

ONE

WORLD OUT OF JOINT

In January 2005, while I was serving as ambassador to the United States, Jutta and I were invited to an opulent ball in Palm Beach, Florida. The dress code for men was white tie and medals; for women, a long gown. The location of the Red Cross benefit ball was Mar-a-Lago, and the host was Donald Trump. Young men dressed as Roman gladiators carried torches as the guests, among them several of my fellow ambassadors and I, with our wives, traversed a long, red carpet to approach the host and his new wife, Melania. A real Hollywood experience! Later that evening I chatted with Donald Trump about his grandfather's German roots—never suspecting that, to the surprise of almost everybody, this man would be elected the forty-fifth president of the United States of America in November 2016.

Since the very beginning of my diplomatic career, in the early 1970s, I have had opportunities to meet a great number of international political leaders. This began with Jimmy Carter in the late

1970s, followed by Ronald Reagan. In the 1980s I experienced the redoubtable Soviet Foreign Minister Gromyko, as well as the terrible Romanian dictator Nicolae Ceaușescu, and then Mikhail Gorbachev, George H. W. Bush, Maggie Thatcher, François Mitterrand, and Jacques Chirac. In the 1990s I had to negotiate with the Serbian President Slobodan Milošević, who was later put on trial in The Hague. During that process I also met Igor Ivanov, who later became Russian foreign minister, and whom I still call a friend today. As a member of the German chancellor's delegation, I then met Vladimir Putin and, as ambassador to Washington, attempted to improve relations between George W. Bush and Germany, which had suffered greatly in the wake of the invasion of Iraq. As the chairman of the Munich Security Conference (MSC) for the last decade-plus, I have met a great many other state leaders, ministers, and international decisionmakers, from secretaries-general of the United Nations to presidents of the European Commission, from Ukrainian president Petro Poroshenko all the way to Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif and his Saudi counterpart Adel al-Jubeir.

Several of these leaders were responsible for decisions with crucial geopolitical or historical consequences. Take Ronald Reagan, and his successor George H. W. Bush, or think of Helmut Kohl and Gorbachev: peaceful German reunification, the breakup of the Soviet Union!

But none of these many decisionmakers shook up and unsettled the world like President Trump has since taking office in January 2017. The entire established liberal world order is threatening to give way, and nothing is the way it was before.

That the world is more dangerous had become clear to many of us, of course, ever since 9/11, the Iraq War, and the bloody wars in Syria and then also in Yemen. When Putin annexed Crimea in 2014 and instigated the bloody conflict in Eastern Ukraine, many saw him to be the great alienator. Nobody could have known that the new American president, of all people, would be the one to chal-

lenge the whole established order—free trade as well as the Western canon of values and the principle of collective security anchored in Article 5 of the NATO treaty.

But how dangerous is the situation in actuality? “Global security is more endangered today than at any time since the collapse of the Soviet Union” is a warning I have heard affirmed repeatedly, in many lectures.

German President Frank-Walter Steinmeier expressed it in similar terms back when he was foreign minister: “The world is out of joint.” We are apparently experiencing an epochal watershed; an era is ending, and the contours of a new geopolitical age are only starting to come into focus. The Munich Security Report published by the MSC in February 2019 called this the “great reshuffling of the pieces of the international order.” To date, it is hard to judge whether someone will be able to pick up the core elements of the global order and piece them back together—or whether the old order will be destroyed before the work on a new one has even begun.¹

What is clear: No matter where one looks, there are countless conflicts in the world and multiple crises whose effects extend even to Europe. Many of them will be further exacerbated by the effects of the coronavirus pandemic. Today there are around 70 million people who have fled their homes due to conflict or persecution—a dismal record. And according to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), where I long served on the governing board, in 2019 global military spending rose to unprecedented levels, indicating a crisis of growing tensions and bloody conflicts.

In Syria, whose coast is just 125 kilometers from the European Union (EU) member Cyprus, hundreds of thousands of people have been killed in the last eight years. Millions have been displaced. The United Nations (UN) has stopped counting the casualties of this conflict, because the lack of access to the country makes it impossible to verify this information. In April 2016, Staffan de Mistura, the UN special envoy for Syria, estimated 400,000 dead by that time. The latest figures estimate around half a million fatalities. That is

about the population of Dresden, Germany, or Oakland, California.

Since the beginning of the Syrian conflict, more than 6 million people have been displaced within the country and 5.6 million more have fled its borders. These two groups of refugees comprise more than half of Syria's population. And we are still receiving reports about atrocities like barrel bombs thrown over residential areas and the use of chemical weapons. Syria, once a destination for culture tourists from all over the world, has become a country in a permanent state of emergency; city names like Aleppo, Afrin, and Eastern Ghouta have now become synonymous with horror, suffering, and death.

Syria is only the most terrible example of the many internationalized civil wars—that is, wars in which a conflict starts as a confrontation between local actors but gradually involves ever more external powers. A terrible war of this kind is raging in Yemen, too, where regional powers are muscling in—Iran on one side and Saudi Arabia on the other.

The neighboring continent of Africa has several countries in a permanent state of violence: just think of Mali, Sudan, Congo, or Somalia. Another hotspot is located right at the gate of the European Union, no further from Berlin than Paris: A military conflict is raging in Ukraine, which shares a border with Poland, Hungary, Romania, and Slovakia. Over 2,500 civilians have been killed there since Russia began its military operation in Eastern Ukraine in 2014. Even after four years of international negotiations on pacifying the situation, shots are fired on a regular basis.

Mind you, those are only the wars and conflicts that manage to attract international attention. Under this visible peak of the iceberg of violence is extremely thick pack ice, made up of numerous violent conflicts all over the world that receive less attention. Among them are the civil war in South Sudan, attacks in the Sinai in Egypt, the collapse of the state in Libya, the drug war in the Philippines, the conflict with the Taliban in Northwest Pakistan, and the war against Islamists in Mali. The list could go on forever.

Beyond the “crises of the day” are the “eternal” hotspots, including the confrontations between Turkey and the Kurdish Workers’ Party (PKK), which have been conducted militarily and practically without interruption since 1984; the Somalian civil war, which has been raging for thirty years; the conflict over Tibet that has been simmering since 1950; the equally old conflict between China and Taiwan, and the territorial disputes in the South China Sea. Resolution seems just as far away in Nagorno-Karabakh, Transnistria, and South Ossetia and Abkhazia, breakaway regions of Azerbaijan, Moldova, and Georgia, respectively; Russia’s conflict with Chechnya; the interethnic tensions in the West Balkans, including the still contentious status of Kosovo; the disputes about Iran’s nuclear program; the turbulent relations between North and South Korea, which have been based on a truce but no peace treaty for 75 years; and, last but not least, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

And, finally, there are also those countries that have suffered through traumatizing civil wars which were ended only with great difficulty, and that are now struggling to rebuild a stable state—places where old conflicts could flare up again at any time: Rwanda, Côte d’Ivoire, Chad, Congo, and Sri Lanka, to name a few examples.

There is also great concern with those countries that may not be at war but can hardly be regarded as stable. Turkey was at the threshold of civil war during the attempted coup in summer 2015; since then it has persisted in a state of emergency that seems to be becoming increasingly authoritarian.

Joining the ranks of crises, military conflicts, and political instability are terror attacks all over the world. Their best-known perpetrators include the Islamic State, Boko Haram, al Qaida, and the Taliban. The large majority of these attacks in recent years were committed in Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Nigeria, and Syria.

Fortunately, as of this writing, Germany has not yet been a main terrorist target. Nevertheless, there have been attacks ranging from the insidious murders and robberies committed by the right-wing radical National Socialist Underground (NSU) to serious Islamist

attacks with trucks or knives. Here at home the fear may be greater than the actual danger, but the Germans' increasingly anxious view of the chaotic global situation is certainly justified.

JUST MINUTES FROM A MAJOR WAR

The unusual abundance of dangerous and bloody crises and conflicts is "crowned" by a persistent nuclear threat, which has become so normal that it seldom attracts any political attention.

In Germany, the country where hundreds of thousands of people marched in the 1980s to protest against new intermediate-range nuclear missiles and for peace, one thing seems to have slipped everyone's mind: that the danger of a confrontation between the great powers, and of nuclear escalation, has by no means been averted. That the Nobel Peace Prize was awarded to opponents of nuclear armaments in 2017 is, thus, especially gratifying—although this will hardly prompt the nuclear powers to disarm.

While we here in Germany are in the midst of a heated discussion about whether the budget for the German Army should be increased at all, in many parts of the world an arms race is well underway. China's increasingly self-assertive behavior is being reflected ever more clearly in its demands for military respect. Beijing is upgrading its armaments. And in pursuing a more powerful role for China in Asia and the world, President Xi Jinping seems to not shun the risk of antagonizing others—most importantly the United States.² This raises the question, will the further rise of China take place peacefully or will it someday lead to violent conflict?

There are also new initiatives to upgrade defense efforts in Russia and the United States, especially in the area of nuclear weapons. Old nuclear bombs are being modernized, and completely new weapons systems are being developed as well. At the same time, there have been several near collisions between Russian military aircraft and NATO in recent years—occurrences that can easily get

out of control in the tense situation the world is currently facing. How do we ensure that a misunderstanding does not spiral directly into escalation?

Last year, North Korea and the United States threatened each other with the deployment of nuclear weapons, and in the Middle East, rivaling powers that are armed to the teeth—for instance, Saudi Arabia and Iran—moved ever closer to the brink of conflict. What can be done to reduce the danger of an escalation that it might not be possible to harness?

A massive reduction in the number of nuclear weapons has occurred in the last decades, most recently initiated by the New Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START) negotiated by Putin and Barack Obama. But as we observed in the Munich Security Report 2019, these “arms control treaties, still following a bipolar logic, are unraveling, while there is not yet a new multilateral framework for arms control that would be fit for the emerging international system.” The Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty is dead, and with New START unlikely to be extended beyond 2024, “another element which limited dangerous competition between Russia and the United States is likewise imperiled.”³ Meanwhile, the United States and Russia still maintain a total of around 13,000 nuclear warheads so that they can react in the case of a hostile military offensive.⁴

Many believe that nuclear war is a mere specter of the past or a dramatically orchestrated backdrop from a James Bond movie. But the nuclear threat is real: Around the world there are about 1,800 nuclear warheads just a button away from deployment, standing ready day and night.⁵

We should keep in mind how often militarily relevant incidents have occurred in recent years. I am a member of the European Leadership Network (ELN), which has issued a series of publications that warn about such dangers and document how often there were near collisions or unnecessary provocations between Russian and Western airplanes or ships. According to ELN, sixty such near collisions occurred between March 2014 and March 2015 alone.

This includes cases like that of a Scandinavian Airlines plane that nearly collided with a Russian military plane near Copenhagen, Denmark. A catastrophe was barely averted. While most of the incidents designated as serious by the ELN were provoked by Russia, NATO must, in its own interest, do everything to ensure that the risk of confrontation is minimized.

RISKY BEHAVIOR ON THE BRINK

In any case, the danger of an international war between great and intermediate powers has clearly increased in recent years. Because of this concern, I chose to entitle the 2018 Munich Security Conference “To the Brink—and Back?”—meaning that what we observed in many places all over the world was, in fact, “brinkmanship”: extremely risky behavior that placed countries on the brink of war.

The hope was that the conference would be able to send a signal of de-escalation and *détente* and present initiatives showing how the world could step back from the brink. Unfortunately, this was not the case. Instead, many speakers added further fuel to the fire. At the end of 2019, I am even more concerned than I was in 2018.

I do not mean to sound alarmist. A major war continues to be rather unlikely. But the risk is, unfortunately, clearly greater than it was just a few years ago. One reason is the growing perception of threat in the great powers’ capitals, which bears the risk of becoming a self-fulfilling prophecy—after all, “If everyone prepares for a hostile world, its arrival is almost preordained.”⁶ The situation today is more strained and dangerous than we have seen since the end of the Cold War. So it is high time for political leaders all over the world to take this danger seriously and act accordingly.

GLOBAL TREND: MORE INEQUALITY, LESS FREEDOM

Obviously, not only war and violence are playing a greater role these days. A new systemic competition appears to be on the horizon. Liberal democracy and the principle of open markets—the only conceivable models of legitimate political and economic order back in the 1990s—are no longer the clear preference in today’s world.

The 2018 Freedom Report issued by Freedom House states dryly, “Democracy faced its most serious crisis in decades in 2017 as its basic tenets—including guarantees of free and fair elections, the rights of minorities, freedom of the press, and the rule of law—came under attack around the world.”

According to the Freedom House indicators, 2019 was the fourteenth year in a row in which there were more countries where political rights and civil liberties declined than countries that registered a positive trend. Similar conclusions were drawn by the latest Bertelsmann Stiftung’s Transformation Index, which scores the development of democracy and the market economy in 129 developing and transitioning countries. The alarming trend identified by these researchers can be summarized as more inequality, less freedom.

In China the Communist Party developed a system of authoritarian state capitalism, which was thoroughly successful in opening the path from poverty to moderate prosperity for wide parts of the population. This made China into an attractive example for many authoritarian states to follow. This is despite the fact that the authors of the Transformation Index also emphasize that democracies are much more capable of combatting corruption, social exclusion, and barriers to fair economic competition. Autocratic states have a much poorer track record in this respect, not to mention human rights.

Nevertheless, primarily because of China’s economic success, the Chinese government is completely confident that its system is a suitable export model for other states to imitate—even as President

Xi Jinping is having the constitution changed so that he can remain in office indefinitely. At the same time, Beijing matches growing assertiveness abroad with increasing repression and surveillance at home.⁷

Russia left the path toward a liberal, democratic state under the rule of law a long time ago. A true opposition, free media, and a vibrant civil society are not tolerated at all. And yet the idea of “strong leadership” is catching on more, not only with the Russians, but also in many other places in the world.

Even in the European Union, there are advocates of “illiberal democracy.” They want to restrict freedom of the press and free speech, warn about the “Eurocracy” in Brussels, or fall for general xenophobia. They constitute an axis of fear that seeks salvation by retreating into the nationalism of years gone by.

And lastly, even in the United States, which used to be regarded as the land of freedom, defenders of democracy must now fight daily for compliance with those standards that were once considered unassailable.

Liberalism has come under pressure in another form as well. For decades the principle of an open global economy was considered a guarantee for gains in prosperity, but this is now being increasingly questioned. Negotiations about dismantling trade barriers in the framework of the World Trade Organization have been stagnant for years. Ratification of regional free trade agreements has become quite difficult, even between the European Union and Canada.

In the meantime, President Donald Trump has introduced new protective tariffs on steel and aluminum, and since June 2018 goods from the European Union are no longer exempted from these duties. There is a real danger that this is the prelude to introducing ever more measures, culminating in a trade war—which means nobody wins.

GLOBAL CRISIS MANAGERS UNDER PRESSURE

International organizations and agreements have also come under pressure. Successes like the Paris Agreement on climate change and the nuclear deal with Iran do show that it is still possible to find answers to questions of global concern. But precisely these examples also show that the compromises reached are built on shaky ground: Donald Trump announced the United States's withdrawal from the climate accord back in summer 2017. And after the withdrawal of the United States from the Iran framework in May 2018, its future has become highly dubious.

Important powers, first and foremost the United States under President Trump, are cutting back funding for peace missions or pulling out of specialized agencies of the United Nations. Just like during the Cold War, the United Nations is once again frequently paralyzed because the permanent members block each other in the Security Council. And because the council no longer reflects today's global distribution of power, frustrated states are switching to substitute formats; informal "clubs" like the G7 and G20 are gaining momentum. This is happening because these less regulated bodies allow for something resembling "effective multilateralism." But is that really true? Didn't the 2017 G7 summit, the results of which Trump later undermined by tweet, sow doubts about such alternative formats?

My friend Ian Bremmer calls this phenomenon the emergence of a "G-Zero world," a vacuum fed by the decline of Western influence and by many states focusing on their own domestic problems. The result, according to Bremmer, is a world in which no country alone, nor any group of states, is willing to develop a truly global agenda, let alone provide solutions for the world's problems.

In Europe the annexation of Crimea and Russia's continuing intervention in Eastern Ukraine demonstrate that our continent is no postmodern paradise in which the use of military force is impossible. The dream of 1990—that the end of German partition would

allow for the emergence of a comprehensive Euro-Atlantic security architecture that integrates Russia—has gone up in smoke.

OVERALL, PESSIMISM PREVAILS

Only traces of the widespread optimism of the early 1990s remain. Scholars who believe in overall progress are striking a different note in their contributions to today's discourse. It is not all that long ago that they would have expressed the opposite opinion.

Just twenty years ago, we believed that the world would move more or less constantly in the right direction. Democracy, human rights, and the market economy were advancing everywhere. International organizations took on ever more tasks and appeared to epitomize the model of global governance—one that would be equal to taking on the challenges of environmental pollution, child labor, and infectious diseases. So much appeared to be on the right track.

The establishment of the World Trade Organization in 1995 was considered a milestone. An open global economy was considered good for everyone in the long run, and for this a shared regulatory framework was needed. That was a broad consensus in principle, even though unfair trade practices such as dumping and export subsidies did, of course, persist.

At that time, China was barely present on the geopolitical map. The Middle Kingdom was in the midst of an economic boom, but hardly anyone imagined that it might also become a political rival of the largest economic power yet, the United States. Many believed instead that China (as my old friend Robert Zoellick, the former World Bank president, put it) could become a “responsible stakeholder” if integrated into international organizations and, above all, the global economic architecture—and would thus assimilate into the existing liberal world order as a reliable partner.

The United Nations Conference on Environment and Develop-

ment had been held in Rio de Janeiro in 1992. This is where Agenda 21, which defined common goals for sustainable development, was passed. The conference was the starting point for a whole series of important global initiatives on environmental and climate protection. In Rio the vision of functioning global governance to solve global problems suddenly seemed within reach.

People spoke of the “peace dividend” and hoped that money which had previously been poured into equipping armed forces in both the East and the West could now serve other purposes. Countries including Kazakhstan and Ukraine even voluntarily gave up the nuclear weapons stored on their territory. The Cold War was a thing of the past; the future promised disarmament and cooperation.

In the 1990s, Europeans saw Russia as a partner and as a country that was modernizing and would develop toward real democracy. The CSCE became the OSCE: Although only one letter changed, from that point on the *Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe* became the *Organization* for this purpose. But behind this new name was a visionary idea, as Russian President Mikhail Gorbachev formulated it at the time, of a “Common European Home” where the West and the East would live together.

Overall, Europe was focused on cooperation. After decades during which a small but growing group of European countries were cooperating more closely on economics and policy, in 1992 the European Economic Community (EEC) became the European Union. Its membership has increased considerably since then, from 12 in 1992 to 28 today. Back then, nearly everyone believed that expansion and deepening of the EU were two sides of the same coin, and that we Europeans, as the founders had formulated, would inexorably proceed further along the path to an “ever closer union.”

The United States supported the Europeans—not always unconditionally, but certainly in principle—in deepening their cooperation and endorsed the steps to enlarge the EU, accompanied by the integration of Central and Eastern European countries into NATO.

After the end of the Cold War, it seemed that these countries were finally taking their place in the West. In the United States, President George H. W. Bush expressed his wish for a “Europe whole, free, and at peace.” While the country substantially reduced its military personnel stationed in Europe, no one seriously doubted that the United States would continue to be engaged in Europe and would thus remain a “European power.”

For us Germans, these developments were a godsend. With the turning point in 1989–1991, from the fall of the Berlin Wall to the end of the Soviet Union, the core objectives of West German policy had been fulfilled. Germany was reunited and now “surrounded by friends.” It was integrated into important international organizations, from the United Nations to the EU and NATO, and had once again become a respected member of the international community. No threat to its national security was in sight.

THE GOOD NEWS: IT IS NOT ALL BAD

Although some of these hopes for peace, democracy, human rights, and free trade have been shattered, from the historical perspective there are certainly grounds for optimism. Therefore, it would be wrong to paint only an apocalyptic picture. If we occasionally distance ourselves from the latest news of the day and try to look at the larger view, we can see a picture of humanity that is—in the historical perspective—not only more peaceful than ever, but also more healthy and prosperous. This picture, as Harvard professor Steven Pinker has emphasized over and over again in a number of publications, shows that we are moving in the right direction overall.

Some important current figures support Pinker’s optimism. Despite how often wars and their victims are in the news, the fact is the number of victims has dropped significantly in the decades since World War II. And global poverty, as we are reminded time and time again, has also been reduced. Billions of people, many of

them in in China, have risen out of extreme poverty to form a new global middle class. Between 2005 and 2010 alone, the number of people who had to live on less than US\$1.25 a day was reduced by half a billion.

In 1950, only about every third person in the world could read and write (36 percent). In 2010 the literacy rate had risen to around four out of every five people in the world (83 percent).

Further, we have succeeded in conquering many serious diseases that regularly cost the lives of countless people just a few decades ago. The distribution of vaccines resulted in the number of measles victims dropping by 84 percent between 2000 and 2016. Polio cases have fallen by 99 percent since 1988. Child mortality has been reduced in most countries. According to the World Health Organization, 20,000 fewer children died each day in 2016 than in 1990.

Even death is less menacing. It still comes, but not quite so fast: The average global life expectancy climbed from about 46 years in 1950 to 72 in 2017.

All of this sounds quite gratifying—and it certainly is! All the same, wars, crises, and instability in the world regularly thwart this general upswing and sometimes even roll it back. One major war, and the number of victims climbs back up. A single deadly epidemic, and the life expectancy drops. This is why it would be a fatal mistake to sit back and let the world take its course, believing that everything always gets better.

Considering the many victims of war and violence, it would be more than cynical to tell them, “Too bad for you, but you are simply the exceptions on the path to peace and justice.”

Every single victim who could have been saved is one too many.

REASONS FOR HOPE AND OPTIMISM

When I was born, after the end of the World War II, Germany was in ruins and the guilt-ridden nation seemed irrevocably brought to its knees—deindustrialized, occupied by the victorious powers, and shortly thereafter, sawed into two parts. Who would have wagered even a penny that by 2018 this country would be reunified, a politically stable democracy, and one of the leading economies in the world? I share this experience with many of my generation, and only those under age thirty can possibly believe that Germany had been on the sunny side of history “all along.”

And in my professional life as a diplomat, first in Bonn and later in Berlin and various foreign postings, I was able to witness political events that nobody would have thought possible.

My colleagues and I held our breath when Foreign Minister Hans-Dietrich Genscher walked out on the balcony of the German embassy in Prague on the evening of September 30, 1989, and declared to hundreds of East German refugees that they would be allowed to emigrate by train to West Germany the very next day. I accompanied one of the later trains, representing the West German government. I will never forget the scent of cold sweat, of fear, in the crowded compartments of the night train, nor the rejoicing upon our arrival in the West the following morning. More on this in a later chapter.

I sat behind the German chancellor as a member of the German delegation in Paris, when the heads of state and government of thirty-two European countries as well as the United States and Canada declared the end of the division of Europe on November 21, 1990, and signed the final document of the CSCE summit, committing to democracy as the only form of government and promising their populations to guarantee human rights. The day on which the Charter of Paris for a New Europe was signed heralded the end of the Cold War, which had been a threat for the entire world until that day.

I was the chief German negotiator during the talks in Dayton, Ohio, in November 1995, when the bloody war that raged for years in Yugoslavia was ended after weeks of arduous negotiations. A peace treaty was later signed by Serbian President Slobodan Milošević, Croatian President Franjo Tuđman, and the chairman of the presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Alija Izetbegović—three men who were such bitter enemies that they had refused even to sit at the same table before this event. What I learned from this was that, for the sake of peace, one has to negotiate even with war criminals, and that the goal of peace can sometimes be achieved only through the deployment of military force.

My first day in Washington, D.C., as the new German ambassador to Washington was September 11, 2001. Before I even figured out the telephone system, my staff and I had to provide assistance to the families of the German victims of the terrorist attacks, while at the same time organizing crisis communications between my own government and the White House. In so doing, however, I also experienced the extraordinary generosity of the German population in this time of need. Within just a few weeks, Germans donated many millions of dollars, which I was later able to present to the U.S. Department of Defense for the families of the victims of the attack on the Pentagon. The U.S. general who accepted the check was impressed, stating that he had never before received such a large donation from abroad.

As the ambassador in London, I was congratulated by complete strangers in 2006 for the World Cup's "fairy tale summer"—a soccer tournament that was so joyful and peaceful that the word "Germany" no longer made the British think of the trinity of Hitler, the war, and the kaiser.

And as chairman of the Munich Security Conference since 2008, I have encountered so many leaders from politics, business, and civil society searching for new solutions and ideas to make this world a better place.

The English language uses the expression "fog of war" to ex-

press the fact that even the best made plans are worthless in times of war, because the actual events remain obscured by surprises, imponderables, and uncertainty. Not even commanders can maintain a complete overview, yet they have to make weighty decisions even when they can no longer see beyond the hand in front of their face.

Yet over and again, I have experienced that conflicts can actually be resolved even from within the fog—that trust and optimism can replace hate and desperation, and that peace is possible.

The path to peace can be found. Sometimes we just have to look a very long time to find it. That is why good foreign policy also requires tenacity and endurance—we like to speak of “strategic patience” in such cases. And, sometimes the journey is the destination.

FIVE REASONS WHY PEACE AND STABILITY ARE SO DIFFICULT TO SECURE TODAY

So, what is it that makes peace and stability so difficult to achieve? Let us try to get to the bottom of this problem: It is not a monocausal explanation we are dealing with, of course, but a whole bundle of causes and developments. I would like to briefly present five of these:

The Epochal Break in Power Politics

The unipolar world of the U.S. hegemony that began in 1990 is coming to an end. The next epoch will be characterized, above all, by the rise of China—and thus by a relative power shift away from the United States (and Europe) toward countries outside the traditional West. But extensive power shifts also carry the risk of new crises and conflicts. After all, ascending powers have their own ideas about how the international order is to be shaped—and they may well contradict the ideas propagated by the previous great powers. What we are dealing with here is also known as Thucydides’s trap.

The ancient Greek historian had observed in the tensions between Sparta and Athens that the rise of new powers rarely proceeds peacefully. This raises a question: Can the values of the West, and the institutions that still protect and support the liberal world order it founded, survive in the long term? Or is a new world order emerging—an alternative to the Western order we have known? The disconcertion is palpable, and it is growing. It is further magnified by the fact that the classic “policeman of the world,” who had provided for a semblance of order, has withdrawn: “America First,” the political slogan of the Trump administration, means that Washington no longer feels responsible for global governance, international institutions, and global rules. But if the United States is no longer willing to take on this role, who should or can? This question frequently surfaced during discussions at the 2019 Munich Security Conference and was a core concern raised in our Munich Security Report 2019. In it, we drew the disconcerting conclusion that “some of the candidates for an increased role as guardians of the liberal order are willing but incapable, others are at least moderately capable but unwilling or unable to bring their capabilities to the fore.”⁸

The Loss of Truth and Trust

One problem is that trust between governments—especially among the most powerful of them—is virtually gone. And it is very, very difficult to rebuild trust once it has been destroyed. In this sense, relationships between states are not so different from a marriage. What makes the situation all the more precarious is that we are observing an alarming loss of trust on all sorts of levels in recent years.

For starters, today we often cannot distinguish between fact and fake. What is truth, and what is propaganda? This is not new in the history of the world; as Aeschylus said, the first casualty of war is truth. But it now seems to apply in times of peace as well. Citizens, like governments, are bombarded with information to such

a degree that it is often impossible, or at least difficult, to ascertain what is true.

In the battle of ideas, everyone is adamant about their own “facts.” This is an essential element in our world of increasing uncertainty.

Trust is also being undermined by the fact that Russia and others are deploying the latest technologies in an effort to manipulate democratic means of shaping public opinion in Western societies. We can track this especially in the debate about the role of Russian hackers and social media campaigns in the lead-up to presidential elections in the United States. But in the past year, the Chinese also came under fire for very aggressive interference in politics, universities, and media in Western democracies. Interventions in the freedom of expression are especially problematic in this regard—for instance, when Chinese media in foreign countries are “brought into line” in the hopes of restricting critical debates on human rights violations in China or on the assertion of Chinese territorial claims. In Australia, massive Chinese donations were exposed, which had been funneled to political parties and individual politicians who subsequently expressed very favorable opinions about China.

Thus it may be difficult to consider Xi Jinping’s China or Putin’s Russia a reliable partner. But it does not mean that we should not work together with Beijing and Moscow where possible.

What makes the situation especially dangerous in the case of Russia is the combination of two factors: the current crises in which both Russia and the West are involved (first and foremost in Ukraine and in Syria, but also in Yemen and elsewhere) and the loss of political trust, which has resulted, for instance, in today’s almost complete absence of contacts between the Russian General Staff and the Pentagon. These days it is a major geopolitical event when the Russian chief of the General Staff meets with his American counterpart. In the Clinton and Obama eras, there were multiple communication channels between various levels of Western

and Russian military and civilian leadership and command headquarters. Everyone knew their counterpart and who to call in order to clear up any misunderstandings. No one knows with any certainty who to call any more. The two sides barely know each other.

Yet this does not only concern the question of whether Putin trusts Chancellor Angela Merkel or whether Trump trusts Putin. It is also about whether citizens still trust their institutions. Surveys show that citizens' trust in their governments to make reasonable decisions has dropped dramatically in the twenty-eight EU member states. This loss in trust is not complete, but it is quite substantial. And this loss of confidence in politics extends all the way down to the local level.

The Loss in Predictive Power

Added to this is a new kind of loss in predictive power, or an inability to anticipate the trajectory or significance of world events. As chairman of the Munich Security Conference, which is attended each year by over 500 decisionmakers from all over the world, I think about which topics to put on the agenda months ahead of time. It is important for us to set the right priorities, but we also want to discuss what will be affecting people in the year to come. I try to accomplish this by spending time beforehand with friends, colleagues, and experts whom I believe to be the most intelligent and experienced people in foreign policy, whether they are from Brussels, Moscow, or Washington, from Berlin, London, or Paris.

In early 2014 the political and civil rights demonstrations on Independence Square in Kyiv were reaching their climax. Yet not one of my advisors and experts suggested addressing the Ukraine crisis as the start of a major European security emergency. Everyone considered these events to be a domestic topic for Ukraine.

Six weeks later, everything had changed: Russian soldiers and tanks invaded, Crimea was annexed, and the crisis was no longer an inner-Ukrainian matter, but a massive international security conflict with threatening effects even today.

Just as bad, at the same time not one of us had recognized the relevance of a second topic: key word “Islamic State” (IS). In retrospect, I know now that there were definitely experts at the German Intelligence Service (BND) and the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), and certainly in the back offices of the German Foreign Office as well, who were already worried about the Islamic State. However, the topic had not yet been picked up by decisionmakers. Only a few months later, in June 2014, everyone who followed the news knew that the IS presented a major security policy risk on a global scale—one that would occupy us for many years and continues to do so to this day.

Alternatively, take the year 2016: Why was almost everyone caught off guard in the days before the Brexit decision? Why were the analysts not able to predict the result with any accuracy? And what about the U.S. election? Who saw that ending with a loss for Hillary Clinton?

In 2017 I had the opportunity to accompany the German Foreign Minister Sigmar Gabriel to a discussion with the Saudi Arabian foreign minister about the current situation in the Middle East. There were no signs beforehand that a crisis with Qatar would erupt overnight. Suddenly we were facing the threat of war. Who had seen that coming? No one! And this list of surprises will be continued in 2020 and beyond.

A lack of predictability can cause headaches for stockbrokers. But in foreign policy it presents a new—and significant—problem. It was never possible to plan foreign policy precisely, of course, but in the past it was possible to make a more reliable prognosis of strategic developments. Conflicts escalated more slowly, the actors involved were old acquaintances, and their arguments and interests, familiar. This is no longer the case. Conflict prevention, as good as it sounds, has thus become much more difficult.

We can no longer prepare for what is coming and always have to be prepared for surprises. Expect the unexpected!

The Loss of the Nation-State's Monopoly of Power

An entirely different phenomenon that complicates efforts toward peace is the loss of the nation-state's monopoly of power. When the German Empire was founded in 1871, Otto von Bismarck was able to assert that he, as chancellor of the new state, was capable of providing for its external and internal security and prosperity. Today's small European nation-state can no longer make such a promise. Angela Merkel is smart enough to not even insinuate to voters that, as chancellor, she could save us from polluted air, terrorism, or pandemics. Indeed, the solution to nearly all difficult questions we face today transcends the capacity of individual nation-states. Only global approaches to problem-solving have any prospect of success. The increasing popularity of authoritarian leaders and populists is based in part on the fact that they assert the opposite and deceive their supporters by telling them what they want to hear: that the nation-state that forged the country's national identity is alive and well, and potent.

The Fundamental Change in the Nature of Conflicts

A further problem is the changing nature of conflicts. When our grandfathers and fathers went to battle in World Wars I and II, those were conflicts between nation-states. The German kaiser, the Russian czar, Hitler, or the French or American president issued the marching orders. States fought against states.

In 2019, the long list of armed conflicts in the world does not include any classic wars between nation-states. Not a single one.

In Afghanistan the Taliban are fighting fellow Afghans; in Syria the combatants include the Shiites against the Sunnis. Nor are the conflicts in Yemen and Mali classic interstate wars, although they do involve some external powers. Of course, mercenaries and foreign influences are everywhere. But in essence, all of these conflicts are variants of civil wars, very different from the wars of the past. This intensifies the powerlessness of the international community, because the world order of the United Nations is based on states as

the acting subjects and prescribes rules for their interactions. Now conflicts involve entities like the Islamic State, which calls itself a state but is not. How can the UN take action against them? We will not get far with classical international law.

Added to this are technological developments that further relativize the nation-state's monopoly on power. The conflicts of today, and those of tomorrow even more so, are conducted by drone or by cyberattack—"weapons" that can be procured by any group or even by individuals. How helpless are the military and the police if the electricity supply to a large city is cut off, or a drone loaded with explosives is flown into a sold-out stadium? Such events also blur the classic boundaries between the roles of the military and the police, between foreign and domestic policy, and between international and homeland security.

OVERTAXED PEACEMAKERS

The EU, the transatlantic partners, and Germany itself all ask themselves, are we sufficiently prepared for all of these epochal security challenges, some of which we have never seen before?

The European Union has certainly seen better days as a peacemaker. European integration is anything but a one-way street toward an ever-closer union. Brexit, the intra-European effects of the financial and economic crisis, and the disagreements among member states about how to deal with the refugee crisis have made this abundantly clear. By now it is no longer unthinkable that the process of European unification could actually be rolled back or will leave individual members, like Great Britain, behind.

Of course, there have always been severe crises in the EU. But they have never been waged as personally and as bitterly as is happening now on the issues of quotas for refugees or in the dispute about the basic principles of the rule of law. This even led to leaders of EU member states refusing to participate in the same panel

discussion at the 2018 Munich Security Conference, which is an extremely alarming development, especially since the capacity for joint foreign policy action—an EU that speaks with one voice—is needed more than ever. How can we square that circle?

Sadly, we can no longer rely on our American partner, either. On the other side of the Atlantic, old certainties are being called into question. As stated so diplomatically in the coalition agreement of the new German government in 2018, “The U.S. is undergoing a profound transition, which presents us with great challenges.”

In other words, since taking office, President Donald Trump has baffled America’s friends by cossetting autocrats all over the world while never tiring of complaining about the United States’s classical alliance partners, especially the Europeans. It took an effort to make Trump acknowledge Article 5 of the NATO Treaty, which commits the signatories to collective defense if any member is attacked. At the NATO Summit in July 2018, Trump even threatened that the Americans would “go it alone” unless his NATO partners raised their monetary contributions immediately. Understandably, all of this has triggered new thinking about the future of NATO and thus of the security of Europe. Or as others have put it, now it has become “painfully clear to America’s allies that they will increasingly have to fend for themselves.”⁹ The United States’s renunciation of the nuclear deal with Iran only heightened the shock in Europe about the unreliability of Trump’s foreign policy.

Polling numbers published by the Pew Research Institute reveal the extent of this shock about Washington’s retreat: According to results from September 2018, 37 percent of respondents from all over the world said that the United States is now doing less to help address major global problems compared to a few years ago. Only 14 percent said the United States was doing more. Among North Americans and Europeans, the number was even smaller.¹⁰ Trump’s predecessor, Barack Obama, had already signaled a sea change, speaking of the United States as a Pacific power that wanted to dedicate itself to addressing the dangers on the other side

of the globe, thereby necessitating a “pivot to Asia.” Although the events in Ukraine have since resulted in the United States increasing its military presence in Europe, one thing is clear in the long run: We Europeans will have to become much more self-reliant. What would happen if the United States actually renounced its treaty obligations someday?

Since the very founding of the Federal Republic of Germany, the United States—underpinned by the nuclear umbrella—has effectively provided our ultimate life insurance. Will it persist in this role forever? If not, what does that mean for us?

That is a quick overview of the general geopolitical situation in the summer of 2018. So there are plenty of reasons for concern. Our country will be facing a whole slew of new foreign policy tasks. The question is whether and how Germany wants to grapple with them—and whether it can.

THE CHALLENGE FOR GERMANY

How should Western foreign policy orient its compass, particularly to deal with the plethora of current violent conflicts in the world? At the moment the West’s compass is spinning: Is the lesson to be drawn from Afghanistan and Iraq that we would be better off refraining completely from lengthy, laborious stabilization missions because they are generally fruitless? Did the international involvement there perhaps blaze important trails for development? Can the West stake any claim to moral leadership at all after Abu Ghraib and Guantanamo? If so, what should this leadership look like? Is the conclusion from the bloody, bumpy transition processes since the Arab Spring that we would be better off not undermining dictatorships? Or do we admit that the chaos in the Middle East today is in part also a result of Western *realpolitik*, which cemented apparent stability in the short term by supporting autocratic rulers?

There are so many important questions we need to debate if

we are to understand that we are not facing a cartoonish black-or-white decision between two archetypes: the fanatic democrat who would rather overthrow every dictatorship or the political realist who has no problem with the suppression of others' freedom as long as it keeps things calm in Western eyes.

No, foreign policy decisions are not carried out at these opposite poles; they take place in a spectrum of shades of gray.

The debate about such decisions in Germany, however, is often emotionally charged, as if there were only black and white. Some voices ask whether Germany, with its usual policy of staying on the sidelines, belongs to the West at all. Intellectuals are particularly bothered by Germany's behavior in the UN Security Council in 2011, when Germany, a nonpermanent member, abstained from voting on the no-fly zone over Libya. Others, such as Bernd Ulrich in the weekly *Die Zeit* in 2014, emphasize the burdens that have to be shouldered due to the Western policy of intervention: "In the last fifteen years it was stunning to see how Western heads of state bent, and sometimes broke, international law; what justifications they offered for the war and what alliances they switched how often. This mortgage must finally be expressed and accepted; the West will recover its capacity for action only by acknowledging this debt, not by refusing to mention it."

The best thing about the West is that it allows this dispute about the right foreign policy, as well as critical self-reflection. The kind of confrontation raging here would not be possible in newspapers in Russia or China. But the fact that we can conduct this discussion so openly—in contrast to many other countries—brings with it an enormous responsibility to draw clear conclusions from the debate. After all, what the West itself defines as its values and ambitions remains of paramount importance for people in many parts of the world.

Both within the Federal Republic and without, there is considerable skepticism about whether Germany can currently measure up to this responsibility. For example, the *Washington Post* on

April 27, 2018, called Germany's hesitation to accept international military obligations one of the greatest strains on Europe. "German passivity is deeply engrained," it explains. "Berlin's political class lacks strategic thinking, hates risk . . . and hides behind its ignominious past to justify pacifism when it comes to hard questions about defense and security issues."

This cautious German policy, as Michael Thumann commented in *Die Zeit* on March 9, 2018, simply does not do justice to the modern challenges and power politics upheavals of the twenty-first century: "In March 2014 Angela Merkel said that Vladimir Putin was living on a different planet. A distant star where might is right, where one conquers territory and no international law applies. Four years later, however, much has changed. Today it looks as if Putin fits in perfectly with this new, hard, real world. And as if Merkel is living on another planet."

In May 2018, Christoph von Marschall expressed a similarly harsh criticism in the Berlin daily *Tagesspiegel*:

Wherever one looks, the surroundings are becoming more dangerous: wars in the Middle East, migration pressure and the threat of terrorism from Africa, an aggressive Russia. Relying on the U.S., the chancellor says, is no longer possible to the same extent. Europe must do more. [But] what is its contribution? . . . The political class and the majority of the media are content with the excuse that Germany's history makes it a special case. More than seventy years after the war, the Allies are no longer willing to make an exception. Germany's EU partners, especially France, are pushing for a common European defense.

Has Germany earned this harsh criticism? What is clear is that things are getting unpleasant. And Germany—and its partners in the EU—clearly need a wake-up call. But what role and what responsibility can and must Germany shoulder, along with its European partners? What does it actually mean to take on "more responsibility?" Is that meant politically, militarily, or perhaps

“only” morally? To answer these questions, we have to widen our scope. Above all, we must explain in detail why good foreign policy and diplomacy are so very hard in the twenty-first century. There is no getting around discussing the fundamental issues of war, peace, and international law, without which it is not possible to understand the complex and dangerous global situation in which Germany and Europe are acting. It further requires an in-depth look at two states that have always been of tremendous importance to the security of Germany and Europe—namely, the United States and Russia. As I finalize this text, at the end of 2019, the debate in Berlin about whether and how to take on “international responsibility” is in full swing again. In my view, this is an important and urgent debate. All of this will be discussed in the following chapters. Let us start with the question of how diplomacy, the most important instrument of German foreign policy, really works.