Introduction – An Outdated Playbook

The twenty-first century strategic landscape is being fundamentally reshaped by a series of global trends that have redefined the nature of power, the holders of power, the ways in which power is used, and the manner in which power flows through the international system. These trends include the rising importance of economic factors, the increasing influence of a truly global private sector, the emergence of new forms of leverage used by larger states, structural changes that are raising inequality, and the growing role of non-state networks fueled by technological innovation and the speed of communications. Over the past seven decades, the international order has enabled tremendous peace and prosperity, yet the present world appears to be in the midst of a renewal of great power competition. It seems clear that the rules of the game have changed, and yet many states are still making policy based on an outdated playbook. Failure to respond to these global trends could render traditional forms and tools of power insufficient to shape and secure preferred outcomes. Participants in the 70th Student Conference on U.S. Affairs (SCUSA 70) will assess the current state of the international system and will recommend actions the United States could take to advance its security and prosperity in the evolving world order.

Pundits, scholars, practitioners, and even staunch U.S. allies are openly questioning the most defining feature of the past 70 years of international relations, namely U.S. leadership in many areas of international affairs. Such leadership has been the bedrock on which all U.S. foreign policy has been built, regardless of which political party held power in Washington. The post-World War II rules-based order was constructed on the belief that states could learn to resist aggressive tendencies and be gently guided into ever closer cooperation through the tools of international institutions, collective security, democratic governance, and open markets. This international order is often credited with both the remarkable absence of direct military conflict between great powers over the past 70 years and the greatest advances in global living standards in history. With U.S. global leadership having served as the foundation for this system, many individuals today suggest that disengagement of the United States would be the greatest threat to continued international peace and prosperity.

Critics counter that the cold logic of nuclear deterrence and mutually assured destruction deserves the real credit for keeping the peace, and that the liberal world order was never more than a temporary Western alliance in the face of an imminent Soviet threat – an alliance that has become too costly and no longer serves U.S. interests now that the Soviet threat is long gone and the challenge from post-Soviet Russia is not an existential one. Is this perspective correct? Were the last 70 years an anomaly in which international cooperation burned brightly but briefly, in a system always destined to revert to the historical norm of great power confrontation? Can we reimagine cooperation by updating an aging and outdated rules-based international order to
take account of the fundamental transformations that are reshaping the world? Or perhaps cooperation is already being reimagined each and every day, a ceaseless evolutionary process of innovation that international relations scholars and nation-states have largely missed because so much of the action has shifted to new actors and unknown corners of the international stage.

Untangling these difficult questions requires taking stock of where we have come from and where we are today. With the luxury of hindsight, historical eras and their corresponding foreign policy objectives seem clear and obvious. The bipolar confrontation between the United States and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) dominated the Cold War era with its overriding imperative to do whatever necessary to avoid nuclear annihilation. For decades, this meant having more nuclear weapons until suddenly it meant having less. The unexpected unravelling of the USSR led to a fleeting U.S. unipolar moment and the premature declaration of the end of history and the victory of liberal democracy and capitalism. That shining moment of optimism did not last long, however, as the attacks of September 11, 2001, heralded a new international threat of global terrorist movements, including al-Qa’ida, the Taliban, and eventually the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS). The Global War on Terrorism became the single-minded focus of U.S. foreign policy for much of the first decade of the twenty-first century, recalling U.S. determination in the Cold War with its straightforward us-against-them, good-versus-evil narrative.

The past decade, however, seems to have been one of disorientation, as a series of crises has shaken global confidence in the international system and our understanding of the forces that shape it. The sacrosanct tandem of democracy and free markets suffered a double blow as the excesses of unbridled capitalism unleashed a global financial crisis in 2008, and the wave of democratic protests embodied by the Arab Spring of 2011 slowly degenerated into a series of repressive crackdowns and deadly and intractable civil wars. The European Union (EU) was awarded the Nobel Prize in 2012 for ending the scourge of war in Europe, but faced a barrage of challenges, including a debt crisis that threatened to take down the Eurozone, the refugee crisis which ended an era of ever-opening borders and sparked a fierce nationalist backlash, and the United Kingdom’s decision to exit the EU, which could be the thread that unravels the club. Globally, the ever-growing consensus that global warming represents an existential threat to the planet produced a glimmer of global cooperation in the form of the Paris Agreement, only to be challenged by the Trump Administration’s announcement of its intention to withdraw the United States from the agreement. Even as the United States and its allies put al-Qa’ida and ISIS on the run, great power conflict reawakened from its long slumber as a resurgent Russia altered European borders by force, a rising China asserted itself in East Asia, and the deadly morass in Syria became an ever-widening proxy war for greater control of the Middle East.

This cursory survey of the headlines, however, reveals no clearly discernible new patterns and perhaps misses the real stories, namely the big transformations that are radically remaking the world. Only through fully analyzing these trends can we better understand current events and lay a foundation for reimagining cooperation. This SCUSA 70 theme paper, therefore, will consider five important trends and will provide some questions to guide conversations on reimagining cooperation.
**Trend 1:** Competition between large states is now as much economic as it is political and/or military in nature. Likewise, the key concern of many small states is economic development rather than protection from foreign invasion.

It is empirically indisputable that there has not been direct military conflict between large states in the post-World War II world, although the cause of this phenomena remains the subject of heated debate. The explanation is likely a combination of multiple factors, including overwhelming deterrence (both nuclear and conventional), the growing influence of international law and norms against the use of force, the spread of democracy, and the desire to avoid the steep costs of disrupting an increasingly interconnected global economy.

Interestingly, the argument that global economic ties would prevent war was made just prior to the outbreak of World War I. It remains unclear whether the twenty-first century’s version of globalization, involving not only high trade levels but also transnational supply chains and truly integrated global capital markets, will be more effective than the pre-World War I variety in preventing war. The key point, however, is not that war between large states is no longer possible, but rather that globalization and economic interdependence have created entirely new mechanisms for states to cooperate and compete for power and security, and that this type of competition and cooperation has become much more common than military conflict.

These mechanisms can be used as new forms of coercion, such as sanctions, tariffs, or forced austerity programs, or more positively, to support allies, such as economic assistance, trade agreements, or debt relief. On coercion, consider the headlines: non-proliferation efforts against North Korea and Iran are largely centered on sanctions rather than military pressure; the United States counters Russian aggression with sanctions on oligarchs; the United States levies tariffs on China and threatens a trade war to stop China’s rise; China responds to U.S. pressure not with troops but by threatening to sell its stockpile of U.S. treasury bills; Russia seeks influence in Europe by controlling gas supplies; and China counters U.S. global influence through its extensive economic development initiatives throughout Africa and Central Asia. From the U.S. perspective, economic sanctions have become a frequent foreign policy tool, as they do not rely on the consent of the targeted, do not endanger the lives of troops, and are relatively easy to implement. Yet the conditions under which sanctions are effective are very limited, and to date only the United States and the EU have had the economic power and legal influence to inflict meaningful pain via such tools. This asymmetry has, of course, led to loud complaints from other countries that sanctions are just another form of coercive violations of their sovereignty.

On the development side, global cooperation is more than ever focused on economic concerns. Key cooperation between central banks and world leaders at the G20 limited the damage of the 2008-2009 financial crisis. International conferences today tackle such issues as sustainable development (at the United Nations General Assembly), trade (at the World Trade Organization), international tax policy (at the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development), and a host of other issues that have huge economic implications, including climate change, migration, and global health concerns. Perhaps the most fitting example is the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), adopted at the largest gathering of world leaders in history in New York on September 25, 2015. The 2030 Agenda is a
nonbinding commitment by all 193 UN member states to meet a concrete set of development targets by 2030, and is founded on the premise of a global partnership. The SDGs should not be seen as independent of political or security concerns, but rather intimately linked to them. As John Allen, President of the Brookings Institute, recently wrote, “The roots of unrest, terrorism, and insurgency are often linked to hunger, poverty, and lack of opportunity – the very phenomena the SDGs are focused on. It is development solutions that address and can ultimately fix these problems, not military interventions.” This is not a new idea; however, efforts to connect the dots between development, security, and humanitarian assistance are receiving renewed attention. Allen’s words echo those of then General James Mattis (now Secretary of Defense), who famously told Congress in 2013, “If you don’t fund the State Department fully, then I need to buy more ammunition ultimately.”

Reimagining cooperation, therefore, requires that we update our conception of power in the twenty-first century to account for the fact that globalization and increased economic interdependence between states has given states additional tools for affecting change in the global arena. While a strong and capable military remains essential as both a deterrent and to defend against imminent threats, foreign policy must take a much more expansive approach that employs economic and political – as well as military – tools.

**Trend 2: The rise of a global private sector of powerful multinational corporations offers both opportunities and challenges as corporations wield more power than many states.**

During Napoleon’s time, states were the key influential actors on the global stage. Yet in today’s world, Google and Facebook are likely to wield more influence than most states. According to a 2016 study by the anti-poverty charity Global Justice Now, the ten biggest corporations in the world make more money than the 180 smallest countries (measured by GDP) in the world *combined* (out of 195 countries in total). Of the 100 largest economic entities in the world in 2015, 69 of them were corporations and only 31 of them were countries, an imbalance that has been consistently widening. Clearly, the rise of such large corporations and corresponding capital markets brings both opportunities and challenges and has dramatically altered the international system.

One of the key opportunities created by these powerful private sector actors is the growing role of foreign direct investment (FDI) in driving growth. In 1980, approximately 70 percent of financial flows to developing countries from the United States consisted of official development assistance from the United States Government. Today, that number is less than 10 percent, with the remaining 90 percent composed of FDI, other types of investment, private philanthropy, etc. One of the key phrases associated with the SDGs is the need to get “from billions to trillions” in financing, with the clear implication that unlocking private funding is essential, as governments simply do not have sufficient resources to achieve the SDGs on their own.

Actions by the private sector can often complement, substitute for, or influence government actions. When President Donald J. Trump announced his intention to pull the United States out of the Paris Agreement on climate change, many U.S. corporations were quick to proclaim that the withdrawal would not change their efforts to reduce carbon emissions, efforts that will clearly mitigate changes in official policy. The private sector has also influenced U.S. states on
social policy, such as when pressure by CEOs of large corporations led North Carolina to repeal its so-called “bathroom bill” that regulated the use of restrooms by transgender people in 2016.

Regardless of one’s position on the political spectrum, these examples also highlight some of the challenges associated with this trend, as the private sector is a largely undemocratic force. Whether it is corruption, a lack of capacity, or a fragile legal system, many countries are not in a position to ensure that the policies supported by their citizens have sway over those preferred by multinational corporations or international capital markets. When former Brazilian President Inacio Lula da Silva was elected in 2003, the Brazilian currency experienced a 30 percent drop and approximately $6 billion in foreign investment left the country, causing him to quickly abandon some of his economic campaign proposals.\(^{11}\) As one of his close aides noted, “We are in government but not in power. Power today is global power, the power of the big companies, the power of financial capital.”\(^{12}\) Another example involves the ability of multinational corporations to avoid taxes by shifting their profits to low tax jurisdictions. By some estimates, the United States loses approximately $70 billion a year in tax revenue (roughly 20 percent of the total corporate tax collected) due to efforts by corporations to shift profits overseas through so-called inversions or other allegedly legal tax maneuvers.\(^{13}\) For example, in 2012 it was revealed that Starbucks had paid no corporate taxes in the United Kingdom for five years, despite sales of approximately $1.3 billion over that span.\(^{14}\) And if the United States and the UK have such difficulties regulating corporate taxation, imagine the challenges that developing countries face.

These issues have caught the attention of world leaders and have become contentious topics of international affairs, including at the G7, the OECD, and at UNGA. Successfully addressing the many complex issues that arise when global companies transcend borders requires that states cooperate in sharing information and, where necessary, in setting global rules. Tax and investment laws used to be seen as completely domestic policy but are now clearly international in nature and require a renewed form of international cooperation to address concerns. And while such topics may seem humdrum in comparison to military conflicts, a clear argument can be made that they have a much larger impact on the economic development of most countries.

**Trend 3:** Deepening of global capital markets has led to rising public debt levels, a phenomenon that constrains policy options and allows large states to exert increased leverage over smaller ones through economic, rather than military, means.

The 1970s marked an unprecedented increase in the level of global capital flows, driven largely by the dismantling of capital controls, the move to floating exchange rates, privatization, and advances in technology that lowered barriers to FDI and portfolio investments in developing countries.\(^{15}\) An increasingly significant consequence of increased global flows was a steady rise in global public debt levels in both developed and developing countries. The sudden availability of credit allowed politicians to increase spending while pushing the costs into the future (perhaps best captured by former Vice President Dick Cheney’s alleged comment that “deficits don’t matter,” supposedly said in response to Secretary of the Treasury Paul O’Neill’s fears that proposed tax cuts would lead to a fiscal crisis).\(^{16}\)

In the most direct sense, rising debt levels have a significant impact on international affairs as they limit a state’s policy options. With today’s debt levels, is it realistic to believe that the
United States could undertake a Marshall Plan-like foreign policy in 2018? Commenting on the Department of State’s four-year annual policy review, an op-ed columnist in The Washington Post described its proposals as “very small-bore compared with the scale of the problems” and concluded that the Department of State was simply acknowledging the limits of “a world of constrained funding.” Likewise, the ability of many developing countries to fund their priorities is limited by the need to service external debt and maintain positive credit ratings.

Beyond simply limiting policy options, however, rising debt levels play an even more significant role in the power dynamic between countries. Large states, whether fairly or unfairly, often wield their economic power in ways that can infringe on the sovereignty of other states, without many of the negative consequences associated with direct military intervention. This is not to imply that the targeted countries do not bear blame for their own economic decisions, but rather simply to underscore that those decisions create opportunities that larger states can and do exploit. This dynamic has played out repeatedly, as illustrated by complaints from Greece and other Eurozone countries against German-induced austerity policy, Argentine and Venezuelan diatribes against the extra-territorial power of Wall Street, and growing concerns about China’s use of infrastructure financing to cement its political influence in many parts of the world. In the depths of the Eurozone debt crisis, the Greek Deputy Culture Minister told Spiegel Online, “It is as though my country were experiencing the consequences of war . . . We have lost a quarter of our gross domestic product and a quarter of our population is unemployed. . . . I feel as though we were in Leipzig or Dresden with the bombs raining down.”

Former President Christina Fernandez de Kirchner of Argentina compared Wall Street hedge funds to terrorists, telling the United Nations General Assembly in 2014, “terrorists are not only those who set off bombs, but also those who destabilize economies, causing hunger, misery, and poverty.”

In a world in which military conflict has become rarer and the use of aggressive force to expand a state’s power has lost some legitimacy, efforts by states to accumulate power have simply taken different forms. The most pressing challenges facing many states are not always security-related, but rather more often due to economic factors that can have just as dire consequences. Efforts at cooperation, therefore, need to take account of this fact.

**Trend 4: Structural changes are worsening inequality and creating a backlash against globalization and those that benefit from it.** Widening rifts in society, particularly within developed countries, have created spillovers that weaken the traditional separation of domestic and foreign policy.

Structural changes including technology-driven automation, urbanization, and globalization have largely tended to benefit the haves at the expense of the have-nots, particularly in developed countries like the United States. While all income levels in the United States experienced rising prosperity from the mid-1940s until the late 1970s, income growth for lower income groups then stalled, while those at the top continued to see significant gains: the share of total U.S. income going to the top 1 percent rose from roughly 10 percent in 1980 to 22 percent in 2015. More broadly, according to the Institute for Policy Studies, inequality in the United States “has been growing markedly, by every major statistical measure, for some 30 years.”
The most common explanations for widening income inequality involve the unequal distributional impacts of automation, urbanization, and dislocations caused by the establishment of global supply chains. One study by the Center for Business and Economic Research noted that the largest risks of automation-induced job losses were concentrated among low-wage and low-skilled workers. Another study by PricewaterhouseCoopers concluded, “The starkest results are those by education level, with much lower potential automation rates on average for highly educated workers with graduate degrees or above, than for those with low to medium education levels.”

Urbanization is another global trend that is having large distributional impacts. Whereas 30 percent of the world’s population was urban in 1950, the corresponding figure for 2018 is 55 percent and projected to rise to 68 percent by 2050. The factors driving urbanization largely revolve around the economic benefits of cities in the context of an economy shifting from manufacturing to knowledge-based service sectors: the need for service industries to be near customers; the efficient allocation of labor due to the ability of employees to switch jobs without moving; and the high rate of knowledge spillover and increased innovation in areas with high densities of highly educated workers. These “agglomeration effects” have concentrated new net job growth in urban areas over the last twenty-five years and have made those areas more resilient to downturns. The flip side is, of course, that rural communities (and some shrinking rust-belt industrial cities) are increasingly being shut out of the country’s economic growth.

The distributional impacts of urbanization are being amplified by globalization. As Stephen Kotkin notes, “Globalization creates wealth by enticing dynamic urban centers in richer countries to invest abroad rather than in hinterlands at home . . . Western elites concentrated on harvesting globalization’s benefits rather than minimizing its costs, and as a result, they turbocharged the process and exacerbated its divisive consequences.” As U.S. companies took advantage of cheap labor abroad, trade’s share of U.S. GDP rose rapidly after 1970, from 10.7 percent in 1970 to 26.6 percent in 2016. The rise of global capital markets, as discussed earlier, also led to huge inflows of capital due to the attractiveness of the United States as an investment destination. These two phenomena combined to produce a sharp fall in manufacturing’s share of the United States economy (hurting smaller Rust Belt cities), and a steep rise in the role of the financial sector (centered in the largest urban areas such as New York).

Globalization has therefore exacerbated the growing geographic divide between winners and losers. According to the 2016 Distressed Communities Index, a report by the Economic Innovation Group, this gap is sobering. “From 2010 to 2013, the most distressed 10 percent of zip codes lost 13 percent of their jobs and saw more than one in 10 business establishments close. During that same period, the most prosperous 10 percent of zip codes saw employment rise by a staggering 22 percent and the number of business establishments rise by 11 percent.” This analysis highlights the fact that national metrics such as GDP and unemployment figures are aggregates that often hide wide disparities across the country.

Increases in inequality have huge implications for international affairs, as seen in the rise of nationalist movements across the United States and Europe, many of which are upending decades of consensus on international issues. These movements are united by their antipathy to
“globalist” forces and multilateral institutions, which they see as undemocratic and at odds with the economic interests of their political bases. For international cooperation to succeed, it must take account of these domestic forces and ensure that such cooperation is made politically sustainable through measures to mitigate the impact on disadvantaged groups.

**Trend 5:** Globalization and the Internet have increased the flow and speed of communication, and have given rise to networks that have dramatically lowered barriers for sharing information and organizing.

Just as the dramatic decrease in global transportation costs in the early twentieth century led to a surge in global trade levels, the Internet and globalization have facilitated the easy sharing of information across international borders at unimaginable speeds. This has led to a significant expansion in the number of international networks set up by entities facing similar challenges. Networks allow for the sharing of experiences, innovations, best practices, and lessons learned, and they create bonds that transcend national boundaries and chip away at the traditional dominance of states in international affairs. The rise of cities as global actors is a perfect example. As former UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon said in 2012, “Our struggle for global sustainability will be won or lost in cities.”

Yet the challenges faced by cities are often technical, and national governments are not always well placed to provide assistance, occupied as they tend to be by national priorities. Cities have therefore organized to confront these challenges. As urban expert Ian Klaus notes, “One city alone, or a few cities working together, simply couldn’t tackle problems global in scope such as climate change or terrorism. So, facilitated by the increased ease of communication and often supported by leading philanthropies, cities began building robust networks.”

According to Klaus, there are now over 200 active city networks, including C40 Cities (over 90 cities representing more than 10 percent of the global population), the Global Covenant of Mayors (more than 7,000 cities), and the United Cities and Local Governments. Some of these networks “work around the dominant power structures of the nation-state” while others are seeking a louder voice in existing institutions, such as the United Nations, to advocate for their issues.

Networks empower not just subnational actors, but also individuals by freeing them from their reliance on official sources of information. Examples include the clichéd rural farmer in a developing country who receives updated commodity prices on a mobile phone, people in poverty who receive remittances (money sent by relatives working abroad) rather than rely on official development assistance, and protestors in countries lacking press freedom who can seek news from the Internet or evade censors via virtual private networks and social media. In short, globalization-enabled networks have removed the bottleneck of national governments and have allowed direct interactions between people regardless of where they are located. This has weakened the ability of national governments to control international interactions, as such interactions now happen largely outside of traditional state-controlled channels.

The rise of these networks has profound implications for international cooperation, including the fact that such cooperation is no longer limited to state-state cooperation. In addition, broader networks more readily identify existing innovative solutions rather than forcing states to start from scratch or recreate the wheel.
Conclusion – Updating the Model

At the dawn of the diplomatic era, ambassadors were sent overseas with plenipotentiary power. That is, ambassadors had the authority to make decisions and speak in the voice of their leaders, rather than being given explicit instructions. However, as communication media evolved from written dispatches to phone calls, ambassadorial authority became increasingly circumscribed. White House and other Washington-based officials no longer had to rely on the Ambassador to convey messages to foreign governments, and 24-hour real-time news sources and global newspapers provided ample competition for diplomatic reporting. As the analysis of the above trends has shown, the world over the past fifty years has seen a similarly dizzying transformation that has not been sufficiently recognized. Simply put, we are using outdated models based on a conception of a world that no longer exists.

It is therefore acutely necessary that we reimagine cooperation for the world that does exist, if we wish to have any hope of reinvigorated and flourishing global partnerships. In today’s world, there is continuity as well as change. The largest states remain the most powerful actors on the global stage as they retain the ability to set the rules and the agenda of global affairs. Furthermore, states, particularly democratic ones, remain the most legitimate entities for expressing the will of their citizens. Yet the emergence of the global trends discussed above does change the game. As you begin your discussions on reimagining cooperation as part of SCUSA 70, we urge you to keep these trends in mind. With this framework as a foundation, we offer a few key questions aimed at stimulating robust discussions:

1. **Do policy makers embrace the idea that security and economic issues are inextricably intertwined in American foreign policy?** In the immediate post-World War II period, there was a strong consensus among U.S. foreign policy makers that international security was intrinsically linked to economic developments, and that the United States could not separate itself from events abroad. As Secretary of the Treasury Henry Morgenthau explained in 1944, “All of us have seen the great economic tragedy of our time. We saw the worldwide depression of the 1930s. We saw currency disorders develop and spread from land to land, destroying the basis for international trade and international investment and even international faith. In their wake, we saw unemployment and wretchedness—idle tools, wasted wealth. We saw their victims fall prey, in places, to demagogues and dictators. We saw bewilderment and bitterness become the breeders of fascism and, finally, of war.”

   Does the same conviction that economic matters affect domestic politics and international security inform today’s policy makers? Should it?

2. **Does U.S. foreign policy appropriately balance economic and political considerations, including the right mix of competition and cooperation, and employ the right blend of military and economic assistance?** The Spring 2017 Pew Global Attitudes Survey rated U.S. power and influence as a greater threat to their countries than China’s or Russia’s. Does this result reflect an American tendency to rely too heavily on the U.S. military and military intervention abroad in recent decades? Furthermore, a rapidly rising debt burden constrains U.S. policy options. If and when the opportunity for another Marshall-type plan arises, will the United States be in a position to at least consider it, rather than be relegated to “small bore” solutions?
3. **How should states set global rules to balance the risks and rewards of working with multiple stakeholders to take advantage of disparate sources of technical expertise?** Innovative government policies such as de-risking mechanisms and green bonds have the potential to attract the tens of trillions of dollars of potential development financing currently unavailable in pension funds and insurance companies. Yet, as multinational corporations grow in size and power, governments need effective rules to prevent rent-seeking behavior or partnerships in which corporations reap the profits while foisting risks off on governments. Early experiments with public-private-partnerships have provided cautionary tales and have generated significant improvements in guiding principles for such partnerships.

4. **Can the United States address the domestic implications of globalization and international cooperation in an effort to reduce inequality and avoid or mitigate populist backlashes?** Open markets and social safety nets were an integral part of the post-World War II formula to avoid exclusive trading blocs that could trigger aggression and to protect those that were most negatively impacted by free trade.\(^{36}\) This model worked well in the fifties and sixties, yet since the 1970s income inequality has risen to levels not seen since the 1920s. The rise of a so-called global elite has also weakened ties within countries, as those that benefit the most from globalization have forged “a transglobal community of peers who have more in common with one another than with their countrymen back home.”\(^{37}\) How should states address the link between domestic and international policy, particularly when national statistics such as GDP growth are often aggregates that disguise deep and growing divisions within society?

5. **How should the United States respond to the rising importance of multilateralism and multilateral institutions in an increasingly interconnected world in which less powerful actors are demanding a voice in setting global rules?** Multilateral negotiations routinely establish global rules, such as those related to taxation, trade, investment, and sanctions, and joint strategies to address global challenges, such as climate change or migration. Despite a U.S. incentive to prefer bilateral diplomacy (where its influence is usually much stronger) and the difficult reality that many multilateral institutions are overly bureaucratic and often ineffective, should the United States recommit to multilateralism, including efforts to reform international institutions, the deepening of its diplomatic expertise and engagement in multilateral negotiations, and its traditional support for multi-stakeholders, such as non-governmental organizations and the private sector?

SCUSA 70 presents all participants with a grand opportunity to consider how the international system has evolved to the current moment in time, the new and emerging forces that are shaping it, and how the United States can best position itself to advance its security, prosperity, and values in the current context. The postwar rules-based order was created at a time when the United States had emerged not only victorious from war, but largely unscathed and with a booming economy that gave it an overwhelming and unprecedented power advantage over all other states. In the decades since, the world has changed drastically. In the absence of the overwhelming material and strategic advantages it enjoyed in the post-World War II period, can the United States again be a leader in fostering the forms of international cooperation most suited to the challenges of the time?


4 General Assembly resolution 72/201, Unilateral economic measures as a means of political and economic coercion against developing countries, A/RES/72/201 (17 January 2018), available from undocs.org/A/RES/72/201.


12 Younge, “Who’s in control – nation states or global corporations?”


26 Center for Business and Economic Research, “How Vulnerable are American Communities to Automation, Trade & Urbanization?”
32 Klaus, “Why cities dominate the modern world.”