



International society is being atomised, according to the London based International Institute of Strategic Studies (IISS). Launching the annual Strategic Survey, IISS notes that 'neither balance of power, nor international rules based governance serves as ordering principles'. It adds 'International institutions have been marginalised', reports Nick Watts.

IISS notes that the disruptors carry most of the advantage; those clinging to the status quo are losing their grip. 'The US is pricing itself out of alliance politics – complaining that...allies pay too little. China is advancing its agenda via its 'Belt and Road' initiative, which is intended to ensure that states stand with it, or are usefully neutral. Meanwhile Russia continues to insert itself into situations where it can, to its advantage. The advance of technology has an impact on the pace of development of sensors and weapon systems, as well as the dissemination of information.

All of these elements serve to present policy makers and their advisers with complex choices. Small states are more likely to conform to the wishes of the predominant power in their region, to ensure tranquillity. Those states looking to advance through development funding will find their way to friends and allies that do not impose conditionality on the support they receive. Likewise with those seeking investment and modernization of their technological base.

IISS further notes that 'a global rules based order may in time be re-established. That will only happen with the determined application of statecraft, rather than by the earnest convening of international summits. The questions are: whose rules will they be, and how many different orders will they govern?'

The dilemma for British policy makers, as they contemplate the opportunities of Global Britain, is how they play into this changing scene? The traditional affiliation to NATO, which celebrates its 70th anniversary this year, could become irrelevant if the US administration moves the needle more firmly towards an 'America first' policy. Disengagement from the EU will at the very least cement the Franco-German motor driving further integration in Europe. Both of these possibilities will need serious consideration by policy makers in London. In a world of disruptors and demagogues, smart power will be at a premium; so smart policies will be needed. The status quo is not on offer.

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