RIS

On the horizon: The futures of IR

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This Special Issue celebrates the 50th anniversary of *Review of International Studies*. Since 1975, the *Review*
has published over 200 issues and over 1300 articles. The journal has played a key role in shaping the disci-
pline of International Relations (IR), leading, or critically intervening in, key debates. To celebrate 50 years
of *Review of International Studies*, we have curated a Special Issue examining the challenges facing global
politics for the next 50 years. IR has regularly turned its attention backwards towards its historical origins.
Instead, we look to the future. In this Introduction, we start by outlining four traditions of future-oriented
thinking: positivist, realist prediction; planning, forecasting, and scenario-building; utopian dreams of an
ideal political future; and prefigurative thinking in activist politics. From these traditions, we learn that
thinking about the future is always thinking about the present. We then outline four themes in the Special
Issue articles: How do we think about the future at all? How do we think about imperial pasts and the ongo-
ing questions of colonization and racialization in the present? How will technological change mediate and
generates geopolitical change? How are socioecological crises, and in particular climate change, increas-
ingly shaping how we think about the future of global politics? Overall, these provide us with a diverse,
stimulating, and thought-provoking set of essays about the future of global politics, as both discipline and
set of empirical problems.

Introduction

This Special Issue celebrates the 50th anniversary of *Review of International Studies* (RIS). First
published as the *British Journal of International Studies* in April 1975, the journal's purpose, as
understood by its first editor, J. E. Spence, was 'to cultivate an interest in the academic study of
the international arena'. Its aim was to 'be genuinely eclectic, concerned to foster debate [and] …
reflect a diversity of scholarly argument'. Across 50 volumes (213 issues, over 1,300 articles), RIS has
published a wide range of original research on global politics broadly conceived. Over this period,
the journal has played a key role in shaping the discipline of International Relations (IR), leading,
or critically intervening in, key debates.

Like many modern social sciences, IR has regularly turned its attention backwards towards its
historical origins.[1] Indeed, the very first article in the first issue of the *British Journal of International
Studies* started by invoking a familiar origin story of IR in the UK: 'In 1919 the world's first chair

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[1]Brian C. Schmidt, 'On the history and historiography of international relations', in Beth A. Simmons, Thomas Risse, and
Walter Carlsnaes (eds), *Handbook of International Relations* (London: Sage, 2012), pp. 3–28.

in global politics was founded at Aberystwyth.'[2] Such claims sit alongside other narratives that trace the historical pedigree of the study of global politics to key historical events such as the Peloponnesian War, the Peace of Westphalia, the French Revolution, World War I, the Twenty Years' Crisis, or to writers such as Thucydides, Machiavelli, Grotius, Hobbes, Locke, Kant, or Marx. In the 20th century, there have been repeated efforts to narrate the history of the discipline – with the 'great debates' being perhaps the most (in)famous example.[3] Each of these narratives has looked backwards to make claims about the substance of global politics – as both academic discipline and empirical subject. Each has of course done so from a particular subject position – that of European white men, often located specifically in dominant, even imperialist, powers. These narratives have led to certain ontopolitical claims[4] about the nature of global politics becoming hegemonic – not least the naturalisation of an idea of the state summed up by John Agnew famously as the 'territorial trap'.[5] Each of these narratives has written its own version of the past in which it sees the seeds of the present, thus legitimising that present as the logical, teleological inheritance of the past. Looking to the past has thus been a way to legitimise particular approaches to global politics.[6] Likewise, much critique of the discipline has focused on denaturalising conventional disciplinary narratives and excavating minoritised histories,[7] and more recently, constructing alternative narratives of the 'multiple' origins of IR or 'women's international thought'.[8] Indeed, much of the post- and decolonial critique of the discipline has been predicated on rereading the past of global politics to highlight and delegitimise the racist and imperialist assumptions and elisions on which those disciplinary narratives were often predicated.[9]

Looking to the past has been an exercise in contextualising and making sense of present disciplinary understandings. As such, rather than revisit the past – as might have been expected of a 50th anniversary issue – we want to look to the future. It could, of course, be argued that turns to the past were oriented towards future change. For example, in the early 20th century, many argued – most famously Norman Angell – that historical transformations had rendered war useless as an instrument of state power and that means needed to be found to transcend it in the future.[10] In 1919, examinations of the origins and conduct of the Great War were intended to further the aspiration that war could be avoided in the future. The concept of the Anthropocene

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[2]P. A. Reynolds, 'International studies: Retrospect and prospect', *Review of International Studies*, 1:1 (1975), pp. 1–19.

[3]Steve Smith, 'The self-images of a discipline: A genealogy of International Relations theory', in Ken Booth and Steve Smith (eds), *International Relations Theory Today* (University Park: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1995), pp. 1–37.

[4]William E. Connolly, *The Ethos of Pluralization* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995), p. 1. Connolly refers to 'ontopolitical interpretation', noting that 'every political interpretation invokes a set of fundaments about necessities and possibilities of human being [or ontology]. … Hence, every interpretation of political events … contains an ontopolitical dimension.'

[5]John Agnew, 'The territorial trap: The geographical assumptions of International Relations theory', *Review of International Political Economy*, 1:1 (1994), pp. 53–80.

[6]Barry Hindess, 'The past is another culture', *International Political Sociology*, 1:4 (2007), pp. 325–38.

[7]E.g. Benno Teschke, *The Myth of 1648: Class, Geopolitics, and the Making of Modern International Relations* (London: Verso, 2003); Errol A. Henderson, 'The revolution will not be theorised: Du Bois, Locke, and the Howard School's challenge to white supremacist IR theory', *Millennium: Journal of International Studies*, 45:3 (2017), pp. 492–510; Robert Vitalis, *White World Order, Black Power Politics: The Birth of American International Relations* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2015). See also Andrew S. Rosenberg, 'Race and systemic crises in international politics: An agenda for pluralistic scholarship', *Review of International Studies*, 50 (2024), pp. 457–75.

[8]Vineet Thakur and Karen Smith (eds), 'The multiple origins of IR', Special Issue of the *Review of International Studies*, 47:5 (2021); Patricia Owens, Katharina Rietzler, Kimberly Hutchings, and Sarah C. Dunstan (eds), *Women's International Thought: Towards a New Canon* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022).

[9]Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008); Arthur Bueno, Mariana Teixeira, and David Strecker (eds), *De-Centering Global Sociology: The Peripheral Turn in Social Theory and Research* (Milton: Taylor & Francis, 2022); Sanjay Seth, 'Postcolonial theory and the critique of International Relations', in Sanjay Seth (ed.), *Postcolonial Theory and International Relations* (London: Routledge, 2013), pp. 15–30.

[10]Cornelia Navari, 'The great illusion revisited: The international theory of Norman Angell', *Review of International Studies*, 15:4 (1989), pp. 341–58; Norman Angell, *The Great Illusion* (New York: Cosimo, 2007, originally published 1909).

similarly traces the impact of the present on the geological record in order to highlight concerns about anthropogenic climate impacts that might inspire adaptations aimed at bringing about certain future outcomes.[11] Choices about how to frame that past have important implications both for the politics of the present, and how we inspire action aimed at the future: for example, in relation to the Anthropocene, it matters if the date given is 1492 (Columbus and colonialism), 1776 (Watt's steam engine and industrial capitalism), or 1945 (Hiroshima and nuclear militarism). However, it is important to note the distinction between looking to the past to legitimate a politics in the present that aims to establish a particular future and looking towards the future to understand something about the present. To an extent, these distinctions are analytic separations, and yet we think the temporal frames imply different politics. As Leira and Kessler (this issue) note, this question of how past, present, and future are related is key to understanding the politics of approaches to global politics as both discipline and empirical dynamic.

Rather than revisit the past again, therefore, the editorial team chose to invite authors to look towards the future. There is of course the danger that this leads to epochal claims that overstate the extent to which the future will be dramatically different to the past and present. Looking back at claims of the epochal significance of 9/11, we should be very cautious about framing the future as a distinct break from the past and present.[12] Indeed, the seeds of the future are sown in the past and the present. Looking to the future involves claims about the nature of the past and present and how what we perceive to be their substantive, durable features will be perpetuated in various ways. Such claims frequently, however, entail framing these elements of the present in specific ways, in order to engineer a specific future. For example, the claim that the future will be dominated by particular threats works to naturalise certain understandings of vulnerability and to claim the necessity of certain security measures in the future. The perceived vulnerability of the state to threatening individuals (e.g., those perceived to be 'extremists') has driven security agendas formed around futures in which individuals (especially those belonging to minoritised communities) are detectable through technologies such as facial recognition.[13]

As such, we should be wary of speculating in epochal terms and alive to the politics of futurology. With this in mind, we asked authors to think about the way in which both the *discipline* and the *empirical dynamics* of global politics might develop in the next 50 years. This question was intended to provoke authors to think about how global politics might evolve over time and the challenges this would pose. On the one hand, this is a question about what seeds of the future we see in the present – which elements of the present will be durable and become significant in the future. On the other, this is a question of what, and who, is currently elided and/or silenced in the present and could emerge in the future.

This introduction outlines the broad terrain for the special issue. We start by looking at how orientations towards the future have played a role in global politics. We do so to outline how and why dispositions to the future are somewhat different to dispositions towards the past and to provide context for the overall theme of the special issue. We then turn to the specific themes that have emerged in the 10 articles that follow: problematising the future; changes to the global order; the impact of technology; and climate futures. We conclude by looking briefly at the relation between the future of the discipline and the future of the empirical dynamics of global politics. We look at the way in which these two futures are interrelated and the politics of this relation.

Thinking the future

Thinking about the future can take many forms. In the disciplinary space of the study of global politics, at least four key strands of thought can be identified. First, the positivist, realist tradition

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[11]John S. Dryzek and Jonathan Pickering, *The Politics of the Anthropocene* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018).

[12]Maja Zehfuss, 'Forget September 11', *Third World Quarterly*, 24:3 (2003), pp. 513–28.

[13]Marieke de Goede and Samuel Randalls, 'Precaution, preemption: Arts and technologies of the actionable future', *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, 27:5 (2009), pp. 859–78.

in International Relations thought was underpinned by a future-oriented predictive ambition.[14] Indeed, the attempt to outline law-like regularities that govern global politics was intended to provide the basis for predictions about how empirical global politics would unfold and how actors could meaningfully intervene in, and influence, its future.[15] The failure to predict both the end of the Cold War (which confounded predictions of the durability of bipolar international power structures) and the international political forms that the post–Cold War world would exhibit (the effects of uni- or multipolarity) sharply exposed this tradition of thinking.[16] When the future of the global order was more fragmented and volatile than theories of bipolarity and/or US hegemony had predicted, the future orientation of this tradition was thrown into question. Indeed, questions were asked about realism's ability to convincingly diagnose the past and the present given its inability to predict the future. It would be wrong to say that the positivist/predictive tradition declined in influence, but it has had to adapt – for example, through constructivist arguments about how the structural qualities of global politics neither fully explain nor allow a prediction of its particular patterns and outcomes.[17] While the predictive impulse remains strong in the broadly realist tradition, it is tempered now by a sense that reading the future out of the past is a complex and hazardous project.

The second tradition of future-oriented thinking regarding global politics might be seen as the historical counterpart to the predictive ambitions of realism. Empirically, this second tradition has manifested as planning, forecasting, and scenario-building.[18] This type of thinking has been typical of military, government, and think-tank approaches to global politics. While it has its origins in Cold War strategic planning, it has become integral to many domains of global politics, notably those concerned with development, health, and the environment. Especially during the Cold War, this tradition existed as a way to anticipate the behaviour of adversaries, to plan future projects (e.g. infrastructure investment), and to game out the possible lessons to be learned from the adoption of different scenarios. As Anderson and Adey have shown, this anticipatory activity is a way to use possible futures to govern the present.[19] By playing out various scenarios, planners are able to regulate economic and social dynamics to achieve what they regard to be the optimal future outcomes. Of course, such futures are shaped by various political preferences, such as the desirability in the Cold War of one party prevailing over the other. Notions of the ideal future are also underpinned by ontopolitical assumptions about the actors that make up the world and the ways they behave – for example, that states will develop collective security organisations such as NATO to solve the security dilemma.[20]

The third tradition of future-oriented thinking in global politics can be broadly characterised as utopian. This tradition is animated by what Jameson refers to as the utopian impulse.[21] This impulse manifests in a wider range of political discourses than fictional utopias alone and comprises an animating dream of an ideal political future. Etymologically defined as a non-place, utopias do not exist in the present and yet are posited as something that could (indeed should) exist in the future. This non-place is therefore always already a future place – a place yet to be,

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[14]Samuel Barkin, 'Realism, prediction, and foreign policy', *Foreign Policy Analysis*, 5:3 (2009), pp. 233–46.

[15]Kenneth Waltz, *Theory of International Politics* (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1979), pp. 9–10.

[16]John J. Mearsheimer, 'Back to the future: Instability in Europe after the Cold War', *International Security*, 15:1 (1990), pp. 5–56.

[17]Alexander Wendt, 'Anarchy is what states make of it: The social construction of power politics', *International Organization*, 46:2 (1992), pp. 391–425.

[18]Herman Kahn, William Brown, and Leon Martel, *The Next 200 Years: A Scenario for America and the World* (New York: Morrow, 1976); Nazli Choucri, 'Forecasting in International Relations: Problems and prospects', *International Interactions*, 1:2 (1974), pp. 63–86; Iver B. Neumann and Erik F. Øverland, 'International Relations and policy planning: The method of perspectivist scenario building', *International Studies Perspectives*, 5:3 (2004), pp. 258–77.

[19]Peter Adey and Ben Anderson, 'Anticipating emergencies: Technologies of preparedness and the matter of security', *Security Dialogue*, 43:2 (2012), pp. 99–117.

[20]Emanuel Adler and Michael Barnett, *Security Communities* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

[21]Fredric Jameson, *Archaeologies of the Future: The Desire Called Utopia and Other Science Fictions* (London: Verso, 2005).

yet to come. For utopians, it is not so much a non-place as a place that has not yet happened. Utopia is a space for an experiment in thinking about what the future could be – an experiment that can guide action in the present.[22] Utopian idealism is present in many strands of thinking and activism in global politics. For example, as Bell has shown, ideals of race underpinned utopian dreams of an Atlantic community.[23] As such, the utopian impulse is a dream or fantasy of a possible future state in which political ideals are realised. That said, the utopian impulse exhibits a different relation to the future and present compared to traditions focused on prediction or planning. Whereas prediction and planning seek to project from the present to the future (and to this end take action in the present to anticipate the future), the utopian impulse separates the present and future. The utopian future can only ever be an ideal that can inspire action, not itself something that might become the present in the future. The future becomes a way to inspire action in the present, but never the actual future of the existing present. A variation of this utopian impulse can also be seen in critical traditions that attempt to identify immanent potentialities and the manner in which they might realised. Cosmopolitanism, for example, identifies immanent potentials for normative communities yet to come.[24] Such thinking looks to the present to identify immanent potential, separating it from the future in which it is normatively desirable that it is realised.

Finally, a variant of a utopian orientation to the future might be seen in the tradition of prefigurative thinking in activist politics.[25] For political activists, the idea of prefigurative politics has been a way to act in the present in order to realise – albeit partially – political ideals that are conceivable and yet to come. As such, the ideal that guides prefigurative politics is not necessarily in the future in the sense that it might occur at a stage in the linear progression of time (for example, if certain technologies were developed) but rather is yet to be realised. As such, prefigurative politics recognises that the fullness of a particular ideal cannot be realised in the present but nevertheless proceeds by attempting to enact that ideal (however imperfectly) in the present in ways that might plausibly generate that future ideal. Here, the yet to come is an indicator that if prefigurative politics continues to work in the present, the ideal may be realised at a point in the future. As with the utopian impulse, the future operates on the present, rather than being a realisation of some potential in the past or present. The ideal that is being prefigured is a regulative figure that is yet to come but nevertheless guides action.

As such, we can see at least four traditions of thinking about the future in relation to global politics. Each tradition posits a relation between the present and a future yet to come – whether that is as the relation of law-like regularities observable in the present, as the anticipation of possible futures, or as an ideal that inspires action in the present. Across these traditions, we highlight two dynamics. First, thinking about the future is always thinking about the present. And second, thinking about the future inspires action in the present. It was with these dynamics in mind that we invited authors to think forward into the next 50 years of global politics – as both disciplinary space and empirical political events. Thinking into the future, we reasoned, would tell us more about the present state of global politics than reflecting on the past (which would rather be an exercise in legitimating certain presents/futures). Looking towards the future helps to diagnose the present and reflect on its potentialities. An orientation to the future is always already thinking about how that present might change rather than legitimating the way it is. Thinking into the future

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[22]Mathias Thaler, 'What if: Multispecies justice as the expression of utopian desire', *Environmental Politics*, 31:2 (2022), pp. 258–76; Darko Suvin, *Defined by a Hollow: Essays on Utopia, Science Fiction and Political Epistemology* (Austria: Peter Lang, 2010); Jason Dittmer, 'Playing geopolitics: Utopian simulations and subversions of International Relations', *GeoJournal*, 80 (2015), pp. 909–23.

[23]Duncan Bell, *Dreamworlds of Race: Empire and the Utopian Destiny of Anglo-America* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2022).

[24]David Held, *Models of Democracy* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2006); Andrew Linklater, 'Cosmopolitan citizenship', *Citizenship Studies*, 2:1 (1998), pp. 23–41.

[25]Catia Confortini, 'Past as prefigurative prelude', in Synne L. Dyvik, Jan Selby, and Rorden Wilkinson (eds), *What's the Point of International Relations?* (London: Routledge, 2017), pp. 83–97.

therefore is a way to decentre our understandings of the present. The articles gathered here thus speculate on the future of global politics in a way that is revealing – and critical – of the state of its present. In this collection, we have identified at least four common themes that we will outline briefly.

Themes

In responding to this challenge, our contributors have identified various recurrent and salient issues raised by the task of thinking about the next 50 years. The first of these is the question of how to think about the future at all. Leira and Kessler engage directly the set of questions we have just raised about the complex relationships between thinking about the future, present, and past. They argue for the importance of conceptual history as a means of addressing this – to focus on how concepts have changed as attempts to grasp a constantly changing world, in order to prepare us for a future which will require both new concepts and a more general 'openness to conceptual change'. Such theorising always comes from somewhere, from some particular positionality.[26] Bendfeldt, Clifford, and Richards tackle this question head on, interrogating their own positionality within the global order – as white, European, early career women academics – and insist on the necessity of ongoing reflexivity regarding how a scholar's social positionality shapes their academic work (both in relation to research and teaching), the sorts of interventions they make, and the inevitable discomfort this reflexive process entails. This focus on reflexivity and positionality has been a recurrent theme across much critical IR theorising since the mid-1990s,[27] but Bendfeldt et al. argue that what they call, following Audre Lorde,[28] 'the master's outlook' has never fully been abandoned. Such reflexivity is a good example of thinking about present positionality from the vantage point of the potential future political outcomes of the assumptions made and privileges enjoyed in the present. As such, this opening pair of articles address in different ways the politics of the relationship between past, present, and future.

A second theme engages questions of considerable recent attention in IR: revisiting the past in order to interrogate imperial and colonial legacies and show the ongoing racialisation of the present.[29] Many of our contributors here build on this attention to imperial and colonial legacies in order to think through how such dynamics will continue to shape the next 50 years. Partly this is about ongoing legacies shaping future practice: as the corollary of failing to escape the 'master's house', race and racism continue to play significant roles in shaping future prospects for different peoples across the world. As Rosenberg argues, the unfolding crises of the contemporary period (climate change, economic instability and inequality, migration), many of which look set to continue or intensify, generate their effects through racialised patterns of inequality and violence. Imperialism and colonialism leave contradictory legacies. For Adamson and Han, one of these is the shift in migration patterns and their political effects: as migration increasingly arises from states with increasing geopolitical power, migrants become assets to those states, usable for economic, cultural, or diplomatic purposes. While global migration arose because of racialised and colonial logics of economic exploitation, its patterns now sustain changing and increasingly complex power relations across states.

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[26] Robert Cox, 'Social forces, states and world orders: Beyond International Relations theory', *Millennium: Journal of International Studies*, 10:2 (1981), pp. 126–55.

[27] Jack L. Amoureux and Brent J. Steele, *Reflexivity and International Relations: Positionality, Critique, and Practice* (London: Routledge, 2015); Inanna Hamati-Ataya, 'Reflectivity, reflexivity, reflexivism: IR's "reflexive turn" – and beyond', *European Journal of International Relations*, 19:4 (2013), pp. 669–94; Christine Sylvester, 'The elusive arts of reflexivity in the "sciences" of International Relations', *Millennium: Journal of International Studies*, 41:2 (2013), pp. 309–25.

[28] Audre Lorde, 'The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House', in *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* (Penguin, 2019), pp. 103–06.

[29] Gurminder K. Bhambra, 'Colonial global economy: Towards a theoretical reorientation of political economy', *Review of International Political Economy*, 28:2 (2021), pp. 307–22; Robbie Shilliam, *International Relations and Non-Western Thought: Imperialism, Colonialism and Investigations of Global Modernity* (London: Routledge, 2010).

These shifts in power relations in the coming decades will also be shaped by specific interventions, not just the unfolding of structural logics. For Aradau, one of the neglected aspects of thinking about the future is the question of 'postsocialism'. While this term started as a means of characterising a particular time and place – Eastern Europe after the collapse of the Soviet Union – Aradau shows how it is more useful to understand it as both method and critique, enabling us to focus on continued socialist struggles and legacies and how they continue to shape – especially in conjunction with ongoing post-colonial ones – future trajectories for global politics. Tansel and Tilley also pick up on the legacies of earlier social struggles through a focus on contemporary movements developing 'post-capitalist' interventions in response to ongoing crises of social reproduction, food systems, and climate change, among others. For Tansel and Tilley, the future is to be understood as shaped by necessary struggles over how ongoing capitalist domination both produces a range of socio-ecological crises and simultaneously seeks to extend its domination through its responses to those crises. As such, this second set of articles all reflect on the ways in which global politics will be stratified by the legacies of its past as well as reorganised in the future.

A third theme in the collection is how technological change at least mediates, and often directly generates, these power relations and their changes over time. Just as the range of cotton-manufacturing technologies, intertwined with alread-existing colonial developments, shaped the global politics of the 19th century,[30] and the ability to extract and refine oil, combined with the geography of oil's relatively concentrated locations, shaped the global politics of the 20th century,[31] ongoing technological innovation continues to shape that of the 21st century. Digital technologies are perhaps the most prominent of these in contemporary debates, as well as in our contributions. Debates about the impact of digital technology on global politics have been around for several decades, through at least the role of computerisation in shaping the neoliberal financial revolutions of the 1980s, the emergence of the internet (as a widespread phenomenon) in the 1990s, the development of 'smart' devices and social media since the mid-2000s, and the rise of governing through 'big data'.[32]

The way that such technological change shapes global politics appears in various forms in our contributions, such as in Adamson and Han's mention of digital surveillance by sending states of their diasporic citizens, or Leira and Kessler's use of digital examples (quantum computing, artificial intelligence, Twitter) to show the problem of thinking about the future at all. It appears in the most sustained form in interrogations of artificial intelligence (AI). Erskine discusses the moral agency of AI as an actor in global politics, noting that it will 'affect what we expect of' the key actors of traditional accounts of global politics: 'individual human actors and states that employ them.'[33] Similarly, Lacy discusses AI as a key element in thinking about the future of warfare, through what he terms (adapting Galeotti) the 'weaponisation of everywhere'.[34] Digital technologies both function as weapons themselves and turn all objects they interact with into potential weapons, thus radically transforming both what warfare *is* and *where* it can be understood to take place. Lacy's arguments draw largely on accounts of technologies as having particular sorts of effects. As such, both Erskine and Lacy focus on the harms AI might commit and the constraints on AI that avoiding these harms may require.

Fourth, while ongoing technological innovation has many important effects on global politics, the trajectories of socio-technical change over the last 200 years have left us with a range of socio-ecological crises which operate at a planetary scale. As already hinted, many of these

[30]Sven Beckert, *Empire of Cotton: A Global History* (New York: Vintage, 2015).
[31]Matthew Huber, *Lifeblood* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2013); Timothy Mitchell, *Carbon Democracy: Political Power in the Age of Oil* (London: Verso, 2013).
[32]Louise Amoore, 'Machine learning political orders', *Review of International Studies*, 49:1 (2023), pp. 20–36.
[33]Toni Erskine, 'AI and the future of IR: Disentangling flesh-and-blood, institutional, and synthetic moral agency in world politics', *Review of International Studies*, 50 (2024), 534–59.
[34]Mark Galeotti, *The Weaponisation of Everything: A Field Guide to the New Way of War* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2022).

papers assume that the dynamics of ecological crises, of which the most prominent is the impact of climate change, will shape the next 50 years of global politics in important ways. This reflects a broader explosion of recognition of the importance of the present climate crisis to global politics. While until relatively recently it has been the preserve of a distinct group of scholars – if a highly active and dynamic body of researchers[35] – it has become the object of much wider attention among IR scholars. It is not that future-oriented thought has neglected the environment both within and beyond IR, but this dimension of thinking about the future is now ubiquitous, even inescapable, and considered way beyond the community of scholars of international environmental politics. In this collection, it is most integral to the contributions by Constantinou and Christodoulou, and Tansel and Tilley. It also shapes many of the others: Rosenberg's discussion of race structuring the experience of the climate crisis; Bendfeldt et al.'s contextualisation of their desire to reflect on their own positionality in global politics; Lacy's discussion of climate change as the key context for the transformation of warfare in coming decades, both as cause and terrain of warfare; Leira and Kessler's discussions of climate change as a prompt for conceptual innovation; or van Wingerden and Vigneswaran's points about climate change both in relation to technological innovation and planetary habitability.

For Tansel and Tilley, climate change is the starting point for interrogating both ongoing strategies of capital and resistance/transformational movements, both of which will shape the trajectories of global politics in the coming decades. They draw perhaps most directly on the notion of *futuring* as prefigurative, as sketched above, focusing on various types of community and movement interventions that seek to escape the logics of capital and create a 'planetary political economy for the global majority'. For Constantinou and Christodoulou, the central problematique is one of remaking diplomatic practice and thought, in order to 'make peace with the planet'. This is for them a task of building on a range of Indigenous, ecological, and post-humanist philosophies to adapt what is for many a core aspect of global politics – diplomacy – to the task of responding to ecological crises. This entails a conceptual openness to the forms of diplomatic relations beyond the traditional state-to-state kind, to include relations among other forms of human community, as well as with non-human others.

Constantinou and Christodoulou thus bring these themes full circle, responding to Leira and Kessler's call for conceptual openness by developing arguments that generate novel concepts to respond to various contemporary challenges to global politics. Van Wingerden and Vigneswaran's critique of 'flatearthism' and 'habitationism' is a similar call for conceptual openness and change. For van Wingerden and Vigneswaran, these entail not just the empirical problems thrown up by the climate and related crises, but in particular, the ongoing theoretical questions generated by the ever-increasing technological capacity to use outer space for a range of political, economic, and social uses. If our future is in space, we need concepts to help us grasp that, concepts which an IR ontologically 'grounded' in the surface of the earth struggles to achieve.

Conclusion

In a journal such as RIS that attempts to cover and shape the scope of what counts as 'International Studies', there is a concern not only with global politics 'out there' but also with the nature of the scholarship that seeks both to analyse and (at least sometimes) to shape that politics. We explicitly invited our contributors to think about the 'next 50 years' of IR in this twin way – both the future of global politics, and the future of a field of study that most (but undoubtedly not all) contributors and readers of RIS identify with.

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[35]For a tiny sample, see Jen Allan, *The New Climate Activism* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2020); Matthew J. Hoffmann, *Climate Governance at the Crossroads: Experimenting with a Global Response after Kyoto* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011); Chukwumerije Okereke, *Global Justice and Neoliberal Environmental Governance* (London: Routledge, 2008); Matthew Paterson, *Global Warming and Global Politics* (London: Routledge, 1996).

Some of the papers dealt more with the discipline in the next 50 years (Bendfeldt et al., Leira and Kessler), while for others, the discipline was somewhat tangential to the analysis they offer (Tansel and Tilley, Adamson and Han). But mostly, the two are intertwined in differing ways. The connections appear often in terms of the need to develop IR theory further in response to particular dynamics shaping the future (Rosenberg on racism, Constantinou and Christodoulou on diplomacy, van Wingerden and Vigneswaran on space). They also appear in relation to the position and intellectual techniques of theorists reflecting on global politics: Bendfeldt et al.'s reflections are provoked by contemporary crises, but they use these to reflect on their positionality, as white Western researchers, to develop knowledge about crises where their own privilege is deeply implicated. Who gets to theorise about the future, and whose future is it they are theorising? And given many, if not all, of these types of reflections are generated by ongoing contestations over race/racism/racialisation and coloniality, we might ask why these are particularly matters of contemporary concern precisely when – as other papers here show (Aradau, Adamson and Han, notably) – those geopolitical dynamics are at the same time transforming those global power relations in significant ways?

As we suggested at the beginning, thinking about the future in IR has long been an intervention designed to shape global politics as much as analyse it. Some of these interventions have been at moments of major crisis where IR has itself been shaped by the desire to intervene – the well-known (if almost clichéd) relationships between Aberystwyth, the League of Nations, and the crisis of World War I being the most obvious. In that instance, IR became deeply embroiled, even as it was being 'invented', in attempts to reform global institutional structures in particular ways. Many interventions are of course more modest and do not occur with such a degree of political empowerment of scholars as in the post–World War I moment. Nevertheless, as these contributions show, thinking about the next 50 years of IR is not solely a matter of predicting, imagining, scenario building, or prefiguration, but of recognising that the construction of knowledge is always also an intervention in the world.

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