UNIDIR

FULL REPORT

International Security in 2045

Exploring Futures for Peace, Security and Disarmament

SARAH GRAND-CLÉMENT

Acknowledgments

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Acronyms & Abbreviations

AI	Artificial Intelligence
CSO	Civil society organization
GGE	Group of Governmental Experts
NSA	Non-State actor
OEWG	Open-ended Working Group
SDGS	Sustainable Development Goals

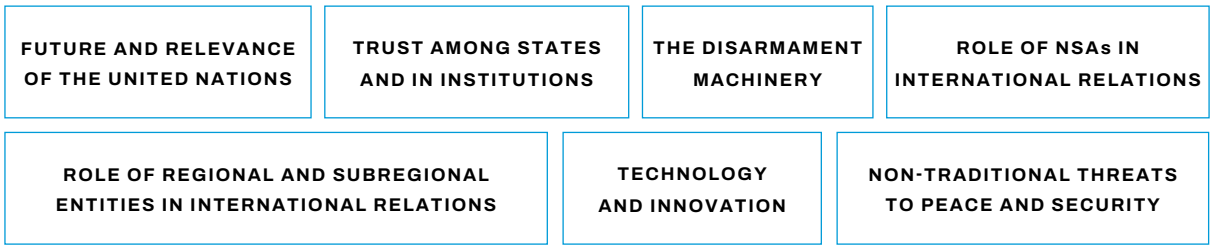
Contents

Executive Summary

Threats to peace that relate to arms control and disarmament have a direct impact on the future of international peace and security, as well as to the achievement of all Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Discussions regarding arms control and disarmament at the multilateral level are largely—though not always—focused on current issues, and are often reactive – rather than proactive – in response to specific threats or evolutions in behaviour or technology. There is also limited space outside of set processes to discuss broader threats, interlinkages, and anticipatory action. The use of foresight to examine international security, and specifically issues of arms control and disarmament, can help our collective preparedness to deal with upcoming unpredictability and to increase our resilience in the face of it. It can also make relevant stakeholders consider what actions are available today and could be taken to mitigate or avoid unwanted futures, and pave the path for preferred futures.

This report presents the findings of a foresight study which utilized future scenarios as a method to explore **potential future challenges, focusing on threats to international security linked to arms control and disarmament, with a view to identifying options for actions available today to mitigate the identified challenges**.

The threats identified via engagement with a range of stakeholders can be divided across seven themes:



While the themes and their associated threats are not exhaustive, they demonstrate not only the relevance and primacy of the United Nations to arms control and disarmament, but also the range of challenges to be addressed, from strategic to operational issues.

This report also provides possible pathways for action for each of the threats identified. The following pages outline both the threats and provide a summary overview of the pathways for action.

1. Uneven distribution of power and lack of inclusiveness within decision-making structures

- **a.** Revitalize discussions on Security Council reform
- **b.** Engage more closely with the regional level
- **c.** Ensure diversity in delegations

2. Member States withdrawing from meaningful multilateral engagement

- **a.** Devolve more decision-making to the regional level

3. Ability to cope with the acceleration and intersection of crises and issues

- **a.** Keep track of changing attitudes, norms, and circumstances to quickly adapt or react to them
- **b.** Consider the limitations of institutional or process mandates
- **c.** Create opportunities to deepen substantive discussions
- **d.** Approach issues from a broader lens
- **e.** Streamline the disarmament agenda
- **f.** Increase the transparency about successes and failures
- **g.** Enable greater feedback loops

4. Over-politicization of issues within the United Nations

- **a.** Maintain impartiality

5. Divisions or competition between Member States

- **a.** Ensure that multilateral mechanisms remain in place
- **b.** Create incentive-based coalitions
- **c.** Reflect upon the consensus decision-making system

6. Weakening of States or their authority in international relations

→ See pathways for action under Issues 1 (*Uneven distribution of power and lack of inclusiveness within decision-making structures*), 2 (*Member States withdrawing from meaningful multilateral engagement*), 3 (*Ability to cope with the acceleration and intersection of crises and issues*), and 12 (*Tensions between the roles of private sector actors and those of States at the international level*).

7. Low or lack of trust between Member States

→ See pathways for action under Issue 5 (*Divisions or competition between Member States*).

8. Low or lack of trust in the United Nations

- **a.** Rethink the issues that the United Nations is best placed to address
- **b.** Improve external communications

9. Lack of adequate responses to non-compliance

- **a.** Re-examine incentives
- **b.** Strengthen resources for implementation and enforcement
- **c.** Enable greater enforcement mechanisms
- **d.** Make compliance a whole-of-society responsibility
- **e.** Ensure transparency and legitimacy of assessments of possible non-compliance
- **f.** Emphasize the benefits of compliance
- **g.** Encourage norm-building within regional groups or blocks of States
- **h.** Enhance the role of regional disarmament centres
- **i.** Engage with communities working in related areas

10. Arms build-up as a way to bolster security

- **a.** Reinvigorate diplomatic relations
- **b.** Change the narrative around deterrence
- **c.** Encourage and improve transparency around spending and weapons
- **d.** Employ confidence building mechanisms
- **e.** Ensure robust arms control treaties are maintained
- **f.** Decrease economic reliance on weapons production
- **g.** Engage with national or local-level actors
- **h.** Prioritize human security

11. Weak rules-based order

- **a.** Hold open and honest discussions around the current order
- **b.** Engage with regional and subregional actors
- **c.** Ensure national and international organizations have sufficient resources
- **d.** Enhance data on arms control and disarmament issues

12. Tensions between the roles of private sector actors and those of States at the international level

- **a.** Maintain role of States in policy- and norm-making
- **b.** Enhance public-private partnerships
- **c.** Reinforce international law-based frameworks
- **d.** Encourage multistakeholder dialogues in arms control and disarmament mechanisms

13. Difficulty in aligning interests between private and public actors

- **a.** Encourage initiatives and incentive structures that drive closer alignment between the private sector with States
- **b.** Focus on individuals in addition to the entities
- **c.** Update regulations on private sector involvement

14. Marginalization of NSAs in international relations

- **a.** Recognize the strengths of NSA inclusion
- **b.** Improve NSA representation at the national level
- **c.** Streamline the approval process for NSA accreditation
- **d.** Improve mechanisms for NSA participation in processes
- **e.** Improve processes for geographically diverse NSA participation
- **f.** Consider a partnership model to enhance collaboration

15. Lack of sufficient inclusion and use of regional and subregional entities

- **a.** Include subregional and even local entities as well as regional ones
- **b.** Empower regional and subregional entities in arms control and disarmament
- **c.** Develop a clear capacity-building strategy
- **d.** Improve coordination between, and participation of, entities

16. Balancing between regulating technology and enabling innovation

- **a.** Clarify the narrative
- **b.** Enhance anticipatory governance
- **c.** Consider using more dynamic and flexible approaches as part of technological governance

17. Access and control of technology and the consequences thereof

- **a.** Hold regular discussions on technological issues
- **b.** Provide support to States
- **c.** Develop better export control regimes and pathways to share technologies

18. Insufficient preparation for non-traditional threats

- **a.** Improve the involvement of a wider set of actors
- **b.** Learn from cross-cutting successes
- **c.** Create instruments which are adaptable to future change
- **d.** Focus on the 2030 Agenda and beyond
- **e.** Improve the use of mitigation and early warning mechanisms
- **f.** Re-examine concepts such as peace and conflict

These pathways for action are not recommendations, but rather aim to provide a range of ideas that could be further discussed and developed with a broad range of stakeholders, both within and outside of the United Nations. As shown by the range of pathways for action, it is not possible to address threats to international security as it relates to weapons and disarmament only; to enable progress in these areas requires action in many other domains and more broadly, portraying the interlinked nature of many of these threats as well as the possible pathways for action.

In addition to these pathways for action, the following elements should also be taken into account:

- The varying time frames that exist to address and enact the various proposed pathways for action; some of the pathways for action can be addressed rapidly but, for many, the pace of change will be lengthy and slow.
- Many of the pathways for action would require multiple stakeholders to achieve.
- Broader normative concepts are necessary for these pathways for action to be successful. This notably includes trust, transparency, solidarity, and accountability, which underpin the elements noted as providing a way forward.
- Causality may be difficult to attribute, particularly if several pathways for action are employed in conjunction, in addition to other extraneous developments. This may make it difficult to identify areas of good practice.

New York, USA, 2005: "Non-Violence" A gift from the Government of Luxembourg presented to the United Nations in 1988. Credit: © UN Photo

1. Introduction

The world is currently witnessing a number of interlinked and reinforcing trends: unprecedented technological developments which are driving the transformation of societies;[1] a worsening of the climate crisis;[2] renewed geo-political tensions;[3] increased strategic ambiguity and even instability with great power competition;[4] and a resurgence of threats and behaviours from the past.[5] These are all examples of factors that present new risks and opportunities to global peace and security.

1.1 Value of Foresight to International Security

It is within this context that, in 2021, the United Nations Secretary-General released *Our Common Agenda*, a new vision for multilateralism, aiming to "get the world back on track by turbocharging action on the Sustainable Development Goals [SDGs]".[6] *Our Common Agenda* identifies 12 areas requiring multilateral action to be achieved, which notably includes a call for a Summit of the Future to discuss and agree on actions and steps to meet existing international commitments.

Following the release of *Our Common Agenda* and ahead of the Summit of the Future planned for 2024, the Secretary-General issued 11 policy briefs expanding on elements contained in *Our Common Agenda*. These briefs include:

- *A New Agenda for Peace,* which considers actions to address increasingly compounded—as well as new—challenges to peace and security;
- *Global Digital Compact,* which proposes measures to enjoy the benefits of digital technologies while also safeguarding against their misuse;
- *International Financial Architecture,* which proposes reforms of the international financial architecture as a way to aid the implementation of the SDGs; and

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1 United Nations, "UN Secretary-General's Strategy On New Technologies", 2018, https://www.un.org/en/newtechnologies/images/pdf/SGs-Strategy-on-New-Technologies.pdf.

2 "Climate Change: A Threat to Human Wellbeing and Health of the Planet. Taking Action Now Can Secure Our Future", IPCC, 28 February 2022, https://www.ipcc.ch/2022/02/28/pr-wgii-ar6/.

3 United Nations, "A New Agenda for Peace: Our Common Agenda Policy Brief 9", 2023, https://www.un.org/sites/un2.un.org/files/our-common-agenda-policy-brief-new-agenda-for-peace-en.pdf.

4 "Launching New Agenda for Peace Policy Brief, Secretary-General Urges States to 'Preserve Our Universal Institution' amid Highest Level of Geopolitical Tension in Decades", United Nations, 20 July 2023, https://press.un.org/en/2023/sgsm21885.doc.htm.

5 For example, as relates to risk of nuclear weapons use; see "Risk of Nuclear Weapons Use Higher Than at Any Time Since Cold War, Disarmament Affairs Chief Warns Security Council", United Nations, 31 March 2023, https://press.un.org/en/2023/sc15250.doc.htm; United Nations, "A New Agenda for Peace".

6 United Nations, "Our Common Agenda", 2021, https://www.un.org/en/common-agenda.

- *United Nations 2.0*, which aims to modernize the United Nations through a "Quintet of Change", notably via embedding and increasing the use of innovation, foresight, and behavioural science. This policy brief in particular builds upon the focus placed by *Our Common Agenda* on the importance of futures and foresight to support the work of the United Nations.

Foresight and futures methods have already been employed within the United Nations: for example, the United Nations Development Programme has developed a manual intended for stakeholders in developing countries to demonstrate how foresight can help to implement the SDGs.[7] However, the use of such approaches have been more limited in areas relating to peace and security within the United Nations, which namely include deliberative bodies of the Security Council and the General Assembly, and United Nations structures and activities in the form of conflict prevention, peacekeeping, peacebuilding, countering terrorism, and disarmament.

> *Scenarios are not projections, predictions, or preferences; rather, they are coherent and credible alternative stories about the future. They are designed to help [entities] challenge their assumptions, develop their strategies, and test their plans.*
>
> Cornelius et al. (2005)

The use of foresight and other future-focused methods offers a range of advantages. Futures and foresight methods represent a set of tools which can be used to enable individuals and groups to think about the future in a structured way and to help manage uncertainty. These methods also help users consider the different and complex interconnections and interactions that shape a given context. Therefore, as the future will always remain unpredictable, the aim is not to try to predict the future but to become better prepared to deal with upcoming unpredictability and to increase our resilience in the face of it.

Overall, these methods can be used to help decision makers with their preparedness, reinforce their ability to consider the future in all its complexity, and aid them to create more resilient and future-proof plans and policies.

A wide range of futures and foresight methods exist to help in this endeavour.[8] One such method is the creation of a range of different future scenarios, which showcase multidimensional and multifaceted alternatives of the future. Future scenarios are meant to be used as simulations of possible futures, to explore how certain aspects may develop, and identify potential areas for action. One of the most well-known cases of use has been by Shell, which has been using future scenarios since the 1970s, and which have been credited

[7] UNDP Global Centre for Public Service Excellence, "Foresight Manual: Empowered Futures for the 2030 Agenda", 5 February 2018, https://www.undp.org/publications/foresight-manual-empowered-futures.

[8] Popper (2008) provides an exhaustive overview of a range of qualitative, quantitative and semi-quantitative foresight methods; Popper, R. (2008). "How Are Foresight Methods Selected?", Foresight, 10(6), 62–89. doi:10.1108/14636680810918586, p. 66.

with anticipating changes to global energy and their possible impacts to the company.[9] Beyond Shell and other private sector actors, future scenarios have since been employed by a range of institutions, from non-governmental organizations, to international and regional entities, such as the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development and the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS, as well as national governments.

1.2 Purpose and Scope of the Project

To provide a more future-focused approach to international security that also corresponds to the goals of *Our Common Agenda* and can help support the upcoming Summit of the Future,[10] UNIDIR undertook a project to explore **potential future challenges, focusing on threats to international security linked to arms control and disarmament, with a view to identifying options for actions available today to mitigate the identified challenges.**

This project aligns with *A New Agenda for Peace*, one of the policy briefs providing further detail on the proposals within *Our Common Agenda*. Specifically, *A New Agenda for Peace* mentions that, to achieve lasting peace and prosperity, "we must adapt to the geopolitical realities of today and the threats of tomorrow".[11] This aligns with the project goals to explore what some of these future threats might be and explore what could be done to avoid the least desirable futures. Specifically, the project sought to:

- develop plausible future scenarios depicting the state of the world in 2045—the United Nations' 100th anniversary (see Section 1.3 for further details on the methodology);
- understand what these different future scenarios entail for international security and the United Nations, with a specific focus on global challenges and threats to peace and security that pertain to arms control and disarmament;[12] and
- identify pathways for action to help address threats to peace and security relating to arms control and disarmament within the context of the United Nations, to serve as initial points of reflection and discussion starters to improve or address the threats identified.

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[9] Peter Cornelius, Alexander Van de Putte, and Mattia Romani, "Three Decades of Scenario Planning in Shell", *California Management Review* 48, no. 1 (2005): 92–109, doi:10.2307/41166329.

[10] One of the calls by the United Nations Secretary-General in Our Common Agenda was for a Summit of the Future, to "forge a new global consensus on what our future should look like, and what we can do today to secure it" (United Nations, "Our Common Agenda", 5). The Summit of the Future is planned for 2024 based on General Assembly resolution A/RES/76/307.

[11] United Nations, "A New Agenda for Peace", 11.

[12] While the terms 'arms control' and 'disarmament' can tend to be used interchangeably, they do refer to different outcomes. Disarmament involves removing access and use of weapons, while arms control is about ensuring weapons access, management, and use is for legitimate use and users and not in excessive amounts. Additionally, the use of the term 'disarmament machinery' in this report and beyond refers to both disarmament and arms control and relates to all weapon types—conventional, of mass destruction, and new technology.

Given the potential for an extremely large scope, three main steps were taken to ensure that this study remained feasible, as well as aligned with UNIDIR's focus and mission. First, regional and subregional challenges were considered at the macro level. In other words, while it was not possible to examine or reference specific country- or regional-level issues, the aim was to ensure that their broader impacts were captured, as much as possible, at the macro level.

Second, the study sought to provide a framing for 'international security'. There are many different definitions of this concept, and thus providing a central framing helped ensure that the chosen definition aligned with ultimate project goal. As a starting point, the project team followed the description of the First Committee, which focuses on "disarmament, global challenges and threats to peace that affect the international community and seeks out solutions to the challenges in the international security regime".[13] To aid in the analysis of threats, the project team then further broke down the concept of international security into four levels, which all feed into each other, to create a nested concept of international security. These levels are as follows.

- **Human security:** The security of individuals, which entails being protected from both military and non-military threats.[14]
- **National security:** The ability of States to exercise their sovereignty and ensure the safety and protection of people and societies against external and internal threats (e.g., inter-State conflict, armed violence, terrorism, etc.), both natural and those caused by humans.
- **Regional security:** The security of States within a region against existential risks, to include both natural threats and those caused by humans, including the ability to cooperate and address risks and threats within a regional group.
- **Global security:** The security and resilience of the international system against existential risks, to include both natural threats and those caused by humans.

Third, even with this multi-level definition, the concept of international security remains broad and encompasses a multitude of issues. Therefore, the project specifically focuses on issues relating to arms control and disarmament within the larger concept of international security. Additionally, while we acknowledge that multilateralism extends beyond the United Nations, it should also be noted that the focus and scope of the study and this report is on the United Nations, and therefore specifically on threats to the work of the United Nations in the area of multilateral arms control and disarmament.

However, it should be noted that while this report focuses specifically on issues related to arms control and disarmament within international security, the project and future scenarios can be employed to consider other issues related to international security, such as conflict prevention, peacekeeping, peacebuilding, humanitarian aid, counter-terrorism,

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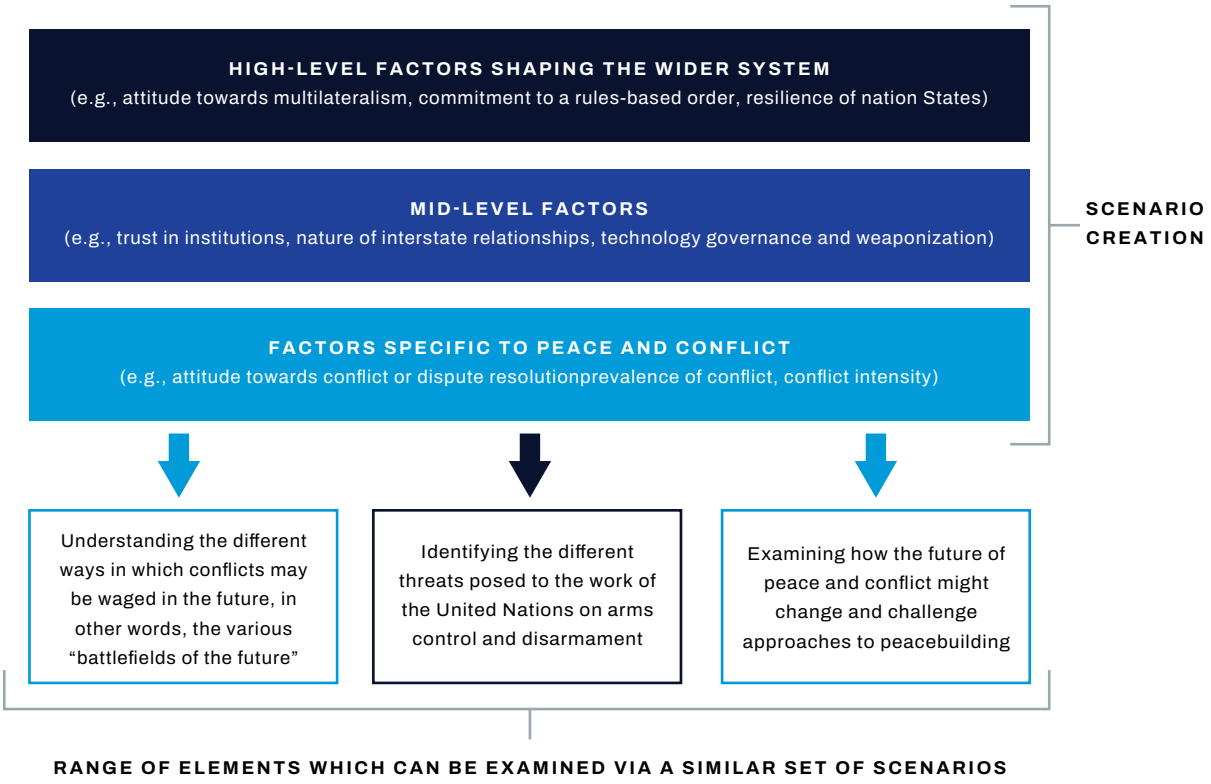
[13] See https://www.un.org/en/ga/first/.

[14] Definition adapted from General Assembly resolution 66/290. It should be noted that human-centred approaches are also highlighted in A New Agenda for Peace, which notably emphasizes the need for human-centred disarmament and more consideration on the human cost of weapons and ways to reduce this cost.

organized crime and more. Figure 1 visualizes the system thinking behind the approach, and how other elements of international security that could be explored. Overall, the figure below demonstrates how the different elements within international security are shaped by the broader system within which they exist.

Figure 1. The System Thinking behind the Use of Future Scenarios



This report is primarily aimed at Member States and the diplomatic community, United Nations personnel, and civil society representatives working on issues related to security and threats to peace, arms control and disarmament, and conflict and conflict prevention. However, given that so many of these issues are interlinked with others, such as climate change, development, health, economics and more, the study likely may also have relevance to a broader range of stakeholders, including private sector actors.

1.3 Methodology

This project comprised three main activities. First, there was the development of the future scenarios between September 2022 and March 2023. A structured methodology was used to develop the future scenarios, which was supported by a series of consultations with a core group of 15 subject matter experts, each with their own areas of expertise.[15] The use of a sufficiently large and diverse expert group, in addition to the design of the consultative process itself, which aggregated views without seeking to give particular inputs dominance over others, sought to mitigate any potential subjectivity and biases on the part of the experts. The scenarios themselves were constructed through a multi-step approach which included identifying elements, or factors, that comprise the world we live in, from which a set of particularly relevant and central factors were identified. Different future developments of these short-listed factors were defined and assessed against each other to subsequently form sets of future scenarios.[16]

Second, these scenarios were then used as a basis for workshop discussions. In total, five workshops were held between April and June 2023. These brought together over 60 participants representing a range of United Nations entities and Member States, as well as representatives from academia, civil society, and the private sector.

Third, 22 targeted interviews were conducted to assess, augment, refine, and validate the pathways for actions emerging from the workshop discussions, a process supplemented by consultation of relevant literature and data. A separate publication details the methodology and can be read in parallel to this report; that publication also contains all elements comprising the individual scenarios.[17]

1.4 Report Structure

Following this introductory chapter, the report introduces the future scenarios which were used to prompt discussion about future threats and pathways for action (**Chapter 2**), before detailing the main themes which emerged from the discussion and delving into the threats identified (**Chapter 3**). The report then examines the possible pathways for action based on the threats identified (**Chapter 4**) before providing several overarching and concluding remarks (**Chapter 5**). Annex 1 provides further detail on the pathways for action, while Annex 2 contains information on participation by experts in this project.

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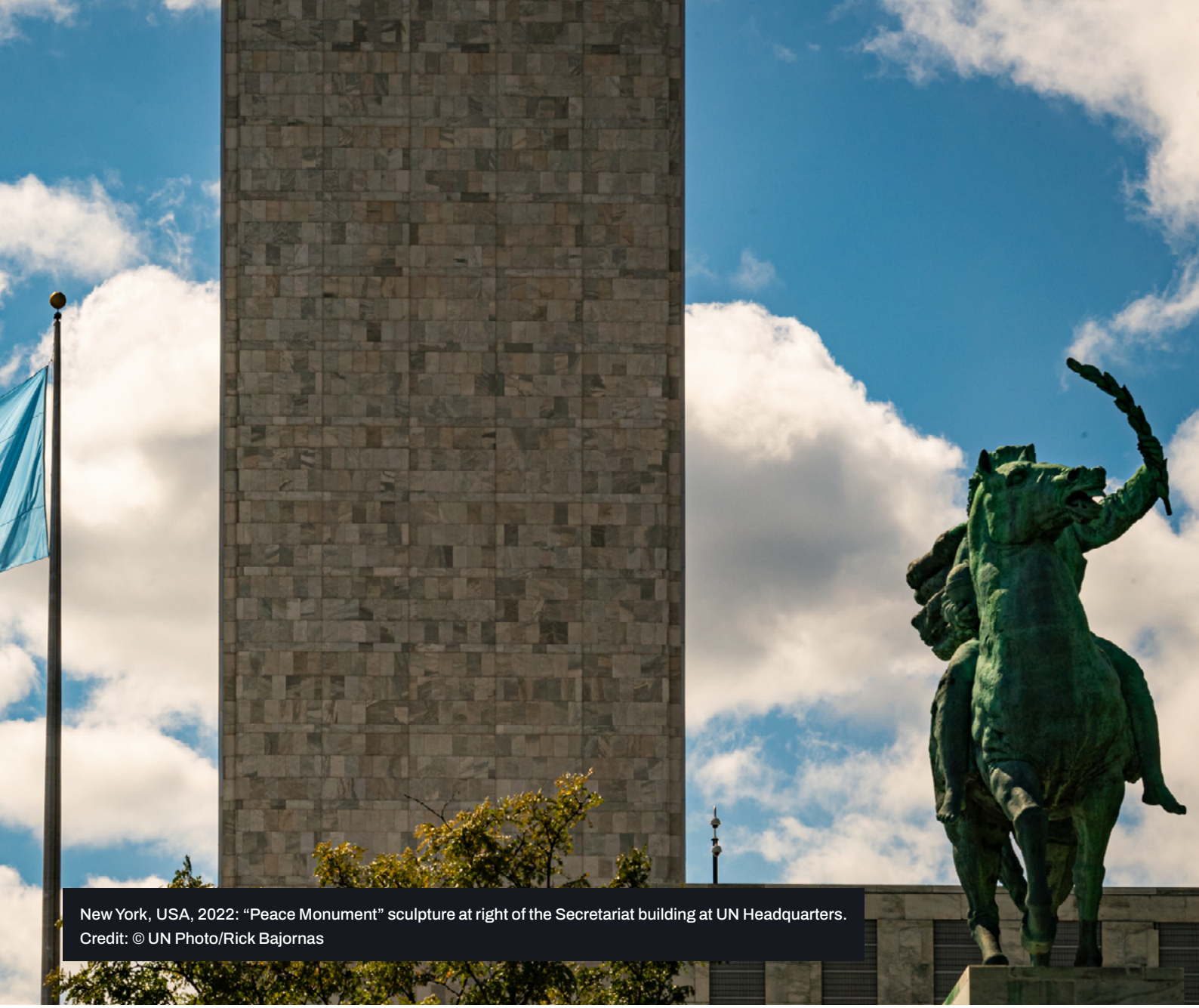
[15] This included experts internal to UNIDIR, as well as external experts with expertise outside of disarmament.

[16] For further information, please consult the methodology report which explains the creation of the future scenarios in more detail. Grand-Clément, S., "International Security in 2045: The methodology behind the future scenarios," 2024.

[17] Ibid.



New York, USA, 2022: “Peace Monument” sculpture at right of the Secretariat building at UN Headquarters. Credit: © UN Photo/Rick Bajornas

2. Providing the Setting: Unpacking the Future Scenarios

The five future scenarios created as part of the project were intended as tools to enable discussion regarding the threats to international peace and security, and pathways for action. As international security does not happen in a vacuum (as shown in Figure 1), the scenarios seek to describe various states of the world in 2045, acting as a basis to explore threats and opportunities for international security within these different contexts. This section provides a brief overview of the five scenarios, with the full narrative available in the parallel publication focused on the methodology behind the scenarios, as well as an overview of the overall reactions to these scenarios from the workshops.

2.1 Future Scenarios Overview

Figure 2 provides an overview of the main elements comprising each of the five future scenarios. These elements provide only a snapshot of the scenarios and their complexity, and are intended to help place the themes emerging from the analysis in context. However, it is recommended to read the scenario narratives to understand the nuances and complexities of each scenario.

Figure 2. Overview of Some of the Main Elements of Each Future Scenario

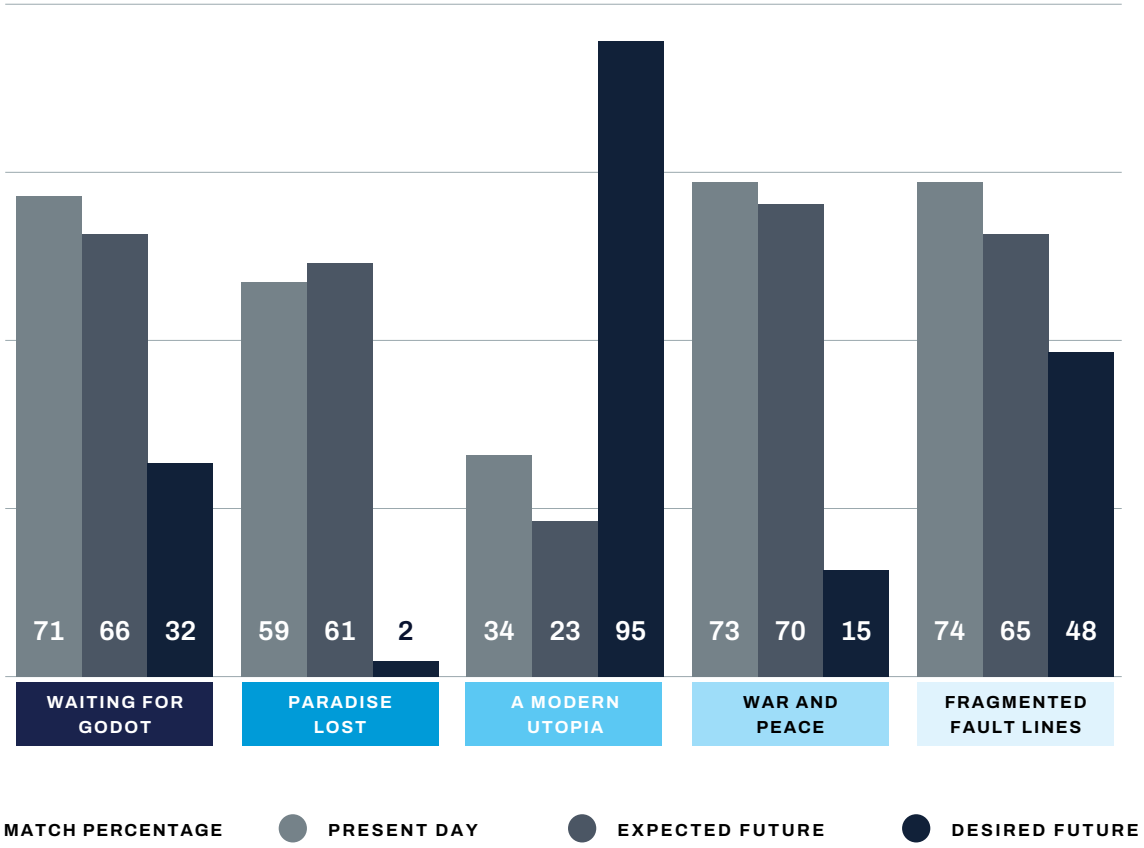
	WAITING FOR GODOT	PARADISE LOST	A MODERN UTOPIA	WAR AND PEACE	FRAGMENTED FAULT LINES
Polarity and attitude to multilateralism	Authority of States in decline, with underlying tensions	States have lost interest in international relations and relations are fragmented	Harmonious relations between multiple spheres of influence	World is fragmented between two poles of power	World is fragmented between multiple spheres of influence
Role of private sector actors in International Relations[18]	Very strong, leading, and influential role	Decreased influence	Similar role and influence to that of the early 2020s	Decreased influence	Important and influential role
Level and type of conflict	Localized, frequent, primarily under the threshold of armed conflict	High intensity conflicts abound, no willingness to resolve these	Infrequent; if they occur, they are localized	Conflict is localized, frequent, and primarily low-intensity	Few conflicts, although these tend to be inter-State with hostilities under the threshold of armed conflict
Majority form of national governance	Democratic backsliding	Authoritarianism	Democratization	Democratic backsliding	Democratization
Liveability of planet Earth	Liveable in most places	Decreased liveability	More parts of Earth are liveable compared to the early 2020s	Decreased liveability	Liveable in most places

[18] Within the scenarios, private sector actors are defined as private companies and industries only.

2.2 Workshop Reactions to the Scenarios

Because our vision and opinions related to the future are subjective, it can be hard to separate what one wants to see happen versus what one thinks might happen. To try and understand which scenario might be the preferred versus the predicted future, a questionnaire was shared with each registered workshop participant, prior to sharing any information on the scenarios themselves. This questionnaire asked respondents to assess the projections which comprise the scenarios. Specifically, respondents were asked to specify three aspects per each projection: how similar they felt it was to the current situation, how similar they felt it was to the expected future, and how similar they felt it was to their desired future. These scores were then aggregated and assessed against the projections which belong to each scenario, resulting in the distribution presented in Figure 3.[19]

Figure 3. Mapping Scenarios Against Present Day, Expected Future, and Desired Future



[19] A total of 34 questionnaires were completed (n=34). Of these, 62% were from United Nations respondents, 24% from Member State representatives, 6% from academia, 3% from the public sector, 3% from a private–public entity, and 3% from the private sector. The distribution by stakeholder type is therefore not equal or representative given certain stakeholders are overrepresented compared to others. Responses from geographical regions are also skewed when examining Member States represented; for example, there were no responses from African State representatives, and only one response from the Latin American and Caribbean States regional group, one from the Eastern Europe regional group, two from the Western European and other States, and four from the Asia–Pacific regional group.

The responses shown in Figure 3 demonstrate that respondents did not see one specific scenario matching the situation of the present day (which was April–June 2023 for the respondents). Similarly, there was no shared perspective from respondents on which scenario would be the expected future. Interestingly, the 'War and Peace' scenario was seen, in both instances, as closest to the present day and expected future, albeit by a small margin compared to 'Waiting for Godot' and 'Fragmented Fault Lines'.

Greater divergence occurs with regard to the desired future; here, 'A Modern Utopia' shines through as the clear preference, although it is the least expected future. Conversely, 'Paradise Lost', while being the least desired future, scores highly when asked if it is the expected future. There is a clear divergence shown by respondents in terms of their desires and expectations for the future, indicating that the pathway towards a desired future such as 'A Modern Utopia' would require a significant departure from our current approaches, means, and methods.

Finally, the least desired future other than 'Paradise Lost' is 'War and Peace'. However, as noted above, it is this scenario which was seen as most expected to unfold in the future, out of the five presented.

This begs the question: how can we move away from these least desired yet most expected type of futures, and instead towards our most desired, yet least expected futures?

A short summary of the reactions to each of the scenarios is provided in the sections below. These summaries notably include the perception from participants as to the 'stability'—or lack therefore—in the scenario. This refers to whether a scenario was seen as being a permanent situation, or whether it was perceived as a transitionary stage.

2.2.1 Waiting for Godot

Polarity and attitude to multilateralism	Authority of States in decline, with underlying tensions
Role of private sector actors in International Relations	Very strong, leading, and influential role
Level and type of conflict	Localized, frequent, primarily under the threshold of armed conflict
Majority form of national governance	Democratic backsliding
Liveability of planet Earth	Liveable in most places

The increased role of private sector actors in international relations was perceived as a threat by most workshop participants. This was due to the perception that this could drive a divide between States in which influential private sector actors (e.g., multinational corporations) emerge and which are relevant in international relations, and States in which no such influential private sector actors have emerged. However, it was noted that States which do not have strong private sector actors leading the way in international relations would have an incentive to cooperate and coordinate, notably to maintain relevance. This would eventually lead to a

two-sided system with the elite on the one hand, where private sector actors originate or are based, and the majority, which do not have such strong or even any private sector actors in international relations. Overall, the sense was that this scenario as not stable. Rather, it was seen as being a transitional phase that could, for example, take place before the 'Paradise Lost' scenario.

2.2.2 Paradise Lost

Polarity and attitude to multilateralism	States have lost interest in international relations and relations are fragmented
Role of private sector actors in International Relations	Decreased influence
Level and type of conflict	High intensity conflicts abound, no willingness to resolve these
Majority form of national governance	Authoritarianism
Liveability of planet Earth	Decreased liveability

This was seen as the 'worst' possible scenario, with many, if not all, aspects being negative. The United Nations was seen as not being able to have a role in this future, with no ability to respond to the various crisis situations, and current mechanisms inadequate or unable to function in this type of future. While it was highlighted that this scenario is unstable and unsustainable, it was also noted that it would be hard to get out of such a scenario. There were notably fears that drastic measures—such as the use of weapons of mass destruction—could be used to put an end to the constant cycle of conflict and other issues plaguing this scenario, such as low trust and incohesive societies.

2.2.3 A Modern Utopia

Polarity and attitude to multilateralism	Harmonious relations between multiple spheres of influence
Role of private sector actors in International Relations	Similar role and influence to that of the early 2020s
Level and type of conflict	Infrequent; if they occur, they are localized
Majority form of national governance	Democratization
Liveability of planet Earth	More parts of Earth are liveable compared to the early 2020s

On the surface, this scenario was seen to be the 'best' outcome for the future of the five scenarios. However, there was overarching agreement that this scenario is not stable. Overall, it was noted that despite the circumstances being ideal, this scenario presents a number of underlying risks, including potential spoilers or exogenous threats that do not

depend on (good) governance. The issue of human forgetfulness was notably raised, in that forgetting the horrors of the past was a risk and once this occurred, people may be less likely to take serious steps to prevent future reoccurrence of such issues. Overall, the maintenance of such a future was seen as requiring many resources and considerable effort; specifically, the role and responsibilities of the United Nations would need to increase to not only maintain this scenario but also to be prepared for any future threat. However, it was also noted that the circumstances in this scenario would allow for much more preparedness and proactivity to identify and address emerging situations of concern.

> *Utopia has an expiry date.*
>
> Workshop participant

2.2.4 War and Peace

Polarity and attitude to multilateralism	World is fragmented between two poles of power
Role of private sector actors in International Relations	Decreased influence
Level and type of conflict	Conflict is localized, frequent, and primarily low-intensity
Majority form of national governance	Democratic backsliding
Liveability of planet Earth	Decreased liveability

While this scenario was seen as reminiscent of the Cold War, several aspects were highlighted as being different from the past, such as stalled innovation and issues linked to climate change. This highlighted the importance of not letting the past impact our perceptions of the future—or present. There were notably diverging views on whether a bipolar world would prevent the management of issues requiring international collaboration, or whether this could help, depending on how powerful the poles were. This could also depend on the issue at hand—for example, climate change or weapons governance, which may have different responses. Overall, this future was seen as needing to get worse—such as a 'Paradise Lost' situation—before it could improve.

2.2.5 Fragmented Fault Lines

Polarity and attitude to multilateralism	World is fragmented between multiple spheres of influence
Role of private sector actors in International Relations	Important and influential role
Level and type of conflict	Few conflicts, although these tend to be inter-State with hostilities under the threshold of armed conflict
Majority form of national governance	Democratization
Liveability of planet Earth	Liveable in most places

There was some divergence with regard to this scenario, not least because of the dichotomy between the poor situation at the geopolitical level versus the generally acceptable situation nationally. Consequently, there was no consensus as to whether this scenario is stable or not; however, participants raised that it could develop in unpredictable ways depending on State behaviour and whether that would result in tensions or conflict. It was also mentioned that international institutions may struggle to deal with global issues in this kind of future, although it was noted—and demonstrated by the questionnaire results—that this scenario has similarities to the current multilateral context.

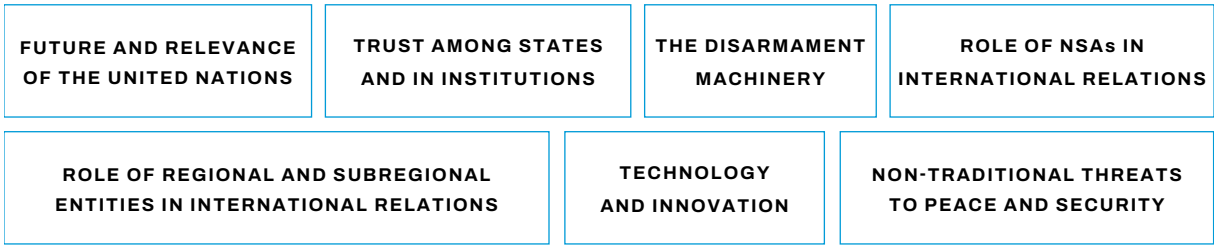
Bologna, Italy, 2013: An old man passes by a street graffiti. Credit: © Kizel

3. Identifying the Issue: Threats to International Peace and Security

Using the future scenarios to identify threats—and from these, possible pathways for action—possesses several advantages. The scenarios allow individuals to project themselves into different types of futures with different possible events, and consider issues from different angles, as well as issues that they may not naturally consider. The scenarios also encourage individuals to examine interlinkages between elements contained within the scenarios, but also between the scenarios themselves. Finally, the scenarios provide all participants a baseline understanding of specific future contexts. Overall, without the use of such scenarios, the insights in this chapter, and thus the pathways for action in the following chapter may not have been reached. Notably, without scenarios, discussions on threats may be based on knowledge of the past or fixated on current issues, as opposed to taking a future-focused outlook. Participants may also be less able to identify drivers of change that could pose a threat that need to be addressed. And finally, use of scenarios can help avoid groupthink, as participants are given more creative freedom and space for contemplation, enabling them to use the scenarios as a safe space to challenge existing assumptions.

While all the scenarios differed from one another, there were nonetheless some common themes which emerged across many, if not all, scenarios, workshops, and stakeholder groups. This section provides an overview of these themes and their related threats, based on the discussions from the workshops. Each theme contains a brief description of the discussions centred around it. Then, specific threats with regard to that theme are outlined. An overview of the themes is provided in Figure 4.

Figure 4. Overview of the Themes[20]



[20] The order of the themes, or the threats contained within these themes, does not imply a hierarchy or order in terms of the themes or threats.

The themes and threats identified below are not exhaustive—nor do they aim to be.[21] The threats identified were driven by, first, the study scope and area of focus, which examined international security from an arms control and disarmament perspective; second, by the scope of the future scenarios, which focus on and highlight specific aspects of the future. These aspects played a role in shaping the discussions within the workshops; and third, by the workshop participants—while a wide range of participants were sought, there was nonetheless a bias in their selection notably in terms of their involvement and familiarity with the United Nations. This, for example, explains the focus on the United Nations with regard to certain issues (such as multilateralism and trust) as opposed to taking a broader perspective.

3.1 Future and Relevance of the United Nations System

The maintenance of the United Nations structures was highlighted by workshop participants as key for several reasons. First, the importance of the United Nations as an institution which can provide a neutral platform for multilateralism and global governance featured in workshop discussions pertaining to all scenarios. This element was also noted in *A New Agenda for Peace*, which observes that the United Nations is "the most inclusive arena for diplomacy to manage global politics and its growing fractures".[22] It was noted that in scenarios where the United Nations was seen as more likely to have a caretaker role (or no longer existed, in a substantive way or at all) it would be much harder to achieve effective multilateralism and solve global issues, from climate change to conflicts. Second, the unique role of the United Nations for global governance was discussed at length, notably how it is a central convening actor in the aftermath of global disasters, providing a platform for the collection of lessons learned from all Member States. Several possible threats that could harm the long-term continuity and relevance of the United Nations thus emerged from the discussions:

> *"No United Nations or just a figurehead United Nations is the worst outcome—the United Nations still provides an undeniable platform to help with multilateralism."*
>
> Workshop participant

The uneven distribution of power and lack of inclusiveness within decision-making structures, notably the Security Council

A number of comments were made about the lack of inclusiveness, which was seen

[21] A number of additional threats not raised during the workshops do of course exist—ranging from the lack of sufficient funding for peace and disarmament at the United Nations to the threat to security by non-State armed groups. The lack of mention of these threats in this report does not imply that they are not considered as important; rather, these were not discussed within the scope and context of the present study.

[22] United Nations, "A New Agenda for Peace", 18.

as negatively impacting sustainability of the United Nations, trust in the United Nations as an institution, and its ability to mediate and resolve issues impacting global security. Additionally, the current system whereby the majority of States are accountable to a select few, which themselves have limited accountability, was raised as problematic, both now and in the future scenarios. In the literature, the uneven distribution of power has also been linked to potential non-compliance with decisions, instruments, and regulations relating to arms control and disarmament (see also threat below and Section 3.4).[23]

Member States withdrawing from meaningful engagement with the multilateral settings of the United Nations and specifically from existing processes pertaining to arms control and disarmament

Disengagement can make compliance with the disarmament machinery more sporadic, due to not seeing the use or relevance of these processes or the United Nations more widely, and not wanting to continue investing in it. This could mean a deprioritization of the United Nations, leading to insufficient or no funding, affecting the ability for the organization to take action, deliver on its mandate or keep its structures fit-for-purpose. This in turn could further impact the United Nations' reputation regarding its ability to achieve change, and create a vicious cycle where it is further deprioritized (see also discussions relating to trust in Section 3.2).

The acceleration and intersection of global crises and issues combined with the United Nation's capacity to cope

The United Nations is in high demand across many fronts. This can be perceived as a lack of responsiveness or agility to respond to (new) challenges and threats. However, workshop discussions did note that the organization's bureaucracy and ways of working could play a role in affecting the time needed for action to be taken on certain topics. Notably, the issue of new and emerging technologies in the context of arms control and disarmament was mentioned. Moreover, it was highlighted that the disarmament agenda is very congested, with processes and meetings happening one after the other and sometimes even concurrently. This can lead to representatives having insufficient time to absorb material or insufficient personnel to attend the relevant meetings. States with less capacity are more affected by this issue, which in turn can harm representation and equal ability to participate. Additionally, while mandates can aid with accountability and focus, they can also limit inter-agency cooperation, hamper processes examining linked issues, and impede operations taking place outside of silos.

The over-politicization of issues dealt with in the United Nations

While the United Nations is inherently a policy organization,[24] as noted in *A New Agenda for Peace*, "the United Nations is shaped

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[23] See Patrick et al., *UN Security Council Reform: What the World Thinks*, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, June 28 2023, https://carnegieendowment.org/2023/06/28/un-security-council-reform-what-world-thinks-pub-90032.

[24] This stems from the fact that each Member State is implementing their own foreign policy at the multilateral level, so in that sense issues are political within the United Nations.

fundamentally by the willingness of its Member States to cooperate".[25] As such, the threat highlighted by workshop participants refers to the over-politicization of issues, thus potentially limiting or preventing the United Nations' ability to respond to urgent issues or rendering the United Nations' response ineffective due to a (perceived) lack of independence of action. A related issue is how this affects decision-making, where deference to the lowest common denominator can water down decisions and subsequent actions, linked, further down the line, to a loss of trust (see Section 3.3). Over-politicization could also lead to insider versus outsider dynamics; a lack, or perceived lack, of impartiality; and to a lack of cooperation between Member States on issues requiring global governance. Ultimately, this was said to affect the image of the United Nations, as well as its ability to take decisive action.

Divisions or competition between Member States

This could lead to stagnation at decision-making forums. This also results in the perceived inefficiency of the United Nations, particularly if this pertains to dealing with a security threat or its outcomes, and an inability to solve challenges due to a lack of cooperation. An additional element to consider under this threat are challenges linked to the misuse of the principle of consensus, whereby in decision-making forums that hold to consensus agreement, withholding consensus can sometimes be wielded as a de facto veto to prevent a process from achieving an outcome. This is an issue that has already been raised by Member States.[26]

Weakening of States or their authority in international relations

This situation could lead to a stagnation of governance, as well as to a reduced role of the United Nations, which depends on the capacities of its Member States. This could also empower non-State actors to fill the vacuum, which poses threats of its own. This notably concerns the empowerment of private sector actors, discussed further in Section 3.4.

Under this theme, it is important to distinguish between mandate-driven elements of the United Nations, which include operational United Nations agencies and Secretariat Offices and Departments (such as the United Nations Children's Fund, the International Organization for Migration, the Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs and the Office for Disarmament Affairs), versus negotiation and decision-making bodies for Member States (such as the General Assembly, the Security Council, and the Conference on Disarmament). While noting this distinction, it is also important to note that the Secretariat and Agencies receive their mandates from decision-making bodies, so while the functions are different, the division between both elements is not so clear cut. Both elements have similarities in terms of the threats faced but conflating them risks losing nuance and misconstruing issues. For example, mandate-driven organizations do not face the same issues of deadlock as decision-making bodies, but their ability for action would be impacted the lack of consensus in decision-making bodies. Table 1 provides an overview of how the threats identified above map against the two different types of bodies.

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[25] United Nations, "A New Agenda for Peace", 3.

[26] See, for example, United Nations, Disarmament Machinery Impasse 'Cause and Consequence' of Competing Strategic Priorities, Ruthless Pursuit of Military Advantage, First Committee Told, 27 October 2022, https://press.un.org/en/2022/gadis3700.doc.htm.

Table 1. Relevance of Identified Threats to Either Operational United Nations Bodies or the United Nations as a Convening Platform, based on Workshop Discussions

ISSUE	SECRETARIAT AND AGENCIES	UNITED NATIONS NEGOTIATION AND DECISION-MAKING BODIES
Lack of responsiveness and lack of agility of response		×
Member States withdrawing from meaningful multilateral engagement	×	×
Over-politicization of the United Nations	×	×
Divisions or competition between Member States		×
Uneven distribution of power and lack of inclusiveness within decision-making structures		×
Weakening of States or their authority in international relations	×	×

3.2 Trust among States and in Institutions

The level of trust in institutions provides legitimacy as well as an ability to address issues. Trust—or the lack thereof—impacts peace and security. Not least because a deficit can play a role in rising tensions and even conflicts, but also because it impacts whether institutions are seen as being fit-for-purpose. For example, the existence of trust is brought up as a key factor in facilitating a peace process once the violence has stopped.[27] Multiple analyses exist examining levels of trust in the United Nations by the general public.[28] Yet these show the difficulty in identifying an overarching answer on trust in the United Nations, as there are differences between countries and regions, familiarity with the United Nations, and timings of surveys where answers may differ following different large-scale events (e.g., the COVID-19

[27] DPPA, "Guidance on Mediation of Ceasefires", September 2022, https://peacemaker.un.org/sites/peacemaker.un.org/files/Ceasefire-Guidance-2022.pdf.

[28] For a meta-analysis of these various surveys, see "Do People Trust the UN? A Look at the Data", Albert Trithart and Olivia Case, 22 February 2023, https://theglobalobservatory.org/2023/02/do-people-trust-the-un-a-look-at-the-data/.

pandemic, or in a situation of conflict). Two possible threats linked to the decline of trust in institutions emerged from the discussions:

Low or lack of trust between Member States and the impact on multilateralism

Trust between States was raised in some of the workshop discussions, notably on how low or lack of trust between Member States can impact United Nations negotiation and decision-making bodies (see Section 3.1). This affects external perceptions of the United Nations (see below), but also its ability to achieve substantive outcomes. Notably, it can be an impediment to the United Nation's arms control and disarmament architecture, the importance of which is highlighted in *A New Agenda for Peace*.

> *In a world of sovereign States, international cooperation is predicated upon trust.*
>
> *A New Agenda for Peace*, p. 8

Low or lack of trust in public sector institutions, particularly the United Nations

Workshop participants discussed the lack of trust by civil society in public sector institutions, noting that this could prevent institutions from protecting individuals, for example due to the unwillingness of individuals to interact with these institutions. In turn, this could impact national and human security due to continued exposure to risk. The issue of a 'trust deficit' has notably been brought up by the Secretary-General at the Security Council, demonstrating the importance of this concept to ensuring effective multilateralism, but also at the national level and its impact on national political establishments.[29] Low or lack of trust in the organization is also driven by a perceived lack of transparency, for example in addressing issues such as accusations of sexual abuse or other serious misconduct, which can affect the organization's reputation. Overall, the scenarios and subsequent discussions with workshop participants demonstrated that a lack of trust in the United Nations specifically, and international organizations more generally, combined with the loss of interest in participation in these multilateral forums is a fundamental threat to the United Nations.

3.3 The Disarmament Machinery

Arms control, disarmament, and non-proliferation play a key role in ensuring adherence to principles of peace and international law, as well as the reduction of conflict. The United Nations provides a platform through which numerous treaties, agreements, protocols and more can be discussed and agreed upon. However, there has been paralysis in some elements of the disarmament machinery for decades, most notably the Conference on Disarmament,[30] and

[29] United Nations, "Secretary-General Highlights 'Trust Deficit' amid Rising Global Turbulence, in Remarks to Security Council Debate on 'Upholding United Nations Charter'", 9 January 2020, https://press.un.org/en/2020/sgsm19934.doc.htm.

[30] United Nations, "A New Agenda for Peace".

the failure to reach consensus across a range of processes,[31] as well as withdrawals from treaties and other such steps back from multilateral or even bilateral agreements.[32] Nonetheless, there have been successes and progress too, such as the Convention on Cluster Munitions adopted in 2008, the Arms Trade Treaty adopted in 2013, the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons adopted in 2017, and the Global Framework for Through-life Conventional Ammunition Management adopted in 2023, which have contributed to prohibiting the use, transfer, and stockpiling of specific weapons, in addition to increasing transparency and responsible action as regards the arms trade and ammunition through-life management. Nonetheless, several possible threats that could harm the international security infrastructure emerged from the discussions:

> *Arms control frameworks and crisis management arrangements that helped stabilize great power rivalries and prevent another world war have eroded.*
>
> *A New Agenda for Peace*, p. 4

The lack of adequate responses to non-compliance with existing instruments

This gap can lead to States increasingly not complying as they do not fear repercussions, thus undermining confidence in multilateral mechanisms. There is also the parallel issue that the incentives for compliance may be inadequate. It can be unattractive for States to comply with governance mechanisms that cannot be enforced, and especially if others flout the rules. This, however, has a broader impact on institutional credibility. This lack of enforcement of compliance, combined with the difficulty of verifying compliance, can also be factors that further erode trust among States, and between States and intergovernmental institutions, including the United Nations.

The use of an arms build-up to bolster security

The predominant mindset remains that more weapons, conventional or otherwise, affords better security. However, there are a number of threats linked to this. First, this accumulation of weapons can be a cause of proliferation and diversion. Second, an arms build-up as a deterrence strategy can be a driver of instability. Overall, this issue is very much tied to how security is and continues to be conceptualized around weapons.

A weak rules-based order, or a breakdown of the rules-based order

The rules-based order has been portrayed as the basis for international relations. However, understandings can vary across States as to the rules underpinning this order.[33] A lack of

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[31] This includes, for example, the 2022 Non-Proliferation Treaty Review Conference, the GGE on lethal autonomous weapons systems, and the 2023 OEWG on reducing space threats through norms, rules and principles of responsible behaviours.

[32] See Miller, Steven, *Hard Times for Arms Control: What Can Be Done?*, The Hague Centre for Strategic Studies, February 2022, https://hcss.nl/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/AC1-Hard-Times-For-Arms-Control-2022-HCSS.pdf.

[33] The lack of a clear definition has been increasingly discussed; see, for example, Boas Lieberherr, "The "Rules-Based Order": Conflicting Understandings", CSS Analyses in Security Policy No. 317, February 2023, https://ethz.ch/content/dam/ethz/special-interest/gess/cis/center-for-securities-studies/pdfs/CSSAnalyse317-EN.pdf.

consensus on the rules-based order poses threats to international security, in particular human security. This issue is also highlighted in *A New Agenda for Peace*, which notes that there are "different interpretations by Member States of [the] universal normative frameworks"[34] observing that "rebuilding consensus on the meaning of and adherence to these frameworks is an essential task for the international system".[35]

3.4 Role of Non-State Actors in International Relations

Non-State actors (NSAs) include a very wide range of organizations and individuals, who have different interests, influence, and purposes. To that end, an overview of which NSAs are in discussed in this report is provided in Box 1.

Box 1. NSAs in the Context of this Report

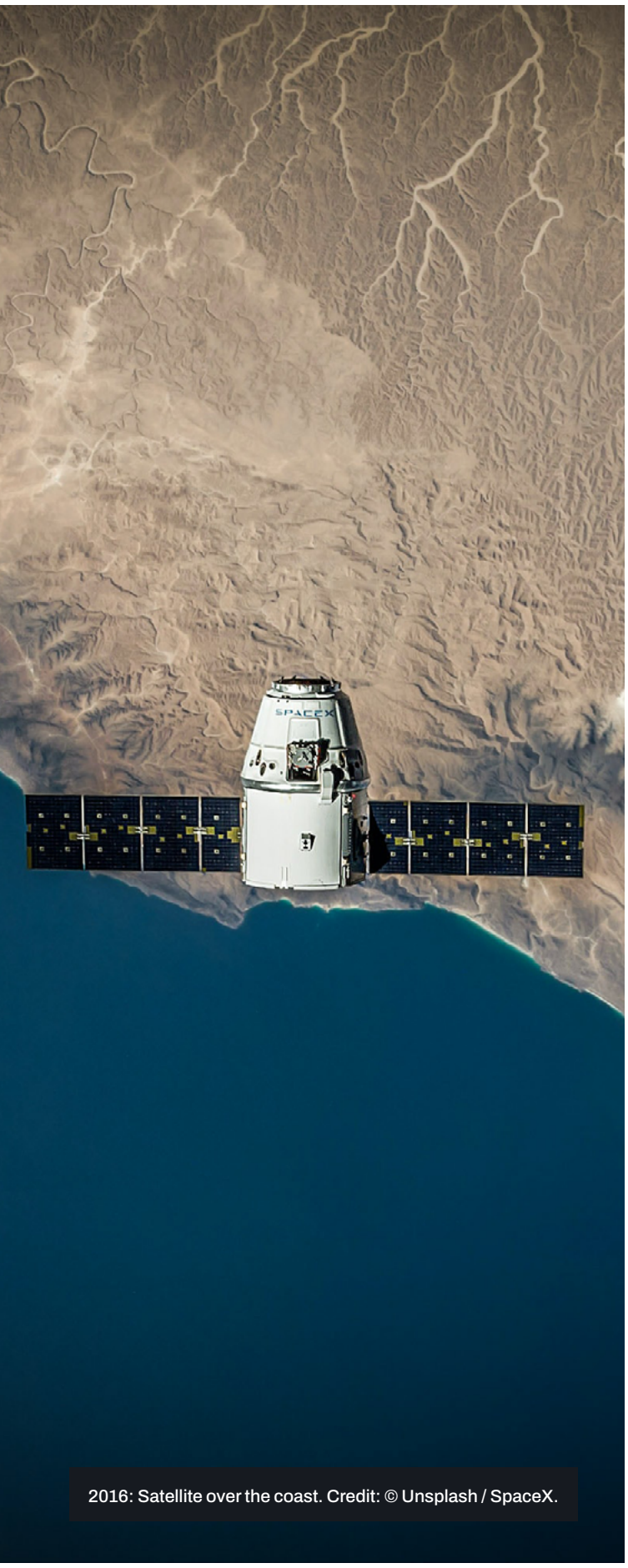
In the context of this report, NSAs refer to non-governmental organizations such as civil society organizations (CSOs), academic and research organizations, advocacy groups, and grassroot movements. Note that discussions did not include non-State armed groups as a category of actor included within NSAs. In the workshops, participants also discussed private sector actors separately to other types of NSAs.

Private sector actors have an increasingly large role in international relations. While the private sector is not a singular entity, and each company has a different reach, motivation, and desired outcomes, it is undeniable that collectively they are increasingly important globally, from providing essential infrastructure and services, to developing means of warfare. This is exemplified by the importance of the role of pharmaceutical corporations during the COVID-19 pandemic in developing vaccines, or the role of private satellite services in providing communications services.

The increased role and importance of private sector actors overall is also reflected in the international security sphere, where their role and decisions have an impact on the geopolitical balance, including security issues. Technology companies in particular have an outsized influence on new developments, as well as their access and use—but governance

[34] United Nations, "A New Agenda for Peace", 7.

[35] Ibid.



2016: Satellite over the coast. Credit: © Unsplash / SpaceX.

mechanisms at the multilateral level are aimed at States, and only indirectly, in some cases, at private sector actors. The provision of Starlink satellite services to Ukraine was notably highlighted as an example of the impact a single private company can have on geopolitical affairs.[36] A brief explanation is provided in Box 2 on the important role played by private sector actors in the context of the disarmament machinery.

[36] Emma Schroeder and Sean Dack, "A Parallel Terrain: Public-Private Defense of the Ukrainian Information Environment", Atlantic Council, 27 February 2023, https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/in-depth-research-reports/report/a-parallel-terrain-public-private-defense-of-the-ukrainian-information-environment/.

Box 2. Role of Private Actors in International Security

Private sector actors play an important role in the defence and security domain. Within **conventional arms and ammunition**, which ranges from large military equipment such as tanks, fighter aircraft, submarines, to small arms and light weapons, private sector actors play a key role in developing, producing, marketing, selling, and transferring such items. While a country's defence industrial and technological base often merges both private and public sector actors, arms control mechanisms at the multilateral level—such as the Arms Trade Treaty—are discussed and agreed between States, with little or limited involvement from private sector actors despite the critical role they play in ensuring the treaty's effectiveness and universalization.[37]

With regard to **technology**, private sector actors play an outsized role in its development and provision, whether this be in the areas of cyber, artificial intelligence (AI), enabling technologies (e.g., semi-conductors, quantum computing, processors, etc.), missile, and satellite technologies. This is notwithstanding the fact that the majority of these technologies are dual use, meaning that development occurs for both civilian and military purposes. For example, private sector actors are leading the way in terms of the newest developments pertaining to AI; yet, private sector actors, unlike other NSAs such as academia or civil society, do not attend the Group of Governmental Experts (GGE) on lethal autonomous weapons systems. Discussions relating to cyber are more inclusive. The 2021–2025 Open-ended Working Group (OEWG) on security of and in the use of information and communications technologies is open to all entities with appropriate accreditation, and private sector actors do take part. However, it should be noted that the previous cyber process (2004–2021) was only open to governments. Additionally, there is pushback in the current OEWG on which private sector actors are allowed to participate and the extent of their participation.

In terms of **outer space**, the private sector is heavily involved, from commercial ventures to strategic space operations. They are nonetheless putting forward best practices in order to ensure safety for their commercial ventures.[38] Discussions in the 2022–2023 OEWG on reducing space threats through norms, rules and principles of responsible behaviours also reinforced the importance of States cooperating with the private sector, noting that their presence in space could increase risks of misunderstanding or miscalculation and thus lead to conflict in outer space.

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[37] Paul Holtom and Anna Mensah, "The Role of Industry in Responsible International Transfers of Conventional Arms", UNIDIR, 30 March 2023, https://unidir.org/publication/role-industry-responsible-international-transfers-conventional-arms.

[38] Sarah Erickson and Vivienne Zhang, "Advancing Space Security Through Norms, Rules and Principles of Responsible Behaviour? Webinar Summary Report", UNIDIR, 1 September 2022, https://www.unidir.org/publication/advancing-space-security-through-norms-rules-and-principles-responsible-behaviour.

While the discussions demonstrated that, for the workshop participants, it was important for States to remain the primary actors in international relations, there was also an acknowledgment of the role and importance of NSAs, beyond private sector actors. These for example include civil society, non-governmental organizations, grassroots movements, faith-based organizations, and youth groups. These actors emerged as a key mitigating measure against the more negative characteristics of certain scenarios, notably in terms of providing a system of checks and balances at the multilateral level, whereby they can offer different inputs and perspectives during processes, review conferences, and other similar multilateral discussions. Several possible threats arising from the role—or lack thereof—of NSAs in international relations emerged from the discussions, particularly focusing on the growing importance of private sector actors in the international sphere:

Tensions between the roles of private sector actors and those of States at the international level

Certain workshop participants mentioned that, at the national level, the growing influence of private sector actors has already led some to assume functions or responsibilities traditionally held by States through outsourcing or privatization, in domains as distinct as healthcare, education or the military. Yet, international institutions and multilateralism have been shaped by States, for States, as the primary actors, and are not adapted to the private sector. Linked to this, there was a point made about how this could put the multilateral system and the relevance of the United Nations at risk, as private sector actors do not have the same interests or obligation to implement international law as States. However, it was recognized by participants that involvement of multi-stakeholder perspectives, including private sector actors, is important. This raised the question as to how best involve them, particularly in discussions at the multilateral level. Making the United Nations more inclusive could come with risks of diluting the roles States play, as well as leading to pushback from States regarding their participation. One of the reasons put forward by workshop participants for such possible pushback is linked to the sentiment that private sector actors may be a way for certain States with powerful private sectors to achieve economic colonialism. This also raised questions around the fitness of the system; notably, around who would be responsible and accountable for decisions made or influenced by private sector actors.

Difficulty in aligning interests between private and public sector actors

The wide difference in incentive structures between private sector actors and States was highlighted, not least due to what this may mean in terms of international and national security should they continue to gain prominence. For example, workshop participants noted that private sector actors may not give human security the same importance that a State would; they may also be driven by financial considerations or are beholden to shareholders, unlike States. Additionally, private sectors actors can play a role in funding initiatives, such as those by other NSAs. In some cases, this can be a way to seek to exert influence. This brings up a number of questions around how they might approach some issues such as weapons proliferation or conflict prevention, given the divergent interests.

Marginalization of NSAs, beyond private sector actors, in international relations

NSA participation is important for bringing a range of views, perspectives, and expertise into issues. Moreover, and unlike private sector actors, the presence of NSAs is already well-established at the United Nations and

across the various arms control and disarmament processes; however, there has been some pushback to their participation or attendance in certain forums. It should also be noted that General Assembly GGE working groups, in addition to only allowing a maximum of 25 Member States to take part, do not allow NSAs to be present, unless invited to take an informal and advisory role, such as through the provision of a briefing, hence limiting their involvement in certain discussions.

3.5 Role of Regional and Subregional Entities in International Relations

Regional and subregional organizations already cooperate and are included at the United Nations and in the various arms control and disarmament processes. The Security Council has acknowledged the important role played by these organizations in maintaining international peace and security.[39] Yet, discussions noted that decision-making remains centralized within the United Nations, and that decision-making is sometimes paralysed at the multilateral level. One possible threat emerged from the discussions:

Lack of sufficient inclusion and use of regional and subregional entities

As noted above, discussions revolved around the very centralized approach to security currently, and how this could be impacted in instances where multilateralism breaks down. Regional organizations could also be an entry point to improving current systems, by being a place for dialogue where the outputs are then fed into the global level; play a more prominent role in liaising with States and seeking their buy-in, thus empowering regional and subregional entities in their actions and decisions; as well as a pathway to capturing ideas and enabling modernization and reform of multilateral organizations. However, there was also a point raised as to the impact of a more regional-based approach on States' sovereignty, and whether this may actually be counterproductive, demonstrating that a considered approach would be necessary to address such a threat.

[39] United Nations, "In Times of Global Crises, Collaboration between Regional Organizations, United Nations Has 'Grown Exponentially', Secretary-General Tells Security Council", 19 April 2021, https://press.un.org/en/2021/sc14498.doc.htm. This is also an aspect highlighted in A New Agenda for Peace which notes that "In the face of growing competition at the global level and threats that are increasingly transnational, we need regional frameworks and organizations, in accordance with Chapter VIII of the Charter, that promote trust-building, transparency and détente. We also need strong partnerships between the United Nations and regional organizations. Regional frameworks and organizations are critical building blocks for the networked multilateralism that I [the Secretary-General] envisage"; United Nations, "A New Agenda for Peace", 12.

3.6 Technology and Innovation

Technology takes many different shapes and forms, from low- to high-end innovations. This includes advanced technologies, such as AI or cyber; enabling technologies, such semi-conductors, quantum computing, additive manufacturing, or processors; and applied technologies, which combines many of these aforementioned technologies, such as within uncrewed systems or weapons of mass destruction. The impact and governance of technologies, and in particular digital technologies, is an issue which is the focus of one of the Secretary-General's latest policy briefs, *A Global Digital Compact — an Open, Free and Secure Digital Future for All*, as well as in *A New Agenda for Peace*, in addition to the yearly release of a report on current developments in science and technology and their potential impacts on international security and disarmament efforts. Several possible threats linked to the role and impact of technology and innovation emerged from the discussions:

The ability to strike a balance between regulating technology while still allowing sufficient space for beneficial innovation

The discussions highlighted that technological innovations could play an important role in improving core aspects of livelihoods, such as food and water access or climate change adaptation. But they also noted that there is a need to ensure that technology is not used for unlawful purposes, such as promoting arms proliferation or within weapons which do not conform to international humanitarian law. Yet, this is a thorny and difficult challenge, which can be witnessed through the discussions in multilateral processes, such as the GGE on lethal autonomous weapons systems whereby this argument is as yet unresolved, or in relation to legislation applied at the regional level, for example the pushback to the European Union's AI Act.[40]

Managing access and control of technology and the consequences thereof

The distribution of innovation and technology is currently uneven between and within countries. This creates a divide which seems likely to continue into the future and could have a negative impact on cooperation and technological governance. Additionally, technology could be a driver of instability: who controls and has or gives access to technology may also play a role in defining it in the context of use prior to, during, and after situations of violence or conflict. The incentives to developing technology may also affect how a given technology is applied—for example, between one focused on national interests versus for public good.

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[40] Javier Espinoza, "European Companies Sound Alarm over Draft AI Law", *Financial Times*, 29 June 2023, https://www.ft.com/content/9b72a5f4-a6d8-41aa-95b8-c75f0bc92465. For more details on the EU AI Act, see European Parliament, "MEPs Ready to Negotiate First-ever Rules for Safe and Transparent AI", 14 June 2023, https://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/press-room/20230609IPR96212/meps-ready-to-negotiate-first-ever-rules-for-safe-and-transparent-ai.

3.7 Non-Traditional Threats to Peace and Security

The disarmament machinery at the United Nations is geared towards dealing with traditional security threats, which are defined as "state survival and conceived mainly in terms of interstate military conflict".[41] However, there has been an increase in non-traditional threats to peace and security and growing understanding of their potential impact. These include technologically-driven disinformation, climate change, unsafe migration, pandemics, and weaponization of trade, to name but a few. These threats can be compounded with one another and can also lead to traditional threats—in other words, armed conflict. One possible threat linked to non-traditional threats to peace and security emerged from the discussions:

> *Peace is not the absence of war.*
>
> Spinoza, quoted by a workshop participant

The United Nations peace and security architecture is not sufficiently adapted or prepared for non-traditional threats

The disarmament machinery focuses on issues relating to disarmament and arms control, with the challenge being that there are no other machineries beyond the disarmament one and the Security Council to deal with international security matters. While non-traditional threats may be dealt with and discussed in other parts of the United Nations, the discussions are not integrated or cross-cutting. Additionally, these non-traditional threats move the paradigm away from State sovereignty as the target, towards internal or human security, which has not traditionally or always been the primary focus of many of the multilateral arms control and disarmament mechanisms in place.

3.8 Key Takeaways

Overall, workshop participants identified a range of threats when using the various future scenarios as tools for examination. Some of these threats may appear, at first glance, to be outside the remit of arms control and disarmament. However, as the analysis above demonstrates, high-level issues relating to the United Nations as a whole affect specific issues pertaining to arms control and disarmament.

The continuing relevance of the United Nations as a convening and decision-making platform emerges as being of primary importance to address threats related to weapons as well as the many other interconnected threats, and thus international security issues more generally. Workshop participants notably stated that a mere figurehead structure—or no United Nations—was the worst outcome, as the United Nations provides a necessary platform conducive to multilateralism.

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[41] Shahar Hameiri and Lee Jones, "The Politics and Governance of Non-Traditional Security", *International Studies Quarterly* 57, no. 3 (2013): 462–473, 2023: doi.org/10.1111/isqu.12014, p. 462.

4. Dealing with the Threats: Possible Pathways for Action

Having discussed the threats, this section outlines possible pathways for action to address these threats, based on inputs from the workshops as well as interviews with over 20 experts from the United Nations, regional organizations, Member States, research organizations and academia, civil society, and the private sector. These pathways for action are not recommendations, although the hope is that they could be, in the future, developed as such. Within the scope of this report, the identified pathways for action provide avenues for reflection on what could be undertaken to address the threats identified, acting as a starting – or continuation – point for a conversation around these issues.

4.1 Issue-Specific Pathways for Action

Table 2 provides an overview of pathways for action identified which are either specific to issues of arms control and disarmament or would have a significant impact upon arms control and disarmament processes, discussions, and implementation. A more detailed explanation of each of these pathways for action, including examples of action which could be taken, is provided in Annex 1.

Many of the themes and threats, and consequently pathways for action, have some level of overlap or linkages between them. As a result, the pathways for action, while divided by issues identified, aim to reflect which elements identified to address or overcome a particular threat may also apply or have an impact on others.

New York, USA, 2015. Security Council unanimously adopting resolution 1649. Credit: © UN Photo/Paulo Filgueiras

Table 2. Issue-Specific Pathways for Action to Address the Identified Threats

ISSUE	PATHWAYS FOR ACTION
1. Uneven distribution of power and lack of inclusiveness within decision-making structures	**a. Revitalize discussions on Security Council reform:** Issues to address notably pertain to representation in the Security Council, existence and use of the veto, and redistribution of decision-making in order to reinforce trust in the Security Council and enable constructive outcomes. **b. Engage more closely with the regional level:** Increased dialogue and decision-making at the regional level on issues of arms control and disarmament may be a way to bridge the disconnect felt between challenges faced on the ground versus the decision-making locations. **c. Ensure diversity in delegations:** Delegations could seek to improve their inclusiveness to ensure diverse perspectives and contributions on arms control and disarmament processes, such as in terms of gender and age characteristics. → See also pathways for action under Issue 14 (*Marginalization of NSAs in international relations*) and Issue 15 (*Lack of sufficient inclusion and use of regional and subregional entities*).
2. Member States withdrawing from meaningful multilateral engagement	**a. Devolve more decision-making to the regional level:** Seek to empower regional and subregional organizations in the area of arms control and disarmament to not only enhance engagement but also ensure change is still occurring on the ground regardless of issues at the multilateral level. → See also pathways for action under Issue 3 (*Ability to cope with the acceleration and intersection of crises and issues*), 8 (*Low or lack of trust in the United Nations*), and Issue 15 (*Lack of sufficient inclusion and use of regional and subregional entities*).
3. Ability to cope with the acceleration and intersection of crises and issues	**a. Keep track of changing attitudes, norms, and circumstances to quickly adapt or react to them:** Understand the impact and implications of any evolutions or changes (for example, in illegal or illicit behaviour regarding weapons diversion or use, in technologies, etc.) on the work of the United Nations and in particularly that relating to arms control and disarmament. **b. Consider the limitations of institutional or process mandates:** Having more flexibility embedded in mandates could help improve more substantive inter-institutional collaboration, to examine issues that may otherwise fall within a mandate 'gap', such as technological convergence. **c. Create opportunities to deepen substantive discussions:** Circulating more non-papers to explore issues informally, or holding informal consultations prior to meetings or debates, could help increase awareness and knowledge, and in turn streamline discussions. **d. Approach issues from a broader lens:** Given many issues converge, ensure that these convergences are examined in a more unified way, such as by capturing the political, social, and economic dimensions of certain arms control and disarmament issues. **e. Streamline the disarmament agenda:** Investigate how the disarmament agenda could be streamlined, to allow more time between processes for diplomats to absorb relevant material. **f. Increase the transparency about successes and failures:** The United Nations, and the disarmament machinery specifically, should demonstrate that it can address specific problems that are currently taking place and impacting different regions, but also be honest about its limits.

	g. **Enable greater feedback loops:** Obtaining inputs, feedback, and insights from United Nations personnel and the general public on processes, mechanisms, and the United Nations more broadly can help identify what could work better. → See also pathways for action under Issue 8 (*Low or lack of trust in the United Nations*), Issue 16 (*Balancing between regulating technology and enabling innovation*), Issue 18 (*Insufficient preparation for non-traditional threats*).
4. Over-politicization of issues within the United Nations	a. **Maintain impartiality:** United Nations bodies should maintain impartiality and not seek to stigmatize different sides, continuing to re-main a neutral platform for negotiations between States.
5. Divisions or competition between Member States	a. **Ensure that multilateral mechanisms remain in place:** Preserve multilateral mechanisms as a way to encourage and foster dialogue. b. **Create incentive-based coalitions:** Partnerships and coalitions between Member States that focus on areas of action as an incentive could be created around formal processes. c. **Reflect upon the consensus decision-making system:** Further discussion and decisions on correct use of consensus voting is necessary, and how to ensure that it can be used adequately without derailing processes. → See also pathways for action under Issue 2 (*Member States withdrawing from meaningful multilateral engagement*) and Issue 8 (*Low or lack of trust in the United Nations*).
6. Weakening of States or their authority in international relations	→ See pathways for action under Issues 1 (*Uneven distribution of power and lack of inclusiveness within decision-making structures*), 2 (*Member States withdrawing from meaningful multilateral engagement*), 3 (*Ability to cope with the acceleration and intersection of crises and issues*), and 12 (*Tensions between the roles of private sector actors and those of States at the international level*).
7. Low or lack of trust between Member States	→ See pathways for action under Issue 5 (*Divisions or competition between Member States*).
8. Low or lack of trust in the United Nations	a. **Rethink the issues that the United Nations is best placed to address:** Acknowledging the limitations of the United Nations can help rebuild trust in its capacity for action, as well as a focus on its areas of strength, such as being a convening platform. b. **Improve external communications:** Maintaining and constantly improving the United Nations' external communication is important to ensure that there is an understanding of the role of the organization, what it can do, and what it has control over. → See also pathway for action under Issues 1 (*Uneven distribution of power and lack of inclusiveness within decision-making structures*), 3 (*Ability to cope with the acceleration and intersection of crises and issues*), 14 (*Marginalization of NSAs in international relations*) and 15 (*Lack of sufficient inclusion and use of regional and subregional entities*).
9. Lack of adequate responses to non-compliance	a. **Re-examine incentives:** There is a need to rethink the incentives for compliance, examining both punitive and non-punitive measures as well as the existing infrastructure and resources to aid States with compliance.

	b. **Strengthen resources for implementation and enforcement:** A review of the resources available for the different instruments across conventional weapons and weapons of mass destruction would help to ascertain which need additional resources for implementation and enforcement, as well as what resources might be needed for international cooperation and assistance. c. **Enable greater enforcement mechanisms:** Options include ensuring that such mechanisms are implementable and adaptable, as well as putting in place the means to compel adherence. d. **Make compliance a whole-of-society responsibility:** Encouraging a wider range of NSAs (e.g., private sector actors, academia, CSOs, and beyond) to take an active role. This can help place bottom-up pressure as well as top-down pressure to ensure compliance. e. **Ensure transparency and legitimacy of assessments of possible non-compliance:** Increasing the diversity of inspectors in terms of their background could be a way forward. Ensuring that personnel have technical expertise, including within secretariats overseeing implementation of treaties or frameworks, would also help. f. **Emphasize the benefits of compliance:** Emphasis around the benefits of compliance (e.g., economic, societal, etc.) could be done through improved communication, including with NSAs, but also using novel techniques, such applying behavioural insights, such as nudging. g. **Encourage norm-building within regional groups or blocks of States:** Regional application of norms and frameworks could help ensure that these are tailored to regional needs. h. **Enhance the role of regional disarmament centres:** Regional disarmament centres have a very good understanding of national and regional contexts and can help channel technical expertise on arms control to United Nations country teams. i. **Engage with communities working in related areas:** Reduction of silos between communities working on the same issues, albeit with a different focus, should be examined and enacted. → See also pathways for action under Issues 1 (*Uneven distribution of power and lack of inclusiveness within decision-making structures*), 3 (*Ability to cope with the acceleration and intersection of crises and issues*), and 15 (*Lack of sufficient inclusion and use of regional and subregional entities*).
10. Arms build-up as a way to bolster security	a. **Reinvigorate diplomatic relations:** Increase opportunities for exchange and identification of areas of common ground to resolve particular issues. b. **Change the narrative around deterrence:** Emphasize collaboration, prevention, and regulation, such as by developing acceptable norms of State behaviour, as opposed to thinking in terms of reprisals, mutually assured destruction, or escalation. c. **Encourage and improve transparency around spending and weapons:** Transparency in military and security spending can help provide clarity and reduce the need to purchase or develop more weapons systems – overall helping increase trust. d. **Employ confidence-building mechanisms:** Trust-building is essential, as distrust and opaqueness are key drivers in weapons build-up. e. **Ensure robust arms control treaties are maintained:** States mostly abide by existing instruments, so ensuring that these instruments do not fall by the wayside or that States do not withdraw from treaties is key.

	f. **Decrease economic reliance on weapons production:** Examine how economic reliance on weapons production can be shifted, as this can disincentivize moving away from weapons manufacturing. g. **Engage with national or local-level actors:** Engagement with national or local actors can help promote change bottom-up, in addition to top-down approaches. h. **Prioritize human security:** Prioritization of human security can help shift the focus away from weapons-led security. → See also pathways for action under Issues 14 (*Marginalization of NSAs in international relations*) and 18 (*Insufficient preparation for non-traditional threats*).
11. Weak rules-based order	a. **Hold open and honest discussions around the current order:** Understanding the reasons why the current order was created in the first place, what does not work, or what challenges exist is key to being able to address these issues and rebuild a stronger order. b. **Engage with regional and subregional actors:** Engaging in discussions with regional and subregional actors in times of crisis, as opposed to seeking punitive actions, can help improve relationships and build trust. In turn, this can help improve adherence to international norms and rules. c. **Ensure national and international organizations have sufficient resources:** International organizations play a key role in maintaining the rules-based order, and ensuring that States abide with international law, frameworks, and other instruments, but they need sufficient resources to do so. d. **Enhance data on arms control and disarmament issues:** Data is a key element for accountability, and increased quality and quantity of such data could help enhance transparency and trust. → See also pathways for action under Issues 3 (*Ability to cope with the acceleration and intersection of crises and issues*), 14 (*Marginalization of NSAs in international relations*), 9 (*Lack of adequate responses to non-compliance*) and 15 (*Lack of sufficient inclusion and use of regional and subregional entities*).
12. Tensions between the roles of private sector actors and those of States at the international level	a. **Maintain role of States in policy- and norm-making:** States should remain proactive in tackling issues and considering the challenges and benefits to international, regional, national, local, and human security. b. **Enhance public–private partnerships:** There needs to be recognition that provision of rules, regulation, and norms should be done jointly with private sector actors, particularly given their important and growing role in international security matters. c. **Reinforce international law-based frameworks:** International law remains in the remit of States, so reinforcing it can also serve as a reminder of the currently important and crucial role of States in this domain. d. **Encourage multi-stakeholder dialogues in arms control and disarmament mechanisms:** Enabling and encouraging the participation of NSAs in working groups, meetings, processes, and review conferences can help improve their understanding of instruments, as well as provide opportunities to benefit from their insight, expertise, and knowledge in a specific area. → See also pathways for action under Issues 1 (*Uneven distribution of power and lack of inclusiveness within decision-making structures*), 2 (*Member States withdrawing from meaningful multilateral engagement*), and 3 (*Ability to cope with the acceleration and intersection of crises and issues*).

13. Difficulty in aligning interests be-tween private and public actors	**a. Encourage initiatives and incentive structures that drive closer alignment between the private sector and States:** Incentive structures between actors are different, and identifying areas of overlap (or lack thereof) can help with the identification of areas for collaboration and strengthening of relationships. **b. Focus on individuals in addition to entities:** In addition to the focus on private sector actors with regard to norms and rules, also focus on the individuals within these entities. **c. Update regulations on private sector involvement:** Private sector actors play an increasingly large role, and therefore being clearer on their involvement in areas such as peacebuilding, peacekeeping, reconstruction, and development is critical going forward.
14. Marginalization of NSAs in inter-national relations	**a. Recognize the strengths of NSA inclusion:** NSAs can provide additional and new perspectives, in addition to providing substantive input in terms of Track 2 diplomacy and, as such, additional recognition of the added value of NSAs is needed. **b. Improve NSA representation at the national level:** States could look to ensure and improve inclusion of NSAs at the national level, which would in turn have knock-on effects at the international level. **c. Streamline the approval process for NSA accreditation:** The process for NSAs to obtain a consultative status could be further streamlined to ensure broader participation. **d. Improve mechanisms for NSA participation in processes:** Making States provide an explanation as to why certain NSAs are blocked from participation could help address issues and identify underlying problems. **e. Improve processes for geographically diverse NSA participation:** Ensuring regional balance of NSA participation goes hand-in-hand with ensuring improved participation. **f. Consider a partnership model to enhance collaboration:** Closer collaboration and informal ways of working between States and NSAs could ensure that NSAs are able to share their views even if processes or rules of procedure may not always allow for their (full) participation.
15. Lack of sufficient inclusion and use of regional and subregional entities	**a. Include subregional and even local entities as well as regional ones:** Subregional entities can play an equally, if not more, important role, and further effort could be undertaken to ensure their inclusion at the multilateral level. **b. Empower regional and subregional entities in arms control and disarmament:** Regionally focused mechanisms should be pursued to ensure that instruments are designed according to regional or subregional realities, which also increases their chances of implementation. **c. Develop a clear capacity-building strategy:** Improve capacity within regional and subregional entities through the provision of resources, training, and opportunities for engagement. **d. Improve coordination between, and participation of, entities:** Putting in place memorandums of understanding for ensuring political alignment between regional and subregional entities can help increase their role at the multilateral level as well as improve their coordination. → See also pathways for action under Issue 9 (*Lack of adequate responses to non-compliance*).

16. Balancing between regulating technology and enabling innovation	**a. Clarify the narrative:** Utilize capacity-building initiatives, or informal meetings prior to formal processes, to enhance clarity on issues of technology and governance. **b. Enhance anticipatory governance:** Better foresight is needed with regard to emerging and dual-use technology, in order to be more proactive in terms of technological issues and how they may impact—either positively or negatively—international peace and security, as well as issues related to arms control and disarmament. **c. Consider using more dynamic and flexible approaches as part of technological governance:** Consider more dynamic approaches, beyond traditional treaty structures as found in the arms control and disarmament field, to consider technologies with wide-ranging applications. → See also pathways for action under Issues 12 (*Tensions between the roles of private sector actors and those of States at the international level*), 14 (*Marginalization of NSAs in international relations*) and 15 (*Lack of sufficient inclusion and use of regional and subregional entities*).
17. Access and control of technology and the consequences thereof	**a. Hold regular discussions on technological issues:** Making use of the diversity of instruments within the United Nations in order to discuss changes—often rapid—in technologies, in order to be more proactive about these issues. **b. Provide support to States:** Capacity-building activities should be considered in order to provide States with a better understanding around fair technology transfers, particularly for developing States, and to overcome any gaps in knowledge. **c. Develop better export control regimes and pathways to share technologies:** New and emerging technologies require thinking about their access through export controls in more detail. → See also pathways for action under Issues 12 (Tensions between the roles of private sector actors and those of States at the inter-national level), 8 (Difficulty in aligning interests between private and public actors), and 15 (*Lack of sufficient inclusion and use of regional and subregional entities*).
18. Insufficient preparation for non-traditional threats	**a. Improve the involvement of a wider set of actors:** A more inclusive approach should be taken to enable NSAs, regional and subregional groups, independent experts, and other actors' contribution to national, regional, and global strategies, discussions, and processes. **b. Learn from cross-cutting successes:** Leverage lessons learned from existing cross-area and cross-entity bodies, such as the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Coordination Compact Committee Secretariat. **c. Create instruments which are adaptable to future change:** There should be a shift away from relying on past knowledge, towards approaches that enable more future-focused thinking on threats to international peace and security. **d. Focus on the 2030 Agenda and beyond:** In addition to seeking to implement the 2030 Agenda, consideration of what will come after and how to reinforce communication and action on linkages between issues of arms control and disarmament and development should be considered. **e. Improve the use of mitigation and early warning mechanisms:** These mechanisms can be set up to monitor a range of variables, which can map across a range of threats. **f. Re-examine concepts such as peace and conflict:** Revisiting definitions of 'conflict' could also be a way to include a broader scope with regard to threats. → See also pathways for action under Issues 3 (*Ability to cope with the acceleration and intersection of crises and issues*), 14 (*Marginalization of NSAs in international relations*), 9 (*Lack of adequate responses to non-compliance*) and 15 (*Lack of sufficient inclusion and use of regional and subregional entities*).

4.2 General Purpose and Cross-Cutting Pathways for Action

Some of the pathways for action identified were not necessarily specific to issues of arms control and disarmament, but rather pertained to more general purpose and cross-cutting issues which would also indirectly impact arms control and disarmament. The report does not aim to delve into these in detail, but nonetheless provides an overview of selected broader pathways for action which were mentioned by interviewees alongside more targeted and issue-specific pathways for action (see Box 3).

Box 3. General Purpose and Cross-Cutting Pathways for Action to Address the Identified Threats

Importance of the United Nations' principles

It is important that the United Nations organization conducts its business according to the principles that it espouses. This can manifest itself in multiple ways, such as remuneration of interns.

Fostering a culture of collaboration and cooperation

Beyond processes and mandates, people can play an important role in continuing and promoting siloed attitudes and thus hampering inter-agency cooperation and collaboration. Ensuring that recruitment hires individuals with the right values, vision and diversity of thought is therefore important. Equally important is seeking individuals with an inclusive mindset, who would be open to collaborative efforts, as well as identifying leaders with the type(s) of leadership model most beneficial to achieve the intended goals. Within the existing workforce, use of behavioural insights to nudge attitudes and ways of working could for example be considered, as well as ensuring that organizational configurations and practices incentivize rather than challenge collaboration and cooperation.

Trainings and secondments between different communities

Specialized staff should be offered trainings to understand areas of overlap. This could also be achieved through secondments between a range of United Nations agencies.

Informal platforms for discussions

Outside of formal negotiations, having inclusive and informal platforms or other avenues for Member States and other stakeholders to consult, develop, and discuss ideas can help find areas of common ground and agreement. Informal retreats and meetings could therefore be considered, as well as production of non-papers and other similar initiatives to stimulate information-sharing. This could also help improve the efficiency of processes, including those relating to arms control and disarmament.

Transparency and complementarity in funding

Lack of trust can stem from the feeling that States with more resources are able to wield influence through their funding. This issue would require further examination, and an increase in transparency and declarations of conflict of interest could be considered. Transparency could also be increased with regard to earmarked funding for specific projects. Additionally, complementarity in funding should be sought between donors; this could help States pool together resources to fund areas of common interest and avoid duplication of effort.

4.3 Key Takeaways from the Pathways for Action

The pathways for action outlined above demonstrate a number of initiatives with varying scopes and scales. Some of the pathways are more strategic in nature, some are more tactical, while others are more operational, and may also, if implemented, have different likely or potential impacts on the threat they are seeking to overcome. The pathways also provide a range of ideas that could be further discussed and developed with a broad range of stakeholder, within and outside of the United Nations. Yet, as shown by the range of pathways for action, it is not possible to address threats to international security as it relates to weapons and disarmament only; to enable progress in these areas requires action in many others and more broadly, portraying the interlinked nature of many of these threats—and pathways for action.

States remain the primary actors able to deal with challenges related to international security, namely conflicts, but also global threats such as climate change or new and emerging technology. Yet, the need to include a more diverse set of stakeholders emerges clearly across these pathways for action yielded by the scenarios and the discussions emerging from them. At the same time, monitoring and assessing States and their behaviours should account for not only identifying non-compliance but also rewarding positive behaviours, as was noted in the pathways for action. Indeed, focus should also be placed on ensuring that States remain involved at the multilateral level, to enable crucial discussions and diplomacy to keep thriving.

Many of the threats identified in *A New Agenda for Peace* emerged from the workshop discussions in this project too, despite a different approach and focus. This demonstrates that there are core issues that need to be addressed to help secure a future which is more, rather than less, appealing. As such, when analysing the pathways for action identified as possibilities to address the identified threats, several points for reflection emerge. First, the **time frame necessary to enact the various proposed pathways for action**. Some of the pathways for action can be addressed rapidly but, for many, the pace of change will be lengthy and slow. This does not necessarily mean that change is not happening, but that there should be recognition

that some issues will take years if not decades to address—and patience and continuous effort will be required. Second, these **pathways for action would require multiple stakeholders to achieve**. Dialogue, agreement, and collaborative partnership will be needed to define not only the way forward on the pathways for action, but also in order to enact them. Third, several **broader normative concepts are necessary for these pathways for action to be successful**. This notably includes trust, transparency, solidarity, and accountability, which underpin the elements noted as providing a way forward. Fourth, **causality may be difficult to attribute**, particularly if several pathways for action are employed in conjunction, in addition to other extraneous developments. This may impact the collective ability to understand and develop good practices, unless robust evaluation is undertaken.

Bamako, Mali, 2020. Peace Monument. Credit: © mtcurado

5. Preparing for the Future: The Way Ahead

The future is, of course, unknown. However, the use of futures and foresight methods can help provide us with the tools to increase our resilience, as well as consider issues and take decisions with a more future-focused and proactive mindset. As shown through this particular project, while questions around arms control and disarmament are critical when considering peace and security issues, taking a step back and thinking across areas of work demonstrate the interlinkages in issues needing to be tackled. The creation of the future scenarios can thus be used as a starting point to examine other elements and more specific issues within the international security sphere—such as how conflicts may change and evolve in the future.

Overall, the role of the United Nations in arms control and disarmament is key, and there is a need to strengthen what already exists. However, many of the aspects raised in this report—both the threats and pathways for action—merit a broader and deeper conversation, in the context of the Summit of the Future and beyond. Indeed, as the future scenarios show, our greatest threats are both inaction and 'more of the same'—in other words, entrenchment in a particular structure or set of interests. To that end, building upon the pathways for action could constitute a series of next steps. For example, this could entail understanding the levels of effort required for implementation mapped against likely returns on investment, to allow careful selection of the most relevant pathways in a time of constrained resources and a complex geopolitical climate. Developing the pathways of action into recommendations could then be a subsequent step. The complexity of defining, let alone implementing, these pathways requires a collaborative approach within and beyond the United Nations. Despite the challenges ahead, however, we need to confront the issues if we do not want to end up in a *Paradise Lost* scenario—and acknowledge that the hard work will not end even if we reach *A Modern Utopia*.

Brno, Czechia, 2020. Inflatable Earth model. Credit: © Lubo Ivanko

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Annex 1. Detailed Pathways for Action

The following pages provide additional detail for each pathway for action described in Section 4.

1. Uneven distribution of power and lack of inclusiveness within decision-making structures

a. **Revitalize discussions on Security Council reform:** Issues to address notably pertained to representation in the Security Council, existence and use of the veto, and redistribution of decision-making. Suggestions include: (i) moving discussions and decisions on sanctions from the Security Council to the General Assembly. It was noted that the imbalance in power and lack of representation of certain regions in the Security Council mean that application of sanctions is not always felt to be impartial. This would also mean the application of sanctions would be based on majority voting by all Member States; (ii) issues that cannot find agreement in the Security Council could be automatically moved to the General Assembly ; (iii) increase involvement and consultation by the Security Council with those affected by its decisions;[42] (iv) revitalize discussions on whether and how to include additional permanent members in the Security Council, and provide a transparent and uniform decision; (v) reduce the use of the veto or remove the possibility of using it when discussing certain topics.

b. **Engage more closely with the regional level:** Increased dialogue and decision-making at the regional level on issues of arms control and disarmament could aid representation and horizontal governance on matters relating to weapons and international security. This could also be a way to bridge some of the disconnect felt between challenges faced on the ground versus the decision-making locations. Such regional perspectives on power distribution and inclusiveness could then be taken up at the global level. A way forward could be to have more dialogue and incentives on the matter of reform at the regional level by States, with the outcome of these discussions then taken up at the global level. Avoiding excessive top-down action can also help re-establish trust; this can include the United Nations taking a more passive role, and delegating arms control and disarmament matters and implementation more to regional, subregional, and non-governmental organizations.

c. **Ensure diversity in delegations:** Inclusiveness should also be considered within delegations notably by including diverse perspectives, such as gender and youth, and ensuring that they too can attend and contribute to arms control and disarmament processes (such as GGEs, OEWGs, First Committee, etc.). This could expand upon existing initiatives, such as Youth-4Disarmament. Funding structures and incentives may be needed to enable this and ensure it can be upheld by all Member States.

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42 See The Elders, The Elders call for strengthening of the United Nations, 1 February 2015, https://theelders.org/news/elders-call-strengthening-united-nations.

→ See also pathways for action under Issue 14 (*Marginalization of NSAs in international relations*) and Issue 15 (*Lack of sufficient inclusion and use of regional and subregional entities*).

2. Member States withdrawing from meaningful multilateral engagement

a. **Devolve more decision-making to the regional level:** Empowerment of regional and subregional organizations in the area of arms control and disarmament can help increase willingness of engagement, especially with regard to adapting action to region-specific challenges and capacity for action. Additionally, if action is held up at the global level, change—and improvement of security—can still happen at the regional, subregional, and national levels.

→ See also pathways for action under Issues 3 (*Ability to cope with the acceleration and intersection of crises and issues*), 8 (*Low or lack of trust in the United Nations*), and 15 (*Lack of sufficient inclusion and use of regional and subregional entities*).

3. Ability to cope with the acceleration and intersection of crises and issues

a. **Keep track of changing attitudes, norms, and circumstances in order to quickly adapt or react to them:** Understand the impact and implications of any evolutions or changes (for example, in illegal or illicit behaviour regarding weapons diversion or use, in technologies, etc.) on the work of the United Nations and in particularly that relating to arms control and disarmament. A secondary and linked aspect is to then have the mechanisms necessary to determine whether and how the United Nations, or parts thereof, should adapt or react as a consequence in order to ensure such matters receive timely attention or are taken into account.

b. **Consider the limitations of institutional or process mandates:** Having more flexibility embedded in mandates could help improve more substantive inter-institution collaboration. For example, arms control and disarmament processes could be enabled, where appropriate, to discuss a broader range of weapons and technologies. This could be achieved by initiating cross-cutting mandates across categories of weapon systems, or on technological convergence, or non-traditional threats. This could help address increasingly interlinked issues in a way that current processes do not reflect the reality on the ground.

c. **Create opportunities to deepen substantive discussions:** Circulating more non-papers to explore issues informally, or holding informal consultations prior to meetings or debates, could help increase awareness and knowledge. In turn, this can help improve and streamline discussions, and ultimately benefit the United Nations work in the field of arms control and disarmament.

d. **Approach issues from a broader lens:** Many issues converge, yet the way in which they are dealt with is fragmented (for example, discussions regarding AI). Some of this is due to mandates, as discussed in 3b above. Arms control and disarmament issues could, for example, also capture political, social, and economic dimensions of certain issues, and incorporate more closely cross-cutting work from other agencies and institutions (for example, on AI involve UNESCO, the Human Right Council, etc.). Another aspect is the committee structure of the General Assembly whereby similar topics are dealt by different committees (for example, outer space). A working group could be created to examine these converging issues which are 'cross-mandate' and ensure that they are examined in their entirety, and not limited by mandate or other limitations.

e. **Streamline the disarmament agenda:** Investigate how the disarmament agenda could be streamlined, to allow more time between processes for diplomats to absorb relevant material.

f. **Increase transparency about successes and failures:** The United Nations, and the disarmament machinery specifically, should demonstrate that it can address specific problems that are currently taking place and impacting different regions, but also be honest about its limits. This can also help increase understanding about what hampers progress. The disarmament machinery should also seek to improve communications about its successes, to demonstrate that it can deliver upon its various mandates and has relevance. This can also be helped by decoupling what is achieved by United Nations structures versus political processes which are Member State-led.

g. **Enable greater feedback loops:** Obtaining inputs, feedback, and insights from United Nations personnel and the general public on processes, mechanisms, and the United Nations more broadly can help identify what could work better. Such outreach can also aid in obtaining a range of ideas on how to address the identified issues.

→ See also pathways for action under Issues 8 (*Low or lack of trust in the United Nations*), 16 (*Balancing between regulating technology and enabling innovation*), and 18 (*Insufficient preparation for non-traditional threats*).

4. Over-politicization of issues within the United Nations

a. **Maintain impartiality:** United Nations bodies should maintain impartiality, and not seek to stigmatize different sides. This includes continuing to uphold the Charter of the United Nations, existing norms, and international law. The United Nations should maintain its role as a neutral platform in order to successfully lead negotiations between States. Furthermore, equal actions should be followed by equal consequences; there should not be a (perception of) difference between States. A transparent body to verify allegations of non-impartiality could be considered.

5. Divisions or competition between Member States

a. **Ensure that multilateral mechanisms remain in place:** Even if the use of multilateral mechanisms enabling communication and cooperation fluctuates, their existence should always be preserved as a way to encourage and foster dialogue. Commitments could be put into place to ensure that there is sufficient funding and other resources for their long-term survival.

b. **Create incentive-based coalitions:** Partnerships and coalitions between Member States that focus on areas of action as an incentive could be created around formal processes. This approach could complement and support multilateral processes and coalitions or alliances based on areas of interest, such as by focusing on deepening the discussions on certain topics, or focus on issues such as implementation and capacity-building.

c. **Reflect upon the consensus decision-making system:** Further discussion and decisions on correct use of consensus voting is necessary, and how to ensure that it can be used adequately without derailing processes. Ideas include moving towards majority voting when no consensus can be achieved, or abstentions which do not block otherwise unanimous decisions.

→ See also pathways for action under Issues 2 (*Member States withdrawing from meaningful multilateral engagement*) and 8 (*Low or lack of trust in the United Nations*).

6. Weakening of States or their authority in international relations

→ See pathways for action under Issues 1 (*Uneven distribution of power and lack of inclusiveness within decision-making structures*), 2 (*Member States withdrawing from meaningful multilateral engagement*), 3 (*Ability to cope with the acceleration and intersection of crises and issues*), and 12 (*Tensions between the roles of private sector actors and those of States at the international level*).

7. Low or lack of trust between Member States

→ See pathways for action under Issue 5 (*Divisions or competition between Member States*).

8. Low or lack of trust in the United Nations

a. **Rethink the issues that the United Nations is best placed to address:** Acknowledging the limitations of the United Nations can help rebuild trust in its capacity for action. This could for example entail focusing predominantly on serving as a convening power, and engaging and sharing certain tasks with other actors, such as regional and subregional actors on areas on issues like peacekeeping.

b. **Improve external communications:** Maintaining and constantly improving the United Nations' external communication is important to ensure that there is an understanding of the role of the organization, what it can do, and what it has control over. This is particularly critical when it comes to issues of international security, where understanding the differences between the Secretariat and agencies versus the negotiation and decision-making bodies can help the general public understand what can and is being done by United Nations staff (e.g., gathering data about arms transfers and making it available), and what is within the remit of Member States (e.g., providing such data to the United Nations). This can include utilizing novel means, such as online participation and feedback, in addition to ensuring the existing public education initiatives continue.

→ See also pathways for action under Issues 1 (*Uneven distribution of power and lack of inclusiveness within decision-making structures*), 3 (*Ability to cope with the acceleration and intersection of crises and issues*), 14 (*Marginalization of NSAs in international relations*) and 15 (*Lack of sufficient inclusion and use of regional and subregional entities*).

9. Lack of adequate responses to non-compliance

a. **Re-examine incentives:** There is a need to rethink incentives for compliance. As regards punitive actions, one aspect is to make sure that sanctions, such as economic ones, are applied in a non-discriminatory fashion—in other words, that similar acts of non-compliance by States get comparable punitive actions. As regards non-punitive measures, reflecting upon the provision of incentives or rewards to States which abide by the existing treaties, regulations and norms could also incentivize compliance. Another aspect is ensuring that States have the necessary tools and resources in order to comply with a treaty, framework, norms, or other, and make these available if not. Pursuing action should also be after a buffer period, in cases where parallel or back-channel processes have proven to be inconclusive.

b. **Strengthen resources for implementation and enforcement:** A review of the resources available for different instruments across conventional weapons and weapons of mass destruction would help to ascertain which need additional resources for implementation and enforcement, as well as what resources might be needed for international cooperation and assistance. In addition, an examination of whether these resources would be more beneficial at the national or regional level would also be necessary. For example, efforts made to improve peace and security could also be examined as being a potential condition for receiving development assistance.

c. **Enable greater enforcement mechanisms:** Several options can emerge as part of this pathway. First, the design phase of instruments should ensure that implementation and enforcement mechanisms are included, actionable, and adaptable to future change. In legal terms, this could include improving the competency of international courts to take action, strengthening the status of international decisions, implementing a specific court to address violations to a treaty or framework. In punitive terms, enacting measures already integrated in agreements, in cases of long-standing or severe non-compliance, could serve as a means to compel adherence and demonstrate that non-compliance will be punished. To aid with conciliation, establishment of mediation processes and dispute resolutions mechanisms could also be considered.

d. **Make compliance a whole-of-society responsibility:** Encouraging a wider range of NSAs (e.g., private sector actors, academia, CSOs, and beyond) to take an active role. This can help place bottom-up pressure as well as top-down pressure to ensure compliance.

e. **Ensure transparency and legitimacy of assessments of possible non-compliance:** Increasing the diversity of inspectors in terms of their background could be a way forward. Ensuring that personnel have technical expertise, including within secretariats overseeing implementation of treaties or frameworks, would also help.

f. **Emphasize the benefits of compliance:** Emphasis around the benefits of compliance (e.g., economic, societal, etc.) could be done through improved communication, including with NSAs, but also using novel techniques, such applying behavioural insights such as nudging.

g. **Encourage norm-building within regional groups or blocks of States:** Regional application of norms and frameworks could help ensure that these are tailored to regional needs. Additionally, this can also place more responsibility on regional groups or blocs to ensure compliance, such as through sanctions between members, including removal from the block, economic sanctions, peer reviews, or other. Strengthening regional compliance can also strengthen compliance and maintenance of norms at the global level.

h. **Enhance the role of regional disarmament centres:** Regional disarmament centres have a very good understanding of national and regional contexts and can help channel technical expertise on arms control to United Nations country teams; as such, more effort could be made to ensure that their role is made more prominent, and their activities are as visible and impactful as possible within the disarmament machinery and beyond. This could include, for example, improving support available to them, as well as the coordination and information-sharing between them. The role of regional disarmament centres could also be enhanced through more inclusion in decision-making at the global level.

i. **Engage with communities working in related areas:** Reduction of silos between communities working on the same issues, albeit with a different focus, should be examined and enacted. For example, the arms control and disarmament community could improve coordination and dialogue with the development, conflict prevention, peacekeeping, and peacebuilding communities, particularly at the strategic-level. Notably, institutional change could be considered to strengthen collaboration and communication at the working level.

→ See also pathways for action under Issues 1 (*Uneven distribution of power and lack of inclusiveness within decision-making structures*), 3 (*Ability to cope with the acceleration and intersection of crises and issues*), and 15 (*Lack of sufficient inclusion and use of regional and subregional entities*).

10. Arms build-up as a way to bolster security

a. **Reinvigorate diplomatic relations:** Increase opportunities for exchange and identification of areas of common ground to resolve particular issues. Improving personal relationships can also help, for example providing space and incentives for diplomats to get to know each other better on a personal level can help build greater trust, and reduce the need to rely on weapons in times of geopolitical instability. To that end, Track 1.5 or Track 2 diplomacy can also be helpful in enabling dialogue.

b. **Change the narrative around deterrence:** Emphasize collaboration, prevention, and regulation, such as by developing acceptable norms of State behaviour, as opposed to thinking in terms of reprisals, mutually assured destruction, or escalation. Overall, seek to reduce the degree to which weapons are seen as improving security, or better yet remove the incentive for deterrence. Improving actor-specific understanding on weapons build-up could help, such as on why specific actors acquire, possess, and retain weapons, to then also be able to examine what may contribute to them being put aside. Processes and instruments focus on the 'supply' of weapons. However, examining the 'demand' can not only help develop a better understanding of existing issues, but also integrate considerations regarding non-traditional threats (see Issue area 17). Having a combined approach which addresses both supply and demand could therefore be implemented. Each actor will have its own reasons and circumstances, as well as weapons mix, so a case-by-case approach would be the most conducive to obtain positive results.

c. **Encourage and improve transparency around spending and weapons:** Transparency in military and security spending can help provide clarity and reduce the need to purchase or develop more weapons systems and overall help increase trust. This could involve revitalizing and continuing to promote engagement with transparency instruments, such as the United Nations Register of Conventional Arms, the United Nations Report on Military Expenditures and the Arms Trade Treaty. It could also involve ensuring regular inspections are taking place.

d. **Employ confidence-building mechanisms:** Trust-building is essential, as distrust and opaqueness are key drivers in weapons build-up. Development and maintenance of such mechanisms, including at bilateral and regional levels, can therefore help, including those which are already embedded in existing instruments.

e. **Ensure robust arms control treaties are maintained:** States mostly abide by existing instruments, so ensuring that these instruments do not fall by the wayside or that States do not withdraw from treaties is key.

f. **Decrease economic reliance on weapons production:** Economic reliance on weapons production can disincentivize moving away from weapon manufacturing. This could be countered by initiatives looking to transition workers to other industries requiring similar skillsets, reskill individuals, and re-use the equipment in relevant industries. Such an approach would however require engagement with private sector actors.

g. **Engage with national or local-level actors:** In addition to top-down approaches, engagement with national or local actors can also help promote change bottom-up. This can be through education and awareness-raising about having a broader sense of security beyond militarization. This can also include efforts to improve women's representation, as they can bring in different conceptions of security to governance.

h. **Prioritize human security:** Prioritization of human security can help shift the from away from weapons-led security. This can be done by ensuring this perspective is discussed, highlighted, and enforced across mechanisms, treaties, and other arms control and disarmament instruments.

→ See also pathways for action under Issues 14 (*Marginalization of NSAs in international relations*) and 18 (*Insufficient preparation for non-traditional threats*).

11. Weak rules-based order

a. **Hold open and honest discussions around the current order:** Understanding the reasons why the current order was created in the first place, what does not work, or what challenges exist is key to being able to address these issues and rebuild a stronger order. Informal as well as formal multi-stakeholder discussions could be held in order to restate the collective challenges the international community faces, and reinvigorate consensus around the rules-based order.

b. **Engage with regional and subregional actors:** Engaging in discussions with regional and subregional actors in times of crisis, as opposed to seeking punitive actions, can help improve relationships and build trust. In turn, this can help improve adherence to international norms and rules.

c. **Ensure national and international organizations have sufficient resources:** International organizations play a key role in maintaining the rules-based order, and ensuring that States abide with international law, frameworks, and other instruments. However, to do so, they need appropriate resources. National organizations can also play a key role, and thus ensuring continuity in funds, programmes and other initiatives which enable them to obtain the necessary resources is key.

d. **Enhance data on arms control and disarmament issues:** Data is a key element for accountability. Improving and incentivizing voluntary State reporting and participation in processes can be a way to improve existing data. Data issues could also be examined more comprehensively, beyond reporting requested from States.

→ See also pathways for action under Issues 3 (*Ability to cope with the acceleration and intersection of crises and issues*), 14 (*Marginalization of NSAs in international relations*), 9 (*Lack of adequate responses to non-compliance*) and 15 (Lack of sufficient inclusion and use of regional and subregional entities).

12. Tensions between the roles of private sector actors and those of States at the international level

a. **Maintain role of States in policy- and norm-making:** States should remain proactive in tackling issues and considering the challenges and benefits to international, regional, national, local, and human security.

b. **Enhance public–private partnerships:** There needs to be recognition that provision of rules, regulation, and norms should be done jointly with private sector actors, particularly given their important and growing role in international security matters, as discussed in Section 3.3. An exact exploration of how best to distribute the involvement of the various actors in arms control and disarmament discussions, processes, and implementation of decisions, and how best to integrate new actors, would however also be needed. This could for example involve emphasizing the benefits of the involvement and participation of the private sector in arms control and disarmament related matters.

c. **Reinforce international law-based frameworks:** International law remains in the remit of States, so reinforcing it can also serve as a reminder of the currently important and crucial role of States in this domain. Reinforcing it also serves the purpose of providing further commitment to tackling threats to peace and security.

d. **Encourage multi-stakeholder dialogues in arms control and disarmament mechanisms:** Enabling and encouraging the participation of NSAs in working groups, meetings, processes, and review conferences can help improve their understanding of instruments, as well as provide opportunities to benefit from their insight, expertise, and knowledge in a specific area. Informal discussions can also help to ensure alignment between discussions at the multilateral level and on-the-ground realities. This should, as much as possible, also include non-Western private sector actors.

→ See also pathways for action under Issues 1 (*Uneven distribution of power and lack of inclusiveness within decision-making structures*), 2 (*Member States withdrawing from meaningful multilateral engagement*), and 3 (*Ability to cope with the acceleration and intersection of crises and issues*).

13. Difficulty in aligning interests between private and public actors

a. **Encourage initiatives and incentive structures that drive closer alignment between the private sector and States:** Incentive structures between actors are different with regard to international security, and the aim would be to move away from elements such as profit, market share, influence, or investment opportunities being the primary incentives motivating private sector actors in this area. Understanding which interests overlap and compete between private sector and public sector actors can help identify areas for collaboration and areas which need to be bridged. Specifically, compliance and accountability mechanisms could be used to align interests of private sector actors with issues such as arms control, disarmament, and conflict prevention. These mechanisms could for example mirror existing mechanisms, such as the environmental, social, and corporate governance movement implemented to guide more sustainable investment strategies. This can also help to identify how commercial decisions by certain private sector actors can be managed in terms of their impact on regulatory decisions.

Development of guiding principles empowering private sector actors towards positive development and strengthening of international security while providing a financial incentive could therefore be considered.

b. **Focus on individuals in addition to the entities:** Currently, focus on private sector actors within international security is primarily on the entities themselves. However, an approach could be to also focus on the individuals within these entities, to appeal to them about the norms and rules that are seen as critical within arms control and disarmament processes—in effect, separating individuals from the corporate aspect.

c. **Update regulations on private sector involvement:** Private sector actors play an increasingly large role, and therefore being clearer on their involvement in areas such as peacebuilding, peacekeeping, reconstruction, and development is critical going forward. Conversely, there may also be a need to increase the involvement of public sector and international institutions in private sector or industrial structures, in an understanding that private sector involvement is an ongoing and defining feature.

14. Marginalization of NSAs in international relations

a. **Recognize the strengths of NSA inclusion:** NSAs can provide additional and new perspectives, in addition to providing substantive input in terms of Track 2 diplomacy. Additional recognition of the added value of NSAs is needed—for example, applying learning and successes from processes which successfully included NSAs. In the disarmament field, the use of explosive weapons in populated areas (EWIPA) political declaration process has been cited of a good example of CSO inclusion. Outside of this, the sharing of personal experiences of people with HIV/AIDS to the executive board of Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS is also a good example of bringing the reality on the ground to decision makers. Taking these examples into account, one way forward within the arms control and disarmament field more broadly could be to have NSA work presented on a regular basis to the Advisory Board on Disarmament Matters, to better highlight challenges faced on the ground.

b. **Improve NSA representation at the national level:** States could look to ensure and improve inclusion of NSAs at the national level, which would in turn have knock-on effects at the international level. This could include consolidating national organizations and advocates, liaising with them, and giving them the necessary space to provide their inputs.

c. **Streamline the approval process for NSA accreditation:** NSAs looking to obtain a consultative status which enables them access to a number of bodies and mechanisms must apply for Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) accreditation. Suggestions to streamline this process include ensuring faster decision times, and the possibility to appeal should an application be rejected.

d. **Improve mechanisms for NSA participation in processes:** Making States provide an explanation as to why certain NSAs are blocked from participation could therefore help address issues and identify underlying problems. In a similar vein, protecting the speaking time for NSA interventions can also help ensure that chairs leave sufficient time for NSA participation, or ensure that NSAs can take the floor at multiple intervals throughout, as is the case in the Arms Trade Treaty Conferences of States Parties. Reframing working groups, particularly on new

and emerging technologies, to having them focus on external expertise of these issues could be considered. Multi-stakeholder dialogues and other information consultation mechanisms could also be increasingly used.

e. **Improve processes for geographically diverse NSA participation:** Ensuring regional balance of NSA participation goes hand-in-hand with ensuring improved participation. Notably, an examination or barriers to entry—literally and figuratively—faced by NSA representatives to meetings in New York or Geneva would be needed. Lessening visa requirements and providing funding for non-Western NSAs could help ensure more diverse views.

f. **Consider a partnership model to enhance collaboration:** Closer collaboration and informal ways of working between States and NSAs could ensure that NSAs are able to share their views even if processes or rules of procedure may not always allow for their (full) participation. These consultations could also ensure that a variety of voices are heard, including of under-represented people (youth, women, victims, etc.). As noted in discussions relating to the revitalization of the Conference on Disarmament, views from NSAs could also be incorporated by States in their national statements.[43]

15. Lack of sufficient inclusion and use of regional and subregional entities

a. **Include subregional and even local entities as well as regional ones:** Subregional entities can play an equally, if not more, important role. Therefore, more should be done to ensure subregional entities are included in multilateral processes, discussions and other mechanisms. This inclusion can also promote uptake of certain issues within subregional entities, which can play a role in helping States ratify and implement instruments. Formalization of approaches to subregional (and, in some cases, regional) entities could help emphasize importance of participation to processes at the global level. Inclusion of local entities or individuals could also be explored, such as mayors or urban leaders, to promote a bottom-up approach to tackling certain issues.

b. **Empower regional and subregional entities in arms control and disarmament:** Regionally focused mechanisms should be pursued to ensure that instruments are designed according to regional or subregional realities, which also increases their chances of implementation. The Global Framework for Through-life Conventional Ammunition Management is an example of such an instrument, which provides the general framework which can be then made more specific for each region. The United Nations could seek to moderate and facilitate discussion on regional issues, while letting regional and subregional actors lead on the substance of the discussions and implementation of various mechanisms. On the other side of the coin, regional and subregional entities could also engage more closely on these issues and demonstrate proactive involvement.

c. **Develop a clear capacity-building strategy:** Improve capacity within regional and subregional entities through the provision of resources, training, and opportunities for engagement. The

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43 See Sebban et al., "Revitalizing the Conference on Disarmament: Workshop Report", UNIDIR, 18 August 2023, https://doi.org/10.37559/WMD/23/CD-Retreat.

United Nations can play a role in developing guidance for these entities, particularly on issues where States may not have sufficient knowledge or understanding on the importance of their involvement. Gaps in knowledge between regions need to be identified and could be addressed within the regional and subregional groups.

d. **Improve coordination between, and participation of, entities:** Putting in place memorandums of understanding for ensuring political alignment between regional and subregional entities can help increase their role at the multilateral level as well as improve their coordination.

→ See also pathways for action under Issue 9 (*Lack of adequate responses to non-compliance*).

16. Balancing between regulating technology and enabling innovation

a. **Clarify the narrative:** Utilize capacity-building initiatives, or informal meetings prior to formal processes, to enhance clarity on the fact that technology regulation and governance will not hamper innovation or development of emerging technology for peaceful uses, which may help remove some misconceptions or misinformation.

b. **Enhance anticipatory governance:** Better foresight is needed with regard to emerging and dual-use technology, in order to be more proactive in terms of technological issues and how they may impact—either positively or negatively—international peace and security, as well as issues related to arms control and disarmament. This could include regular horizon-scanning activities, discussions with external experts, and setting of clear criteria as to when a technology would merit further discussion by Member States as part of a more formalized process.

c. **Consider using more dynamic and flexible approaches as part of technological governance:** Traditional treaty structures as found in the arms control and disarmament field may not be the most adapted to technologies which have wide-ranging applications as well as both positive and 'less positive' impacts. Elaborating more dynamic approaches could be helpful. This can even include holding discussions that are not dependent on achieving consensus or an outcome document.

→ See also pathways for action under Issues 12 (*Tensions between the roles of private sector actors and those of States at the international level*), 14 (*Marginalization of NSAs in international relations*), and 15 (*Lack of sufficient inclusion and use of regional and subregional entities*).

17. Access and control of technology and the consequences thereof

a. **Hold regular discussions on technological issues:** Making use of the diversity of instruments within the United Nations—such as the Office of the Secretary-General's Envoy on Technology or Arria-formula meetings within the Security Council—in order to discuss changes—often rapid—in technologies, in order to be more proactive about these issues.

b. **Provide support to States:** Capacity-building activities should be considered in order to provide States with a better understanding around fair technology transfers, particularly for developing States, and to overcome any gaps in knowledge. Entities at the global, regional, and subregional levels could also develop implementation mechanisms, as well as monitoring and assessment of technologies. There should be an encouragement to share beneficial

innovations to overcome a technological divide between and within States. This can also include support to help States develop relevant national strategies.

c. **Develop better export control regimes and pathways to share technologies:** New and emerging technologies require thinking about their access through export controls in more detail. Amended mechanisms and involvement of experts can help develop understandings of the challenges, opportunities, and ethical considerations. This could also include considering export (and import) controls of intangible technology transfers.

→ See also pathways for action under Issues 12 (*Tensions between the roles of private sector actors and those of States at the international level*), 8 (Difficulty in aligning interests between private and public actors), and 15 (*Lack of sufficient inclusion and use of regional and subregional entities*).

18. Insufficient preparation for non-traditional threats

a. **Improve the involvement of a wider set of actors:** A more inclusive approach should be taken to enable NSAs, regional and subregional groups, independent experts, and other actors to contribute to national, regional, and global strategies, discussions, and processes. This broader set of actors should be enabled to provide authoritative information on realities and issues on the ground. Often, they can bring in perspectives which demonstrate the interlinkages between issues, in ways which are sometimes not addressed in full in processes, but merit examination. This also includes liaising more with other communities of actors working on issues linked to or impacting arms control and disarmament, such as experts on development, climate change, economics, or health issues, such as by setting up working groups or a taskforce for this type of cross-cutting work. It would however be important to ensure that this expertise is reflected in discussion and processes, rather than merely securitizing these non-traditional threats.

b. **Learn from cross-cutting successes:** Several cross-area and cross-entity bodies have emerged, such as the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Coordination Compact Committee Secretariat. The Compact notably involves close to 50 entities, bringing together entities working on issues relating to arms control and disarmament with those working on counter-terrorism, crime, and more. This example and others can provide a blueprint and set of lessons learned for tackling other cross-cutting areas which are seen as not traditionally belonging within the remit of arms control and disarmament.

c. **Create instruments which are adaptable to future change:** There should be a shift away from relying on past knowledge, towards approaches that enable more future-focused thinking on threats to international peace and security. Futures and foresight methods could, for example, be employed to avoid solely relying on empirical approaches to analyse threats. Additionally, embedding more flexibility to ensure that arms control and disarmament agreements can be implemented, amended and supplemented, in order to keep abreast of ongoing developments, could be a possible solution for exploration.

d. **Focus on the 2030 Agenda and beyond:** The SDGs cover a range of issues and provide a clear roadmap for what can and should be achieved. Change or action against non-traditional threats that impact peace and security can therefore be actioned by seeking to implement the 2030 Agenda within the timelines set out by the Secretary-General, and monitor implementation

in order to prepare for what may come after Agenda 2030. Additionally, the 2030 Agenda provides clear linkages between issues of arms control and disarmament and development, the message of which could be reinforced and better communicated and in the future could be integrated more closely with issues of peace, security and disarmament within arms control and disarmament forums.

e. **Improve the use of mitigation and early warning mechanisms:** These mechanisms can be set up to monitor a range of variables, which can map across a range of threats. Alongside these mechanisms, an adequate response and multi-stakeholder response to these indicators should also be determined.

f. **Re-examine concepts such as peace and conflict:** Revisiting definitions of 'conflict could also be a way to include a broader scope with regard to threats. This includes, notably, taking into account instances or weapons that fall under the threshold—such as instances of armed violence, or low-level weapons such as improvised explosive devices.

→ See also pathways for action under Issues 3 (*Ability to cope with the acceleration and intersection of crises and issues*), 14 (*Marginalization of NSAs in international relations*), 9 (*Lack of adequate responses to non-compliance*), and 15 (*Lack of sufficient inclusion and use of regional and subregional entities*).

Annex 2. Expert Participation

The expert group was comprised of 15 core experts and 7 ad-hoc experts who helped shape the development of the future scenarios. Four chose to remain anonymous, with the remaining 18 acknowledged below.

Alisha Anand
Andrey Baklitskiy
Tomisha Bino
Renata Dalaqua
Harry Deng
Sarah Erickson
Hardy Giezendanner
Sarah Grand-Clément
Paul Holtom
Trish Lavery
Marina Manke
Manuel Martinez Miralles
Siobhan O'Neil
Giacomo Persi Paoli
Pavel Podvig
Farzan Sabet
Ioana Puscas
Sweta Saxena

Beyond the expert group, over 60 participants took part across the five workshops, all of which were held under the Chatham House Rule. In addition, interviews were conducted with 22 individuals, two of which chose to remain anonymous, with the remaining 20 acknowledged below.

Simon Bagshaw
Tiyamike Banda
Tomisha Bino
Renata Dalaqua
Lucia Dammert
Neil Davison
Renata Dwan
Chris Earney
Rose Gottemoeller
Henriette van Gulik
Paul Holtom
Nnenna Ifeanyi-Ajufo
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Manuel Martinez Miralles
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