

Conference „The Future of International Order“, November 29 – December 1, 2015

Conclusions and Policy Recommendations

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International order has never been more relevant. Scientific and technological innovations are connecting economies and societies in increasingly tight patterns of interdependence. Shifts in economic activities and political power, but also diffusion of power between ever-larger numbers of relevant actors cause uncertainty and new demands for mutual adjustment. The United States is painfully experiencing the limits of its influence to shape international politics. National governments and international organizations struggle to adapt their policies to the bewildering kaleidoscope of change and often find themselves gridlocked.

As one of the primary beneficiaries of globalisation, Germany depends on a functioning international order more than most other states. To protect and promote its interest, German foreign policy thus needs to recognise and anticipate trends in international order to shape developments. Yet our concepts to understand international order have barely changed since the 1990's, and analysts and practitioners alike find them no longer satisfactory. The debate on international order needs new thinking to develop new ideas for action. This was what the Conference “The Future of International Order”, organised by the Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik (SWP) from Nov. 29 to Dec. 1st, set out to do. The conference brought together some 35 international participants from four continents, including academics, think tank researchers and German foreign officials in their private capacities for a comparative assessment of regional and functional “partial orders” and the role of great powers in the future of international order (see fig. 1).

<u>Functional Orders</u>	<u>Regional Security Orders</u>	<u>Great Powers</u>
1 Cyber Space Climate Change	2 East Asia – Pacific Greater Europe	5 United States China
3 Nuclear Weapons Regulation	Middle East	
4 Global Trade and Investment Public Health Emergencies		

Figure 1: Subjects for discussion at the conference. The numbers refer to the different sessions.

Here are some major findings from those discussions:

- The **international order is becoming more complex, more pluralistic and more fragmented**. “More complex” refers to the range and depth of issues that require political interventions and regulatory frameworks, as well as to what we call “interferences” between partial orders: changes in one area affect other policy areas, often in unpredictable ways. This means **that policy interventions will have to address not only the issues themselves, but also be attentive to possible interferences**.
- “More pluralistic and more fragmented” refers to the underlying power structure of the international order. **Diffusion of power**, rather than power shifts, is the most important

aspect of change at this level, with U.S. dominance becoming increasingly tenuous. This exacerbates the difficulties of “ordering” world politics.

- **Functioning statehood, respect for sovereignty, and a modicum of consensus between great powers** emerged as **crucial ingredients of robust partial orders**. Where such ingredients are missing, as in the Middle Eastern regional order, instability and violence at the national level threaten the effectiveness and perhaps even the survival not only of the partial regional order itself, but also that of others (as, for example, the global nuclear weapons order in the case of the Middle East) .
- International leadership will need to mobilize broad-based international co-operation under circumstances of **weakened domestic authority of governments**, which **constrains their ability to contribute to international order**. A key issue here is the **absence of trust both within and between states**. Yet the pluralisation of the international power structure should not only be seen as a complication. It also offers an opportunity to strengthen the legitimacy and improve the quality of international order.
- The serious erosion of international order frequently originates within states. Precarious, failing and failed national political orders statehood contributes to many of today’s global problems, complicates the search for solutions, and seriously hampers implementation of international agreements. **State capacity**, the ability of states to contribute effectively to the formulation and implementation of international order therefore **represents perhaps the most important challenge** for a sustainable international order. **More international co-operation by other states may be required to provide substitutes for deficient or dysfunctional statehood**.
- **Co-operation between the U.S. and the China (but also the absence of it) increasingly takes centre stage** in many aspects of international order and international “ordering”. In working out their relationship in the best interest of both, but also of the rest of the world, both are hampered by domestic political uncertainties and constraints, but also by their respective foreign policy identities and visions. **How Washington and Beijing manage to adapt and adjust to each other will likely have a major impact on the future shape of international order, by design or by default**.
- While the deficiencies and flaws of the present international order are increasingly evident both in terms of its substance and with regard to the underlying power structure, no alternative blueprints are in sight. China, in particular, clearly recognizes to what extent it has benefitted from the existing international order, and may be more interested in changing its rank and status within this order than in promoting fundamentally different arrangements. **The major problem with international order today therefore is not that it is contested but that it may be unravelling**.
- **Efforts at strengthening international order will have to work top-down as well as bottom-up**, though with emphasis on the latter. The politics of international order will have to begin at home. Beyond that, the resilience and sustainability of partial orders will need to be strengthened, and ways should be sought to project elements of stability into other partial orders or down to the state level should be explored.
- The rise of Islamic fundamentalist terrorism suggests that **ordering world politics through mutual accommodation of interests will need to be complemented by a shared vision**. This vision should reaffirm the renunciation of violence as a means of resolving conflict but link it to a much more vigorous commitment to fairness and distributive justice within and between countries.