPT are at risk of shattering. Preventing nuclear war is not merely an agenda to manage — it is an existential imperative.

The NPT's five recognized NWS (hereafter, the N5) are responsible for upholding international peace and security as permanent members of the U.N. Security Council. They must make far-reaching strides toward nuclear disarmament to preserve the NPT and oversee its full and effective implementation, including the legal obligation to engage in and conclude nuclear disarmament negotiations under Article VI. The recent entry into force of the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons reveals the extent to which NNWS remain committed to the disarmament agenda.

In conjunction with diplomatic efforts to improve political relations between all nuclear-armed states — including by strengthening conventional arms control, pursuing military deconfliction, and remaining attentive to one another's core interests — reducing great powers' reliance on nuclear weapons will reduce one of the greatest threats to humanity. In support of U.N. Secretary-General António Guterres's *New Agenda for Peace and Our Common Agenda*, the following recommendations provide practical ways of supporting and implementing nuclear risk reduction and disarmament obligations before it is too late.

Proposal 6: Preventing the accidental use of nuclear weapons

The new risks presented by emerging technologies destabilize the deterrence landscape. The serious risks of accidental nuclear launch stemming from maintaining nuclear forces at the high levels of operational readiness familiar from Cold War nuclear postures are augmented today by new risks of cyberattacks on nuclear command and control systems. States should undertake several measures over the coming years in pursuit of nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation obligations and to enhance crisis stability, which could allow nuclear powers to "de-alert" existing nuclear forces without undermining deterrence in the interim or increasing incentives for a conventional war. Such steps would be in line with previous U.N. First Committee and General Assembly resolutions, most recently in 2020, to "decrease the operational readiness of nuclear weapons systems" — an effort supported by almost every state, including several nuclear-armed states party and not party to the NPT.[14]

> " *...states should take steps toward eliminating plans for short-notice preemptive nuclear strikes and launch-on-warning options from nuclear doctrines and postures as part of a significant de-alerting effort.*

- **De-alerting:** Alongside efforts to strengthen conventional arms control and improve political relations between great powers (including the measures proposed in other sections of this report), states should take steps toward eliminating plans for short-notice preemptive nuclear strikes and launch-on-warning options from nuclear doctrines and postures as part of a significant **de-alerting** effort. These steps can minimize the chance of military clashes among nuclear-armed states.

  o More ambitious de-alerting steps could include storing nuclear warheads separate from their missiles, disabling some missiles and launch systems, and placing warheads under civilian control. However, this would require a qualitative change of relations among great powers, a movement from relations based on deterrence to relations based on mutual trust, cooperation, and even partnership.

- **No cyberattacks on NC3:** NWS should jointly pledge to **avoid cyberattacks against other states' nuclear command and control systems**. Eventually, this should lead to an agreement prohibiting attacks on nuclear command and control systems via cyberspace or missile or drone strikes, including by conventional means.

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14 United Nations, "Decreasing the Operational Readiness of Nuclear Weapons Systems: Resolution/Adopted by the General Assembly," A/RES/75/72, Dec. 17, 2020. https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/3895585.

- **Evaluating AI risks:** Nuclear-armed states should initiate and forge a comprehensive framework, developed through collaborative and inclusive dialogues among NWS and NNWS, to **evaluate the risks of integrating AI into NC3 systems**. States should agree upon baseline definitions, norms, and unilateral declarations and actions, as well as confidence-building measures, with respect to the use of emerging technologies in NC3 systems. Such measures should lead to longer-term, more formal arms control and risk reduction arrangements.

> **"***...[nuclear weapon states] should each unilaterally declare that they will not place their NC3 systems under full command of AI.***"**

- **"Human in the loop":** Building on this integrated risk assessment of AI in nuclear command and control, NWS should each unilaterally declare that they will **not place their NC3 systems under full command of AI**.

  o NWS should share and clarify their definitions and understandings of keeping a human "in the loop," especially with respect to integrating higher-risk AI models into their NC3 systems, including cutting-edge deep-learning models.

Proposal 7: Preventing the deliberate use of nuclear weapons

The N5's Jan. 2022 statement that a "nuclear war cannot be won and must never be fought" was an important positive step.[15] The N5 should reaffirm this statement and build upon it with tangible risk reduction efforts and confidence-building measures to restore dialogue, with the goal of avoiding direct military clashes among NWS. This would allow them to reduce the role of nuclear weapons in their national security strategies.

- **No-first-use agreement:** As soon as possible, states should begin discussions on what a credible **multilateral no-first-use agreement** would look like and what initial reciprocal measures would be necessary to make such an agreement possible, considering the implications it may have for NWS allies. As part of this endeavor, NWS should renounce attempts to threaten one another's vital interests and those of allied states through non-nuclear wars and, so long as they retain possession of nuclear arsenals and this prior condition is respected, commit not to be the first to use nuclear weapons against another state.[16] They would also

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15 U.S. Mission to International Organizations in Geneva, "Joint Statement of the Leaders of the Five Nuclear-Weapon States on Preventing Nuclear War and Avoiding Arms Races," Jan. 3, 2022. https://geneva.usmission.gov/2022/01/03/p5-statement/.

16 Though U.S. leaders have vacillated in years past on a sole-purpose declaratory policy, the increasing U.S. desire to engage China in nuclear talks will require substantive consideration of this issue. Steve Andreasen, "Declaratory Policy: Advancing Sole Purpose", NTI Paper (June 2021). https://media.nti.org/documents/Declaratory_Policy_Advancing_Sole_Purpose_-_Andreasen_Excerpt.pdf; W. J. Hennigan, "The U.S. Has Received a Rare Invitation from China. There Is Only One Right Answer," The New York Times, April 15, 2024, https://www.nytimes.com/2024/04/15/opinion/china-nuclear-weapons.html.

promise not to threaten to use nuclear weapons against NNWS.

- o Such a declaratory policy should make clear that it is in the service of reducing the role of nuclear weapons within states' security strategies in compliance with all existing treaty obligations.

- **Recommitting to negative security assurances:** Nuclear-armed states should also recommit to — and expand upon — their existing commitments to eschew nuclear threats under unilateral negative security assurances, particularly with respect to nuclear-weapon-free zone treaties.

  - o States should also work toward a universal and legally binding instrument to assure NNWS, particularly those within nuclear-weapon-free zones, against the use or threat of use of nuclear weapons.

- **Arms reductions:** Building on risk reduction efforts, NWS should make strides to negotiate limits *and* reductions of nuclear and conventional arsenals.

- **Transparency:** As another interim risk reduction measure, NWS should commit to increased transparency regarding their existing nuclear capabilities, doctrines, and modernization plans. This could take place through the N5's ongoing dialogue on nuclear doctrines or through the draft reporting form offered by the Nonproliferation and Disarmament Initiative in 2012 and 2017.

- **Commitments:** The international community, particularly leading non-nuclear and non-aligned states, should pressure NWS to take the necessary measures that would allow them to:

  - o Not further increase their nuclear arsenals and develop clear plans for their reduction

  - o Not produce fissile material for nuclear weapons or other nuclear explosive devices

  - o Not design new weapons

  - o Not deploy nuclear weapons on their territory, another state's territory, or in outer space

  - o Not conduct nuclear tests

  - o Not threaten to use nuclear weapons

  - o A U.N. Security Council resolution should formalize these commitments.

Proposal 8: Revitalizing the global commitment to nuclear disarmament

The majority of U.N. member states have rejected nuclear weapons by joining the NPT as NNWS, creating nuclear-weapon-free zones and, most recently, by bringing into force the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons. More countries in Latin America, Africa, the Middle East, and Southeast Asia view nuclear deterrence as anathema to national security and inherently dangerous to humanity. The following measures should be pursued to build on this further:

- **Strengthening the NPT:** All NPT states should recommit to seeking the full and effective implementation of the Treaty, including its Article VI obligations on nuclear disarmament. Drawing on some of the suggestions put forth by civil society, NPT states should bolster and protect the base nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament commitments underpinning the NPT and commit to strengthening the NPT Review Process through procedural and substantive changes.[17]

Suggested measures to reduce the risk of nuclear war

PREVENTING ACCIDENTAL USE	PREVENTING DELIBERATE USE	REVITALIZING DISARMAMENT
Take steps towards **eliminating plans for short-notice preemptive nuclear strikes** and launch-on-warning options from nuclear doctrines, alongside efforts to strengthen conventional arms control and improve relations between great powers	Begin discussions on what a credible **multilateral no-first-use agreement** would look like and what conditions are required to achieve it	Recommit to **seeking full implementation of the NPT** and review the functioning of the U.N.'s nuclear disarmament machinery
Pledge to **eschew cyberattacks** against other states' nuclear command, control, and communication systems (NC3)	**Recommit to existing commitments** to eschew nuclear threats under unilateral negative security assurances	By way of a U.N. General Assembly resolution, mandate **a recurring study on the consequences of nuclear detonations** every 5–7 years
Forge a comprehensive framework to evaluate the **risks of integrating AI** into NC3 systems	Negotiate **limits and reductions of nuclear and conventional arsenals** and increase transparency regarding existing capabilities	

- **Revitalize the U.N. Disarmament Machinery:** In addition to strengthening and reforming the NPT Process, there is also a need to reform existing multilateral disarmament forums. Through a Special Session of the General Assembly devoted to Disarmament, states should take up a serious review of the functioning of nuclear disarmament machinery, including the Conference on Disarmament, the U.N. Disarmament Commission, and the First Committee on Disarmament

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17 Thomas Markram and Gaukhar Mukhatzhanova, "Further Strengthening the NPT ReviewProcess: Reflections and Recommendations," Vienna Center for Disarmament and Non-Proliferation (May 2023). https://vcdnp.org/further-strengthening-npt-review-process/.

and International Security, among others.[18] This review could include a review of the mandate and rules of procedure, including the role of the Presidency of the Conference on Disarmament, civil society participation, composition, and observers.

- **Effects and consequences of nuclear use:** Today, even more than in the Cold War, a major nuclear conflict could escalate from a single miscommunication or blunder and extend far beyond the immediate areas and the people initially impacted. In this context, we welcome the U.N. General Assembly's current efforts to renew study on the effects of nuclear use. To increase even further the international community's appreciation of the heightened risk of nuclear weapons use, as well as to increase scientific understanding of the comprehensive suite of the effects of nuclear exchanges of different sizes, we advise the General Assembly to **adopt a resolution that mandates a comprehensive study of the consequences of nuclear detonations** in the twenty-first century every five to seven years. This recurring study would incorporate the effects of blasts of various yields, radiation sickness, displacement, migration, effects on critical infrastructure and supply chains, and the risk of starvation and famine due to long-term effects on climate, agricultural production, and global food markets.[19] While such a study would not, on its own, correct the great powers' current perception that their core interests are at risk, it would nonetheless serve to revitalize popular and elite-level awareness of the stakes and risks of nuclear war in the twenty-first century.

18 The U.N. General Assembly has held three Special Sessions on Disarmament (SSOD). There was SSOD–I in 1978, SSOD–II in 1982, and SSOD–III in 1988. United Nations, "Special Sessions of the General Assembly Devoted to Disarmament," U.N. Office for Disarmament Affairs, https://archive-disarmament.unoda.org/topics/ssod/.

19 The idea of a study of this variety was first advanced in United Nations, "Report of the Scientific Advisory Group on the Status and Developments Regarding Nuclear Weapons, Nuclear Weapon Risks, the Humanitarian Consequences of Nuclear Weapons, Nuclear Disarmament, and Related Issues," U.N. Office for Disarmament Affairs, TPNW/MSP/2023/8, Oct. 27, 2023: 24. https://front.un-arm.org/publications/tpnw-sag-report.pdf.

VARIABLE 4:
ECONOMIC COERCION AND INTERNATIONAL SECURITY

Just as the international security order is under extreme stress in an increasingly post-unipolar world, so too, is the global economic order.

Support for and confidence in the neoliberal paradigm is collapsing globally, not least due to the forms of economic and political inequality it has engendered, along with growing calls for greater emphasis on sustainability and planetary well-being. Institutions such as the World Trade Organization, International Monetary Fund, and World Bank are facing crises of legitimacy, becoming victims of geopolitical tensions between great powers, or both. Moreover, political winds are pushing some states toward protectionism, disrupting trade and fueling geopolitical tensions. As the global security situation deteriorates, the international economic order becomes ever more "securitized."

> "*...few tools of economic statecraft have catalyzed tensions and fragmentation in the security sphere as much as the overuse of economic sanctions...*

Ideally, states should prevent geopolitics from holding the mutual benefits of trade and development hostage, seek new models of development compatible with countering climate change, and resolve to govern matters of trade, debt relief, and unilateral coercive measures through equitable multilateral institutions. The Better Order Project acknowledges the crucial nature of the task of reforming international financial institutions and the need to forge a global economic order that meets the needs of a profoundly changing world. Yet, while these remain of immense importance to the future of global order and justice, addressing issues of such magnitude lies beyond the remit of this project.

Therefore, we have chosen to focus this section of the report more narrowly on how to prevent the international *security* order from suffering further bifurcation as a result of a fracturing *economic* order, given the significant consequences for the future of multilateralism and international stability that such a development would have. And few tools of economic statecraft have catalyzed tensions and fragmentation in the security sphere as much as the overuse of economic sanctions — including, but not limited to, the extraterritorial application of economic coercion.

> *In a post-unipolar world, states will need to develop mechanisms to regulate the use of economic sanctions...*

The use of economic sanctions has grown significantly over the past decades and is likely to become more common in the future, as emerging powers find their use increasingly tempting and emulate the actions of established powers. Though sanctions tend to be viewed as a humane alternative to war, they can have devastating humanitarian consequences, often bringing considerable harm to populations. For instance, the long-term imposition of crippling economic sanctions has at times damaged the very fabric of societies and increased the risk of state collapse, with all of its destabilizing implications.

Yet, despite their impact on the security order and the near-exponential growth of their usage, norms and laws regulating economic sanctions remain next to nonexistent.

In a post-unipolar world, states will need to develop mechanisms to regulate the use of economic sanctions, limit their detrimental impact on civilian populations, and reduce the risk of sanctions contributing to bifurcated economic and security orders. In part, these can include principles drawn from IHL. We advance several proposals that can help manage the use of economic coercion, given that the growing use of these measures risks making an intensifying security competition even more difficult to control.

Our proposals do not seek to outlaw non–U.N. sanctions but rather determine their legality and regulate their use. While those states that regularly employ some of these instruments of economic coercion will likely not favor regulation today, we predict that they will develop an interest in avoiding a negative-sum economic and security dynamic once a larger number of states begin to employ these tools more regularly in a post-unipolar world.

Proposal 9: An ICJ advisory opinion

We propose that the U.N. General Assembly pass a resolution requesting that the International Court of Justice (ICJ) provide its perspective on the legality of various unilateral coercive measures by way of an advisory opinion.

In particular, the ICJ should weigh in on two specific disputed areas of law with respect to unilateral sanctions: whether secondary sanctions are lawful and whether the manner in which U.S. financial sanctions are currently applied represents an application of domestic U.S. law or falls under the category of extraterritorial sanctions.

International treaty law is largely silent on these questions. States and scholars have fallen into three broad segments: the first rejects any sanctions imposed by any authority other than the U.N. Security Council; the second, embraced by the largest

camp of the international community, holds that unilateral sanctions may be lawful in some circumstances but that extraterritorial application of these sanctions goes too far; and the third finds unilateral sanctions, including secondary sanctions, generally permissible.

The United States, for example, does not view its use of financial sanctions as extraterritorial but instead as an application of domestic U.S. law, since all transactions in the U.S. dollar transit through U.S. territory, where U.S. jurisdiction holds. This renders most global financial transactions a matter of domestic U.S. law due to the centrality of the U.S. dollar in the global financial clearing system. Other states reject this interpretation and hold that these sanctions are unlawful extraterritorial applications of U.S. law.

> *...the ICJ should weigh in on two specific disputed areas of law with respect to unilateral sanctions: whether secondary sanctions are lawful and whether the manner in which U.S. financial sanctions are currently applied represents an application of domestic U.S. law or falls under the category of extraterritorial sanctions.*

An ICJ advisory opinion would also clarify the legal obligation of states with respect to the effects of unilateral coercive measures in international law. Notably, the current U.N. Special Rapporteur on Unilateral Coercive Measures has requested such a clarification.

An ICJ advisory opinion would be more likely to provide a rallying point for political leaders and citizens to push for a reduction in excessive economic measures rather than end the practice of secondary sanctions overnight. Still, if the Court decides the economic measures in question are incompatible with international law, states could begin negotiations toward a comprehensive ban on the use of secondary sanctions through a multilateral treaty or global agreement in which states would agree neither to issue nor comply with such sanctions.

If the ICJ determines that secondary sanctions are lawful — or that secondary sanctions are unlawful but that U.S. financial sanctions do not fall under this category — this would legitimize a significant body of existing U.S. sanctions. In this case, the need for mechanisms *regulating* rather than banning extraterritorial and financial sanctions would become even more critical as their usage would likely increase, including potentially by states who currently only resort to measures of primary rather than secondary coercion. Several such mechanisms, which should be pursued irrespective of how the ICJ rules since they deal not only with secondary sanctions, are proposed below. Proposals 10 and 11 offer a top-down approach; Proposal 12 suggests an alternative bottom-up approach.

Proposal 10: Risk reduction and de-escalation

We propose the establishment of a plurilateral forum for states to pursue near-term risk reduction efforts regarding all forms of coercive economic measures to build the necessary guardrails to mitigate the worst risks to the global economy and

> *Without seeking to place economic statecraft under the remit of IHL, international humanitarian legal principles can provide an analytical framework to set best practices.*

international security. The purpose would not be to outlaw all forms of sanctions but, rather, to agree on limits that can reduce their impact on civilians and the fabric of the international security order. A rejuvenated and functional World Trade Organization would be the natural home for such discussions to take place. However, U.N. member states could forge a new Convention on the Employment of Economic Statecraft as an alternative plan.

States should address the dangers of securitizing aspects of the global economy and mutual perceptions of risk related to economic coercion.

- **Crisis monitoring and communications:** States should establish crisis monitoring and communications systems to convey intent and aims and to avoid misapprehension and accidental escalation through tit-for-tat unilateral measures.

- **Definition establishment:** States should also establish shared and, eventually, legal definitions of key terms, including "economic coercion," "unilateral sanctions," and "extraterritorial sanctions," which currently do not enjoy widespread agreement. States should also develop processes for establishing such definitions at a more inclusive forum, such as the U.N. General Assembly.

- **Shared norms:** The process of finding shared definitions would help provide the foundation required to discuss and agree upon norms to describe responsible behavior regarding economic statecraft.

Other topics that the plurilateral forum should address include the challenges of categorizing dual-use technologies, the economic consequences associated with overcompliance with sanctions, and the areas in which sanctions should not be applied.

Proposal 11: Norms and best practices

As the basis for a future set of legally binding principles and as part of the process outlined in Proposal 10, states should also agree on a set of norms and best practices to govern the use of economic statecraft as a general category of inter-state relations. Without seeking to place economic statecraft under the remit of IHL, international humanitarian legal principles can provide an analytical framework to set best practices. Processes for transparency and information sharing, means-end proportionality requirements (a basic feature of most international law regimes), and obligations to minimize harm to civilians and third parties are some of the IHL principles that could guide this work.

Creating norms of distinction and proportionality in unilateral economic statecraft would also allow states to properly characterize their concerns and provide information about their perceived threats through the crisis monitoring and communications systems outlined in Proposal 2. These norms should be assessed using an effects-based test rather than simply looking at the intent of the sanctioning state, which means considering all the foreseeable impacts from the imposition of sanctions, including issues related to overcompliance by the private sector.

> **"***...states should seek to limit measures that disrupt basic financial services, access to medicine, or global food supply chains.***

Best practices should also include obligations to actively avoid certain harms, as well as an obligation to assess harms caused over time:

- Per the Additional Protocols to the Geneva Conventions (1977) and customary IHL, states shall not destroy objects "indispensable to the survival of the civilian population." In the parallel situation of economic sanctions, states should seek to limit measures that disrupt basic financial services, access to medicine, or global food supply chains.

- Given that starvation of civilians is understood as prohibited under IHL per the Additional Protocols to the Geneva Conventions and under customary law, states should craft norms prohibiting the use of economic sanctions that result in starvation of civilian populations.

- Currently, the International Law Commission has agreed to a standard where the "purpose" of sanctions can justify their disproportionate use. Temporality, another way to determine proportionality, is often interpreted as "until the target changes behavior." New best practices, by contrast, should include an expectation for requiring regular, periodic review and a reconsideration of unilateral measures.

Best practices should also be based on precedents from international human rights law.

- Economic coercion can violate international human rights law if states fail to protect the right to life and provide minimum economic, social, and cultural rights. States should design collective processes to investigate whether general blockades or comprehensive embargoes rise to the level of generating deprivation that violates the the U.N. Charter or the International Covenants on Civil and Political Rights and on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights. States should also investigate how this view could be brought to U.N. bodies, including by limiting civilian access to clean water, sanitation, food, and medicine.

Proposal 12: Bilateral U.S.–China agreement

If the multilateral top-down negotiation process described above proves too complex and cumbersome, a more bottom-up process in which leading actors begin the process of forging new patterns of interaction on their own should be considered. Even tentative steps can set a precedent that other states may feel inclined to emulate.

> " *...we propose that the United States and China begin negotiating a bilateral 'arms control–style' agreement limiting the use of several unilateral instruments of economic coercion...*

As part of the intensification of the trade conflict between China and the United States, Washington has waged a tariff war against Beijing, tightened financial and technological restrictions, and imposed sanctions on Chinese entities. In response, China has sharply increased its adoption of unilateral measures, including asset freezes, visa restrictions, export and import controls, and bans on cooperation with U.S. entities. China has also adopted new legal frameworks modeled from and responding to U.S. sanctions, notably the Anti–Foreign Sanctions Law (2021) and the Unreliable Entity List (2019). Concurrently, the strained relationship between the United States and China has also weakened institutions like the World Trade Organization, with the United States notably blocking appointments to the organization's Appellate Body.

A prolonged U.S–China economic standoff would have profound consequences for the multilateral trade order, the global economy, and the international security order — including the world's ability to manage both traditional and transnational security challenges. Therefore, we propose that the United States and China begin negotiating a bilateral "arms control–style" agreement limiting the use of several unilateral instruments of economic coercion, including extraterritorial sanctions. This could serve as one example of the types of frameworks and principles that might eventually apply equally to all states. Such an agreement could take existing export controls and intellectual property restrictions as a starting point and, from there, broaden it to include general principles to govern the use of unilateral sanctions outside the U.S– China relationship.

Like the arms control agreements of the Cold War, this initiative may only become feasible after both the United States and China have become convinced that unregulated economic competition, aided by punitive measures, cannot be unambiguously "won" by either side and puts both powers in a lose-lose situation. But since the unregulated usage of punitive economic measures would be destructive not only to the great powers but also to the global economy and the international security order writ large in a post-unipolar world, this should incentivize the great powers to consider agreed-upon norms and principles for economic statecraft as a preventive measure rather than as a remedy.

CATEGORY II:

TRANSNATIONAL AND PLANETARY THREATS

VARIABLE 5: CLIMATE, PEACE, AND SECURITY
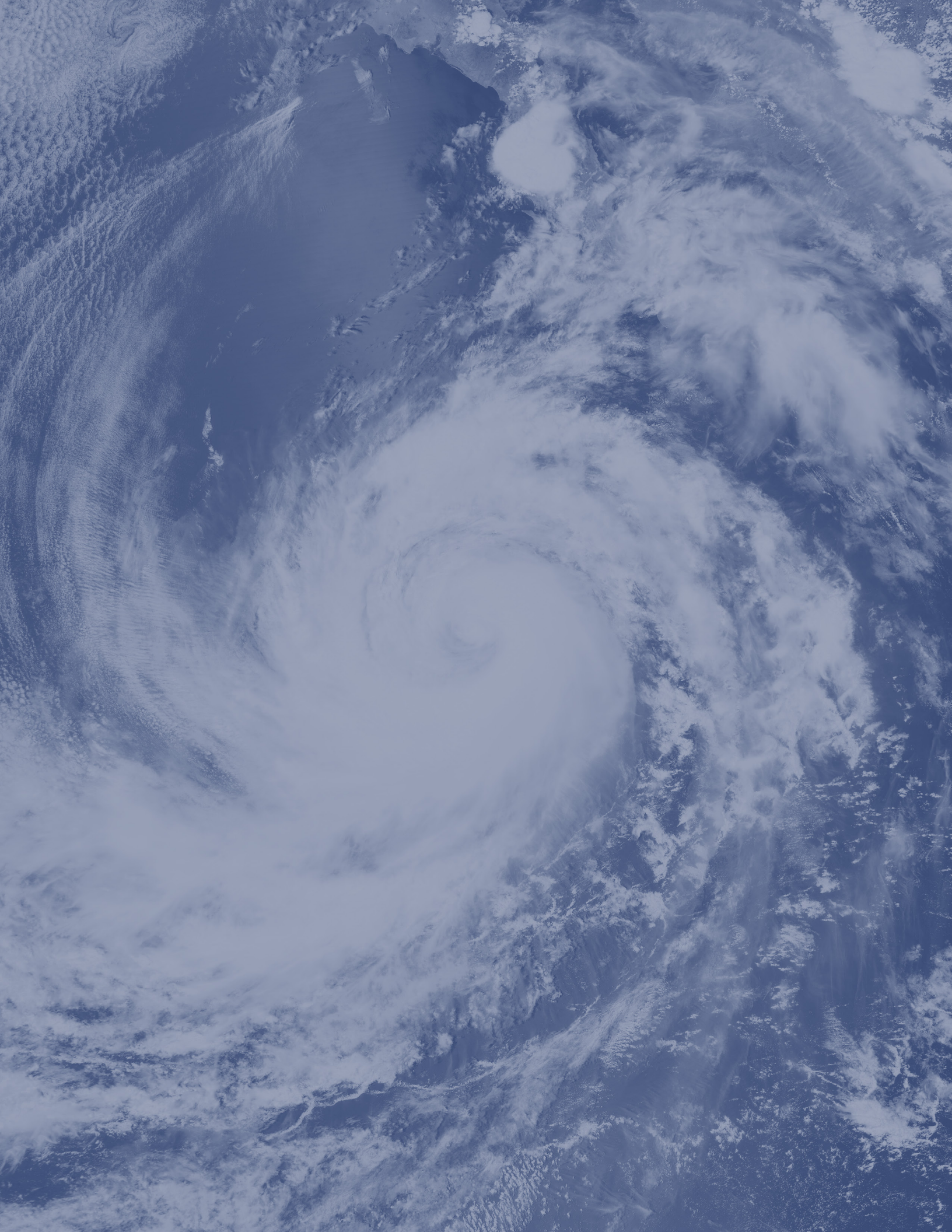 Proposal 13: Bridging the global divide on climate security
  Proposal 14: A solutions-oriented "P20"
  Proposal 15: A new compact for Small Island Developing States
  Proposal 16: Strengthening regional leadership
VARIABLE 6: ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE AND CYBER
  Proposal 17: An AI emergency first response force

VARIABLE 5:
CLIMATE, PEACE, AND SECURITY

Climate change is a vast and complex issue that permeates virtually every aspect of human society, including international politics. It is among the most urgent tasks humanity confronts in our era. A comprehensive response to climate change must aim for profound and transformative reform of global political, economic, social, and normative spaces. It must address mitigation, adaptation, technology, finance, and our ideas of consumption and equality.

Due to the Better Order Project's security focus and internal expertise, this report is centered on how climate change will affect international security and, in that context, which substantive policy approaches are achievable and practical.

However, this focus and the proposals below by no means negate our view that the international community must address all dimensions of the climate question if we are to achieve a better and more sustainably prosperous world. These include the importance of climate change as a matter of collective responsibility with the Common But Differentiated Responsibilities principle at its core.[20] The distressing reality is that the Paris Agreement commitments on climate finance, technology transfer, and emission reductions remain far from being met. These failures have increased the likelihood of greater warming and its potential security impacts.

The term "climate security" traditionally covers the linkages between climate and conflict. However, many have also expanded the definition to include human security. While this report does address human security, the focus is mostly on risks of conflict and existential threats to states.

Climate security is a contentious area in the global order, as U.N. Security Council debates have revealed.[21] A key resolution on the topic failed at the Security Council in 2021, with Russia and India voting against it and China abstaining.[22]

The European Union tends to lead in the push for securitizing climate change, with the United States supporting or opposing this approach depending on the party in power in Washington. Russia and China have historically opposed or been skeptical of a "climate security" framework, as have India and more than 80 Global South states. Opponents most often object to securitization because they see climate change as

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20 The principle, enshrined in the U.N. Framework Convention on Climate Change, notes that all states should work to solve the climate change problem, but their responsibility to do so is not equal. Rather this responsibility is differentiated — i.e., dependent on their respective contributions to creating the problem, capabilities they can bring to bear, and their social and economic conditions.

21 United Nations, "Security Council Open Debate on Climate and Security," U.N. Climate Action, Sept. 23, 2021, https://www.un.org/en/climatechange/security-council-open-debate-climate-and-security-0.

22 United Nations, S/2021/990, U.N. Security Council, Dec. 13, 2021, https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BFCF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/s_2021_990.pdf.

> **"** *...as the global mean temperature continues to rise and climate-related disasters multiply, there is likely to be growing worldwide acceptance of the links between climate and security...*

being related predominantly to development — they wish to maintain the centrality of the U.N. Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), question links between climate and conflict, and worry that Western states might use climate change as a pretext for Responsibility to Protect–type coerced interventions.[23] However, other Global South states, such as SIDS countries and highly vulnerable states, have mostly supported the securitization of climate change and its appropriateness at the U.N. Security Council.

Research on climate security is evolving, but it is clear that climate change and security are linked in highly complex ways. There is no simplistic causation between intensifying climate change and greater conflict. But climate change impacts security (and vice versa) through critical intervening variables such as preexisting social cohesion, state capacity, and regional dynamics, which are crucial in the impacts of climate-magnified factors such as resource scarcity, mass migration, and natural disasters.[24]

Going forward, major divides may persist on finance, technology transfer, and the phasing out of fossil fuels, with some wealthier states and oil producers likely to be the most recalcitrant. However, as the global mean temperature continues to rise and climate-related disasters multiply, there is likely to be growing worldwide acceptance of the links between climate and security, even if some states remain wary of oversecuritizing the issue. This may lead all sides to accept the necessity of compromise and collaboration on the most urgent aspects of this nexus.

The following proposals envision substantial yet achievable advances in tackling climate, peace, and security.

Proposal 13: Bridging the global divide on climate security

This proposal charts a new path that resolves the United Nations' climate security divide.

- Halt attempts to pass a U.N. Security Council resolution on the topic, noting the deadlock on the climate security question at the UNSC and the fundamental divides that characterize the debate.

- Adopt a new U.N. General Assembly resolution with the following elements, noting that the GA already has a history of taking on the broader topic of climate change,

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23 Sarang Shidore, "Climate Change Resolution Fails to Pass UN Security Council," The National Interest, Jan. 6, 2022, https://nationalinterest.org/blog/buzz/climate-change-resolution-fails-pass-un-security-council-199105.

24 Joshua W. Busby, States and Nature: The Effects of Climate Change on Security (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022). https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108957922.

including a request for an advisory opinion from the ICJ and defining access to a clean, healthy, and sustainable environment as a universal human right:[25]

a. Affirm the centrality of the UNFCCC in international climate negotiations and that the principle of Common But Differentiated Responsibilities should remain the basis of such negotiations. Reaffirm the goals of the Paris Agreement and subsequent international climate agreements.

b. Recognize that scientific evidence points to complex and contingent linkages between climate and security. Intervening variables such as institutions and social cohesion play a critical role.

c. Emphasize that meeting international commitments on finance, technology transfer, and decarbonization is the best way to avoid negative climate security outcomes and that a much greater focus on adaptation is a critical part of this effort.

d. Reject any external military intervention in the internal affairs of states using climate change or climate security as a justification.

Proposal 14: A solutions-oriented "P20"

We propose the creation of a new informal grouping, the Planetary 20 (P20), to focus on climate security while balancing efficacy and higher ambition. It may also take on other issues in the climate area while retaining a focus on climate security.

This proposal recognizes the UNFCCC as the core negotiating forum but enables speedier action by a subset of states on climate security with the P20, convened under U.N. auspices. Just as the G20 transformed into a leaders' summit during the global financial crisis of 2008, the P20 will be a leaders-driven body with an annual summit commensurate with the existential nature of the climate crisis. The grouping aims for deep engagement, consensus-building, and coordination in an informal format, leading to problem-solving rather than formations of divisive blocs or "clubs."

The composition of this new body must reflect the states that are most critical to solving the challenge of climate change while also being inclusive. Thus, the P20 must include great and middle powers, major historical and current emitters, vulnerable states, innovation hubs, and small island states.

The P20 should include the following sets of states:

a. **The five current permanent members** of the U.N. Security Council

b. Germany, as the host of the UNFCCC, and being, historically and currently, a major climate and renewables player from the **Global North**

c. **The five biggest global greenhouse gas emitters** not included in (a), currently India, Japan, Brazil, Indonesia, and Iran

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25 United Nations, "The Human Right to a Clean, Healthy, and Sustainable Environment: Draft Resolution/Adopted by the General Assembly," A/RES/76/300, July 26, 2022, https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/3983329.

d. **Two major oil and gas producers** that are not included in any other category (e.g., Saudi Arabia, Canada, Iraq, Algeria, and others)

e. **Five highly climate-vulnerable states** to be selected from and by the existing Vulnerable 20 (V20) grouping of such states

f. **Two Small Island Developing States** that are not included in any other category

g. One small state that is an **innovation or finance hub** and not included in any other category (e.g., United Arab Emirates and Singapore)

h. One state critical to **land use or deforestation** that is not included in any other category (e.g., Democratic Republic of Congo)

i. Under no circumstances should the body have fewer than two members each from Africa and Latin America.

j. If the body is to discuss a specific state or regional body, it should ensure that this state or regional body is invited and participates in these deliberations.

P20 composition

Next five biggest global greenhouse gas emitters

India
Japan
Brazil
Indonesia
Iran

Established powers

China
France
Russia
UK
USA
Germany

Two major oil & gas producers

Five highly climate-vulnerable states

Two Small Island Developing States

One small innovation or finance hub state

One state crucial to land use or deforestation
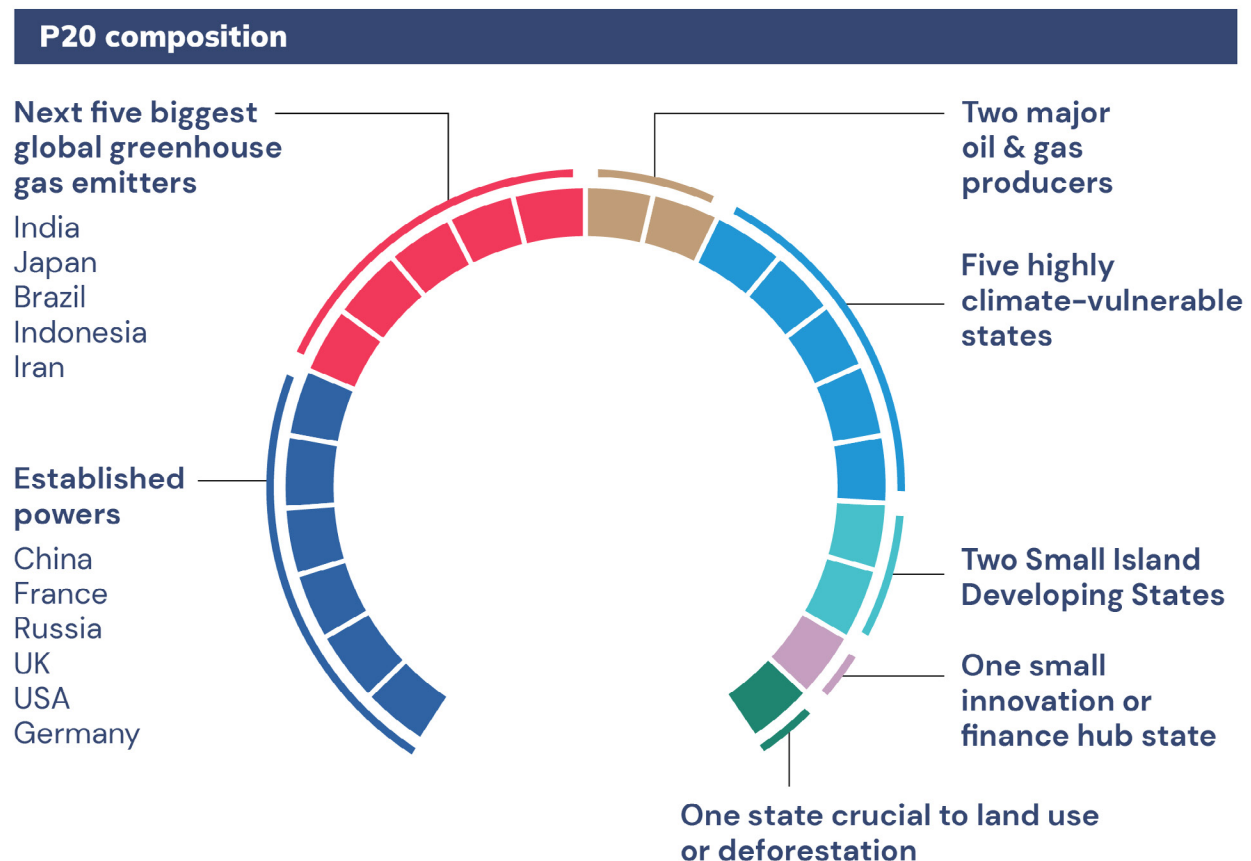
The P20 will be an informal body similar to the current G20 (i.e., without a permanent secretariat and staff), governed each year by a troika of the presidencies of the current, past, and next year. Such a structure has the advantages of a collegial

give-and-take and may be less vulnerable to domestic politics. It is designed to be the first stop for problem-solving on climate, peace, and security, with its informal structure as a major advantage for achieving needed compromises. If and when the informal agreements and understandings it reaches on a specific problem gain wider consensus, long-term commitment, and are ready to be formalized (a desirable outcome), the U.N. Peacebuilding Commission (see Proposal 2 on U.N. Security Council Reform) and, ultimately, the U.N. General Assembly would be the logical bodies for this to take place.

Proposal 15: A new compact for Small Island Developing States

This proposal addresses perhaps the most existential climate security issue; the near-uninhabitability or disappearance of entire states and the consequent displacement of their inhabitants, unquestionably relevant to Small Island Developing States. This group comprises 39 states with a total population of 68 million, with about 30 percent living at altitudes less than five meters above sea level. (This proposal does not address the issue of potential major migration from larger states, largely due to the major scientific uncertainties over the extent, geographies, and timelines of such migration and the low likelihood of achievable consensus among key states in the near future — a key factor for formulating proposals for this project.)

The 1951 Refugee Convention does not apply to environment or climate-displaced persons. There are nonbinding declarations and regional conventions, such as the Cartagena (1984) and Brazil (2014) Declarations. The latter opens the door for the recognition of climate-displaced persons as entitled to protection. However, these regional initiatives do not represent a global consensus or norm.

Climate-displaced persons — the large majority of whom thus far have migrated domestically — are not, in and of themselves, a threat. However, the international community must prepare for undesirable scenarios related to climate change, which pose the clearest existential threat to SIDS.

Accordingly, the international community should pioneer a global compact within the next 10–15 years on long-term "climate visas" for the resettlement of some SIDS residents, to be operationalized in a phased manner in the second half of this century. The focus should be on residents of SIDS that have also been classified as the Least Developed Countries by the United Nations. These are currently Comoros, Guinea–Bissau, Haiti, Kiribati, São Tomé and Príncipe, Solomon Islands, Timor–Leste, and Tuvalu.

- The granting of such visas should not be linked to extraneous conditions, such as concessions by these states on prohibiting or enabling military partnerships, alliances, access agreements, or basing rights as a part of regional or great power rivalries. Nor should it entail states giving up economic rights, including sovereignty over their exclusive economic zones (EEZs).

- For SIDS that could completely disappear by the end of this century, their EEZ revenue must remain accessible to their citizens and their descendants through an international agreement facilitated by the P20. International law is still evolving on questions such as how to administer revenue from these EEZs and how these states might continue to retain international personality through continuing citizenship of their climate-displaced citizens. The International Law Commission is engaged in developing detailed proposals on this topic. The P20, with the affected states invited, could serve as a venue for addressing these questions from a political standpoint.

Proposal 16: Strengthening regional leadership

This proposal aims to strike a balance between two constraints. The first is the strong opposition within wealthy states to major transfers of wealth to the Global South and the lack of leverage by the latter to achieve this goal. The second is the urgent need for the most climate-vulnerable states to preserve core aspects of their viability and security, for which a certain level of external financial support is essential. The proposal resolves this tension by identifying lower-cost approaches that still significantly strengthen climate resilience in the most vulnerable regions of the world.[26]

Recognizing that climate's impacts on human security — and potentially on state stability — transcend borders, the P20 should propose a special allocation to an existing climate fund or channel (beyond the finances already committed through the New Collective Quantified Goal currently on the Conference of the Parties' agenda). This additional funding should be dedicated to empowering vital regional organizations in the most climate-vulnerable regions and aimed at strengthening and capacity-building in activities such as installing early warning systems and providing humanitarian assistance and disaster relief.[27] The principle would be for regional bodies to increasingly take the lead on climate security challenges — a version of "collective responsibility." These organizations include, but are not limited to, BIMSTEC (South/Southeast Asia), CARICOM (the Caribbean), ECOWAS (West Africa), IGAD (East Africa), PIF (the Pacific), and SICA (Central America). The new Middle Eastern regional security organization proposed in this report should assume responsibility for addressing climate security in the Middle East and North Africa.

The allocation should increase the funding levels for these organizations tenfold or more. Current annual budgets are typically in the low hundreds of millions of dollars for many of these organizations, so the required total expenditure for a quantum leap in their capacities would likely be in the range of $15 billion to $20 billion USD.

Funding should be principally furnished by the states in the Global North and China,

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26 The recommendations in this proposal should not detract from the more significant efforts needed to achieve international goals and commitments on climate finance, which are critical to overcoming the climate crisis.

27 We assume that the U.N. system and international financial institutions will adopt the Multidimensional Vulnerability Index rather than per capita gross domestic product for assessing lending and development assistance needs.

though Global South middle powers with capability should also be encouraged to contribute. The international community should also explore additional innovative global sources of financing. The appropriate fund to house and disburse this contribution can be decided in due course. Still, the Green Climate Fund, Adaptation Fund, Loss and Damage Fund, and regional multilateral banks (such as the Inter–American Development Bank) might be the strongest candidates.
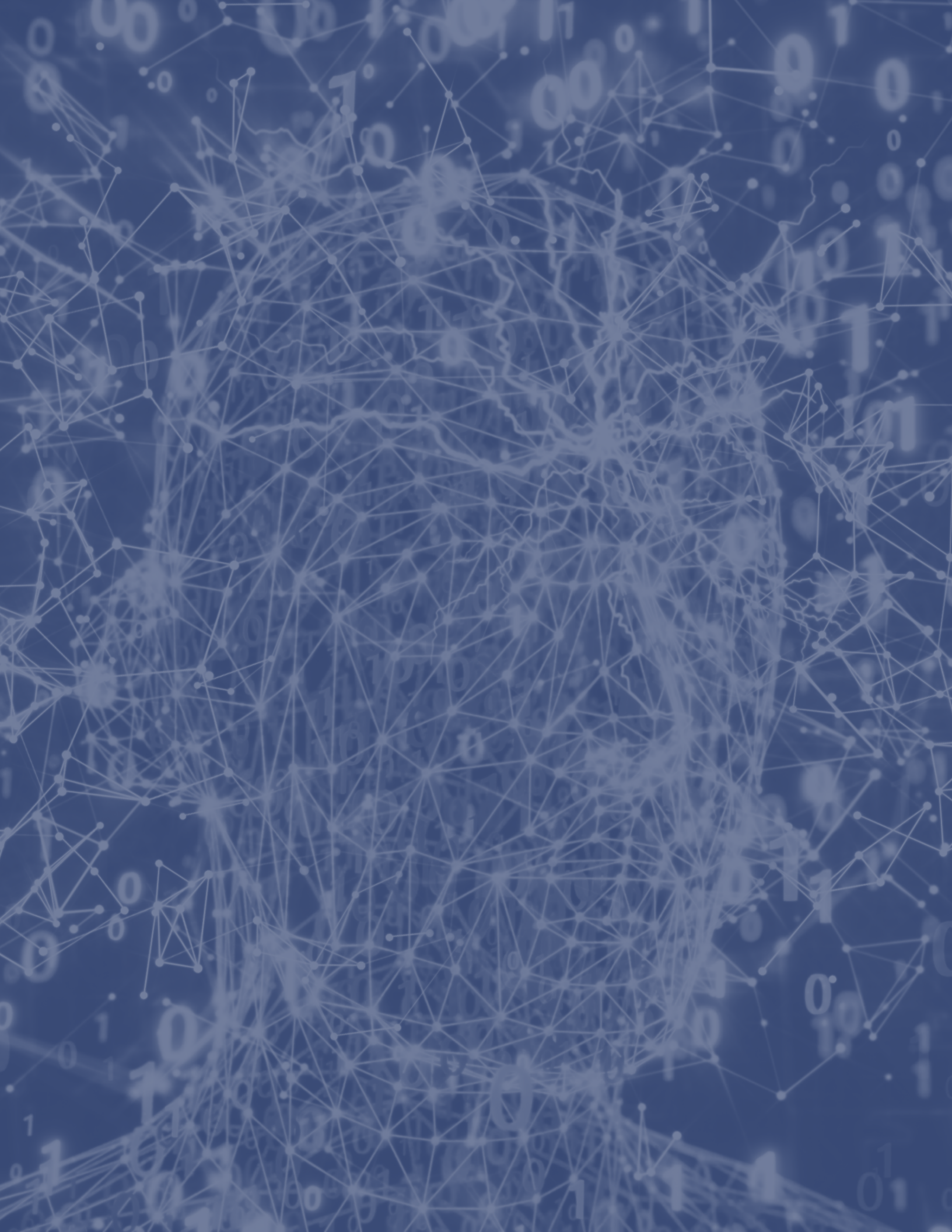
VARIABLE 6:
ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE AND CYBER

AI systems will become more powerful, versatile, and widespread in the near future, placing increasing pressure on the foundations of economic, social, and political systems globally. Cooperative institutions that regulate and manage AI, particularly at the international level, will struggle to keep pace with this rapid rate of change, hindered by geopolitical divisions and the fact that most AI innovation occurs among private actors rather than national governments. These challenges will require the international community to consider new approaches to the international governance of AI. This proposal seeks to respond to gaps in global AI regulation and safety, particularly the dangers posed by a rogue generative AI that has substantial decision-making authority and eludes built-in controls and regulation at the national and international levels. More specifically, we propose a backstop in case safeguards designed to prevent an AI crisis fail.

There is widespread concern about AI's future development.[28] Some have warned of the technology's capacity to surpass the intelligence of humans within just a few years, with the possibility that, in an extreme worst-case scenario, AI's development leads to the extinction of the human race. At the international level, experts and policymakers worry that AI could significantly worsen geopolitical divisions and the ability to resolve transnational challenges. Militarily, analysts fear the deployment of AI in new weapon systems, including drones and other autonomous weapons, lessening human control and potentially weakening the barrier to killing. This is particularly so in the case of nuclear command and control. Some have advocated increasing the use of AI in nuclear weapons, which they argue would make accidental use less likely than under human supervision. Others, however, including many warfare ethicists, are dismayed by the prospect that a nuclear war could start without human decision-makers "in the loop." These critics argue that the inclusion of AI in nuclear command and control may make accidental use even more likely, given the speed with which AI would make decisions.

Others in the AI community are more optimistic about the future development of the technology and its possible effects. For some, this is because they believe the

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28 The AI concerns addressed in this report primarily reflect the discussions in the technology capitals of developed countries, particularly the United States and in Europe. While states in the Global South tend to share those concerns, other questions — including, for instance, AI's environmental impact — are more central. This divide is likely to increase over time

technology is not innovating as quickly as was initially feared and may not make additional significant breakthroughs. Others believe it is possible to build controls in AI itself that will prevent the technology from causing serious harm. This debate will not be settled any time soon. What is clear, however, is that the future risk of AI is significant enough to warrant efforts to ensure its safe development. It would be irresponsible to do nothing *in the hope* that things take care of themselves.

The concern over AI has generated multiple and diverse efforts to provide some ground rules to this burgeoning but essentially unregulated field. These regulatory efforts, which fall into one of three categories, are not mutually exclusive but overlap and are potentially reinforcing:

- **Ethical and normative frameworks** to guide the research, development, deployment, and use of AI, since those that currently exist are voluntary or rely on self-policing

- **National or regional regulations** or laws related to AI

- **International AI governance**, including the formation of new institutions and international standards put forth by existing institutions, including the U.N. and the Group of Seven (G7).

This first category primarily concerns issues surrounding copyright, privacy, and bias related to gender, race, sexual orientation, and ability. However, some of the initiatives are intended to address general AI safety. More than 100 sets of principles have been developed at the time of this writing, including the guiding principles in the U.N. AI Advisory Body Interim Report. The report calls for AI to be governed "inclusively, for the benefit of all," in the "public interest," and to be "universal, networked, and rooted in adaptive multi-stakeholder collaboration."[29] In the United States, the Biden administration's Executive Order 14110 included voluntary commitments from leading AI companies, including the development of "safe and secure" AI, promoting "responsible innovation," and AI that protects civil rights and workers.[30] While important, these efforts are insufficient and require additional compulsory standards.

The second category of AI management refers to actual laws and regulations at the national or regional level. The leading example is the E.U. AI Act — a E.U.–wide regulatory framework that governs AI according to the level of risk it poses.[31] It is the first set of regulations of its kind. However, the E.U. AI Act does not regulate all AI, leaving AI used for military, national security, and research purposes unaddressed.

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29 U.N. AI Advisory Body, Interim Report: Governing AI for Humanity (New York: United Nations, 2023). https://www.un.org/sites/un2.un.org/files/ai_advisory_body_interim_report.pdf.

30 Government of the United States, "Remarks by President Biden and Vice President Harris on the Administration's Commitment to Advancing the Safe, Secure, and Trustworthy Development and Use of Artificial Intelligence," The White House, Oct. 30, 2023, https://bidenwhitehouse.archives.gov/briefing-room/speeches-remarks/2023/10/30/remarks-by-president-biden-and-vice-president-harris-on-the-administrations-commitment-to-advancing-the-safe-secure-and-trustworthy-development-and-use-of-artificial-intelligence/.

31 European Union, "Regulation (EU) 2024/1689 of the European Parliament and of the Council," June 13, 2024, http://data.europa.eu/eli/reg/2024/1689/oj.

Part of the regulatory challenge that AI poses is its inherent dual-use nature. Once released, AI models can essentially be fit for any purpose; there are no fundamental limitations or distinctions that one would find in other technologies. As such, many international bodies are attempting to develop more holistic AI regulations with new institutions to manage them. The U.N. AI Advisory Body, for example, is working to coordinate global AI governance and has members from various governments, civil society, and major private organizations. Additionally, within the U.N. Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the Global AI Ethics Governance Observatory maintains the mandate to "provide a global resource for policymakers, regulators, academics, the private sector and civil society to find solutions to the most pressing challenges posed by Artificial Intelligence."[32] Former British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak has proposed a "CERN for AI," which would attempt to regulate AI much as the European Organization for Nuclear Research does for international particle physics.[33] Similarly, numerous experts have called for an artificial intelligence International Atomic Energy Agency — referencing the international body that governs the use of nuclear technology.[34]

These bodies and their proposed regulations are numerous and multifaceted. Their efforts, which mainly aim to prevent the malicious use of AI and any international challenges that could result, are vital. However, prevention is not foolproof. Regulatory gaps exist and will likely always exist for three reasons.

> *Preventative efforts rely on our limited anticipation of what we think the future of AI will be, suggesting that we need to develop the means to counter forms and conduct of AI that we cannot presently anticipate.*

First, geopolitical divisions may prevent the cooperation necessary to reach robust international agreements. Second, AI is predominantly developed and controlled by private actors as opposed to national governments. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, there is the risk that AI evolves so quickly — on its own, outside of human control, and in ways that we cannot anticipate — that regulations and countermeasures will not be able to keep pace. Preventative efforts rely on our limited anticipation of what we think the future of AI will be, suggesting that we need to develop the means to counter forms and conduct of AI that we cannot presently anticipate.

It is necessary, therefore, to combine robust preventative efforts with a backstop or fail-safe that can act in the event of an AI crisis that preventive and regulatory

32 United Nations, "Ethics of Artificial Intelligence," UNESCO, https://www.unesco.org/en/artificial-intelligence/recommendation-ethics.

33 Laurie Clarke, Annabelle Dickson, and Cristina Gallardo, "Rishi Sunak Wants to Lead the World on AI. The World Ain't Listening," *Politico*, June 5, 2023, https://www.politico.eu/article/rishi-sunak-ai-technology-wants-to-lead-the-world-on-ai-the-world-aint-listening/.

34 Ian J. Stewart, "Why the IAEA Model May Not Be Best for Regulating Artificial Intelligence," Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists, June 9, 2023, https://thebulletin.org/2023/06/why-the-iaea-model-may-not-be-best-for-regulating-artificial-intelligence/.

measures fail to stop. Specifically, we seek to complement the aforementioned processes with an organization that addresses the risks of a rogue, nonhuman-directed AI.

Proposal 17: An AI emergency first response force

We propose the establishment of an international organization that serves as an emergency first response force for global AI threats and emergencies that no single country could adequately respond to alone. The new organization should be inclusive and responsive to the states forming its membership and be independent of other international organizations. It would, however, require the partnership, cooperation, and coordination of numerous intelligence organizations, law enforcement agencies, private companies, universities, technical and scientific institutes as well as the governments of the organization's member states.

This organization combines a focus on prevention and response; its AI first responders would have three core divisions: (I) monitoring, detection, and prevention, (II) emergency preparedness, and (III) threat response and coordination. These organizational divisions would operate in unison despite their distinct objectives and areas of focus. This organization could be conceived of as the tip of the spear for global AI emergency response.

Division I: *Monitoring, detection, and prevention*

This first division of this organization would serve primarily as a monitoring and detection watchdog for global AI threats and emergencies — the world's AI eyes and ears. The ambition is to build a successful early warning system for developing AI threats and emergencies that this organization could initially deliver to private organizations, law enforcement, and governments in the hope that — with enough warning — those entities could neutralize or mitigate threats on their own. If this prevention effort through early warning does not work, however, this organization would stand ready to coordinate a response with relevant entities or step in and respond itself (the purpose of Division III). Division I would also include two other teams: (1) a team dedicated to researching the detection of *future* rogue AI threats and the best counterresponse to them and (2) a research and development team that builds its own AI tools to combat rogue and malicious AI.

Division II: *Emergency preparedness*

The second division of this organization would focus on preparing all relevant entities to respond to AI threats and emergencies. This division would conduct emergency preparedness exercises, run simulations, and offer best practices to those entities that can neutralize an emerging AI threat or respond after that threat has materialized and potentially deployed.

This division's objective would be to ensure that, to the best of its ability, individuals and entities are not responding to threats and emergencies for the first time.

Emergency response and coordination plans would be in place to help guide actors in the event of a crisis. This division of the organization would focus on prevention via preparation, guided by the belief that, for frontline actors, anticipation beats reaction.[35]

> "*We propose the establishment of an international organization that serves as an emergency first response force for global AI threats...*

Division III: *Threat response and coordination*

The third division would serve as the global vanguard for responding to, neutralizing, and containing AI threats and emergencies when prevention has failed. A key element of this division's functionality would be using AI to fight back against the threatening or rogue AI. If emerging AI threats cannot be eliminated or minimized at their source, these teams (organized according to specific types of AI threats) would step in, respond, and eliminate those threats when other organizations (most likely at the national level) fail. They would help coordinate among relevant entities and intervene when necessary to eliminate AI threats. Teams would be on constant alert, ready to deploy (likely virtually, but potentially on the ground as well) and respond to any AI crisis. Operational plans would be previously established for these teams in terms of coordination (e.g., with relevant private actors or a national intelligence service) and response to address threats as quickly and effectively as possible. They would regularly train to respond to various AI threats and emergencies.

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35 Whereas Division I's preventative efforts are via early warning and detection.

CATEGORY III:

REGIONAL FLASHPOINTS AND ORDERING

ter deadly Hamas attack

• Netanyahu warns of 'long'
army hunts down infiltrat

415 people killed in
strikes

WAR
RUSSIANS PUSH I
AND BOMBARD

But Its Control of
Black Sea Line
Is Tenuous

By MICHAEL SCHWIRTZ

MYKOLAIV, Ukraine — The re-
mains of a Russian Tiger fighting
vehicle still smoldering on the side
of the road as Ukrainian troops
scooped remote their trenches
smoking cigarettes. Nearby, a
group of local villagers was tinker-
ing with a captured T-90 tank, try-
ing to get it running again so that
the Ukrainian Army might put it
to use.

For three days, Russian forces
had fought to take Mykolaiv,
by Sunday Ukrainian troops had
driven them back from the city
limits and retaken the airport,
halting the Russian advance
along the Black Sea, at least tem-
porarily.

"Few expected such strength
from our people because, when
you haven't slept for three days,
and when you only have one dry
ration because the rest burned up,
when it's negative temperature
out and there is nothing to warm
you, and when you are constantly
in the fight, believe me, it is physi-
cally very difficult," an exhausted
Col. Sviatoslav Stetsenko, of the
Ukrainian Army's 59th Brigade,
said in an interview. "But our peo-
ple endured this."

...ing Mykolaiv remains a key
...for Russian forces, and
...artillery in the dis-
...uggested that
...t pushed
...ex-

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New York Times

NEW YORK, TUESDAY, MARCH 1, 2022

Today, clo
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partly cloudy,
Tomorrow, pa
52. Weather ma

ROCKET ASSAULTS KILL CIVILIANS IN UKRAIN
AS TIGHTENING SANCTIONS ISOLATE ...OS

ordered to prevent genocide

...za war stakes • No call to halt offensive • UN sacks staff for Hamas lin

...the US, which said it was halting
...the agency, added that the claims
...ed 12 UN staff "who may have
...olved" in the October 7 attack.
...case had been brought by
...h, which accused Israel of
...the Gaza Strip, allegations
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...rong panel of judges
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...utely aware of the
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...g," said Joan
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...ime Minis-

ter Benjamin Netanyahu vowed to con-
tinue the military campaign while doing
"our utmost to keep civilians out of
harm's way."

Describing the allegation of genocide
as "false and outrageous," he depicted
the court's decision not to call for a
ceasefire as a victory for Israel.

"Like every country, Israel has an
inherent right to defend itself," he said.
"The vile attempt to deny Israel this
fundamental right is blatant discrimi-
nation against the Jewish state, and it
was justly rejected."

But South Africa also hailed the r
ing, watched live by Presiden
Ramaphosa alongside Palestinian

President Cyril
Ramaphosa of
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VARIABLE 7:
GREAT POWER FLASHPOINTS AND REGIONAL ORDERING

Today, three regional flashpoints exhibit the risk of a major war involving the great powers. In Europe, following Moscow's invasion on Feb. 24, 2022, an inter-state war already rages between Russia and Ukraine and continually threatens to escalate into a direct NATO–Russia clash. In the Middle East, the Israel–Hamas war has become regionalized, and reciprocal strikes have escalated to the inter-state level — events that are destabilizing in their own right but could also drag great powers into an even broader regional conflagration. Finally, tensions between the United States and China continue to rise over Taiwan, the South China Sea, and the broader shape of order in East Asia.

A better order requires mechanisms to render regional flashpoints more predictable and less subject to the effects of rival visions of regional order. The following three proposals posit ways to inject a greater degree of stability and predictability into the European and Middle Eastern regional security complexes over the coming years.

Much of the future of the international order will undoubtedly turn on the course of relations between Washington and Beijing in the coming years. However, due to the wide-ranging nature of this bilateral relationship, an agenda for stabilizing U.S.–China relations would require its own project. It would also exceed the parameters of this project, which focuses on a select number of key variables pertaining to the international security order. While some of the irritants in U.S.–China relations are related to the Western Pacific, others transcend geography and the security realm, strictly defined, such as trade, technology, climate change, and pandemics. This distinguishes U.S.–China relations from U.S.–Russia relations, which are more centered on hard security issues and the wider European neighborhood (e.g., Ukraine, Syria, frozen conflicts, and strategic stability).

For this reason, our report does not propose pathways for the United States and China to avoid a clash over Taiwan or reconcile their competing visions of regional order in East Asia.[36] Still, our proposals for enhancing security in Europe and the Middle East would have the added benefit of reducing the likelihood that those two regional theaters would fall victim to U.S.–China competition. They do so by allowing states in both regions to reach understandings that could reduce the risk of conflicts erupting that external actors could exploit or prolong.

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36 The Quincy Institute's East Asia program addresses this crucial issue in great depth. QI has and will continue to produce extensive intellectual products identifying pathways to avoid a U.S.–China clash.

Our proposed measures may even help stabilize U.S.–China relations. If some theaters are taken off the table as areas for U.S.–China competition, outstanding disagreements between Washington and Beijing are less likely to become entangled with separate issues, allowing both capitals to address them more productively. Given that crucial global issues from AI to climate change are increasingly being held hostage by mounting U.S.–China tensions, stabilizing regional orders will play an important role in building a more secure international order at the global level.

Strengthening stability in Europe

Although high-intensity warfare in Ukraine may end over the coming months or years, the risks of an unrestrained confrontation between Russia and the West have become clear. The danger of an even more severe military clash in Europe remains alarming.

> *To prevent a dangerous situation from worsening, it is crucial to rebuild trust and cultivate more predictable habits of interaction to underwrite stability from Vancouver to Vladivostok.*

Despite the evolving character of Washington's strategic priorities, NATO will likely remain the preeminent security organization in Europe for the foreseeable future. Given mutual threat perceptions between Russia and the collective West, the NATO–Russia frontier will remain tense, unstable, and prone to escalation. Political developments inside the United States, Russia, and Eastern European states will consistently risk upsetting what will likely be a fragile and tenuous equilibrium following the current phase of hostilities in Ukraine. As a result, Eastern Europe will remain a dangerous flashpoint and prone to flare-ups for years to come.

Reconciling the rival visions of order held by different actors in the wider Euro–Atlantic region may not prove possible. To prevent a dangerous situation from worsening, it is crucial to rebuild trust and cultivate more predictable habits of interaction to underwrite stability from Vancouver to Vladivostok.

Proposal 18: A European crisis consultation mechanism

The current standoff between Russia and the West stems partly from the application of competing principles over how to organize European security. These include states' right to choose their geopolitical orientation (including membership in military alliances) and the notion of indivisible security, the latter of which posits that one state should not increase its security at the expense of another. Indeed, many of the Helsinki Decalogue's principles, although built on the foundation of the U.N. Charter and international law, are in tension with one another (e.g., sovereignty/noninterference and human rights; territorial integrity and self-determination). It may not be possible to overcome such tensions in their entirety. As such, they must be carefully managed.

A European crisis consultation mechanism should be established to assist with this task.[37] This mechanism, in which actors can game out and prepare for crises in advance, would also aim to reduce crises' negative impacts, should they erupt, by providing a less public-facing setting for adjudicating competing principles and the disputes that flow from them.

> **The crisis consultation mechanism would function as a contact group aimed at forging new habits of action among its members and assessing threats to continental stability more collectively.**

This new entity would be a mechanism — not an institution. It would boast no permanent secretariat, although its participants could request that the expertise and toolbox of existing bodies, such as the Conflict Prevention Centre of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), be placed at their disposal on an *ad hoc* basis. The crisis consultation mechanism would be developed gradually from the ground up, ideally flowing from the terms of a regulated ceasefire and eventual negotiated settlement to the current war in Ukraine, in which no side is likely to emerge as an absolute winner.

Absent a negotiated settlement, one might imagine a deconfliction mechanism aimed at avoiding clashes between Russia and the West in the context of the Ukraine war and beyond as an initial step toward birthing the crisis consultation body. The history of the Helsinki Final Act's adoption in the 1970s shows how vociferous competition can take place alongside the compartmentalization of common interests. However, deconfliction alone will not sufficiently address the more fundamental issues plaguing Russia–West relations.

The crisis consultation mechanism would function as a contact group aimed at forging new habits of action among its participants and assessing threats to continental stability more collectively. In so doing, it would foster a sense of shared responsibility and imbue the lengthy frontier between NATO and Russia with an added degree of predictability.

The mechanism's purpose would be to shape norms of behavior for geopolitical crises, not to definitively resolve crises in a fashion that goes against the interests of any country without its input. Nonetheless, it would fill a significant gap in the post–Cold War European tapestry.

Concerns over appearing to accord Russia, a non–NATO member, a veto over NATO decisions have long been common, partly because it would stand to undermine the alliance by conflicting with the principle that only membership in the club should come with such privileges. At the same time, as NATO has enlarged to include much of the continent, Russia — one of the continent's most powerful states — has become one of the few countries excluded from what has become Europe's preeminent security

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37 A similar proposal for a European crisis consultation mechanism originally appeared in Samuel Charap et al. (eds.), A Consensus Proposal for a Revised Regional Order in Post–Soviet Europe and Eurasia (Santa Monica: RAND Corporation, 2019). https://www.rand.org/pubs/conf_proceedings/CF410.html.

decision-making body. The new mechanism would help all sides save face, with Moscow obtaining recognition of its status without NATO formally conceding the principle of states' right to determine their own security arrangements.

> **The mechanism will help ensure that future conflicts are either averted or, at the very least, prove less dangerous.**

The creation of this mechanism will likely depend on several prerequisites, including determining Ukraine's political and security status in the European security architecture, clarifying the long-term degree of closeness between the U.S./Western and Ukrainian military and intelligence communities (a task that will require ongoing attention and that the mechanism could continually address), reckoning with such issues as war crimes and reconstruction in Ukraine, and restoring a degree of trust and the conditions for dialogue between Russia and NATO states (including a political commitment from all sides to use the proposed mechanism in the event of a crisis).

The mechanism will help ensure that future conflicts are either averted or, at the very least, prove less dangerous. The creation of this mechanism would represent a qualitative change to the *de facto* situation that prevailed on the eve of the 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine. There would be (a) a contact group that boasts flexible methods and composition and (b) a political commitment to talk through crises, incidental or otherwise. Existing dialogue mechanisms prior to Feb. 2022 were beset by various shortcomings. From Russia's perspective, for example, the NATO–Russia Council did not offer Moscow a meaningful say over matters it believed held significant implications for its security. For its part, the U.S.–Russia Strategic Stability Dialogue featured no European representation, nor was its creation aimed at addressing core political principles and their application.

By its nature, the new mechanism would have to be nimbler than the OSCE, which operates based on consensus among its 57 members. Yet the new mechanism would still need to balance efficiency and representation. The precise composition of its permanent and *ad hoc* membership would depend on several factors, many of which are unknown at present, such as how committed the United States will remain to European security over the coming decades and how much the European Union will have emerged as a strong security and defense actor worthy of representation in its own right alongside select E.U. member states.

With time, the mechanism could come to embrace issues beyond hard security. In doing so, it could eventually segment its dealings with broader confidence-building measures from its crisis mode engagements, thereby contributing to rebuilding aspects of Europe's security order. Shared rules of engagement could also gradually be forged, although short of the rigid and overly formal procedures of other institutions.

None of this changes the importance of preserving the OSCE as an inclusive body for rebuilding certain parts of the European security order — and, although they feature contradictions and have sometimes been egregiously transgressed, the

Helsinki Decalogue remains the optimal basis for this. The purpose of the crisis consultation mechanism is somewhat different: it is aimed at managing confrontation and stabilizing zones of conflict rather than forging a common continental security architecture. Still, by reducing the chances that they will be subject to further violations, this new mechanism can increase the odds that the Helsinki principles will lie at the core of a more ambitious project to rebuild cooperative security in Europe when the time is ripe.

Ordering the Middle East

The deteriorating conditions between Israelis and Palestinians (even before Oct. 7, 2023) and the absence of a regional security architecture are central drivers of instability in the Middle East.

> *Previous peace processes ... have failed. The Palestinians are no closer to realizing their rights and freedoms or achieving de facto statehood. And Israel's ongoing occupation of Palestinian land has brought it neither peace nor security...*

Previous peace processes aimed at resolving the Israeli–Palestinian conflict have failed. The Palestinians are no closer to realizing their rights and freedoms or achieving *de facto* statehood. And Israel's ongoing occupation of Palestinian land has brought it neither peace nor security, as the Oct. 7 attacks brutally demonstrated. The Trump and Biden administrations' attempts to forgo resolving the Israeli–Palestinian conflict in favor of pursuing partial economic and security integration in the region have arguably aggravated the situation further. Nor is there confidence that the Trump peace plan can establish a durable peace, since it, among other things, fails to address the underlying causes of the conflict and long-standing legal frameworks.

Moreover, the Middle East still does not have an equivalent of an OSCE, Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), or any other inclusive, standing security body. Efforts by extra-regional powers to order the region have primarily focused on quasi-bloc formation rather than movement toward cooperative security. Existing organizations such as the Gulf Cooperation Council or the Arab League are exclusive by nature; the former is purely a subregional organization that also excludes Iran and Iraq, while the latter excludes non–Arab states.

Unless these structural problems — the Israeli–Palestinian conflict and the absence of a regional security architecture — are addressed, the region's insecurity will only deepen. The violence will continue to spill over and destabilize neighboring states, the risk of war between key regional powers will shoot upward, militarization and the use of force will increase, global energy flows will be disrupted, and migration flows will be exacerbated, adding further instability to bordering regions. Moreover, attempts to organize the Middle East around opposition to Iran are increasingly out of step with evolving threat perceptions following Israel's decimation of Gaza and its attack on Doha.

The region needs a new paradigm centered on inclusive security. Such an architecture should reject containment-based logic, enabling the region to transcend its current spiral of instability. Lasting stability, however, is impossible without the establishment of a Palestinian state. These two goals are inseparable.

Having played an instrumental role in creating the State of Israel (including through U.N. General Assembly Resolution 181), it is incumbent upon the international community — now comprising a much larger and more inclusive global order — to ensure the Palestinian people are finally endowed with a state of their own. The right to self-determination is one of the most inalienable and enduring concepts of the international order, a peremptory norm of international law.[38]

The international community must advance a clear cost-benefit structure — including, if necessary, sanctions and an arms embargo — so that Israel clearly understands the downsides of failing to end its occupation and the upsides of its potential participation in the regional security architecture.

> **The international community must advance a clear cost-benefit structure — including, if necessary, sanctions and an arms embargo — so that Israel clearly understands the downsides of failing to end its occupation...**

Relying on the parties to the conflict to reach a two-state solution through direct bilateral talks has proven impossible. As a result, the international community — led by regional states — is now duty-bound to forge ahead with a solution of its own design.

This proposal envisions two parallel and mutually reinforcing tracks: the creation of an inclusive regional security architecture that encompasses all states of the Middle East, and the establishment of a sovereign Palestinian state. However, while the door for Israel's inclusion in the security architecture must remain open, *it must be contingent on the prior realization of Palestinian statehood.*

In short, Israel's entry ticket to the regional security architecture is the creation of a Palestinian state. Yet Israeli resistance to ending the occupation should not delay the development of the broader security framework. On the contrary, progress without Israel would create a powerful incentive for Israeli society to embrace a future of coexistence rather than isolation. For instance, while Israel appears to have calculated for now that the potential security costs of ending the occupation outweigh the potential benefits of normalization with Saudi Arabia, that calculation will likely change once a fully fledged regional security architecture has been erected.

Finally, this approach would allow the United States to achieve two objectives simultaneously: transferring the primary responsibility for regional security to local actors — enabling the drawdown of U.S. forces — and offering Israel its best

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38 International Court of Justice, "Legal Consequences Arising from the Policies and Practices of Israel in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, Including East Jerusalem," Advisory Opinion (July 19, 2024), para. 233, https://www.icj-cij.org/case/186.

opportunity yet to live in genuine peace and security with its neighbors.

Proposal 19: Ending the occupation and establishing a viable Palestinian state

Given the longevity of the conflict, it has become evident that incremental stopgap efforts will not suffice to deliver self-determination for Palestinians or security for Israel. The necessary prerequisite is to end the occupation. The severity of tensions and the profound distress prevailing today urgently call for bold, ambitious, and creative diplomacy. Anything less will only perpetuate the cycle of violence. The ICJ has held that Israel's occupation of the occupied Palestinian territories is illegal, a reality predating the events on and after Oct. 7, 2023. Not only is Israel under an obligation to end its illegal occupation but all states are obliged not to abet the occupation and to ensure that no impediment to Palestinian self-determination remains.[39]

The alternative to de-occupation is a continuously deteriorating violent conflict that may result in further ethnic cleansing and regional destabilization. The Oslo model for negotiations reinforced asymmetries of power and is inherently unbalanced, with the Palestinian Authority shedding credibility for its enforcement of the Israeli occupation and the Israelis facing few consequences for its perpetuation. The Trump plan repeats and reinforces these errors further and, on top of that, seeks to eliminate existing legal frameworks and address this conflict in a legal vacuum.

With time running short before additional and even more devastating consequences are felt, the international community must act decisively to alter Israel's incentive structure. Several powers, particularly the United States, have not used their significant leverage in a sustained way. Given the regional and global consequences of the existing conflict alongside the potential for further deterioration, responsibility for ending the occupation can no longer rest with the parties alone.

Therefore, building on U.N. General Assembly Resolution ES–10/24, adopted on Sept. 18, 2024, the Security Council should unanimously adopt a resolution under Chapter VII encompassing the following action plan:

1. International reaffirmation that a viable and sustainable Palestinian state alongside Israel should be realized within three years, in accordance with the following steps:
   a. Israel must undertake irreversible and tangible measures toward ending the occupation.
   b. Within 12 months, the Israeli government — in conjunction with the permanent members of the Security Council — must produce clear parameters for dismantling the occupation based on 1967 lines, with Jerusalem as a shared

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39 ICJ, "Legal Consequences," paras. 267, 278–79.

capital (or East and West Jerusalem as respective capitals), with the process of de-occupation occurring over the subsequent two years.

    c. Subject to Palestinian approval, these parameters could include the possibility of land swaps negotiated and completed simultaneously with the de-occupation process. Arrangements within Jerusalem's Old City would require the agreement of both parties while acknowledging existing precedent and practice on the Temple Mount/Haram al-Sharif.

    d. Early in this process, Israel should recognize a Palestinian state.

    e. Israel's failure to implement these measures will result in the international community taking action to impose various costs on Israel to hold it accountable, including an arms embargo.

2. Arab states and Iran should commit to recognizing Israel and including it in the regional architecture, once the process of de-occupation is complete.

3. Although not a substitute for de-occupation, the U.N. Security Council should adopt a resolution admitting Palestine as a member state of the United Nations early in this process.

> **The alternative to de-occupation is a continuously deteriorating violent conflict…**

4. A Palestinian government endorsed by Palestinians in an open, inclusive process should govern Gaza and the West Bank as one single entity.

5. A joint Palestinian–Israeli declaration should be submitted to the U.N. Security Council, endorsed by all relevant actors, committing to recognizing one another's borders and abiding by international law in all subsequent interactions.

6. The Israeli and Palestinian governments will each select three countries to form a six-member Contact Group. The Contact Group will assume responsibility for overseeing the implementation of these measures under the guidance of the U.N. Secretary-General. Of the three countries each party selects, at least one must be a permanent member of the Security Council and at least one must come from the Middle East and North Africa region. If either government fails to fulfill its obligation to submit its nominations to the Contact Group within two months, the Security Council will decide on the group's membership.

7. The Secretary-General and the Contact Group should submit monthly reports to the Security Council on the implementation of this resolution.

A complementary mechanism should also be created to address other outstanding issues, including refugee rights. Completing these steps would go a long way toward normalizing relations with Israel, pursuant to the objectives of the 2002 Arab League Beirut Declaration.

If the above steps do not lead to de-occupation and two states, the international

community will have two choices: to resort to sanctions or return the question of Palestine to a U.N. commission. The latter would require establishing a new entity with a remit to propose solutions guided by the need for equal rights for Palestinians and Israelis in addition to past U.N. resolutions.

Proposal 20: Establishing a Middle East security architecture

In parallel with the efforts to resolve the Israeli–Palestinian conflict, a U.N. Security Council–endorsed process should begin to develop a cooperative regional security architecture for all states in the Middle East, inclusive of Türkiye, Iran, and — once a Palestinian state has been created — Israel and Palestine.

Learning from the mistakes made in post–Cold War European history, during which time NATO became the continent's preeminent security body while the OSCE was seemingly relegated to managing "softer" issues such as election integrity and media freedom, the new architecture should explicitly aim to transcend bloc logic — and will ultimately become the region's leading hard security institution.

The principles guiding the cooperative security order will be as follows:

- The centrality of states and non-interference in the internal affairs of others

- The inadmissibility of the acquisition of territory by force and the ensuring of equal security for all

- Initial confidence-building measures should be geared toward replacing existing alliances with a comprehensive system of cooperative security over the coming 10 to 15 years

- The regional architecture should explicitly reject containment-based logic

- It should embrace collective approaches and focus on the regional common good, particularly on transnational challenges like climate change

- The responsibility for the region's security should fall primarily on the shoulders of regional states rather than on extra-regional powers.

The architecture should be structured as follows:

- A permanent, formal organization should be set up to facilitate diplomacy and manage the region's security. The organization will eventually become the preeminent hard security body in the region, although it will also address issues such as migration, climate change, and development. The organization and its mechanisms should be structured around three basic pillars:

  - Conflict Prevention and Resolution

  - Crisis Management and Disarmament

- Regionwide Socioeconomic and Climate Challenges

- Following the principle of regional ownership for the establishment of regional order and the importance of prioritizing the security concerns of the states in the region, an initial quintet of key Middle Eastern states — Saudi Arabia, Türkiye, Egypt, Iran, and Iraq — should lead the inclusive efforts to establish the new architecture that responds to the interests of all participating regional states;

- Initial steps should focus on integrating more countries into existing economic and political arrangements, such as trade agreements and energy collaboration;

- Absent the necessary steps toward the creation of a Palestinian state outlined above, Israel's inclusion in this process would be delayed, although conditional understandings and outreach with Israel could be explored in the meantime;

- Extra-regional powers could potentially participate as observers.

To further jump-start this process, regional states should adopt a Middle East Declaration on Regional Security and Arms Control. This would entail a commitment to significant disarmament and reduction of military expenditure across the region, with the eventual goal of a Middle East free of nuclear and other weapons of mass destruction.

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The signatories to this report hold a range of perspectives on the future of international order — a fact visible in the varied compromises that underpin the above proposals. By agreeing to add their names, members of this diverse group are not signaling their endorsement of every word in this publication, but rather, their broad support for the desirability of its recommendations taken as a package.

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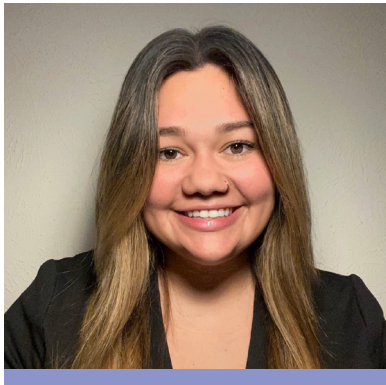
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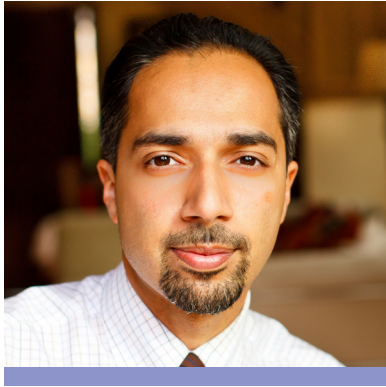
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