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Rapporteurs: Theresa Lou, Research Associate, International Institutions and Global Governance (IIGG) program, Council on Foreign Relations (CFR); Terry Mullan, Program Coordinator, IIGG, CFR; and Megan Roberts, Associate Director, IIGG, CFR

CONFERENCE TAKEAWAYS

- Geopolitical competition is intensifying, and emerging economies and nonstate actors are becoming more powerful. These trends are complicating international cooperation at a time when the demand for innovative multilateralism has never been greater.
- Although international power is diffusing, international institutions have not kept up, often forcing the use of outdated frameworks to alleviate globally shared problems.
- Ongoing power shifts, conflicting interests, and normative disagreements make it difficult to establish formal, legally binding agreements. However, there are opportunities for breakthrough in "minilateral" cooperation, where leading countries work in parallel with international institutions to create more informal, customized commitments according to each country's capacity.
- The challenge of global governance is complicated by volatile domestic politics in many regions of the world. The current wave of populism is likely to constrain international cooperation and the reform of international institutions.

INTRODUCTION

Growing geopolitical rivalries and political opposition to globalization are weakening prospects for effective multilateral cooperation. Dramatic flows of refugees and migrants—generated in part by the grinding conflict in Syria—have exposed gaps in multilateral efforts to end violence and address humanitarian emergencies, demonstrated how weakness in international institutions affects the most vulnerable communities, and testified to the need to improve international coordination and burden sharing. Meanwhile, divergent views on global economic governance and international internet regulation have roiled both markets and government relations. The absence of a region-wide security organization in Asia complicates growing tensions over competing maritime claims. To consider how best to address these challenges, thirty-nine delegates from twenty countries gathered for the Council of Councils Fifth Annual Conference in New York City.

MANAGING FLOWS OF REFUGEES AND MIGRANTS

Sixty million people are currently displaced due to violent conflict and other crises. The rapid escalation of refugee flows in 2015, coupled with the protracted nature of today's conflicts, has severely strained the global humanitarian regime. The 1951 Refugee Convention, enacted after World War II, has failed to adapt to a world of fragile states and violent nonstate actors. As emergencies and new threats such as climate change blur the distinction between economic migrants, refugees, and "survival migrants," more people are falling outside the treaty's protection. Conference participants noted that the current system provides only a patchwork of protections for asylum seekers, an unsustainable situation given that the average duration of displacement is now seventeen years. Participants said that refugees should be empowered to work and rebuild their lives in host countries. Participants also called for better coordination between humanitarian and development efforts in order to deliver durable solutions and help refugees integrate into host communities. Noting that technological advances in communication and transportation have enhanced opportunities for human mobility, participants discussed the importance of relieving the strained refugee system and providing legal avenues for migration.

Participants also agreed that the responsibilities and costs of coping with refugees often fall disproportionately on neighboring countries, most of them in unstable regions. Refugee-hosting states therefore often lack the capacity to provide necessary services for asylum seekers, forcing them to rely on international aid to support refugee populations. However, there is an estimated $15 billion annual financing gap for global humanitarian action. Participants agreed that alleviating strains on the global humanitarian system would require greater political leadership from traditional donors and new donors from among the emerging economies. Additionally, participants highlighted the need to address the unique challenges faced by asylum seekers in Africa, the Americas, and Asia, as well as those faced by the refugees who have reached Europe.

Suggested Policy Prescriptions:

- Member states should more equitably share the responsibilities and financial burdens of hosting refugees. Increased commitments—particularly from nontraditional donors—are needed to bridge the $15 billion humanitarian assistance gap.
- Migrants and refugees should have access to more legal avenues of migration. In situations of chronic displacement, refugees should be empowered to become self-reliant economic actors who can contribute to the local economy. Purely restrictive migration policies only encourage smuggling and further support illicit networks of smugglers and traffickers.
- International donors should provide further assistance to hosting countries and focus on political solutions that address root causes of displacement. Without political settlements to violent conflicts, humanitarian action can at best deliver stopgap solutions.

PREVENTING THE NEXT GLOBAL ECONOMIC CRISIS

As economies struggle to recover from the financial crisis of 2008, leaders continue to call for enhanced global economic coordination to restore growth and prevent another crisis. However, participants conceded that while global economic policy coordination is desirable and regularly invoked, the determinants of global growth ultimately depend on national policy choices. This duality requires leaders globally to reconcile their often conflicting national goals with the need for multilateral cooperation. Moreover, many participants thought that too little has been done to combat the structural causes of the most recent crisis, to say nothing of preventing a future one. They further identified several uncertainties for global growth prospects, including China's increasing debt and opaque banking industry, the possibility of the United Kingdom's exit from the European Union (EU), and Greece's ongoing efforts at structural adjustment.

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Several attendees believed that the rate of global economic recovery had been too slow to keep pace with troubling demographic realities—such as rapidly aging populations and a contracting working-age population—and slowdowns in productivity gains. Others noted that the aim of economic governance should be to promote strong, sustainable economic growth, rather than to accept low growth in advanced economies as a "new normal." While the global economy has partially rebounded, with some employment rates approaching full levels, the quality of employment and opportunities for economic and social progress fall short of expectations.

Consequently, public support for globalization and free trade is waning in favor of more protectionist policies. One successful achievement in promoting global macroeconomic stability through multilateral coordination has been the work of the Group of Twenty (G20), which was elevated to the leaders' level in 2008. Although it lacks enforcement capacity, the G20 plays a critical role in restraining protectionism and establishing international regulatory standards for financial institutions. However, participants wondered whether the G20 would be able to advance trade liberalization as globalization loses its luster among publics.

Suggested Policy Prescriptions:

- G20 member heads of states should continue to attend G20 summits. The G20 should also promote mechanisms, including the mutual assessment process, that can strengthen its credibility and follow-through on policy measures.
- National leaders need to improve communication both within and among countries on issues of global economic governance. They also need to be more transparent about their aims and offer better explanations to citizens about the value of global economic coordination.
- Global economic leaders should consider transforming the Financial Stability Board into a full-fledged, treaty-based organization with universal membership.

ASSESSING THE SYRIAN CRISIS

The days of a U.S.-Russia–centric world are structurally over.

The Syrian civil war, now in its sixth year, continues to fuel conflicts and humanitarian crises in the region. Russia's military intervention in September 2015 not only intensified challenges but also renewed efforts for a peaceful resolution. Participants concluded that although President Bashar al-Assad's regime has regained stability and territory with Russia's assistance, it is overstretched and unlikely to turn its gains into a decisive victory. Meanwhile, the fragmented opposition has lost ground but will persevere given the support it receives domestically and from abroad. One participant highlighted the importance of continued peace talks but noted that regional and international backers of both sides, as well as the parties themselves, would need to agree that there will be "no victor, no vanquished" for an eventual power-sharing agreement to work. Another member observed that the cessation of hostilities should go hand in hand with intense political discussions. Though several participants mentioned the need for further U.S.-Russian cooperation on resolving the conflict, one individual noted that the days of a U.S.-Russia–centric world are structurally over.

Some participants lamented that the window for establishing a humanitarian zone in Syria had closed, citing Russian military involvement and logistical challenges the U.S. military faces in enforcing such a zone. Viewpoints diverged on the possibility of restoring Syria to its prewar territorial boundaries. Some argued that divisions between certain sects have become more rigid and that the most that could be hoped for would be the creation of multiple autonomous entities under a loose coordinating entity. Others contended that the borders in the Middle East have been remarkably durable and that the question is what internal political processes are needed in Syria to permit post-conflict reconciliation.

Suggested Policy Prescriptions:

- The United States and Russia should increase their cooperation in the UN Security Council and the International Syria Support Group. The two powers should put aside their broader geopolitical differences and strengthen the cessation of hostilities and find a political solution.
- Washington and Moscow should ensure regional proxies in the civil war do not undermine the political negotiations by reassuring them that their core interests will be respected.
- Countries should negotiate concessions from the Assad regime by offering incentives—such as the lifting of sanctions, funding for reconstruction, restoring of diplomatic relations—to encourage the regime to be more flexible and accept a solution that enjoys broad support.

MOVING FORWARD ON GLOBAL INTERNET GOVERNANCE

For the past decade, proponents of a "multistakeholder" model and those of a multilateral one have debated the different roles that national governments, private enterprises, and civil society should play in internet regulations. However, one participant suggested that this debate has shifted since the U.S. Department of Commerce announced its intent to end its oversight of the Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers. Participants noted the many challenges to prescribing a suitable form for internet governance. Reconciling divergent viewpoints will be challenging given the range of opinions on cybersecurity, privacy, and trust in institutions. Nations are struggling to balance accessibility, freedom of expression, innovation, openness, privacy, and security, as advances in digital interconnectedness are creating technical and social disruptions globally. Furthermore, though the West was vital in shaping today's internet, participants suggested, the internet's future may be determined in Asia, where different viewpoints on the internet dominate.

As much as Western democracies and authoritarian regimes are split on their prescriptions for internet governance, the West itself is often divided. For instance, several participants suggested that if countries cannot agree on shared policies on data flows, the internet could fragment into separate national internets, while others said that a moderate amount of fragmentation could be tolerable. In the absence of new multilateral agreements on internet governance, modest bilateral steps have been made. Most notable was the 2015 U.S.-China economic espionage agreement. Such accords could be the start of a promising dialogue on common understandings of international law and norms for cyberspace. However, the agreement's effectiveness will be difficult to enforce given the complications of tracing the source of cyberattacks. Most participants agreed that as dependence on internet-accessible devices increases, new security vulnerabilities will grow. Finding a balanced approach to preventing unauthorized access and misuse of data is important. Repeated breaches will undermine consumer confidence. Yet, safeguards should be as minimal as possible to avoid disrupting internet operations and innovation.

Suggested Policy Prescriptions:

- Governments and industry groups should work together to establish internet industry standards and protocols, particularly with regard to internet-accessible devices. This includes

settling issues of cost, encryption, insurance risk, interoperability, and ownership in order to safeguard privacy and reduce risks.

- National regulators should attempt to distinguish between personal and corporate data. This would allow public data to be used globally while still keeping private information secure.
- Governments should reduce the monopolistic power of internet service and software companies. This includes requiring companies to package software and services separately.

FRAMING AN ASIAN SECURITY ARCHITECTURE

China's economic rise and military modernization pose significant challenges to Asian stability, particularly in the absence of a comprehensive regional security architecture. Despite the emergence of overlapping bilateral and multilateral structures, security in the Asia-Pacific is still underpinned by a hub-and-spoke alliance system centered on the United States, which many countries in the region support as a counterweight to China. One participant noted that unlike in Europe, where economic and security issues are divided between different institutions, several institutions in Asia address both sets of concerns. For example, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) aspires to centrality in regional economic and political issues. But its ability to play a strong leadership role is limited by the diversity of its membership and its historical reluctance to become involved in the internal politics of its members. The most volatile regional disputes today pertain to the rival claims in the East and South China Seas, but no regional multilateral forum capable of overcoming the lack of mutual trust among the relevant claimants exists.

Most participants agreed that Beijing's intentions in the region remain ambiguous: it simultaneously demonstrates assertiveness in the South China Sea and courts Southeast Asian countries through development and infrastructure aid. They also agreed that the future of Asian security architecture will be shaped not only by China's rise but also by how the United States responds. Most participants concurred that it was important for the United States to remain committed to its allies and to the rebalance to Asia while acknowledging the challenges of doing so without increasing China's sense of insecurity. They also noted that some U.S. allies and partners question U.S. commitment to the region. One participant speculated that China, excluded by the existing U.S.-dominated architecture, might seek to facilitate the emergence of a parallel regional security framework to foster regional stability, security, and peace.

Suggested Policy Prescriptions:

- ASEAN member states should strengthen the institution and use the forum to establish basic rules of security cooperation and to find balance among China, the United States, and other countries in the region.
- Regional institutions should coordinate their functions to minimize redundancy and competition. Address immediate regional security issues to enhance institutional credibility.
- China, where possible, should be invited into the multilateral security architecture and work toward expanding the scope of existing institutions. At the same time, the United States should be more open to new institutions created by China.