This year’s conference theme emerged from a discussion among conference organizers following the Trump-Trudeau exchanges surrounding the G7 summit in Charlevoix, Quebec in June 2018. Conference organizers on both sides of the border wondered if the Trump administration represents an aberration, or an inflection point indicating a fundamental shift in the norms of international relations, perceptions of national interest, and the foreign policies used to pursue those interests. The discussion quickly turned global. Other populist-nationalist movements, such as Brexit in Britain, the Five Star Movement in Italy, the Arab Spring – in Anbar, Egypt, and the Maghreb; and the emergence of nationalist leaders around the globe, such as President Vladimir Putin (in Russia), President Recep Tayyip Erdogan (in Turkey), Prime

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1 The views expressed in this report are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of the U.S. Department of the Army, the U.S. Department of Defense, or the U.S. Government.
Minister Andrej Babis (in the Czech Republic), President Jair Bolsonaro (in Brazil), and Prime Minister Narendra Modi (in India) suggest the populist-nationalist trends extend well beyond the U.S., and Western politics. Currently 20 countries around the globe are under some form of populist government.² A general dissatisfaction with the status quo order, spurred by fears of persistent conflict, economic instability, divisive ideologies, mass migration, and societal demographic shifts indicate the world may be on the cusp of a fundamental shift in the international order.³

Likewise, a quick survey of popular international relations and political science literature revealed books by prominent scholar’s addressing the changing international order theme from various perspectives. Among these were Robert Kagan’s apologist book exhorting the value and virtue of a U.S.-lead, rules-based, liberal international order⁴; Richard Haass’ bleak prospect that the disarray of the current order will get worse under continued pressure for change⁵; and Jon Meacham’s aspirational analysis of U.S. history, suggesting the solution to disunity and dysfunction may reside in the near providential ability of the U.S. to overcome periods of divisive internal struggle because the U.S. possesses an optimistic soul.⁶ Subsequently, a more detailed literature review suggested that populist movements and the emerging policy trends of nationalist lead governments are fundamentally altering collective perspectives of national interests, international order institutions, and national commitment to maintaining or adhering to traditional norms. Yet, there was little consensus on the most salient drivers of change or the elusive potential implications of current trends. Given all that, the conference partners had found the 14th annual Kingston Conference on International Security (KCIS) theme, “A Changing International Order? Implications for the Security Environment”.

To explore this theme, the KCIS partners organized panels around three regional perspectives (the Americas, the Indo-Pacific, and the North Atlantic). Panelists were challenged to examine indicators of change or stability across their region, and to present the security implications of that change or stability. In an attempt to focus presentations, a set of research questions were posed. The guiding research questions included: Are western societies (electorates) at an inflection point regarding fundamental commitments to traditional world order, and their country’s role in maintaining it? Are western state’s security policies and commitments still relevant and supported by their electorates? Are all state’s traditional security policy assumptions, regarding national interests and objectives, still valid? Are state

³ William A. Galston (2018 March 8) Order from Chaos: The rise of European populism and the collapse of the center-left. Brookings. Retrieved from https://www.brookings.edu/blog/order-from-chaos/2018/03/08/the-rise-of-european-populism-and-the-collapse-of-the-center-left/ [Note: may want to drop this citation. The previous two sentences may have originated from this article... but they extend well beyond the points Galston would want attributed to him.]
government views regarding their role in maintaining traditional world order, and their belief in existing security commitments changing in fundamental ways? To answer these questions, the conference organizers suggested presenters employ an analytic framework that considered three indicators of change: Dissonance between U.S. stated policy and behavior in their focus region, indications of regional partner hedging behaviors, and the emergence of new narratives regarding alternative views on emerging international order options.

Conference speakers were not directed to use a specific definition for international order. One reason for not directing a definition is the lack of consensus regarding the elusive elements that constitute the order. Therefore, conference organizers offer the following description, to provide context for the discussion that follows. Two points of general consensus regarding international order, the order is a nation-state based system and the purpose of the order is to provide norms of behavior, procedural mechanisms, and deliberation forums to facilitate problem solving and conflict avoidance. The use of the term ‘international’ order was deliberately chosen, as opposed to the idea of ‘world’ or ‘global’ order. Much of the world is underrepresented and poorly served by the current order. A point consistently made throughout the conference, western democracies must work harder to address the legitimate grievances of the developing world before any pretense at a global order can be accepted.

Further precision on what constitutes order, how it is being challenged, and what this portends for the future was informed by the presentations and discussion at this year’s KCIS. Indeed, most panelists and keynotes offered their own definitions for international order or highlighted key areas of deviation from the view of others.

Context: Drivers of Change

During his challenge to the conference, Lieutenant General Jean Marc Lanthier, Commander Canadian Army, provided two factors that added clarity to the security environment challenge and implications for western militaries. The first insight was the changing nature of the security environment. Over the last decade, the competitive space has seen the resurgence of multipolar state competition, an increasingly influential plurality of non-state actors, and coercive competition that defies traditional notions of a Peace-War paradigm. According to Lanthier, “there are more channels for tension” as a result of this depolarization and competition. Cooperation and coercive competition below the threshold of conflict dominate the current multi-faceted and complex security environment.

Lanthier offered a second insight, suggesting that there is a unique military challenge associated with the expansion of competitive domains. This challenge manifests in three interrelated ways. The first manifestation is a compression of the time available to intervene,

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9 Breede, 2009.
10 Keynote, LGen Lanthier.
driven by a ubiquitous and instant access to information – especially over social media. A second manifestation is the expansion of domains in which the military must operate. Currently, Canada recognizes 7 unique domains: land, sea, air, cyber, space – which are recognized in U.S. doctrine\(^\text{11}\) – along with information operations, and sustainment. While not officially recognized as a domain, the Human Domain – that space in which cognitive choice and human behavior dominates - was also invoked by Lanthier. Finally, the third manifestation, western democracy’s technological edge is no longer assured. The militaries of western democracies must persistently compete for transient advantage in the technology, legitimacy, and human domain decision spaces.

Preceding the regional panels, a context setting panel explored the drivers of change. This panel was charged with identifying and highlighting factors placing the most pressure on the status quo order. These factors contribute to either the pace of change along current trend lines, or the redirection of current trend lines. In priority order, the drivers of change addressed by the first panel were geo-economic factors, geo-political factors, institutions of international order management, and a catch all category of “other factors”.

The “Drivers of Change” panel examined specific aspects of these four factors of change. The regional panels expanded on initial insights, providing regionally specific illustrative examples to emphasize their importance. Dr. Carol Evans examined the geo-economic factors driving change. She emphasized the impact of a rising China on international order, in terms of relative economic influence and peer-status with the U.S. (and the military power derived from that economic strength). She identified three important economic dynamics that are reshaping the global international security landscape. The first is the erosion of multilateral frameworks, aided by the current U.S. Administration’s “America First” nationalist economic policies. The administration’s trade policies signal a shift away from the multilateral rules based order in favor of bilateral trade agreements, the use of trade wars and economic sanctions to influence national behaviors beyond those spheres. She then turned to the impact a rising China has on international order, in terms of relative economic influence, peer-status with the U.S., and the potential military power derived from China’s Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). Her third driver of change focused on the weaponization of critical infrastructure by Russia and China through cyber, foreign investment, economic espionage activities, and there impacts on U.S. and NATO military capabilities.

A critical point, the relative economic power and influence of China and the U.S. is principally dependent on each country’s internal politics and adaptation to the competitive environment. For the foreseeable future, neither country is likely to derail the other from its economic path. Further, and tied closely to this observation, Professor William “Trey” Braun

observed that a return to a multi-polar world will force the U.S. to abandon the “liberal hegemony” foreign policies it has pursued since the end of the cold war.\textsuperscript{12}

The impact of domestic politics on the international order, particularly U.S. domestic politics, was cited by several panel members and keynote presenters; it was a recurring theme throughout the conference.\textsuperscript{13} The U.S.’s political commitment to enforcing international order rules and norms, and U.S. foreign and trade policy trends have a particularly profound impact on the international order; as the U.S. has arguably been the principle designer, manager, and enforcer of the international order since 1945. The emergence of populist-nationalist constituencies in the U.S., largely driven by identity politics and disillusionment with the failures of status quo arrangements to achieve security and prosperity objectives, have significantly impacted U.S. foreign and trade policy under the Trump administration. Most speakers specifically addressed the impact of the Trump administration’s policies on their region.\textsuperscript{14}

Changes in the institutions managing the international order and leader enforcement of international order norms, was engaged by nearly every panel during the conference. From the early 1980s through the 1990s, China was admitted to the majority of international order governing institutions.\textsuperscript{15} During this period, China prospered, perhaps more significantly than any other nation, as a result of the international order overseen by these institutions. However, China is now offering alternatives to these established institutions. Institutions such as the World Bank, International Monetary Fund, the European Union, the International Criminal Court (ICC), and the United Nations (UN) are no longer assumed to be sole forums to reconcile differences and coordinate action. Moreover, long-standing multilateral agreements on a wide variety of issues, such as the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), the Trans Pacific Partnership (TPP), the Iranian nuclear deal (Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action – JCPOA), and the Intermediate-range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty are also coming under pressure or have already dissolved. Indeed, the JCPOA, NAFTA, and TPP were specifically called out as examples of shifting ground under these traditionally reliable mechanism for stabilizing interstate relations.\textsuperscript{16} Chief among China’s alternative order institutions are the Chinese Belt-Road Initiative (BRI) institutions, China’s Development Bank (CDB), and the Asian Infrastructure and Investment Bank (AIIB).

\textsuperscript{13} Panel 1: Focus of Professor William “Trey” Braun’s presentation, Panel 3, PSS. Panel 5, PKRN
\textsuperscript{14} Most notably, our keynote presentation by Dr. Drezner.
\textsuperscript{15} China was admitted to the WTO – 11 Dec 2001; China has been a member of the IMF – from the beginning... but in 1980 China expanded its formal relationship, increasing their IMF quota (now $30.5B... 6.09% voting shares) & securing a seat on the IMF executive board.
\textsuperscript{16} Panel 2, DCE, Panel 3, PSvH, Panel 3, RB, Panel 4, DSG,
Many speakers engaged the category “other factors”, examining the impact of persistent regional violence, mass migrations, host state immigration and amnesty policies, and societal demographic and normative shifts affecting national perceptions regarding what constitutes a successful international order.\(^{17}\)

### Conference Insights

The remaining seven insights and an update on command relationships on the Korean peninsula were derived from the regional panels and keynote presentations. The key insights included the proposition that the international order is dynamic, and undergoing a transition from a uni-polar to a multi-polar system of influence. China is driving much of this change, while the U.S. undergirds the current international order. How effectively the U.S. and China assert themselves (or not) will determine how the order will change (or not). There is a discernable shift in international cooperation mechanisms away from multilateral agreements, in favor of bilateral arrangements. The impact of this shift is further complicated by the changing role (and potentially diminished influence) of the institutions and national leadership that oversee the management and norm enforcement through these institutions.

#### Dynamic Order

International order undergoes constant change. It is difficult to determine if current changes constitute a fundamental inflection point, or a natural adaptation of the existing system and relative leadership roles over that system. The international order is a dynamic construct, continuously changing as it matures and adapts to the changing environment. Status quo international order institutions are under increasing pressure to adapt to shifting power dynamics and the perception that predictability and stability (versus spreading liberal order values) should dominate optimal order arrangements. The emergence of new institutions of order, directly challenging status quo institutions for legitimacy and influence, suggest an impatience with the speed of change and adaptation within status quo institutions.

About two-thirds of conference presenters characterized current change trends as constituting an inflection point toward fundamental change in the status quo order. About one-third of the conference presenters concluded that the perception of change is mostly rhetorical. Basing their conclusion on state behavior, the minority positon presenters suggested the current international order system has not and will not fundamentally change for some time to come. Dr. Sarah Berg Moller argued, “the security realm is largely unchanged” and despite the new institutions that we see emerging such as the BRI or the AIIB, the world remains essentially Hobbesian in nature and the institutions – whatever form they may take – are there to mitigate it.\(^{18}\)

Upon closer examination of the arguments, the distinction between fundamental change and natural adaptation advocates appears to rest on what view the observer takes of China’s

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17 Keynote, Dr. Daniel Drezner, Panel 2, AFdK,, Panel 2, DSM, Panel 3, DSO, Panel 3, PSS,
18 This was the view of Dr. Sara Moller on the first panel. The first panels 2:1 split between a future predictions of fundamental change versus status quo stability held through the list of conference presenters.
influence and leadership over the current international order trends. All of the speakers acknowledge the status quo system is undergoing significant change. The distinction between the majority and minority views is whether the significant change in status quo norms, rules, institutions, and leadership constitute fundamental change. All of the presenters acknowledged China’s rise as a global economic power and regional hegemon over the Indo-Pacific region. The minority view presenters did not believe the power-shift dynamic and new perspectives of an optimal order constitute a wholesale replacement of the status quo order. The keynote speaker, Dr. Dan Drezner, offered two pieces of evidence to support the no fundamental change argument, (1) China, the most likely nation to replace U.S. leadership in any region, has prospered under the status quo order, and will not do anything to disrupt that prosperity; and (2) both the status quo and emerging institutions of international order generally adhere to the principles of Brenton Woods, and are run by the same people (international order governance elites). Therefore, “it is not a change to the international order, but a change within the international order”\(^\text{19}\). New institutions of order management and a Chinese led Indo-Pacific does not signal fundamental change. Dr. Drezner concludes that the greatest threat of instability is a contested transition as China assumes the role of regional hegemon in Asia; if a smooth transition occurs, China will run an adapted international order that won’t be fundamentally different from the status quo order.\(^\text{20}\)

This philosophy is deeply rooted in classic international relations liberalism. It assumes that, over time, China and the U.S. will generally move toward the same destiny of a more perfect system. However, the majority of speakers adopted a position more reminiscent of international relations realists (and populist-nationalists), which is much less optimistic about the prospect of an international order under China’s increasing influence or leadership. They would prefer an adaptation of the status quo system, to address persistent developing nation grievances, while management oversight of key institutions of the system and enforcement of collective western democratic rules and norms remains under U.S. leadership.

Dr. Christopher Ankersen warns that current changes to the international order are not going to snap back after or break during the Trump administration. Rather, they constitute reform and adaptive change which western states must accommodate. Western democracies must carefully monitor the pace and degree of change, because it is yet an un-determined thing whether current change will constitute an adaptation or fundamental change to international order.

**Return to Multipolarity**

The international order is transitioning back to a multi-polar power dynamic, with a commensurate return of great power politics. China and India are both on a trajectory to overcome US economic dominance in the next few decades. India is an ascending player in the global order influence arena. However, as eloquently noted by Dr. Sumit Ganguly, India must overcome dysfunctional domestic politics and corruption challenges before they can leverage

\(^{19}\) Keynote, Drezner.

\(^{20}\) Keynote, Drezner.
their growing economic and demographic advantages, and China remains “the most significant threat to liberal values and liberal order in Asia.”

Though unpopular in the neighborhood, Japan remains a very strong ‘middle power’ in the Pacific. If China’s security role eclipses the U.S. and its partners in the region, it is reasonable to expect Japan to assume a greater regional security role. If international order leaders cannot prevent North Korea from developing nuclear weapons and the missile technology to deliver them, Japan may feel the need to assure their own security by fielding a similar capability.

Finally, Russia remains a middle-power on the world stage, relegated to a spoiler state. Russia is no longer the military, political, or economic powerhouse of the former Soviet Union. But Russia has demonstrated an ability to punch above its weight, by infusing itself in partnerships and ventures which complicate and confound cooperation among western democratic nations to take decisive action.

**China Rising**

China’s ascendency as a global economic power (and as a result, military power) is challenging U.S. leadership over the international order, and replacing the U.S. as a regional hegemonic influencer in Asia. However, Dr. Drezner cautioned the audience against wide and sweeping generalizations. He observed that U.S. structural power over the international system is often underestimated; and the rising power and influence of China is often exaggerated. Having said that, it was widely acknowledged that the U.S. took its eye off China and her influence over international order norms in the Pacific for several decades. While no one challenged Dr. Drezner’s admonition about avoiding extreme positions, presenters generally acknowledged that U.S. influence in the Indo-Pacific has diminished (largely due to U.S. behavior in the region), while China’s influence is resurgent. Further, Indo-Pacific panelists suggested the U.S. has never competed with an economy like China’s, U.S. foreign policy has no orienting focus, and both the U.S. and China believe they are exceptional. Neither nation has a history of dealing with another country claiming an equal right to “exceptional” or “indispensable” status, especially a country which also has the power and will to advance those claims by their actions.

**U.S. – A Changing Role?**

The U.S. is the manager and enforcer of the current international order. If the U.S. role changes, the status quo order is likely to change. Because of its traditional role as the manager and enforcer of the international order, a change in U.S. foreign policy or commitment to lead the international order will have an out-sized impact on that order and the mechanisms by which that order is managed. The increasing economic (and military) power of challengers, particularly China, and two decades of failed interventionist foreign policy, are forcing the U.S.

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21 Panel 4, Ganguly
22 Keynote, Drezner
23 Panel 4, Wyne
24 Panel 4, Wyne
to re-examine its role in the world and the policies by which it interacts with other nations. Under the populist-nationalist oriented Trump administration, this new role will likely be interpreted as retrenchment. That characterization is probably too strong, as the Trump administration is fully committed to engagement, through a series of bi-lateral trade and diplomacy arrangements. In fact, the Trump administration has proven a willingness to engage with dubious leaders, and arguably exercised U.S. power to better account for U.S. interests. Most impressive, in light of critic’s expectations, President Trump has steadfastly avoided escalation to conflict – even under pressure from many political camps to act in the face of provocation. Since the end of the Cold War no U.S. president has avoided significant conflict escalation this far into his term of office due to an external provocation.

Due to the perception of U.S. foreign policy and security strategy intervention failures since the end of the Cold War, the re-emergence of a multi-polar international security environment, and the complication of a plurality of non-state actors – often ideologically or self-interest motivated, it is likely the U.S. will adopt a more traditional realist and less interventionist foreign policy regardless of administrations. This will require greater effort among western democratic states to coordinate collective responses to international order challenges as power is dispersing, rather than coalescing around a few known actors. And that coordinated effort must include economic, diplomatic, military, and legitimacy narrative lines-of-effort to succeed. Western democracies must compete with authoritarian counter-narratives promising stability, security, and prosperity with apparent resources and whole-of-government unity to back their claims (which they are not obliged to justify to their own populations – much less harmonize with other governments).

25 The history on this has not been written. In fact, in almost every case, the negotiations and coercive leverage outcomes have not been finalized or run-their-course. Time will tell if the Trump administration’s new style and approach to international relations leadership will yield beneficial results for the U.S.

26 U.S. Presidents since 1991 has escalated or engaged in new conflict in the first three years of their administration. Bush #41, invasion of Panama (5 months), DESERT STORM (21 months); Clinton #42, Somalia (UNOSOM II – 3 mos), First NATO combat mission – Bosnia (11 months), Operations Joint Endeavor (36 months); Bush #43, Afghanistan (Operation Enduring Freedom – 10 months), Iraq (Operation IRAQI FREEDOM – 27 Months); and Obama #44, Afghanistan surge (2 months), Libya (Operation ODYSSEY DAWN - 27 months), and Drone strike strategy in Pakistan, Somalia, Afghanistan, Iraq, and Yemen (“There were ten times more air strikes in the covert war on terror during President Barack Obama’s presidency than under his predecessor, George W. Bush. ...in the year after taking office, Obama ordered more drone strikes than Bush did during his entire presidency.” https://www.thebureauinvestigates.com/stories/2017-01-17/obamas-covert-drone-war-in-numbers-ten-times-more-strikes-than-bush. President Trump has yet to have ‘his war’. His expanded presence of troops in Syria and Afghanistan, Shayrat missile strikes, and Special Operations in Nigeria don’t appear to raise to the intervention level of his predecessors; Although President Obama was credited with greater troop withdrawals from Iraq and Afghanistan during his first term than President Trump.

27 Panel 1, Evans and Braun. Professor Braun attributed the idea to Stephen Walt (Harvard) and John Mearsheimer (Chicago).

28 Keynote, Rowswell
End of Multilateralism

Resurgence of nationalism and populism in domestic politics around the world is altering international relationships, which are trending towards issue-specific, bilateral partnerships, and away from comprehensive, multilateral agreements. The vast majority of presenters emphasized (or at least acknowledged) the role of domestic politics in shaping these context dependent foreign policy choices. This domestic pressure it is not limited to the Trump administration.

Dr. Stéfanie von Hlatky noted the actions of the Trump administration are undermining institutions such as North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). However, this pressure is not limited to the current administration. The structural challenge of democratic elections and the U.S. political parties’ extreme bi-polar positions, has results in predictably unpredictable U.S. foreign policy. With no pretense of curbing domestic political infighting at the water’s edge, U.S. partners and allies perceive U.S. reliability as increasingly volatile.

The tension between idealist aspirations to spread western democratic values based on human rights and rule-of-law, and populist-nationalist considerations of tangible national interests, national power, and utilitarian outcomes will shape U.S. foreign policy choices. In the U.S. and across western democracies, populist and nationalist tendencies seem to be in ascendance. These tendencies favor foreign policy based on tangible self-interest objectives, over collective interests defined by multilateral agreements and collective institutions of liberal order. Therefore, the international order is moving away from multilateral relationships, towards issue-specific, bilateral relationships. In this regard, the U.S. appears less committed to traditional multilateral alliances, treaties, trade arrangements, and other agreements based on collective common interests. Further, nationalist politics suggest that the U.S. will switch partners based on issues, and may court partners with vastly differing ideologies and values to achieve national advantage. Because U.S. popular perceptions are increasingly concerned with loss of influence within the status quo order, and a growing belief that partners and collective agreement stakeholders are taking advantage of the U.S., the U.S. populous and their leaders are becoming less committed advocates of the order and collective agreements.

In this geo-political environment, it may be unwise for traditional western democratic partners to expect core ideological alignment to transcend other factors in securing U.S. commitment on multiple issues. As a result, there is growing interest among ‘democratic middle-powers’ and rising authoritarian powers (China) to influence the trajectory of new order norms through new institutions and relationships, or adapted status quo institutions and alliances to their advantage.

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29 Panel 3, von Hlatky
30 If someone said this (or a collective of folks said this) besides me, we should ‘name cite’ them here. This is another potentially negative assertion about U.S. foreign policy which must be proven or journalistically acknowledged as reflecting an idea that emerged from the conference, or it won’t get by USAWC PAO.
31 Panel 1, Evans; Keynote, Drezner; Panel 2, Moller.
Institutions (still) matter

Institutions of international order are an important component of the international order system. Existing institutions reinforce and manage the status quo order, while new and emerging institutions may pose a significant challenge to the status quo. Institutions such as the Asian Infrastructure and Investment Bank (AIIB) and other Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) facilitating institutions are challenging the order imposed by the World Bank, International Monetary Fund, and the United Nations. Traditional institutions, like the NATO, UN, and the ICC continue to present continuity to the international system. However, differing perspectives within these organizations, and between them and those they impose control over are undermining their legitimacy. NATO nations and Russia have fundamentally different perceptions regarding the same behavior.\(^{32}\) NATO enlargement is seen as the ‘destiny’ of a benign expansion of western democratic values by NATO, and as a threat to national sovereignty and security by Russia.\(^{33}\) Likewise, color revolutions are seen as a natural extension of democratic values grounded in human rights and rule-of-law by NATO nations, and as threats to sovereignty and legitimate governance by Russia.\(^{34}\)

Dr. Marc Ozawa offered an interesting alternative motivation to explain Russian behavior. He suggested, Russian behavior is not driven by NATO expansion. Rather, Russia’s assertiveness is directly tied to the price of oil, and not NATO activity or relative military power. Russia is an oil exporter, and their economy (and sense of security) are heavily dependent on oil prices. Dr. Ozawa suggests when oil prices are high, Russia feels secure enough to be assertive on the international stage. When oil prices are low, Russia feels insecure and is much less adventurous.\(^{35}\) If accurate, this argument logically implies that economic and energy focused organizations, like the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), may influence the security environment and Russia’s national decision making as much or more than traditional security focused institutions of international order.

Transition, not Change.

Arguably, it is the inability to manage a smooth transition, not the change in international order leadership, which poses the greatest threat to peace. “It is not a change to the international order, but a change within the international order,” and the international community’s inability to deal with this change, which poses the greatest threat to peace.\(^{36}\) The supplanting of old regimes by new ones is the real threat posed by revision. In Dr. Drezner’s opinion, transnational institutions, interdependent economies, and nuclear weapons and missile treaties are among the mechanisms that could help the U.S. and China avoid the proverbial Thucydides’ Trap\(^ {37}\), by facilitating a smooth power transition and moderating the

\(^{32}\) Panel 5, Geis; Keynote Baines
\(^{33}\) Panel 5, Geis
\(^{34}\) Panel 3, Ozawa
\(^{35}\) Panel 3, Ozawa
\(^{36}\) Keynote, Drezner
speed and degree of change. Current U.S. foreign policy and independent action may undermine the mechanisms necessary to moderate volatile change and manage a smooth transition.

Ambassador Ben Rowswell (President, Canadian International Council) provided a compelling keynote address highlighting the critical role middle powers can play in shaping international order. By means of a lively Canadian history lesson, which invoked the memory of diplomat and scholar John Wendell Holmes', Ambassador Rowswell pointed out that the direction and purpose of Canada’s foreign policy is driven by core values as much as national interests. However, he observed, nations only get a seat at the table because of power. As a middle-power, Canada magnifies her role in shaping international order by brings democracies together around pragmatic solutions, and selectively applying power in alignment with or independently of great powers; all the while guided by Canada’s core values and national interests. In this way, Canada has historically influenced the changing balance of power, tempered brazen behavior of rising powers, advocated for liberal democracy, and engaged in fierce domestic debates over ‘with the U.S. or independent of U.S.’ foreign policy. If Canada and other democratic middle-power states wish to influence the current international order dynamic, and potentially facilitate a smooth transition of power, they must begin by framing pragmatic problems within a broader common interest strategic approach. In execution of this broader strategic approach, middle-powers must carefully balance the risk-benefit calculation of alliance with and autonomy from great power positions. Amalgamating power within an alliance alongside great powers accrues greater influence, and a seat at the table; but middle-powers must be capable of acting independently to be effective brokers of core value and national interest outcomes. In short, Rowswell admonished Canada “to unite the world’s democracies once again.”

Dr. Chris Ankersen countered that the shift towards a multipolar order may diminish Canada’s influence. Canada’s traditional role as a “helpful fixer may not be as useful as it was in the past.” This is the result of an increasing number of actors competing for influence as well as a pivot in U.S. foreign policy focus to a region without a shared history with Canada, the Indo-Pacific.

Panelist and retired Ambassador Ferry de Kerkhove sharply noted that Canada fails to articulate a “clear eyed foreign policy.” Indeed, as Dr. Kim Nossal noted, Canada’s on-going “act of anti-Americanism” is unhelpful in terms of meeting Canada’s national interests. Alignment of U.S. and Canadian interests has guaranteed Canada’s security for decades, but Canadian’s collective unwillingness to accept this has led to “strategic fudge from our
Canada provides middle-power states an example for effectively influencing great power states. In all cases, Canada has diplomatically and discreetly built consensus to solve problems. To enhance their power and influence Canada generally stays tightly aligned with U.S. positions. However, particularly when Canadian core values are invoked, Canada builds consensus apart from the U.S. to provide a values based independent voice of reason. At this point however, it seems Canada is choosing not to choose. It is being a-strategic.

A Practitioner’s Perspective

The final keynote speaker at the conference, Lieutenant General Wayne Eyre, Deputy Commander, United Nations Command (UNC), Korea, and now the Canadian Army Commander presented an informative brief on the security status of the Korean peninsula, and the UNC’s multi-year effort to disentangle command responsibilities and authorities between UNC, United States Forces Korea (USFK), 8th U.S. Army, and Republic of Korea armed forces commands. He further offered an insightful and engaging update on Canada’s operational and strategic interest in the region.

Conclusion

The KCIS team delivered a very informed set of presentations organized around a ‘Context Setting’ panel, three regional panels (The Americas, the Indo-Pacific, and the North Atlantic), and a preliminary insight ‘Commonalities and Security Implications’ panel. Panelist and keynote speakers effectively addressed the focusing research questions as a collective, but generally abandoned the suggested analytic framework of considering three indicators of change: dissonance between U.S. stated policy and behavior in the region, indications of regional partner hedging behaviors, and the emergence of new narratives regarding alternative views on emerging world order options.

What appears to be certain is that the status quo international order is undergoing significant change. What is not certain is whether that change represents a corrective adaptation within the norms of the existing system, or a fundamental change that will replace existing norms and the leadership over the system. Deterrence and effective competition, within the construct of a rules-based international order, have resulted in a managed peace for several decades. Current critiques of the status quo international order and its shortcomings receive a great deal of attention. Those critiques resonate with many audiences, while patriotism and “positive narratives” are proffered less often and are not as valued when they are suggested. The positive narratives are dismissed as old thinking, or perceived as propaganda. Therefore policy practitioners, military leaders, and security scholars may be
reluctant to offer the positive narrative, to make a case for re-enforcing the current international order system under U.S. leadership. Rather, current trends suggest the status quo international order is being replaced by a fundamentally new system and alternative leadership arrangement. Until the virtues and benefits of the status quo system are more fully examined and explained, the international dialogue focused on criticism of the existing order will dominate the change dialogue.

This executive summary conference report will be followed by the fifth volume in the KCIS series, with a compilation of presenter papers in a KCIS 2019 volume. Anticipate the publication of the KCIS 2019 volume in early spring of 2020! Until then, look to the KCIS website (https://www.queensu.ca/kcis/), or the Strategic Studies Institute web site (https://ssi.armywarcollege.edu/) to see articles, blog entries, and infographics inspired by and related to this important topic.