



SCENARIOS FOR 2040

CHARTING THE FUTURE AMID UNCERTAINTY

The previous chapters of Global Trends 2040 described how key structural forces are laying the foundations for our future world, including demographics, environment, economics, and technology, and then explored the dynamics emerging within societies, states, and the international system as communities and leaders respond to and engage with these forces. These sections point to a world that is increasingly out of balance and contested at every level, but this trajectory is not set in stone.

To better understand how these conditions might play out differently during the next 20 years, we developed scenarios describing a range of possible global futures. Three key questions or uncertainties helped to shape these scenarios.

- **How severe are the looming global challenges?**
- **How do states and nonstate actors engage in the world, including focus and type of engagement?**
- **Finally, what do states prioritize for the future?**

Using these questions, we have identified five plausible, distinctive, and illustrative stories of the future. Each reflects the key themes of shared global challenges, fragmentation, disequilibrium, adaptation, and greater contestation.



RENAISSANCE OF DEMOCRACIES



A WORLD ADRIFT



COMPETITIVE COEXISTENCE



SEPARATE SILOS



TRAGEDY AND MOBILIZATION

Three of the scenarios portray futures in which international challenges become incrementally more severe, and interactions are largely defined by the US-China rivalry. In **Renaissance of Democracies**, the United States leads a resurgence of democracies. In **A World Adrift**, China is the leading but not globally dominant state, and in **Competitive Coexistence**, the United States and China prosper and compete for leadership in a bifurcated world.

Two other scenarios depict more radical change. Both arise from particularly severe global discontinuities, and both defy assumptions about the global system. The US-China rivalry is less central in these scenarios because both states are forced to contend with larger, more severe global challenges and find that current structures are not matched to these challenges. **Separate Silos** portrays a world in which globalization has broken down, and economic and security blocs emerge to protect states from mounting threats. **Tragedy and Mobilization** is a story of bottom-up, revolutionary change on the heels of devastating global environmental crises.