“The world,” according to, United States President Donald Trump, “is a very dangerous place.” While this might be dismissed as characteristic hyperbole from, perhaps, the most sciolistic leader of our times, it inadvertently underlines the existential challenges posed by the multitude of seismic shifts since the start of the twenty-first century. While Trump’s sentiment is perceived by many as characteristic of the international arena, the ways in which it is dangerous are changing. Three distinct trends are discernable. First, there are growing intrastate conflicts, which range from urban violence to terrorism, the takeover of ungoverned spaces by extremist groups, secessionist movements, and civil wars. These have erupted on every continent and have mostly been conducted with small arms and light weapons, though some conflicts have also witnessed the use of chemical and biological weapons. The period has also seen maturation of the “Forever War” that started on 9/11, accelerated after the invasion of Iraq, and now sees US forces continue to fight terrorism
from Afghanistan to the Philippines to Somalia. In most of these conflicts innocent civilians have become hapless targets.

Second, the post-Cold War honeymoon is finally over; there are deepening tensions between major international rivals, evident in the increasing interstate conflicts and proxy wars both between regional actors as well as global powers, including some nuclear-armed states. Prominent among these are messy military entanglements in and around Syria involving Russia, the United States, Iran, Israel, and Turkey, with the potential of serious escalation. Similarly, Iran and Saudi Arabia are pitted against each other in Yemen, while China is challenging all the littoral powers in the South China Sea. These contestations are over territorial, ideological, and normative disputes, including varying interpretations of international norms and laws. Coupled with modernization programs and doctrines that might allow for use of nuclear weapons, the nature of the emerging pattern of interstate conflict is contributing to global disorder. Indeed, the latest Nuclear Posture Review (NPR) released by the United States has led many to worry that the long “nuclear peace” might give way to renewed nuclear competition, if not all-out nuclear war. These concerns are exacerbated by an exceedingly impulsive, disruptive, and twitter-happy chief executive in Washington. Simultaneously, China, always expected to become a dominant global actor, has done so mainly through its massive economic leverage and growing military clout, and is providing diplomatic and financial support for alternatives to the liberal democracy and the post-1945 development script, through a combination of checkbook diplomacy, military intimidation, and leadership of key UN agencies.

Third, there is a slew of old and new transnational threats—both manmade and natural—that no single nation—however powerful—can manage on its own. These range from pandemics (such as the ongoing COVID-19 and earlier Ebola outbreaks), natural disasters (wildfires and floods), climate change induced catastrophes, global criminal networks, international extremist organizations, cyber and other forms of attacks, and global proliferation networks. Indeed, despite dire warnings of a climate crisis, the rate at which CO₂ is entering the atmosphere and contributing to the global warming has not slowed in the last decade and a half; this even before the imprudent burning of the Amazon forest. Moreover, cyber and emerging technologies underline the ability of the individual to construct and disrupt global developments. The iPhone, which is younger than the Center for Global Affairs, now numbers over
a billion, allowing an unprecedented flow of information—and disinformation—to reach people all over the globe, including in the hands of the unparalleled number of migrants fleeing violence or seeking better opportunities.

These trends reflect disruptions and discontinuities in global affairs, as well as the potential destruction of the world as we know it. These formidable trends would have been difficult to manage even in ordinary circumstances, but they are exacerbated by several emerging characteristics that are contributing to global disorder.\(^2\)

First, there is the emergence of uber-national, populist leaders and governments who, while putting their own nations first, are challenging the globalization that they helped build. This has led some of them to opt out of international agreements and treaties that they had signed up to. Moreover, many of these leaders and nations are either outrightly rejecting multilateralism or are, at the very least, questioning and challenging international processes, norms, and institutions.

Second, these developments are unfolding against a fragile global economic backdrop marked by unprecedented trade wars. The Great Recession of 2008 shook confidence in global capitalism, and required extraordinary interventions by states and international organizations, introducing austerity measures that have exacerbated inequalities and deepened the social divides. The next impending recession in the era of COVID-19, given the advent of nationalist and populist governments hell-bent on brazenly rejecting the inevitable march of globalization, and willing to embark on unwinnable trade wars, might prove to be even more destructive at the national, regional, and global level.

Third, is the emergence of a disorderly multipolar world. While on the one hand the world is moving toward political, economic, technological, and normative multipolarity, on the other the ability to project power globally still remains the domain of one power—the United States. This means that while countries like Brazil, China, India, Indonesia, Mexico, and South Africa can shape the emerging rules of global governance, they do not have the ability to enforce them. Unless these powers can become security providers, “multipolarity” in the security realm will be a misnomer.

Fourth, a similar multipolarity is apparent in decision-making of most domestic, regional, and global rules. This is on account of the emergence of many stakeholders—beyond the traditional state—in the decision-making process at the national, regional, and global levels. These
stakeholders, including, civil society, private sector, rich foundations and individuals, and cities pose challenges but also hold solutions to the global disorder. At the very least the traditional state-led, top-down decision-making process now also has to contend with non-state-led, bottom-up decision-making processes with the inevitable clash. This is evident in many of the emerging international negotiations and treaties.

Fifth, the rapid pace of technology evolution and diffusion, with the ability to empower individuals, small groups, and even weak states has the potential of creating asymmetrical competition. Coupled with the earlier characteristics of nationalism, multipolarity, and multistakeholderism, there is a seemingly insurmountable gap between the emerging technological capabilities and the ability to create norms and institutions to manage or govern them. The case of He Jiankui, a researcher at Southern University of Science and Technology in Shenzhen, who used CRISPR (Clustered regularly-interspaced short palindromic repeats) to create the first gene-edited twins (Lulu and Nana) in his clinic exemplifies this dilemma.

Finally, while propaganda was always a decisive instrument in global affairs, the advent of $24 \times 7$ global social media, coupled with factless news or “fake news,” armies of trolls, and the ability to influence millions across borders instantaneously poses new disruptive threats. This is highlighted by the revelations of Russia’s interference in the 2016 US elections, and similar fears for the 2020 hustings.

Not all news is bad, of course: The period witnessed the culmination of the Millennium Development Goals and the launch of their successors, the even more ambitious Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). In the realm of international law and human rights the activism of the International Court of Justice, the International Criminal Court, and the Special Rapporteurs initiative have raised accountability of some of the most powerful nations and leaders, even though the enforcement of many decisions remains woefully inadequate. Similarly, even as Aramco’s public listing falls short of expectations, the surge toward renewable energy is noteworthy. In 2004, same-sex marriage was recognized in only a handful of jurisdictions; now that list has 29 countries on it. The #MeToo movement has helped to raise awareness of, and erode impunity for, sexual abuse and harassment in a variety of professions around the world. The decades-long civil war in Colombia came to a peaceful end (although the peace arrangement remains fragile). Thinkers like Steven Pinker remind us that, on aggregate, we live in a richer, healthier, less
violent age now than our ancestors.\textsuperscript{3} Billions of people have been lifted out of absolute poverty, diseases like small pox and polio have been eradicated or nearly so. Life expectancy for most of the world has been extended. This has not come about automatically or by accident: it has required dedicated planning and consistent efforts from a whole range of actors, working top-down, bottom-up, and inside-out all at once. Lessons have been learned, forgotten or ignored, and relearned in the process. This progress has been measurable and welcome, but should in no way be regarded as permanent. Any hope for continued improvement will rest on deliberate, and collective effort.

The fragility of progress is evident in the United Nations (UN) Secretary General’s warning that the SDGs, hailed as the pinnacle of a desire for global improvement for all, are in grave danger, as no country is on target to reach them by 2030.\textsuperscript{4} Similarly, the erstwhile hope contained within the wishy-washy 2015 Paris agreement and climate targets was revealed just four years later in Madrid to have been insufficient, as several nations clung to the illusion that incremental remedies in the face of a climate emergency were still plausible. The global trade regime, embodied in the World Trade Organization, is on the precipice of irrelevance: tariffs and counter-tariffs look ready to resume, and its dispute resolution mechanism has come under concerted attack from Washington. In the COVID-19 era, the need for global responses seems apparent, but today the centrality of the UN across a range of topics is seriously undermined by the contempt for multilateralism shown by the current US administration and other key governments around the world. Some believe that the very world order—liberal, rule-based, or a vehicle for soft US-hegemony—is, at the very least, set to shift or, in the extreme scenario, is likely to entirely collapse. Within that world order, what was once regarded as the “end of history”—the supremacy of the liberal democratic form of governance—now appears more fragile than ever, with populism on the rise everywhere and authoritarian regimes retrenching around the globe. Ironically, the biggest threat to the liberal democratic order is coming from within and is led by those who were until recently its custodians. In 2018 Freedom House, for instance, reported its twelfth consecutive drop in overall freedom, noting a reduction in a number of rights.

What are we to make of this? Will the future of global affairs be the extension of current trends? Or will we see more disruptions, discontinuities, and even destruction of the existing world order? The complexity
of global affairs (as the sum of real-world activity) requires a multidimensional point of view, and an interdisciplinary set of tools, techniques, and concepts if it is to be understood and influenced.

Global Affairs (as an academic field) was in its infancy in the immediate afterglow of the Cold War; now it has expanded in scale and sophistication. While Global Affairs incorporates perspectives from traditional academic disciplines, such as Development, Political Economy, International Law, and International Relations, it does so in a synthetic way that allows dynamic and polysemic issues, such as energy and the environment, human rights, and gender relations to be treated holistically. Global Affairs is marked not only by a variegated set of foci, but has increasingly incorporated rigorous and robust means of inquiry and analysis. Indeed, the field in 2019 bears little resemblance with that of 2004 when the term first came into vogue, at least among practitioners. How will Global Affairs as an intellectual and practical enterprise evolve in the coming years? What is next for the discipline and will the field be able to keep pace with its topsy-turvy subject matter?

The aim of this volume is to address these questions, but not to produce a series of identical chapters, each more or less a literature review attempting to distill a “state of the discipline.” Rather, the chapters will reflect the diversity of approaches and subjects that coexist within a necessarily multidisciplinary body of thought that is Global Affairs. Some chapters will be case studies of particular events or episodes; others may seek to address wider themes evident in trends and tropes. Each chapter in this volume will offer a slice of a wider picture, allowing readers to appreciate the breadth of the field and depth of inquiry into particular aspects of it.

While the chapters span the spectrum of Global Affairs, all of them speak to the broad theme of the future both in terms of real-world events, and the study of them. Despite its heterogeneity, the volume itself will reverberate with recurring themes, some of which will guide its development, many of which will emerge as the research—and the discussions that stem from it—progresses. Those themes include:

- Whose ideas matter in Global Affairs?
- Which actors will have the greatest impact?
- Will cooperation or competition prevail?
- Has multilateralism peaked?
- Will sovereignty be a problem or a solution?
Are there lessons we can learn from the past to help build a better future?

Before tackling those questions, though, it is worthwhile spending time on the concepts that underpin this enterprise. We now turn to explorations of what constitutes global affairs; how we might look at the future; and how the exercise of power is changing.

**What Is Global Affairs?**

The sum of human activity occurring on a planetary scale is clearly too broad and deep to be encapsulated easily. When we, as a species, have attempted to create an overarching narrative to describe and explain what happens at this scale, we have done so in cosmological or theological ways. Suprahuman forces set our world in motion and are responsible for all that takes place or will take place. All can be understood only through the all-seeing, the all-knowing, the all-powerful. Mysteries abound but the world is a unified whole. Divination, elevation, or intercession are our only hope at understanding or influencing the world.

In our states and in our academies, on the other hand, our proclivity is to divide and conquer. And so governments have foreign ministries, trade bureaus, aid agencies, and defense departments. Universities, likewise, are divided into faculties and disciplines. Each of these categories promises to make tackling global affairs more manageable through specializing; the game-winning strategy is supposedly one of uber-specialization. It is our contention that such hyper-focus, a commitment to drilling down into the component aspects of global affairs, may blind us to the larger patterns at play. Library shelves are full of tomes extolling the various traditional subject-first approaches to world issues. However, Economics without Politics, Law without History, Development without Gender all fail to encompass the comprehensiveness that is Global Affairs.

Global affairs are, simply put, the activities that take place across the world, outside the scope of a single state. Indeed, as we argue in this volume, global affairs are beyond the scope of any and all states. While global affairs have existed for centuries, it is only recently that they have been recognized as such. Rather than merely looking at the world as the sum of diplomacy or trade, foreign ministries were forced to acknowledge the existence of other activities and other actors after the end of the
Cold War. After decades of strict us versus them approaches, untidy problems began to be noticed; untidy because they did not fit into existing organizational mandates or categories. And so foreign ministries began creating new divisions and desks to deal with these so-called new or non-traditional challenges. What was included in those miscellaneous bureaux began modestly enough: things like human security, sustainable development, post-conflict justice, etc. Rather than the black and white world of war and peace, there was a recognition—long overdue—that global affairs was far more complex than previously conceived.5

Building on this appreciation of complexity, Global Affairs,6 as an academic field of study seeks to be more holistic, harnessing the special knowledge contained in Economics, International Law, and International Relations (as examples), and amplifying their analytical power through combination with other approaches. For instance, no discussion of the global economy can be complete without reference to world energy markets. And, as is increasingly clear, only looking at energy as a commodity, and ignoring its effects on the environment and human development is inadequate, to say the least. Indeed, a singular focus on politics or economics, will yield a poorer result than a more well-rounded approach, inclusive of social and cultural aspects of global affairs.

As such, this volume is committed to surveying the future of global affairs from a number of perspectives, looking to point out connections where they occur. When looking at security, for example, we have to consider the role of gender. When considering the UN, we have to see it across all its facets, not just the Security Council, the Secretariat, or any one of its specialized agencies. When considering global actors, we must include more than just states, incorporating the needs and contributions—both positive and negative—of corporations, NGOs, and individuals.

Finally, it is vital that we expand our focus beyond the West and acknowledge the truly global nature of global affairs. The ideas, aspirations, and challenges of many states and peoples around the world have tended to have been sidelined by International Relations, or, when considered, shoe-horned into existing structures (e.g., East versus West, North versus South), neglecting the needs of billions of people, relegating countries to bit parts, with only significance if and when they might further an agenda other than their own. A large part of this belated recognition must include an appreciation that, while change may be a global constant, it impacts us all in different ways. Beyond irresponsibly
assigning people roles as victims, potential customers, likely terrorists, or future challengers, Global Affairs must dedicate itself to authentic engagement with the ideas and agency of the entire planet. Besides, as recent trends, especially in the time of COVID-19, have shown, norm creation is increasingly being driven by actors from the global South—both state and non-state—as well as by middle or small powers, rather than hegemons. The discipline will be well served to recognize and take on board these perspectives.

**POWER, STATE, AND SYSTEM**

The state, contrary to assertions of its demise or irrelevance, continues to remain the primary actor in the contemporary world. Its central role in global affairs is not going to change in the short term. Indeed, we are constantly reminded of the allure of the state, partly because those groups which are not states often clamor to become them. This is as true for the Islamic State as it is for the people of Bougainville. If this were not enough evidence of the utility of being a state, we could look at how statehood is actively being denied to the Kurds and others (by several of their neighboring governments). Statehood remains coin of the global realm. Only states can occupy full-voting seats at the UN General Assembly. Only states can receive loans from the World Bank. States are flexing their muscles on and offline, using their power to control the flow of information and the behavior of their citizens. Iran was able to shut down its internet in the Autumn of 2019. The Chinese state has interned a million of its citizens, and is building up structures in the South China Sea. The US state is building a wall along its southern border and operates a fleet of thirteen aircraft carriers. How many battalions, we might we ask, has the Pope? Or Amazon? Or Ali Baba? Or Amnesty International? However, state collapse or failure—notably in Afghanistan, Haiti, and in several countries in Africa—is also indicative that the weaker ones also pose danger to themselves, others states, and their peoples.

Additionally, we should not be blind to the fact that states, while seeming indelible, are not the only actors on the global stage. Unarmed firms like Google, Facebook, Nestle, and Exxon control resources and have influence well beyond the reach of many of the nearly 200 states now extant. What is more, with that economic clout, they are often able to hold sway over states, convincing them to legislate in ways which favor their commercial interests. Moreover, now individuals too
have the wherewithal to achieve change on their own, or to influence states to adopt their agenda. Technology has lowered the barrier of entry, providing non-state actors or individuals the ability to buy, sell, communicate, and even attack like never before. While individuals like Jeff Bezos, Bill Gates, and Elon Musk illustrate the economic potential of individuals, Greta Thunberg, Malala Yusufzai, and Nadia Murad highlight that the conviction and voice of a single person, even without billions of dollars, can resonate across oceans and over borders. Perhaps even more effective at mobilizing action are civil society groups, such as the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (ICAN)—a coalition of 500 nongovernmental and civil society organizations in 101 countries—that spearheaded the process, which culminated in the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons or the NGO Ban Killer Robots, which has animated the debate on autonomous weapon systems, convincing diplomats from states around the world to echo their message in the chambers of the Conference on Disarmament within the Palais des Nations in Geneva.

How can we make sense of this? One way is to expand our understanding of power and look beyond the usual dimensions of military and political, which so far have tended to favor states. Michael Mann’s four-fold sources of social power formulation is instructive here.7 To the traditional three aspects of power he adds a normative or ideological power. And it is, perhaps, here where we have seen the biggest change. Increasingly states are regarded as lacking in normative power, both from without and within their borders. “Sovereignty First” movements have exposed the naked interests of individual states, leaving little room for cooperation, sacrificing collective action on the altar of beggar thy neighbor. State-run disinformation campaigns, preferences for short-term gains tied to election cycles or regime security have tarnished the legitimacy of the state. This normative power is now diffused, and scattered among other actors. In some cases, people appear to place more trust in corporations. Billions of users of platforms, such as Google or Facebook willingly give up large swathes of their private data—information they would object to falling into the hands of domestic law enforcement or foreign espionage agencies. Similarly, some regional and international organizations also command legitimacy and are considered more trustworthy than even some of their member states, perhaps on account of their seemingly “supranational” ambit. UNICEF and the Red Cross, for instance, enjoy the trust of many around the world. This diffusion is
uneven, however. A slim majority of Britons appear to have lost faith in the regional umbrella provided by their membership in the EU: for them, Brussels no longer exercises normative power.

How can we account for this and how far is this trend likely to go? French President Emmanuel Macron worries that there is potential for the West to lose its dominant position in the world, as the normative appeal of its values ebbs away. For some, this represents the end of an era. For others, particularly those outside the West, it is seen as comeuppance or merely a timely readjustment of the ideological poles.

Either way, it is worth noting that the current manifestation of the state-centric system of global affairs, constructed largely by the victors of the Second World War, and tweaked by them at the end of the Cold War, is showing signs of strain. Rather than an inevitable and permanent structure, it needs to be seen as a complex ecosystem, dynamic, and exceedingly fragile. If not maintained, it will be transformed into something else. Whatever comes of it, it is unlikely to remain as it is, nor return to some status quo ante of a golden age. New voices have emerged and are emerging, ready to help shape what comes next, ready to assume and implement the full range of economic and social power to achieve their goals, even though some of these impinge on the power of the state.

**How Do We Understand the Future?**

This volume presents not just the current state of global affairs but also attempts to peer into the near future. Individual authors were left to decide what that future might look like, and whether to focus more on the world or the field of Global Affairs as an academic pursuit. The aim is not to predict precise possibilities, but to sketch out plausible threats and opportunities, and foreground what we can do today to avoid or exploit them.

While acknowledging the unknowability of what is yet to come, it is possible to make some remarks here about how the future is understood within this volume. First, the future is not necessarily linear. Rather than being an incremental path from the past, through the present, and on to the future, it is quite possible that we might see oscillations, serious disruptions, discontinuities, and/or even destruction. It is not a uniquely twenty-first-century phenomenon. Looking back on human existence we have seen repression, revolutions, and recurrences.
In a related sense, we must avoid the temptation of believing that time is teleological: progress toward some inevitable end is not guaranteed, even if we allow for the occasional loop-the-loop or cul-de-sac. History is not over and tomorrow may not be bright. A particular manifestation of this pathology can be seen in technological solutionism; an unfounded belief that technology will make the future a perfected version of today.\(^9\) Equally, though, fatalism is most probably inaccurate and most definitely unhelpful. Humans have agency, even if it is constrained by the structures we have built within global affairs. Certainly, the choices we make today—to abrogate treaties; not to invest in greener technologies—have implications and may bring about a different future, but not necessarily one that we were expecting or will like...or even survive.

Change usually comes incrementally, in small quanta, either positive or negative. The concept of human security, though enshrined in the 1945 UN charter, came into practice only after the end of the Cold War in 1990 in the form of the Human Development Index. Similarly, real wages have not increased a great deal within the industrial world. On the contrary, income inequalities have increased. Sometimes, though, those small changes lead to big impacts. The global temperature is currently set to rise by a mere 3 °C; but when that does occur, it will render much of the globe uninhabitable and lead to mass extinctions.\(^{10}\) Small changes are not the only option though. Occasionally, large changes take place: revolutions, market collapses, world wars are all real possibilities, even if we do not notice their antecedents.

A final reminder is that we need to do our best to avoid the Scylla of presentism (“it has never been like this before”) and the Charybdis of historicism (all events are determined by history). We certainly can detect echoes of past situations which are, at least, analogous to today. Decision-makers have always been faced with complexity; surprises have always happened. Thus, the future will be very different than the past or the present.\(^{11}\) To believe otherwise is fantasy.

### Disruption, Discontinuity, and Destruction

As the subtitle of this volume connotes, we see a variety of possible outcomes in the near future. That we are at an inflection point seems apparent, but the form of that change is not yet evident. While we will not be lured into making precise predictions, we believe that three broad options are likely to manifest. These three options need not be universal
in scope and all three may overlap and coexist, with different outcomes extant in different issues or geographic areas. While we are not confident in forecasting what comes next, we are reasonably confident that tomorrow’s global affairs will not look like today’s.

One possibility is disruption. This implies a change—either temporary or permanent—in the way that global affairs are conducted, even though the system remains mostly unchanged. Such disruptions could be normative, political, economic, social, or technological. Previous examples of disruptive ideas might be the antislavery movement, communism, and fascism, while today globalization is, clearly, a disruptive economic phenomenon. Technological disruptions, such as the innovations of the industrial revolution, advent of aviation, space travel, and artificial intelligence are, clearly, dual use and could be used for both constructive or destructive purposes. Indeed, disruptions possess both progressive and regressive potential. However, they do not necessarily have a systemic impact; they merely affect the way that key actors operate within it.

Another distinct possibility is discontinuity, which indicates a break from the past, that may or may not result in a systemic change (depending on the impact of disruption or destruction). At a minimum, discontinuity might see the emergence of new powers within the existing system. Thus, China’s growing profile and clout within the UN system might reflect this discontinuity. At a maximum, discontinuity might also lead to the cessation or suspension of some aspects of the global system and/or the creation of alternative systems. Again, China’s establishment of the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank and its role in creating the New Development Bank (along with Brazil, Russia, India, and South Africa), partly in response to being dissatisfied with the limited role in the existing international financial institutions, exemplifies longer-term discontinuity. Similarly, the Group of 20 countries assuming a greater role in peace and security issues, as an alternative to an unreformed Security Council, also marks discontinuity.

Finally, there is destruction, which suggests the permanent demise of the existing system of global order. Historically, such destruction was prompted by great power conflict at a global level. Thus, the collapse of the European ancien régime in the wake of the First World War and the death of the League of Nations following the outbreak of the Second World War are examples of institutional destruction. Until the end of the Second World War, such man-made destruction was inevitably followed by the construction of a new institution to manage global order, as evidenced in the creation of the UN. However, after the advent of the nuclear age in 1945, any future direct conflict among nuclear-armed great
powers might result in cataclysmic global destruction, and the inability to create a successor to the UN. Today, apart from nuclear war, the climate change crisis, and, indeed, COVID-19 like pandemics also poses an existential threat to the planet and absolute systemic collapse.

Overview of the Book

Michael Oppenheimer argues that rather than disruption or destruction, the decline in US leadership represents a discontinuity of the system since 1945 and uncertainty of what might replace it. His chapter elaborates that the future of IR will emerge from three intersecting forces: globalization (but without liberal rules, institutions, and leadership); multipolarity (the end of American hegemony and wider distribution of power among states and non-states, even as power itself is redefined); and the proliferation of distinctive, national, and subnational identities (what Sam Huntington called the “non-westernization of IR”). Any two of these forces are compatible with stability: multipolarity (inherently more prone to conflict than other configurations of power, according to Kenneth Waltz) and globalization can work in a world of convergent values and effective conflict management (Congress of Vienna). Divergent values and multipolarity can work in an autarchic world of isolated units; divergent values and globalization can be reconciled by hegemonic power. But all three forces operating simultaneously will produce a future of increasing internal polarization and cross border conflict, diminishing economic growth and poverty alleviation, weakened global institutions and norms of behavior, and reduced collective capacity to confront emerging challenges of global warming, accelerating technology change, nuclear weapons innovation and proliferation. As in any effective scenario, this future is clearly visible to any keen observer; we have only to believe our own eyes.

Christopher Ankersen’s chapter examines whether the resurgence of sovereignty first principles among some states could undermine the salience of the supranational identities. For a long time, the scholarly view of the planet has been decidedly Western and state-centric. Increasingly, though, that perspective is being understood as partial, at best, and problematic, at worst. Ankersen posits that the future of global affairs will be somewhat more inclusive; more voices will join the choir. We need to expand our focus to include not only the state, but the coalitions, alliances, and international organizations created by them, so that we can better appreciate what is actually taking place on the planet. The outcome,
he predicts, will not be harmonious, though: inclusive means additive, not integrated. The erstwhile commitment to multilateralism that was a key feature of the world order since 1945 has faded, only to be replaced by a more self-interested view. The arrangements that states will find themselves in will not be fixed, but transitory, much like the images formed by a kaleidoscope. Stable alliances and global agreements will be replaced by temporary hook-ups. This does not bode well for our ability to tackle global challenges, such as those posed by pandemics like COVID-19.

These megatrends are occurring against the backdrop of the weaponization of facts. John Kane’s chapter tackles how the phenomenon of truth is being played out in global affairs now and in the future. Despite a growing appetite for “evidence-based” thinking and policymaking, we are nevertheless grappling with the challenges of living in an era of “fake news.” Kane is concerned that we are heading for a “post-truth” world in which “nothing matters” except whatever we want to believe. Kane explains the implications of that and how scholars and citizens alike need to guard against falling into the trap of relativism. Toward that end, he provides a practical framework for critically evaluating information, and is confident that it is only through the objective pursuit of knowledge about our world as a shared value can we begin to talk with, rather than past, one another about the most pressing issues of our time.

Turning our attention to the global economy, Christian Busch sees that, in today’s fast-changing world, the role of business, government, and civil society actors is being redefined. Enormous challenges related to climate change, inequality, populism, and technology necessitate public and private sector organizations to rethink their responsibilities and approaches. This provides opportunities as well as challenges. Based on in-depth research on private and public sector organizations, as well as a review of the most relevant developments related to the global economy over the last 15 years, this chapter lays out a framework of how an enlightened kind of capitalism can emerge based on novel approaches of private and public sector organizations. Analyzing the past and future of global affairs via the prism of the global economy, this chapter shows how purpose-orientation, co-opetition, innovative multi-stakeholder-partnerships, and community-led approaches grounded in an enlightened self-interest will shape the future of global affairs in the decades to come. It captures how in a world of discontinuities and
disruptions—in which the only constant is change—individuals and organizations can develop the capacity to deal with the unexpected and play an effective role in tackling society’s most pressing challenges.

Similarly, the loose regime of laws, customs, and norms, governing global affairs is at an inflection point, reflecting a discontinuity. Jennifer Trahan focuses, in particular, on the International Criminal Court (ICC), as well as the creation of a variety of inelegantly named “mechanisms” for compiling evidence of atrocity crimes in Syria, Iraq, and Myanmar. As to the ICC, she argues that it is at a key crossroads, having already weathered extensive political “push back” against its work—a campaign for mass withdrawals (particularly for the withdrawal of African states) from the Court, as well as a campaign to reassert immunity for heads of state. Yet, the Court continues to face serious resistance to its work, as exemplified by scathing and destructive attacks against the Court, including by US government officials, especially when the Court attempts to prosecute state actors. Such difficulties have been exacerbated by the recent rejection by the ICC’s Pre-Trial Chamber of the Prosecutor’s application to proceed with investigation of crimes committed in Afghanistan. As to the “mechanisms” created to compile crime evidence of atrocities committed in Syria, Iraq, and Myanmar, Trahan raises the question of whether the creation of such mechanisms (rather than creation of international or hybrid tribunals) represents a retreat for the field of international justice, forced to adapt to a more hostile political landscape. A key challenge for the international community will be to ensure such evidence collection successfully feeds into systematic prosecutions before courts and tribunals that respect due process and do not implement the death penalty. The chapter concludes that in the future we will, more than ever, need the ICC and other accountability mechanisms in the face of still far too many atrocity crimes being committed, including by state actors.

As in the case of international law, the gendered assumptions driving much of global affairs led to a fundamental rethinking of the traditional areas of international relations and politics, and led to the emergence of the disruptive ‘Feminist Foreign Policy’ (FFP) agenda. Anne-Marie Goetz’s chapter asserts that the defense of “national sovereignty” has allowed states to shield patriarchal preferences, not only blocking women’s rights but contributing to some of the most destructive features of national and international decision-making. For FFP to deliver a significant course correction in international affairs, its practitioners must accept that ending diplomatic silence on abuses of women has costs. It
can bring diplomatic isolation or trigger domestic protest since it may make transnational business arrangements, including arms deals—the fuel for protracted conflicts—contingent on respect for women’s rights.

Clearly, there is a need to counter and, perhaps, even reverse these trajectories of conflict. Thomas Hill believes that overcoming a widespread misunderstanding of what is needed to build peaceful societies stands as one of the greatest global challenges of our time. Governments typically over-invest in military approaches to state security while much-smaller investments in development programs meant to improve human security and resilience to conflict are short termed and apolitical. Education often is overlooked as a possible peacebuilding mechanism, and when it is not, is treated, quite literally, as a children’s matter. Hill argues that building a global constituency that understands, supports, and engages effectively in peacebuilding will require a radical shift toward a new form of education for youth. Conflict Transformation Education (CTE)—characterized by thoughtful deliberation and dialogue, an emphasis on creativity, an acknowledgment of its explicit political nature, and efforts to develop cross-communal peacebuilding constituencies—stands as higher education’s possible answer to over-securitization. Recent participatory action research with higher education actors in Iraq, Colombia and Kuwait offer helpful examples of how scholars and students based in those contexts already have been using CTE methods to counteract dominant narratives about the inevitability of violence, and to create and reinforce notions of shared fate that are prerequisites to building and sustaining peace.

Founded on the recognition of the interdependence of enduring security, peace, development, and human rights, a global consensus was reached, in the form of SDGs, which represent a landmark event. As Jens Rudbeck explains, when the 2015 Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) were established in 2000, there were 63 low-income countries in the world. Fifteen years later, there are only 33 left. While such a dramatic decline suggests that poverty and hunger are becoming problems of the past, it is far too early to declare mission accomplished. Rather than disappearing poverty and hunger are increasingly concentrated in countries characterized by violent conflict and unstable state institutions. Today, half of the world’s poor and hungry live in conflict-affected societies compared to a decade and a half ago when four-fifth of them lived in stable, low-income countries. These new dynamics raise difficult questions about how to solve the most pertinent development issues.
Rudbeck explores the changing patterns of core development issues and critically assess the nature of the solutions proposed by the international development community. Whereas the 2015 MDGs were about reducing poverty and building human capital for the poor, the 2030 SDGs focus on building inclusive, peaceful, resilient and prosperous societies. However, even as no country can claim to have found a path to sustainable development, an important new element in the SDGs is the idea that the goals are universal for all states.

A key driver toward a sustainable future is technology dependent and a technology-driven disruption is underway: we are moving from a purely physical globe to an increasingly virtual one. As Pano Yannakogeorgos explains, the consequences of this compression have brought on an unprecedented global interconnectedness and interdependence never before known among peoples and locales. Underpinning new possibilities for economic development and innovation are vulnerable and unstable information and communication technology (ICT) operational technology (OT) and platform IT (PIT) infrastructures which holistically are termed “cyberspace.” The integrity of this domain is essential to economic development, national security, public safety, and modern civic discourse worldwide. Seeking to exploit vulnerabilities in a fragile technological ecosystem are nation-states, terrorist groups, criminal gangs, and other malicious substate actors. Cyber competition among these actors is always evolving. The terrain is blurred between public and private entities, the targets and exploits are in a constant state of upgrade, and competitors are indistinct and ubiquitous. The state-centered international system is thus under immense pressure as existing security frameworks and stability measures become more outmoded. Yannakogeorgos offers an analysis of the altering landscape of political, military and economic competition in and by means of cyber. Using recent events and documented experiences as examples, he reveals our dependence on networks, and, more worryingly, the fragility of these networks. Yannakogeorgos concludes with suggestions for how the global community may manage risks to assure that cyber is an economic enabler, enhancing human prosperity rather than a source of instability and conflict.

Parallel disruptions, as Carolyn Kissane explains, are already evident in the contours of the geopolitics of energy, which have radically transformed over the last two decades. In the early years of the twenty-first century, policy discussions centered around the existential threat posed by peak oil supply. In capitals across the world, policymakers wondered
how they could best prepare their states for declining oil production. The scarcity of supply was the risk, and the multitude of economic and political sensitivities associated with energy security drove countries to seek new ways of securing hydrocarbons. Kissane explores the energy transition and examines how the geopolitics of energy is experiencing a new stage of discontinuity, exposing both new risks and opportunities for producers and consumers of global energy.

Great Thunberg’s high-profile Atlantic crossing by yacht highlighted the potential climate risks associated with energy transition, and did so in a highly personal way. Thus, Michael Shank argues that the response to the climate crisis is no longer the purview of national policymakers only, since presidents and prime ministers are backing out of the Paris climate agreement—a pact that intended to locate the focus of greenhouse gas emissions reduction in the hands of national governments. Increasingly, subnational actors—cities, states, businesses, universities, hospitals, religious organizations, and other nonprofit sectors in both the global North and South—are taking the lead and filling the void left by national governments. As part of this locus shift, personal behavior change is increasingly discussed among these subnational actors—and by the storytellers within society (e.g., media)—and, as a result, social norms encouraging sustainable consumption (e.g., plant-based diets, slow fashion) are becoming more mainstream in the climate action space, complementing the more traditional and expected environmental choices (e.g., recycling, LED lightbulbs, carbon-light transit). While some frontiers continue to remain stigmatized (e.g., family planning), the invigorated action among subnational actors is ambitious and inspiring. Shank explores the systems-level transformations happening within one particular sector of subnational society—global cities in the global North and South that are taking aggressive action on climate change—since the majority of the world’s population resides in cities and since cities are responsible for the majority of the world’s energy use and greenhouse gas emissions. Shank concludes by tracing out the potential shift, within these cities, toward behavior change strategy and how behavioral economics and social psychologies may be useful in motivating residents within these cities to further reduce subnational sector emissions.

How might any of these global challenges—marked as they are by tension and contestation—be managed? Waheguru Pal Singh Sidhu contends that, despite the advent of new challenges, actors, and institutions in the post-9/11 age, the United Nations (UN) still remains
the multilateral center of global affairs. Indeed, in spite of threats from within and without, the UN continues to shape the global discourse on peace and security, development, and human rights. Over the past 15 years the adoption of Security Council resolution 1540, the SDGs, the Paris Agreement on climate change, the Responsibility to Protect principles, the creation of UN Women, as well as the successful negotiation of the Arms Trade Treaty and the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons, are indicative of this trend. However, the implementation of these norms, agreements, and treaties remains uneven at best and non-existent at worst. Moreover, the present trend of countries pursuing “nation first” policies while questioning multilateralism and global governance is likely to further impair the UN’s operational role. Sidhu examines the UN’s efforts in managing global disorder and discontinuities, and the prospects of establishing a new world order over the coming decades.

This volume offers a rather somber appreciation of the future of global affairs. Destruction is not inevitable; however, navigation the multitude of discontinuities and disruptions will require concerted collective action at all levels, linking from the individual to the global. To spur the necessary policy innovations in global affairs, the discipline of Global Affairs also needs to be more comprehensive: we stress the need to replace the twin shackles of state-only policy and practice, and siloed academic analysis with a transdisciplinary approach. The real challenge will be doing so in a global, inclusive, and cooperative manner, which has not been the hallmark of the discipline subjected to the parochial, exclusive, and confrontational dominant discourse until now.

**Notes**

1. *America First!* 2018. Statement from President Donald J. Trump on Standing with Saudi Arabia, White House, 20 November. https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/statement-president-donald-j-trump-standing-saudi-arabia/.

2. Sidhu, W. P. S. 2018. “Global trends: disruptive, dangerous and disorderly”, *Mint*, 26 February.

3. Pinker, Steven. 2012. *The Better Angels of Our Nature: Why Violence Has Declined*. New York: Penguin. Pinker’s thesis, of course, has been subject of much discussion, including pointed critique. The best example of that is Braumoeller, Bear. 2019. *Only the Dead: The Persistence of War in the Modern Age*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
4. Report of the Secretary-General on SDG Progress 2019, Special Edition. New York: United Nations. https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/24978Report_of_the_SG_on_SDG_Progress_2019.pdf.

5. Goodhand, Jonathan. 1999. “From wars to complex political emergencies: Understanding conflict and peace-building in the new world disorder”. *Third World Quarterly*, 20:1, 13–26.

6. In keeping with the convention used elsewhere in academic writing, especially in International Relations, when referring to the state of the ‘real world’ we use global affairs with lower case letters. When referring to the academic field of Global Affairs we use upper case letters.

7. Mann, Michael. 1986–2014. *Social Sources of Power: Volumes I to IV*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

8. While no precise time-horizon has been imposed, all authors recognize the need to focus on the next 15–25 years, as opposed to the more distant future. This is largely meant to identify the need for priority action, and avoid any flights of fancy that might otherwise be possible if the emphasis is shifted too far into the unknown, and unknowable, future.

9. Morozov, Evgeny. 2013. *To Save Everything, Click Here: The Folly of Technological Solutionism*. New York: Public Affairs.

10. Fountain, Henry. 2019. “Climate change is accelerating, bringing world dangerously close to extinction”, *New York Times*, 4 December and *UN News*. 2019. “Climate change: Another year of record gas emissions, warns UN meteorological agency”, 25 November. https://news.un.org/en/story/2019/11/1052111.

11. Fernández-Armesto. 2019. Filipe, *Out of Our Minds: A History of What We Think and How We Think It*. New York: Oneworld.

12. Acharya, Amitav and Buzan, Barry. 2019. *The Making of Global International Relations: Origins and Evolution of IR at Its Centenary*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.