

PRINCETON PRINCIPLES

Minimum conditions for rebuilding the international, rules-based order

Arising from an international gathering of scholars and practitioners
Princeton University, April 14-15, 2023

We are in an age of unprecedented global challenges and of strategic rivalry. Both of these are generating existential questions about humanity's future.

Amongst the cascading array of global and transnational challenges, climate change is perhaps the most salient; but others – such as health pandemics, food, water and energy security, poverty and inequality, as well as bio-genetic engineering, cyber technologies, and the revolution in AI – make global governance both more urgent and more difficult.

The U.S. and China have each identified the other as a major geopolitical threat. This has made the management of multiple global flashpoints more difficult. States are redefining their security positions. The Russian invasion of Ukraine has triggered the most violent conflict in Europe since World War II. Foundational norms enshrined in the UN Charter and post-Cold War security agreements have been violated. Across the world, the “problems of anarchy” are becoming more acute – arms races, security dilemmas, and geopolitical rivalry.

It is widely observed that the global system is fragmenting, manifest in various functional, political, and economic realms – technology regimes, production networks, trade, finance, and energy systems, information platforms, scientific research networks; geopolitical alignments, and so forth. The recent moves by the United States and China toward strategic and political-technological decoupling are widely seen as a central driver of this story.

At a time when the number and diversity of states and the importance of non-state actors has markedly increased, and when the balance of global power has markedly shifted compared with 1945, the foundations of multilateralism are being undermined — and, in this context, international institutions have too often become dysfunctional. Countries in all regions of the world are choosing how to work within and across shifting alignments and divides.

The fragmentation of the global system may not be reversed, but we believe that its decay can be arrested and its complexity can be managed by the adoption of a minimal set of shared principles, which may in due course be a stepping-stone towards something greater:

1. *Engagement.* The management of global challenges and of strategic rivalry in a complex world depends on the ability of state actors — in particular, the most powerful state actors — to display mutual respect and to engage with one another in good faith, with the aim of building trust through mutual understanding, even in areas where there are severe conflicts of interest or value.
2. *Confidence-building.* Beyond engagement, the management of global challenges and strategic rivalry requires:
 - confidence-building measures to minimise the risk of accidental conflict;
 - the construction of mutually acceptable ‘guard-rails’ to ensure that there are no surprises;

- cooperation to solve global challenges, where cooperation is possible and necessary; and
 - identifying areas of common concern in relation to emerging global challenges.
3. *The promotion of transparency.* Rising economic, political, environmental, technological and security inter-dependence can be managed in the context of strategic rivalry only through the establishment of a degree of openness and confidence. This means that states need to:
 - promote timely transparency, to the greatest extent possible given the exigencies of their domestic political systems, both in relation to country data and in relation to the actions taken by state and non-state actors within their countries.
 4. *Support for sustainable development.* The stability of the international system is put at risk if citizens and states feel vulnerable. Therefore, state actors have an obligation:
 - in accordance with their means, and consistent with the Sustainable Development Goals, to provide credible support for sustainable development and increased resilience in states that would otherwise be vulnerable.
 5. *Constructive technological and economic competition.* Economic relationships and power relationships are inseparably intertwined with one another; strategic rivals will therefore seek geoeconomic and technological competitive advantage. This can be a spur to innovation and to solving global problems such as the provision of clean energy and the protection of global public health. But the world can be reconnected only if such competition is seen as a positive-sum game, and therefore as a basis for the development of a more inclusive world economy. This means:
 - maintaining trading relationships and global supply chains where they bring mutual benefit;
 - cooperating on the global governance of technology and economic activity, in fields where such cooperation is critical and possible; and, in particular,
 - cooperating to establish and maintain the stability of the global financial system, the progress of the clean energy transition, and the protection of global public health.
 6. *Adherence to fundamental tenets of International Humanitarian Law.* For centuries, human beings have sought to limit the horror of war. In the context of the 21st century, this means state actors, whether acting directly or through other state or non-state actors:
 - observing the principle of distinction between combatant and civilian casualties; and
 - avoiding other violations of the Geneva Conventions.
 7. *No first use of nuclear weapons.*
 8. *Peaceful settlement of disputes.* Despite its many current dysfunctions, the international rules-based order has provided the world with an array of means for settling or managing peacefully a large range of inter-state disputes. State actors should:
 - adopt the principle that the peaceful diplomatic management or settlement of disputes, or the use of the available methods of arbitration and adjudication, will be their default mechanism for settling disputes with other state actors; and
 - seek to maintain, rather than undermine, the efficacy of the existing arbitration and adjudication mechanisms.
 9. *Respect for territorial integrity.* It is a fundamental principle of the UN Charter that states should respect the territorial integrity of other states. This means that state actors should:
 - respect international boundaries where these are settled; and
 - seek peaceful resolution of territorial disputes where territory is genuinely in dispute.

10. *No unauthorised forcible regime change*. In the context of diverse types of regime across the world, another fundamental threat to the maintenance of the international rules-based order is action by a state actor or a coalition of state actors to intervene forcibly in the affairs of another state to bring about regime change, outside the strictly constrained circumstances in which current international law permits such intervention. The maintenance of the international order accordingly means that state actors must:
- foreswear any attempt to effect forcible regime change in another state, except where authorised to do so by the United Nations.

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