



# THE DITCHLEY FOUNDATION

## The Future of the West and the International Order 8-10 September 2017

*In partnership with the American Ditchley Foundation – conference in the USA*

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Some facts, Otto Von Bismarck wrote, cannot be changed, they can only be used. As we examine the international order in 2017, we have our own share of unchangeable facts. The United States has a president who has priorities different from his twelve predecessors since the end of World War II. Britain is leaving the European Union. Russia is pursuing an aggressive foreign policy, which includes meddling in democratic political processes in the West. China is seeking a sphere of influence in East Asia. Multilateral trade deals are in serious trouble. And, technological change is having a disruptive effect on western internationalism.

The temptation for foreign policy experts is to argue that the solution to our current problems is to change some of these facts. To wit: the United States should revert to an internationalist foreign policy, or Britain and the EU should patch up their differences, or we should redouble our efforts on open world trade. But what if these remedies are simply infeasible, given the trends in national and international politics? How should we think about the future of the role of the transatlantic community in this new environment?

The purpose of this conference is to convene participants from both sides of the ocean and from different political viewpoints, who will take a careful look at the future of the postwar world order in light of the dramatic changes – both good and bad – over the past five years. To do this, we will examine the following questions:

What are the **deep causes of stress** on the postwar order? For some, it has to do with a breaking of the social compact in the West: a populist or nationalist political revolt in the United States and in Europe against an international order that has delivered in recent years growing economic inequality within key states and appears to fail to deliver prosperity for all but the richest few. For others, the Trump administration's nationalist foreign policy is a return to a kind of normalcy: a decision to withdraw from global leadership, as the original strategic logic laid out at the end of World War II fades into history. For still others, the postwar order is buckling under external shocks, particularly the return of revisionist powers and the unraveling of the Middle East. There is also the role of technological change – especially on automation and social media – that has eroded public support for globalisation while increasing the salience and reach of critiques of the order. Can we rule certain causes in or out; can we agree on how to rank them in importance?

What are the **key points of vulnerability** for the postwar order? The constraints described above mean that the order is under pressure and may function sub-optimally but can it truly break? What could happen that could not be undone – perhaps a trade war, or the break-up of NATO, or the failure to hold to the commitment to support an ally – by a future president and how might it come about?

As we look to the future, what are the **strategic choices and tradeoffs** presented by these developments? What is the price of maintaining the western order and the price of looking to an alternative? For instance, is there a tension between maintaining the rules-based nature of the order and maintaining stable relations with powers, like Russia and China, that seek

an enhanced regional sphere of influence? Is there a tradeoff between upholding the openness of the global economy and addressing economic inequities at home?

Atlanticism and the postwar international order are based on an understanding of interests linked to **values and norms**: open societies, trade, personal liberty, constitutional democracy, the rule of law, collective defense and multilateral solutions to global threats. Does this consensus still exist? If it has changed, what impact will this shift have on international institutions and the architecture of the order? If we are to agree a new set of principles to undergird international order, do they need to be universal? Are we also looking at a subset of states that would share a broader set of principles among themselves? If so, what principles and what states?

What **reforms and changes** should we seek in the international order? What is our desired end state and what are some interim steps that can be taken to advance that goal?

These questions will be addressed by all the participants in plenary sessions, and the conference will split into three break-out groups focused on different aspects of the international order, to include: Great power relations; Geo-economics; and Transnational threats.

This conference will bring together political thinkers and practitioners; technology and business leaders; and commentators and opinion formers from both sides of the Atlantic, in order to discuss whether “the West” – that amorphous but important political concept – can be redefined and renewed in what looks like a new context.