

Hotspots on the Horizon: Challenges beyond COVID-19



Plans are worthless, but planning is everything. It is hard to imagine a scenario that could have better demonstrated the truth of Dwight D. Eisenhower’s words than the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. In the wake of multiple global crises, the policy world was sharply reminded that preparing for ‘high-impact, low-probability’ events is more than just an academic exercise.

Even though countless analysts had warned of possible global pandemics, COVID-19 caught the world off guard. It has pointed to blatant governance gaps within the multilateral system, and underlined that words do not equal policy. While the investment in preparedness in some policy areas like multilateral disarmament is more advanced, other risks such as pandemics or climate change do not seem to have cleared the bar set by limited resources. So how can we prevent valuable insights from rotting away in the digital archives? Which challenges should the global community and German foreign policy monitor more closely and prepare for in 2021 and beyond? In short: How do we get from words to policy?

First, a change of culture to make scenario planning an integral part of foreign policy-making has begun, but will take more time to be completed. Second, policy-makers lack the resources – time, personnel and budget – to prepare for all conceivable developments. It is therefore crucial to draw their attention to empirically grounded and plausible scenarios. Finally, scenario exercises and policy papers can help to look beyond the status quo. Therefore, the following pages gather the collective intelligence of six formidable experts and practitioners. They point to eminent challenges that policy-makers need to pay attention to in the months to come and make proposals for potential solutions: What can we learn from COVID-19 for future pandemics? How should migration policy be reconceptualized? What does it take for peacebuilding in Syria to become successful? How should NATO and the WTO be reformed, and how can Russian meddling in elections be prevented? Have a close look, because after all, planning is everything.



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RONJA SCHELER
Programme Director
International Affairs,
Körber-Stiftung,
Berlin



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FELICITAS VON LOË
Programme Manager
International Affairs,
Körber-Stiftung,
Berlin

What are the greatest challenges currently facing German foreign policy?

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multiple answers possible

