

# Looking Ahead

By Karl Kaiser



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If one reviews the state of global politics looking at where the most pressing problems lie, four stand out: the breakdown of arms control, the climate crisis, the erosion of multilateralism, and ensuring that China's rise remains peaceful.

The withdrawal of the United States and Russia from the INF Agreement signals more than an end to the prohibition of intermediate nuclear weapons. It signals the end of an era, terminating the practice and habit of nuclear cooperation between these adversaries that helped to preserve nuclear peace. President Trump's disruptive and anti-arms control policy has actually been more important than Russia's violation of the agreement's terms in producing this breakdown. To be sure, his administration's argument that the growing nuclear arsenal of China must be dealt with is entirely valid, but to use the solution of an inherently difficult problem as a pretext to discontinue a working agreement undermines the basis of nuclear stability. The same is true for the extension of the New START Treaty on strategic weapons beyond February 2021. Despite Russia's willingness to renew the treaty without preconditions, the Trump administration has been reluctant to do so, pointing to the necessity of

dealing with China's potential. A dialogue on nuclear arms control with China is, indeed, necessary, but its uncertain outcome should not block a treaty between the globe's two biggest nuclear powers and thereby potentially unleash a resumption of the arms race in strategic weapons. The European governments should use all their available influence inside and outside of NATO to induce both powers to resume their nuclear arms control.

As the climate crisis intensifies and progresses, it will profoundly change global politics, though many of its consequences are unpredictable. It is nevertheless foreseeable that the increase in global climate temperature will further strain already struggling economies, eventually causing some to collapse. It will instigate conflicts over scarce resources (most notably water), unleash vast migration pressures (particularly on Europe because of the neighboring Broader Middle East and Africa), make large areas uninhabitable, and necessitate massive transfers of people and of coastal cities with the rise of sea levels. Practically every country on the globe will suffer – though some more than others – but will this induce cooperative or conflictual behavior, common solutions, or a nationalistic *saue*



qui peut using all the instruments of the state, including the military? Whatever the outcome may be, it is evident that only a dramatic change of policy to fight climate change can alleviate the crisis and thereby improve the chance for global peace. The EU's "Green Deal" is a step in that direction; it will hopefully be implemented and induce other major actors to follow suit.

The postwar multilateral order is being eroded at various levels, most consequentially in a significant part of the world economy. The main responsibility lies with the Trump administration and its "America First" policy that applies bilateralism and protectionism in its trade policies, imposes tariffs unilaterally, and is de facto destroying the World Trade Organization by blocking its dispute mechanism. But the role of China, which likes to pose as a defender of multilateralism, should also be mentioned, since it has consistently violated basic rules of fair trade with its subsidization of state firms, forced transfer of technology, and theft of intellectual property. In this respect, the European Union, which itself stands for the realization of the most advanced version of multilateralism in the form of integration, has a particular responsibility to uphold the principles of multilateralism as the core of a liberal trading order. It will hopefully continue not only to directly resist the Trump administration's protectionism but also "circumvent" the United States with a series of global trade deals that implement proven principles of multilateralism, such as its agreements with Canada, Mercosur, or Japan.

Finally, China's rise will restructure international politics and make the American-Chinese rivalry the central feature of the future international system. Whether that rivalry will lead to military conflict is entirely open, but the management of that relationship will no doubt be crucial for global stability during the rest of this century. China's expansionist territorial policy, notably in the South China Sea, does not bode well in this respect, nor does the authoritarian nature of the regime. At this stage, the EU enjoys a flourishing economic relationship with China. It nonetheless has economic and diplomatic problems with China as it faces the Belt and Road Initiative, with its implied aim of creating dependence, as well as China's "17+1-policy," which attempts to create division inside the EU. But an escalation of the U.S.-Chinese security rivalry to a military conflict would inevitably affect Europe as well and in many ways. It is therefore in Europe's profound interest to contribute wherever it can to maintaining peace in East Asia.