Navigating a World in Turmoil

St George's House, Windsor Castle
April 22, 2024

Introduction

It is a great honor for me to speak at St George's House and Windsor Castle in my capacity as Chancellor of Durham University. There are many ties between Durham and Windsor extending back at least six centuries.

The current Archbishop of Canterbury, Justin Welby, was Bishop of Durham (as many other past archbishops have also been), *and* he is a graduate of St John's College at Durham University. Karen O'Brien, the Vice Chancellor of Durham University, and Lucian Hudson, the Director of Communications and University professor of practice are both here today.

Just a two other examples of those close ties … back in the 1470s, William Dudley was a canon of St George's Chapel and then Dean of Windsor before becoming Bishop of Durham. Of note, given the illustrious members of this audience and critical points in British history and culture, Dudley supported Richard, Duke of Gloucester, the future King Richard III, in his bid for the Throne of England. Three hundred years later, Shute Barrington, another former canon at St George's Chapel became Bishop of Durham. During his more than 30 years as Bishop, Shute Barrington was a great patron of my hometown, Bishop Auckland, where he was resident in Auckland Castle. He promoted the expansion of education and founded the Bishop Barrington School, which I attended in the 1970s and 1980s.

This is the bridge to another tie to this wonderful place. My extended family have personal connections to St George's House and this esteemed lecture series. My cousin Elizabeth, part of the Hill family in County Durham, met her husband, Peter Fisher, at Durham University, where they both studied theology. Both are canons in the Church of England. Peter's father, Jim, was a canon of St George's Chapel for 20 years (from 1958-1978). Jim and his wife, Joan, as well as Peter and his sister and brother lived here in a beautiful pre-Tudor house at 6 the Cloisters. Jim helped the Dean of Windsor at the time, Robin Woods, set up St George's House. The wardens of St George's House in his day were Rear Admiral Antony Davis and Charles Handy, and Jim oversaw the clergy related courses. Jim and Joan's ashes are buried in the chapel near those of King Edward IV (elder brother of Richard III no less) in the north ambulatory, near the door to the vestry. There is a stone on the floor with their names on. And the banns for Elizabeth and Peter's marriage were read out in the chapel on 3 Sundays.

For me, this is particularly poignant as sadly Peter is unwell; but both Elizabeth and Peter are thrilled to know that I am giving this lecture—albeit it at such a difficult time for them as well as a momentous period in global affairs …

A World in Turmoil

Indeed … On October 7, 2023, the world suddenly became a whole lot more complex—and difficult to navigate for the United States and the Western Alliance. Hamas' surprise attack on Israel was a "Pearl Harbor" moment. It opened up another front of major power regional conflict, in addition to the war in Ukraine. It pulled the US directly back into Middle East conflicts, and it roiled domestic politics in the US and other key NATO countries ahead of critical sets of national and regional elections.

Pearl Harbor, of course, marked the entry of the United States into World War II, which started with Germany's invasion of Poland, and

ended after the US nuclear attack on the Japanese cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. This may not yet be World War III, but the international system that was established after WWII is being sorely tested, and Israel's war against Hamas has profound implications. Just like in the 1940s, the global order is in flux. The balances of power in different regions that have prevailed since the end of the Cold War in 1989 are shifting. Major countries are reassessing their positions and relationships with the United States, the West and each other. The world is in turmoil.

In 2024, we have three sets of conflicts where the US is a protagonist—as well as many more where there is a demand for US diplomatic attention. We have: 1) a European land war in Ukraine; 2) the war in the Middle East between Israel and Hamas with—as we can see from Iran's recent missile attacks on Israel—*real* risks of a widening conflict pulling in other regional players; and 3) an anticipated clash in the Indo-Pacific between the US and China based on mounting tensions in East Asia and provoked by China's stated goals to regain control of Taiwan as well as to decide other regional territorial disputes in its favor.

Russia is a key player in all three, seeking to upset US positions in Europe, the Middle East, and Asia.

Ukraine and Russia

Looking in detail at the first conflict, Russia's war in Ukraine—sadly, Kyiv's fortunes have shifted negatively over the last 2 years, after it initially managed to beat back Russia's full-scale military invasion. But it is still remarkable to note that Ukraine was not overrun in early 2022 and is not now part of a Slavic union with Russia like Belarus. Nor is Ukraine yet defeated, despite the current steady drumbeat of pessimistic commentary. Ukraine's best current bet is to consolidate a focused defensive strategy on the battlefield—hold on to what it has, keep Russia at bay, and deny Russia a victory.

Unfortunately for Ukraine, Russian President Vladimir Putin seems to be riding high. His March 2024 election is successfully behind him, and he is focused on delegitimizing President Volodymyr Zelensky of Ukraine, who has had to postpone Ukraine's scheduled presidential election because of the war. Putin's goal is to convince the world that having won decisively at the ballot box, he is also winning on the battlefield. But the Russian March election was a farce. Putin's only real political competitor, Alexei Navalny died in a Siberian prison camp. Other contenders were either marginalized by the Kremlin or even marginal political figures. Putin was re-anointed as a modern Tsar with a ridiculous 88% of the vote, his highest ever result. His Kremlin team were guilty of many things in this election, including of over-fulfilling the plan.

Putin's current plan apart from defeating Ukraine and overturning the European and global orders in the process, is to stay in power until the end of his current term in 2030 and possibly until 2036. He will then have outlasted all elected Western leaders, but also Soviet leader Josef Stalin (who was in office 30 years from 1922-1952) and Empress Catherine the Great (who ruled for 34 years from 1762-1296).

Putin sees himself as a historic figure at home and abroad, and also immensely lucky. October 7 happened to be Putin's birthday. Nasty things often happen on Putin's birthday, including in 2006 the murder of journalist and Putin critic Anna Politkovskaya. This time it was the Hamas attack on Israel. It was a stroke of luck for Putin, the gift of a new, exploitable opportunity to turn the tide against the US in the Middle East and elsewhere.

Since October 7, Putin has done his utmost to spotlight US hypocrisy and the gap between its words and deeds in Washington's different handling of Ukraine and Israel/Gaza, and to blame America for everything that has gone wrong here, there and everywhere.

Things are not, however, going as well as Putin would like everyone to believe in Ukraine. He has pulled himself out of the strategic disaster of the first year of what he termed a "special military operation;" and he has regained lost momentum, *but* he has not *yet* positioned himself to dominate the battlefield and defeat Ukraine. He has wrought massive destruction in Ukraine but has still not achieved his initial objectives of taking Kyiv and overthrowing the government.

Russia has sustained colossal losses of manpower and equipment in the past two years. The Russian military is now recovering, rebuilding, and rearming—but has also almost cracked under the strain of what has become a war of attrition, as the June 2023 mutiny of Evgeny Prigozhin clearly demonstrated. The military is mobilizing to fill gaps from casualties but has not yet reached overwhelming (new) force development. Putin faces serious demographic and economic problems ahead even as the Russian economy seems sanctions-proof and has adapted and shown considerable resilience. Having prioritized the massive production of armaments, 40% of Russian economic spending is now on defense and security and *not* on health, education, innovation and securing future development and prosperity.

Putin can't keep up a war economy forever without running into problems, but it is unclear when or how this will have an impact inside Russia. More than a million young Russians—primarily men—have left the country to avoid the war taking their innovative capacity with them. Putin has retained control of those still at home through severe repression, taking Russians back to the Stalinist era. Repression is not exactly a long-term winning strategy for securing the future and ultimately failed for the Soviet Union. The potential for backfire was made evident by the recent ISIS attack on the Crocus Theater in Moscow. In focusing on Ukraine and domestic so-called "liberal enemies," and in deliberately disregarding actionable intelligence provided by both the US and Iran, the Russian security services failed to get ahead of the attack.

A Pivotal Moment

But, not everything in Ukraine or Russia is dependent on Putin overcoming his deficiencies to prevail. We are at a pivotal moment in 2024 where our own actions and resolve are critical. Dwindling military, financial, and political support for Ukraine from the US and Europe has serious implications for the battlefield. It is difficult for Ukraine to deny Putin victory without the continued assistance of its transatlantic partners. Ukraine is now in the situation that Britain was before Pearl Harbor—and it's a good question where things might have ended up here if the US had not stepped up to help.

Action is all the more urgent, because the three sets of conflicts in Europe, the Middle East, and Asia have become intertwined in ways it would have been hard to envisage even a few years ago. In Ukraine, China has become party to a European conflict for the first time since World War II. On the sidelines of the Beijing Olympics in early February 2022, Russian President Putin seemed to secure President Xi's acquiescence in his decision to invade later that month. China and Russia continue to hold high-level meetings affirming their commitment to support each other's policies and positions. China has provided political and economic support to Russia in its Ukraine war, despite having no prior disputes with Ukraine and, in fact, being a major purchaser of Ukrainian grain. And the US is now deeply concerned that China is providing direct technical and targeting assistance to Russia to enhance its performance on the battlefield.

Iran and North Korea are also parties to the Ukraine war—again without any rationale for adopting a hostile attitude toward Ukraine. Initially, they were major arms suppliers to Russia to compensate for shortages of drones and ammunition. Now, they are becoming direct Russian allies. Russia used to keep Iran and North Korea at arm's length, but increasingly Moscow is developing these relationships into something more substantive.

In all three cases of China, Iran, and North Korea, leaders in Beijing, Tehran and Pyongyang are calculating their steps based first and foremost on their analysis of their own long-term fraught relationships with Washington DC, *not with Kyiv*.

Proxy Wars with the United States

Beijing, Tehran, and Pyongyang increasingly see the war in Ukraine as a *proxy* war with the US *for them*. Even supporting Russia is not as central to their thinking as we might assume. Relations with Moscow are also instrumental. Russian President Putin now describes Ukraine as a war against the US, NATO, and the West. This formulation means that siding with Russia in the conflict is an opportunity to thwart US policy and even see the US "cut down to size" in Europe as well as globally. Assisting Russia in Ukraine signals displeasure with US actions elsewhere. It is a way to push back against US stances in other arenas that affect these countries directly. In the case of China, for example, US positions on trade as well as Taiwan, in addition to US efforts to constrain China's military development, provide ample motivation for China to help Russia win its war.

As a result of the war in Ukraine, and now with the conflict in Gaza, an anti-US axis of sorts is forming from Europe to the Middle East to Asia. A loss for Ukraine is primarily a loss for the US. And a win for Russia is a win for China, Iran, and North Korea in their disputes with the US—and in the case of Iran also with Israel, which is another proxy as far as Tehran is concerned for the United States.

None of this is without complications. Iran's support for Russia in Ukraine has pushed Moscow to rupture its previously cordial relations with Israel after the Hamas attacks. Prior to October 7, Russia tried to balance relations with Tehran and Tel Aviv and was in many respects a strong supporter of Israel's regional position. October 7 forced Moscow to make a choice between Iran and Israel in the Middle East. Having previously tried to head off conflict between Iran and Israel, Russia is

now reduced—after the recent missile attacks—to making pleas for "restraint" by "all sides."

On the other side of the ledger, in Asia, South Korea and Japan have also made a choice to support Ukraine politically, financially, and militarily. Again, this has more to do with dynamics in Northeast Asia than Eastern Europe or their previous relations with Ukraine. South Korea and Japan are obviously allies of the United States, but they have serious disputes with North Korea as well as Russia and China to pay attention to. As in Russia's shift in the Middle East toward more open support of Iran, Russia now seems to be moving toward directly aiding North Korea in its nuclear and military build-up—another major change in Russian foreign policy since it invaded Ukraine. In sum, Russia and other countries are doing things that none of them would have contemplated before the war in Ukraine, with as yet unforeseen consequences.

Multiplicity of Conflicts

Some of these consequences may involve non-state actors are taking cues from the intertwined set of major power conflicts. In Yemen, the Houthis have used the war in Gaza as a spur for attacks on vessels in the Red Sea; and some regional observers worry that the Houthis will also be inspired by the war in Ukraine. They fear the Houthis will adopt some of the drone and other stealth attacks against Western shipping that Ukraine has successfully deployed against the Russian fleet in the Black Sea.

ISIS is still operating in the Middle East and Afghanistan, as well as in Africa, and is taking advantage of all the turmoil to launch new attacks against Western targets, with the stated goal of pitting European countries against one another. The recent terror attack against the Crocus Theater in Russia is a case in point. For ISIS, no matter what Moscow thinks, Russia is part of the West and just as culpable of abuses of Muslim populations as any other European country or the United States.

Meanwhile, internal conflicts in countries like Sudan, Ethiopia, and Mozambique continue apace, massing casualties with little prospect of outside intervention while the US, other major powers and international institutions are focused on Ukraine and Gaza.

The multiplicity of global conflicts, and wars with common sets of major powers is in many ways analogous to the periods around WWI and WWII. Indeed, the horrors of the two wars that we thought we had left behind in the 20th Century have followed us into the 21st.

As in the case of both World War I and World War II, we have one global actor—this time, Russia instead of Germany—attempting to overrun and seize the territory of a neighbor. In eastern Ukraine, we have images of trench warfare and mass slaughter on the frontlines reminiscent of the fields of Flanders. In both Ukraine and Gaza, we have massive attacks on cities—with catastrophic levels of destruction, especially in Gaza—shocking military and civilian casualties, massive refugee flows, famine, and disease.

At the February 2024 Munich Security Conference, the International Peace Institute and The Elders group convened a session tracing this 21st Century line of death and destruction down one meridian—Longitude 35—which extends from Ukraine through Israel and the Middle East and then on through Sudan, South Sudan, Ethiopia, to Mozambique. The global order, they posited was unraveling along this line, from north to south.

Unraveling Global Order

Together, Russia's invasion of Ukraine, Israel's war against Hamas in Gaza, and all these other conflicts reveal how dramatically the international system has changed. We can clearly trace this change across the two decades since the pivotal 9/11 terrorist attacks on the United States, followed by the US fateful decisions first to invade

Afghanistan and then Iraq. These decisions and a series of subsequent pivotal events set us on a path that eventually led to Russia's invasion of Ukraine. They reopened all the 20th Century debates about sovereignty, national self-determination, the break-up of empires, post-imperial de-colonization, independent statehood, territorial integrity, war and the use of force, and the contours of international law.

These debates and the raging wars in Ukraine and Gaza highlight the breakdown of the post-Cold War European Security and Global order; the failure of the mechanisms to keep the peace and to deter war that we put in place at the end of World War II; the failure of Western efforts to integrate post-Soviet Russia into existing systems, as well as find to peace in the Middle East; and the loss of the United States' position as the lone superpower of the 1990s.

Although we still fixate on the imperative for the US to fix things, or at least shoulder the blame and responsibility for everything that has gone wrong in the world, the role of the United States has fundamentally changed. We have reached the end of Pax Americana, the US-dominated and led international system. We have nothing yet to take its place.

No More Pax Americana

In my speech, last year, at the May 2023 *Lennart Meri Conference* in Estonia, I talked about the "Revolt of the Rest"—the so-called Global South, or what we also might call the global community beyond the US and the transatlantic alliance. Across the globe, the US is still seen as the puppet master behind every development. Now, the rest of the world wants to free itself from the master and have more say in shaping the next iteration of a global order. They want an order with no hegemon; no blocs; no new Cold War between US and China (to take the place of the long standoff between the US and the USSR); and no international construct where everyone is forced to take sides in every conflict.

The Global South is not at all interested in helping Ukraine, for example—this is a European problem. It has nothing to do with them as far as they are concerned. If Ukraine loses this is on us, the West.

There will, however, be global knock-on effects from Ukraine for the rest of the world—ranging from the evident success of great power bullying and changing borders through the use of force, to the encouragement of nuclear proliferation.

Ukrainian capitulation to Russia will not bring a lasting peace in Europe. A failed state in Ukraine means more refugees and instability and increased Russian coercive attention toward other former Soviet and Eastern bloc countries. The rupture of the post-Cold War European security order will mean the lack of European diplomatic bandwidth to deal with conflicts in the Middle East and Africa, as well as a dearth of development funding as countries dash to build-up their militaries.

Ukraine's defeat will highlight the weakness of the West as well as the failure of its security institutions. Deterrence has already failed once and Russia will be emboldened, but so will Iran and North Korea, and also China (as Taiwan's premier recently warned).

Unfortunately, none of these larger points seem to be getting much traction—including at times within the United States.

Outside the transatlantic alliance, many countries already think that Russia has won, and Ukraine and the West have lost. They think Russia now dominates Eastern Europe again, and can project power against the United States, and there is no going back. Our pessimistic rhetoric on top of Russia's propaganda on this score is consolidating this view. Countries are acting accordingly, including pulling away from the US and Europe diplomatically and economically.

The rest of the world wants less attention to the US, Europe, and West and more emphasis on new and flexible international and regional

arrangements. This is what colleagues at the European Council on Foreign Relations have called *"à la carte* internationalism" in a recent report. Even in Europe, countries like Hungary and Slovakia want to pick and choose how they conduct themselves within the European Union. And formerly close US and NATO allies like Turkey are, at times, separating themselves off from the US and the West, insisting on the restoration of their own name, *Türkiye*, in international forums and demanding that the US respect for them charting their own way in international affairs. Indeed, the Turks and many others have, for the past 20 years, pointed out that the US has practiced *à la carte* internationalism itself ever since it invaded Iraq in 2003. *Türkiye* and many other countries furiously objected to the US invasion bilaterally and at the UN. They tried to stop it but were ignored. They no longer want to be ignored on matters of war and peace.

Over the last 20 years since the US invasion of Iraq, we have had much disagreement about the direction of world affairs. Now, we also have a clash between different political systems to contend with thanks to the economic, political, and now military rise of China since the financial crisis of 2008. The seemingly clear lines of division between communist and capitalist countries during the cold war have blurred. The world is increasingly defined by countries that are more authoritarian and centralized as opposed to those that are more pluralistic or decentralized in their political systems, rather than just democratic.

Contending with Rapid Change

The fact that we have a more transactional and disordered world ahead of us in the rest of the 2020s is particularly difficult when this is clearly a time when we need to pull together … not apart. The world environment anything but benign. We have rapid economic, technological, demographic, and climate change to contend with—for good and bad. Global supply chains are still ruptured from Covid. Indeed, we seem to be forgetting that we have just come through this great and transformative trauma, even as more pandemics are looming.

The world is changing rapidly—too rapidly for most people to keep up, or want to keep up with. We see this in our domestic politics, not just in the fraught arena of foreign affairs. The fundamentals of national power in almost every major power have been shaken by these changes.

Domestic demographic change, in particular, is linked to identity crises. Authoritarianism and the rise of populism in the West, as well as the so-called culture wars, are partly the products of this and the legacy of the post-industrial economic dislocations of the 1980s. I discussed the confluence of these issues in my 2021 book, *There's Nothing for You Here*, drawing on my own experiences growing up in Bishop Auckland as all the coal mines and local industry disappeared and then charting the same developments in the United States and Russia. In the past half century, we have failed to find formulas for dealing with the consequences of these economic and technological changes before a new set of dramatic shifts has come along.

For the last 50 years, parts of the United Kingdom, Europe, and the United States have been on divergent paths of development. Some parts of the UK and the US are arguably worse off than they were certainly 20 years ago. Indeed, about a third of the populations in both Europe and the United States—often concentrated in specific regions like my home region of County Durham and the North East of England—have fallen far behind the mainstream in incomes and life outcomes, including educational attainment and life expectancy.

Men, especially middle- or working-class men, have done particularly badly out of all the changes. I wrote about the experiences of my own father in my book and how he felt unmoored by the closure of the coal mines in County Durham in the 1960s, where he had first gone to work at age 14 in 1947. I am the first person in 3 generations of my father's family not to work in a coalmine. My father died in 2012, and three years later, in 2015, a lengthy article in *The Economist* entitled *Men Adrift* captured my father's sentiments in a more contemporary setting.

The authors noted how, as they put it "badly educated men in rich countries have not adapted well to trade, technology or feminism," and tied their disaffection to the rise of left and right populist parties. Men, they suggested "have not changed as fast as the world around them. And that world has not finished changing." This article prefigured the backlashes against rapid changes a year later with the Brexit vote in the UK, the election of Donald Trump in the US, the emergence of parties like *Alternative für Deutschland* in Germany, and the clear preference for strongman leaders across the globe.

Antiestablishmentarianism

A decade on from all of this, it's not just middle-aged men who are disgruntled. A broader swathe of population feels left behind economically and left out of mainstream politics. In line with the broader socio-economic trends, you see about 30% in most countries of what we might term as elastic support for anti-establishment movements and even authoritarian politicians. But this is enough in many cases to sway political systems—as we clearly see from the recent past in the United States where a couple of hundred thousand votes have decided elections in the Electoral College.

Domestic dilemmas of spatial or geographic and economic inequality, based on divergent paths of development, feed into socio-political and cultural fissures in almost every country. In many striking ways, these domestic divisions mirror the international divides between the so-called global North and South. Every country has a North/South or East/West or center/periphery, or interior/coastal split that exacerbates polarization and political party/partisan divides. These partisan divides, in turn, promote anti-establishment and populist- isolationist politics that demand major domestic change and greatly complicate foreign policy. Rightwing parties from the AfD in Germany, the National Rally in France, and the MAGA movement around Donald Trump in the United States, as well as populist movements on the left, all oppose their countries support for Ukraine, for example.

The rise of the reactionary right and left, however, is neither relentless nor inevitable. In many cases, in both Europe and the US, elites are more polarized than their societies, where polling shows that there is often more nuance than one would expect given the fractured political spectrum. In Italy, right wing parties have been more tempered in their policies once in office because their base has proven not so ideological. MAGA Republicans may also have taken over in the United States, but they certainly don't represent the majority of public sentiment, including on the conservative right. Poland has recently flipped the political switch away from populism, and in Germany, statements and planning by the AfD advocating the mass expulsion of immigrants brought more than 1 million people out to protest in the streets in the depths of winter.

Authoritarianism succeeds when opposition to it is divided and disorganized. So, the key question is whether the more centrist majorities in these and other countries can stand up and organize to counter the vociferous and determined minorities seeking to overturn domestic (not just international) orders. This year, 2024, is critical for answering this question. We will have elections in 64 countries across the globe—not just in the UK and the US, or Russia. Half of humanity, 4 billion people, are going to the polls.

Assessing the situation

If we step back for a moment, and assess the situation, in Russia, just as in the US, the UK and elsewhere, domestic and foreign policies are intertwined. Domestic and international systems crises mirror each other—we have a loss of trust and confidence in domestic and international institutions simultaneously. Putin is the ghost of everyone's Christmas future, and everyone seems to be searching for a strongman to save the day and find magical solutions to intractable problems. But his situation is just as precarious as everyone else's and for the same reasons.

Western societies, including Russia's, are aging and increasingly childless. With low fertility and birth rates, the future looks very different than in the so-called Global South, where there is still a population and youth boom, and demographic, climate, and economic pressures together shape a very different perspective. Youth globally feel pitted against the old in both the West and the rest—but especially in the rest of the world. The anger about a future denied or withheld is roiling international politics and also domestic politics given the dynamics of global migration. Migrants come to Europe and the US for a future, while declining Western populations, with much of their prosperity in the past fret about how they will share depleted resources and having to compete with newcomers especially in left behind places with few prospects and jobs available.

In a world with North/South rifts inside Western countries, not just between the global North and South, the key questions at all levels are: Who (which countries or elites) have privileges and get to make decisions? Who decides what changes? Who pays for change? Who benefits from change? Who does not? Is someone to blame? Can someone or something fix everything? Who can guarantee and sell the future?

The 2024 elections have this as their root question in every country. In the US, the election is clearly a battle of the past vs the present and future. The 2024 election, for many globally, is a symbol of the degeneration of the US and the West. President Biden and former President Trump are both from same post-WWII generation. They circle endlessly around the Cold War past, not just the recent past of last 2 presidential elections.

The possible return of Trump looms large at home and abroad. The "Trump effect" even ahead of the election is shifting domestic US and international calculations. If Trump is reelected, we will have the (re)emergence of a classic political strongman in the Putin mold, but also the end of US leadership of the so-called "free world," given

Trump's election denial, the January 6 insurgency, his two impeachments, and multiple criminal and civil trials. Even if American voters are willing to overlook all of this in November, the US will have lost its moral authority elsewhere. Isolationists will take over in Washington DC marking the diplomatic as well as military retreat of the US, and then what?

If Biden is reelected, the question of whether, given his age, he can complete a full term, and further US domestic preoccupations around "operation successor" will dominate domestic debates. And we also do not know how Trump and the MAGA right, if denied office yet again, will deal with a second defeat?

Despite the evident accomplishments of the Biden Administration's "Build Back Better" strategy, strong post-pandemic macroeconomic recovery and growth people's perceptions of the US are gloomy at home and abroad. Given the stakes for the domestic direction, Ukraine and the global order, the US is everywhere seen the same—as the weak link.

In many respects, in 2024, the US is both disrupted and a disruptor. It is neither the global leader at this moment, nor able to sell an idea of the future at home or abroad. And as the US is a source of uncertainty internationally, this means others have to step up to help shape a more responsive international architecture.

Rising to the Challenges

The challenge right now on every front is how to reinvigorate and reshape the international system and grasp the future in all its complexity. We will need a 360-degree view, humility, flexibility, and creativity to find solutions to a set of critical questions.

These include questions like: Can some kind of international order survive without the core transatlantic partnership that has underpinned it since World War II and also the end of the Cold War? Can the US

succeed as an international actor without this partnership, and can the UK and Europe? Where will Europe and NATO fit in a new order (if there is one) after the European and US elections this year?

In thinking about Europe, NATO and the US: Can Europe step up on its own defence including defence production? Russia is ramping up. Europe needs to as well. It can no longer rely so heavily on the US. There is no current intelligence on any imminent Russian threat outside of Ukraine, but there is a clear threat over time, given current European military posture and defense capacity, which did not deter Russia from moving against Ukraine in 2022. The key challenge is how to show military as well as political resolve to shift Putin's and Russia's calculations—as well as the rest of the world's—so they don't count Europe and the West as down and out as a security player and provider.

There are other difficulties and questions ahead in the transatlantic partnership beyond building up Europe's military production and capacity. The US and Europe are also in different places on climate debate and many economic and trade issues. Can they resolve these differences?

Beyond the transatlantic partnership and given domestic challenges we need fresh thinking about a new international system that brings in different perspectives and voices, and encourages more shared responsibility and action. How do you put people, social and economic issues, and environment first? The UN has devised Strategic Development Goals, and the Summit for the Future, but what about individual countries taking a hard look at the fundamentals of their own national power? All countries have to figure out whether their political structures support the demographic, social, economic and technical changes they are contending with. The international system needs to reflect ways of addressing the domestic challenges that loom large for the rest of the world.

In terms of diplomacy, middle powers, and smaller countries are already playing a role in trying to address the conflicts in Ukraine and the Middle East and elsewhere given the challenges to their own foreign policy interests and the knock-on effects on their domestic politics. China, Brazil, South Africa, and Turkey have come up with various initiatives for Ukraine; South Africa has taken a case against Israel to the International Court of Justice; Egypt, Jordan, Qatar, and the UAE are heavily engaged in diplomacy with Israel and Gaza; and India's Foreign Minister S. Jaishankar is writing eloquently about the contours of a new global order.

We need to use these ideas, and the engagement of new sets of actors in the current conflicts to embrace a new approach to international affairs. We need to understand how other countries views are likely to shape things in the future and figure out how to work with them in forging a new system.

2024 is a pivotal year of choices to be made about the future, at the ballot box and in the global arena.