



ISRM

THE INSTITUTE OF STRATEGIC RISK MANAGEMENT

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CENTRE FOR THE STUDY OF WICKED PROBLEMS

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A MESSAGE FROM DR DAVID RUBENS

As we move into November, it is difficult to know where to focus our attention.

Zohran Mamdani has just been elected as Mayor of New York, the first Muslim to hold that position. A young (35) charismatic outsider, he has dominated the hustings and made the other candidates, Independent former Governor Andrew Cuomo and Republican Curtis Sliwa, look like they come from a different generation (which they do) but also a different political space.

Cuomo in particular has made the fact that Mamdani is a Muslim a central (if not the central) issue in his campaigning, claiming that Mamdani is anti-Israel, antisemitic and a danger to New York. It does not help that Mamdani has campaigned on a socialist platform in a way that is extremely rare in the US (though Bernie Sanders was a recent example of such a stance). President Trumps' immediate reaction to the election victory was to call Mamdani a 'Communist Lunatic', threatening to withhold federal funding from New York and to investigate Mamdani's naturalization process in 2018. We can only offer Mayor Mamdani our best wishes for what will undoubtedly be a rocky road ahead.

In Brazil, CoP 30 has started. Although there is the usual belief that much will be said but it is questionable if anything will be achieved, there are two stories this month that suggest that there may be some cause for optimism .

The first is that Bill Gates has come out and openly spoken about his optimism for the potential that exist to engage with climate change and all of its hyper-complex associated issues.

'Although limiting the global temperature is hugely beneficial, the belief that we need to do so at all costs is diverting resources from the most effective things we could be doing to improve human welfare in poor countries: namely, making it affordable to eliminate all greenhouse gas emissions and reducing extreme poverty with improvements in agriculture and health. The best way to help people adapt to climate change is to make sure they're healthy and prosperous.'⁽¹⁾

In another good news story, it is reported that Chernobyl, the site of the world's worst nuclear disaster back 1986, has recovered to become a natural paradise.

'Chernobyl has become the best nature reserve in Europe. In the 39 years since the disaster, the population of large mammals has increased sevenfold. Wolves have taken over abandoned schools, bears have returned after a century of absence, and lynxes walk on the rooftops of houses where people once lived. The radioactive wasteland has turned into a place where nature has finally exhaled - without us. And the numbers prove it: humans are more dangerous than radiation'⁽²⁾

We have continuously said at the ISRM that the problem we are facing is not climate change – it is human greed and stupidity. If we simply started acting in a way that was appropriate and sustainable, many of the problems we have created would go away – and the impacts would be seen incredibly quickly.

Although the indices associated with climate change are undoubtedly still alarming (and Hurricane Melissa in the Caribbean last week was an additional reminder of that, if one was needed), there are also indications that, in at least some ways, humanity is beginning to get its act together. The cost of generating electricity from offshore wind has halved, the cost to generate electricity from solar panels fell by 77% and for battery storage fell by 84% between 2014 and 2024. It seems that the learning curve is kicking in.

In politics and human security, the war in Sudan has once again escalated, bringing with it human suffering on a level that seems almost inconceivable. The fall of the city of El-Fasher in the western Darfur region has led to a famine and claims of a genocide. More than 150,000 people have died in the conflict across the country and about 12 million have fled their homes in what the United Nations has called the world's largest humanitarian crisis.

The cease fire in Gaza is under extreme pressure (if it can claim to still be in place at all) and in Ukraine the Russian invasion seems to have led to a never-ending war that neither side can win, but neither can step back from.

'Our webinar last week on Sisu, the Finnish concept of national resilience, was the second webinar we have held on the subject. That is highly recommend for anyone wrestling with the issue of resilience and security whether at the global, national, city or community level.'⁽³⁾

So, overall, the world is still the messy place that it ever was and will ever be. The ISRM continues in its mission to shine a light of reason and rationality on the multiple challenges that we are facing.

I hope that this report aids you in your own efforts, wherever you are in the world.

Warmest regards



David Rubens

Executive Director, ISRM

10th November 2025

(1) https://www.gatesnotes.com/work/accelerate-energy-innovation?WT.mc_id=20250400100000_EIB_NB_TGN-Pbing&msclkid=f969ae1c8a3e1aa55175c717aef094ce

(2) https://www.linkedin.com/posts/activity-7382901029547433984-3iAW?utm_source=share&utm_medium=member_desktop&rcm=ACoAAADsOHkBjbdInsieYth_-VuDCxltbuSH4tc

(3) <https://www.theisrm.org/introducing-the-finnish-comprehensive-security-model-sisu-to-the-uk-recording/>

OVERVIEW

The November Global Risk Review Report delivers concise, strategic analysis of key geopolitical, economic and humanitarian developments shaping global stability. This edition highlights a world defined by enduring geopolitical volatility, systemic fragility and accelerating power shifts.

Core themes include the ongoing conflict in Gaza and its deepening humanitarian crisis, the persistent stalemate in the Russia-Ukraine war, as well as the gradual erosion of Western influence amid populist resurgence and strategic realignments. The report further identifies emerging vulnerabilities in digital infrastructure and space security, alongside with the rising influence of youth-driven movements and China's expanding strategic posture.

KEY THEMES INCLUDED:

MIDDLE EAST: FRAGILE CEASEFIRES AND HUMANITARIAN COLLAPSE

- Despite ceasefire announcements, Gaza remains unstable with ongoing violence, famine and infrastructure failure.
- International peacekeeping efforts have stalled, leaving a governance vacuum and complicating reconstruction.
- Egypt has emerged as a key regional mediator, while broader Middle Eastern dynamics remain volatile.

RUSSIA - UKRAINE CONFLICT: STALEMATE AND STRATEGIC RESOURCE INTERESTS

- Ceasefire negotiations have failed repeatedly with both sides refusing territorial compromise.
- Ukraine's reclaimed territory and logistical efficiency contrast with Russia's resource-driven strategy.
- Rare earth minerals and coal in contested regions highlight the geopolitical stakes beyond borders.

U.S. GLOBAL INFLUENCE: SHIFTING ALLIANCES AND DOMESTIC STRAIN

- U.S. involvement in Gaza, Ukraine and Indo-Pacific military cooperation reflects strategic recalibration.
- Rising populism, economic pressure and political fragmentation threaten cohesion.
- Criticism of Israel is becoming mainstream in U.S. discourse, signalling a shift in political sentiment.

EUROPE: POLITICAL VOLATILITY AND SOCIAL TENSIONS

- France faces institutional fragility with frequent leadership changes and mounting debt.
- UK grapples with rising protests, anti-Semitism controversies and declining trust in public institutions.
- Football match cancellations and demonstrations reflect broader societal unrest.

CYBERSECURITY AND INFRASTRUCTURE FRAGILITY

- Global internet outages and cloud service failures expose systemic vulnerabilities in digital infrastructure.
- Over-reliance on single-point systems and cost-cutting measures undermine resilience.
- Cyber drills reveal knowledge gaps and the need for continuous training and scenario planning.

GEOPOLITICAL REALIGNMENTS AND STRATEGIC COMPETITION

- China's strategic sophistication and grassroots influence challenge Western dominance.
- The Afghanistan - Pakistan axis is re-emerging as a geopolitical flashpoint.
- Maritime strikes and extraterritorial force raise ethical concerns about international norms.

YOUTH MOVEMENTS AND POLITICAL REFORM

- Youth-led activism in Nepal, Bangladesh, Indonesia and the U.S. is reshaping political discourse.
- Demands for transparency, technological freedom and non-partisan governance are gaining traction.
- Concerns persist over foreign influence and sustainability of reform momentum.

SPACE AND COSMIC RISK PREPAREDNESS

- Solar flares and asteroid threats pose growing risks to satellite-dependent systems.
- Global preparedness remains fragmented despite efforts by NASA, ESA and others.
- Space debris and orbital risk management require coordinated international strategies.

SYSTEMIC RISK AND RESILIENCE THINKING

- Traditional risk models are inadequate for complex, interconnected systems.
- Emphasis is shifting towards consequence management and scenario-based planning.
- Examples like Chernobyl's ecological recovery highlight resilience beyond human systems.

HUMANITARIAN CHALLENGES AND RESOURCE SCARCITY

- Funding cuts to humanitarian organisations like the Red Cross threaten global aid capacity.
- Water scarcity is emerging as a critical future conflict driver.
- Ethical accountability is increasingly driven by investors and civil society rather than governments.



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Global Risk Review Report aims to provide timely, structured and critical analyses of key geopolitical, economic and humanitarian developments worldwide. This report is designed to support decision-makers, analysts and stakeholders in anticipating risk, understanding systemic shifts and preparing for strategic response. Each edition synthesises complex global events, identifies trends and highlights potential flashpoints that may reshape the international landscape.

Central to the discussions were the unresolved conflicts in Gaza and Ukraine, both marked by stalled peace efforts, humanitarian crises and strategic resource interests. Despite ceasefire declarations, Gaza remains destabilised due to a governance vacuum and continued violence, while Ukraine's territorial integrity and mineral-rich regions remain contested amid diplomatic deadlock.

The report highlights a recalibration of U.S. foreign policy with growing military cooperation in the Indo-Pacific, evolving domestic political sentiment—including mainstream criticism of Israel—and rising internal strain from economic pressures and political fragmentation. Europe faces similar instability with France and the UK experiencing institutional fragility, social unrest and declining public trust.

Cybersecurity and infrastructure fragility have emerged as critical concerns with global outages and single-point failures exposing systemic risks. Space weather and asteroid threats further underscore the vulnerability of satellite-dependent systems, prompting calls for coordinated global preparedness.

Youth-led reform movements across the world in Nepal, Bangladesh and beyond signal a generational shift toward transparency and political renewal, while China's strategic expansion and Western diplomatic inconsistencies challenge traditional global leadership. The report also stresses the growing importance of resource security—particularly rare earth minerals and water—as central drivers of future conflict and cooperation.

In summary, the report calls for resilient governance, proactive risk management and strengthened international collaboration as essential attributes for navigating an increasingly interconnected global landscape.

INTRODUCTION

The discussions trace the deepening crises in Gaza and the West Bank, where repeated ceasefire declarations have failed to secure lasting peace amid governance vacuums and severe humanitarian deterioration. In parallel, the Russia-Ukraine conflict remains entrenched with both parties refusing territorial concessions and international mediators struggling to advance meaningful negotiations.

A recurring theme across these sessions is the evolving role of the United States—balancing its international diplomatic commitments against mounting domestic pressures, including political polarisation, economic strain and rising scepticism towards established foreign policy frameworks. Europe faces comparable headwinds, as nations such as France and the United Kingdom contend with institutional volatility and eroding public confidence in governance structures.

Attention is also drawn to growing vulnerabilities within global digital infrastructure, the emerging risks posed by space weather along with the fragility of interdependent systems. At the same time, youth-led reform movements in countries such as Nepal and Bangladesh reflect a generational demand for transparency, accountability and political renewal. China's continued strategic expansion and resource-driven diplomacy further underscore the shifting dynamics of global influence.

From cyber insecurity and competition over rare-earth resources to humanitarian funding gaps and emerging pandemic threats, the findings underscore the urgent need for resilient governance and adaptive risk management strategies to address the complexities of an increasingly interconnected world.

GEOPOLITICAL AND SECURITY DYNAMICS

A REALIGNING WORLD: POWER SHIFTS AND PERSISTENT CONFLICT

The conversation highlighted the continuing breakdown of peace efforts between Israel and Hamas, marked by renewed violence and internal repression within Gaza. Broader parallels were drawn between authoritarian regimes, such as those in Russia, Afghanistan and Gaza. It was also noted that entrenched power structures and organised militant factions are unlikely to surrender control without significant confrontation.

Attention also turned to Saudi Arabia's evolving regional role under Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman Al Saud, viewed as signalling a pragmatic, economically driven approach aimed at fostering modernisation and stability in the Middle East. However, concerns persisted that the financial isolation of regimes like the Taliban and Russia, while effective to a degree, may not be sufficient to produce sustainable peace.

A notable development discussed was the impact of U.S. sanctions on Russian energy exports, leading both China and India to reduce imports of Russian oil and gas. This reduction poses a significant challenge to Moscow's economy and its capacity to sustain its war efforts. During the session, participants emphasised the enduring role of resource competition —particularly over energy and mineral deposits—as a central driver of modern conflicts, echoing historical precedents from Kosovo to Iraq.

Moreover, contributors voiced concern over global indifference towards women's rights violations in Afghanistan, describing such neglect as both a moral failure and a lost opportunity for global economic and social advancement. Finally, the discussion underscored that global power politics remain shaped by a mix of strategic interests, resource dependency along with the persistent struggle between authoritarian control and humanitarian values.



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Photo by Mohammed Ibrahim
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ONGOING MIDDLE EAST AND REGIONAL SECURITY DYNAMICS

The evolving conflict in Israel and Gaza was further emphasised, where the situation remains unresolved despite a nominal ceasefire. Humanitarian conditions continue to deteriorate with restricted access to aid, hospitals, food, electricity and education. Hamas has maintained its weapons under the terms of the agreement, highlighting a critical point of contention that complicates long-term stability and the implementation of the ceasefire.

The discussion also addressed the role of media and social platforms in shaping public perception and amplifying tensions, noting how social media and sports events have increasingly become instruments of influence and pressure, affecting local and international opinions.

Regional security concerns were extended to Sudan, where drone attacks by the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) have raised tensions with neighbouring countries, including Egypt and Saudi Arabia, reflecting broader geopolitical implications. The RSF's growing capabilities and external support suggest potential escalation in regional conflicts.

In summary, the session pointed to persistent instability in the Middle East, the challenges of enforcing ceasefire agreements and the growing influence of media and technology in shaping regional power dynamics, conflict and humanitarian outcomes.

FROM CEASEFIRE TO CRISIS: A MONTH OF CONTRASTS

The session highlighted recent positive developments in the Middle East, particularly reports of Israeli troop withdrawals from Gaza following progress toward a ceasefire agreement. The focus remained on the humanitarian dimension, including the delivery of aid, the return of hostages, as well as the broader hope for sustained peace and reconstruction efforts.

Attention then turned to ongoing global social unrest with large-scale pro-Palestinian demonstrations in Australia reflecting the wider international response to the conflict. The escalation of these protests into legal proceedings was noted as indicative of growing societal tension and a perceived erosion of traditional civil norms.

Domestic challenges in Australia were also highlighted, specifically regarding the recent failure of the national emergency call system. The outage resulted in fatalities and raised concerns about corporate accountability and transparency, as the telecommunications provider prioritised disclosure to financial markets over communication with emergency services and the public. It is essential to stress that the incident underscored the significance of resilient infrastructure and the need for stronger oversight of essential service providers.

GAZA CEASEFIRE AND EGYPT'S EXPANDING ROLE

The anticipated signing of a ceasefire agreement between Israel and Gaza marked a potential turning point in the prolonged conflict. Emphasis was placed on the devastating humanitarian toll of the war, including widespread destruction across Gaza and Rafah, significant civilian displacement and extensive loss of life. The conversation underscored the absence of clear political or strategic gains, framing the conflict as a humanitarian catastrophe with no identifiable winners.

Attention also turned to Egypt's growing influence in regional stability efforts. Over recent weeks, Egypt has played a pivotal role both in mitigating potential flooding in Sudan through the management of Nile water reserves and in facilitating diplomatic talks leading toward a Gaza ceasefire. These actions were noted as reinforcing Egypt's position as a key mediator and stabilising force in the region.

Looking ahead, concerns were raised about further geopolitical shifts that may occur following the conclusion of the Gaza agreement. Particularly, in relation to developments in the Russia-Ukraine conflict.

CEASEFIRE FRAGILITY AND RISING GLOBAL TENSIONS

While Hamas has been significantly weakened, concerns remain over residual militant capability, the potential for radicalisation and the substantial financial and political costs facing Israel. The ceasefire was characterised as a temporary measure rather than a durable peace, with both sides expected to regroup and rearm. Broader implications were noted, including uncertainty surrounding international legal actions, reconstruction timelines, along with the persistence of core ideological divides.

In the United States, the possible invocation of the Insurrection Act has raised concerns over expanded executive power. In Russia, acknowledgment of a mistaken attack on an Azerbaijani civilian jet underscored ongoing regional volatility. In the UK front, revelations from an undercover documentary exposed serious issues within UK policing culture, adding to public mistrust in institutions. Additional observations touched on political unrest in South America and continuing conflict in Myanmar, both reflecting global patterns of governance challenges and civil instability.



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GEOPOLITICAL INFLUENCE AND POLITICAL UPHEAVAL

The broader implications of recent geopolitical developments were thoroughly examined, particularly the strategic use of influence in ongoing international negotiations. Attention was drawn to the evolving U.S. role in conflicts such as those involving Israel and Gaza, as well as Ukraine, where differing levels of leverage appear to have shaped foreign policy engagement.

The use of economic measures and security alliances to encourage dialogue—most notably in regions such as Southeast Asia—was noted as a key element in facilitating short-term stability.

As for the UK, the conversation highlighted the significant impact of international tensions on public sentiment and political activity. Protests linked to the Gaza conflict, debates over pension fund investments in defence industries along with the rise of independent and issue-driven political candidates were identified as indicators of growing polarisation. What is even more interesting to see, is the declining public tolerance for political missteps, as reflected in an increasing number of resignations across political and public institutions.

In summary, this is a period of heightened global complexity, where international diplomacy, domestic politics and most importantly, public accountability are becoming increasingly intertwined.



RENEWED GEOPOLITICAL TENSIONS IN AFGHANISTAN AND PAKISTAN

Recent developments suggest a resurgence of geopolitical competition reminiscent of the late 20th century ‘Great Game’, as the Taliban consolidates control within Afghanistan while engaging in border clashes with Pakistan. Major powers, including the United States, Russia, China and India, are positioning themselves strategically: on the one hand the U.S. seeks renewed counterterrorism access and influence, on the other hand, Russia and China aim to strengthen trade and logistical corridors, and finally, India has reopened its embassy in Kabul, signalling deeper diplomatic engagement.

Furthermore, Pakistan faces mounting challenges on multiple fronts, contending with internal instability in regions such as Balochistan and Waziristan, while managing renewed tensions with both Afghanistan and India. The region’s strategic significance is underscored by its role in global supply chains and regional connectivity efforts.

There is also potential for gradual social change within Afghanistan as international actors exert diplomatic and economic pressure on the Taliban government. Increased engagement from India, the U.S. and potentially, European nations could influence governance, particularly in areas such as education and women’s rights.

Overall, the conversation concluded that the Afghanistan-Pakistan axis is likely to re-emerge as a major geopolitical flashpoint in the coming year with competing spheres of influence shaping both regional stability and global strategic interests.

STRATEGIC IMPLICATIONS OF THE UKRAINE CONFLICT AND GLOBAL RESOURCE INTERESTS

It was noted that proposals to concede Ukrainian territory overlook a critical legal and ethical constraint: under martial law, Ukraine cannot relinquish land that belongs collectively to its people. Beyond territorial boundaries, the contested regions contain significant reserves of rare earth minerals and coal—resources that underpin much of the global technology and energy sectors.

Speculation arose that Russia’s actions may align with long-term Chinese interests, potentially enabling a near-monopoly over essential raw materials if combined with China’s extensive investments in Australian mining and port infrastructure prior to the imposition of foreign investment restrictions. Australia’s decision to block such acquisitions, including the vast Simpson Station property near the Pine Gap defence facility, was mentioned as a key moment in limiting Chinese strategic reach.

The session also underscored Ukraine’s recent military gains, having reclaimed over 1,800 square kilometres of territory within three weeks, demonstrating growing operational efficiency and effective logistics—an essential factor in sustaining modern warfare. Historical military insights were invoked to highlight that successful campaigns rely less on tactics and more on logistics with comparative analysis showing Ukraine’s logistical adaptability surpassing Russian efforts. The broader conclusion stressed that when major powers cease to ‘overwhelm’ problems, they risk leaving behind dangerous vacuums that reshape global power dynamics.

GLOBAL
GOVERNANCE
AND POWER
TRANSITIONS

GLOBAL POLITICAL DYNAMICS AND SHIFTING U.S. INFLUENCE

Recent geopolitical developments and the evolving role of the United States in global affairs were the main highlights over the session. Discussion focused on the ongoing peace negotiations in Gaza, where U.S. involvement has been viewed as potentially instrumental in advancing a ceasefire agreement.

Furthermore, the participants explored the complex situation in Ukraine, where reports indicate renewed Russian offensives and increased regional tension, alongside perceived inconsistencies in international responses.

Attention then shifted to developments in South America, where U.S. anti-narcotics operations and partnerships with regional forces have generated both cooperation and controversy. It was also noted that these activities reflect broader efforts to assert U.S. influence across multiple fronts, though often through contentious means.

On the U.S. front, the conversation addressed the deployment of U.S. National Guard units to certain states amid rising concerns over crime and civil unrest, sparking debate over federal authority and the balance of power between state and national governance.

Overall, the discussion underscored the extent to which U.S. policies—both foreign and domestic—are reshaping international relations and challenging established norms of political conduct and governance.



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Unsplash

SHIFTING STRATEGIES IN AN ERA OF DOMESTIC AND GLOBAL STRAIN

The discussion centred on growing political, financial and security tensions within the United States and their intersection with broader geopolitical dynamics. Key points included increasing U.S.- Australian military cooperation, particularly the deployment of Navy personnel to enhance Australia's submarine capabilities, viewed as part of a wider effort to counter Chinese strategic influence in the Indo-Pacific region.

On the U.S. front, the country faces mounting internal strain due to the ongoing government shutdown, which has resulted in financial hardship for federal employees and heightened social instability. It was noted that the economic impact—particularly rising inflation and impending healthcare disruptions—could mark a turning point for voter sentiment ahead of the upcoming midterm elections.

Additionally, the conversation highlighted deepening divisions within the Republican Party and the broader political landscape with visible fractures emerging among supporters of the 'Make America Great Again' movement. Analysts observed that these rifts may widen as economic pressures intensify.

Concerns were expressed over the fragility of U.S. political and social cohesion with references to the potential for domestic unrest in polarised urban areas. The discussion concluded with reflections on the importance of maintaining accurate, contemporaneous records of events and analyses—emphasising institutional accountability and the value of evidence-based assessments in times of widespread political distortion and uncertainty.

FROM TERRORISM TO GEOPOLITICS: SHIFTING DEFINITIONS OF POWER

The complexity of defining terrorism and how political and cultural perspectives influence its interpretation was further investigated amongst the participants. Historical examples, including figures and movements once labelled as terrorists, who later became state leaders or peace advocates, were used to illustrate the subjectivity of the term and its dependence on context and power dynamics.

Attention then turned to evolving governance models in both the public and private sectors. Increasingly, sustainability and ethical accountability are being driven not by governments but by investors and stakeholders. This shift reflects a broader transformation in governance expectations and corporate responsibility.

The conversation also examined recent infrastructure and communication failures in Australia, emphasising unrealistic public expectations of technology and the tension between federal and state responsibilities during crises.

Additionally, the growing need for geopolitical literacy was highlighted as a pressing issue for both business and government sectors with reports showing a resurgence in demand for political analysis and humanities expertise—fields long undervalued in favour of technical disciplines.

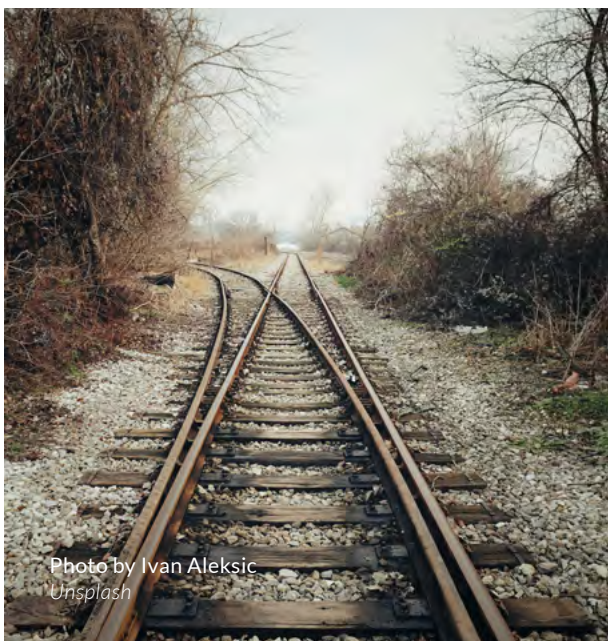
RIISING POPULISM AND THE POLITICS OF FAIRNESS IN WESTERN DEMOCRACIES

The evolving political landscape in the United States and the United Kingdom was a key highlight during the conversation, emphasising the resurgence of populist sentiment and the growing divide between political elites and working-class communities.

The discussion also underscored perceived unfairness in governance, economic inequality and restricted access to basic services, which are fuelling disillusionment among citizens, driving support for populist movements.

Moreover, it was noted that while recent diplomatic progress in the Middle East has been attributed to U.S. leadership, lasting peace remains uncertain until stability is sustained over time. Some parallels were drawn between rising populist movements in the U.S. and the U.K. with concerns that mainstream political parties risk alienating ordinary voters by disregarding their lived experiences.

Overall, the discussion concluded by reflecting on themes of national identity, civic pride and the enduring importance of fairness and representation in maintaining social cohesion.



HIGH-SPEED AMBITIONS AND THE COST OF POLITICAL PRESTIGE

Serbia's launch of freight operations along its new high-speed railway connecting Belgrade to Subotica near the Hungarian border has been the key highlight of the week, with passenger services expected soon. Designed to eventually link Belgrade and Budapest, the project showcases significant regional progress but raises questions about its financial and political foundations.

Originally planned for trains traveling up to 160 km/h, the project was upgraded to 200 km/h for political prestige, leading to costs rising from €6 million to €21 million per train and maintenance expenses increasing by 50%, while delivering only marginal time savings. Concerns were also raised over the decision to replace an EU-backed €330 million plan with a more costly €830 million Chinese loan, sparking inquiries into transparency and long-term sustainability. Despite promising faster travel, stronger regional connectivity and lower emissions, the railway's economic rationale and governance remain under scrutiny.

TECHNOLOGY, INFRASTRUCTURE AND EMERGING RISKS

GLOBAL TRANSITIONS: TECHNOLOGY, POWER AND RISK

A key focus was on China’s forthcoming five-year plan and its potential global implications. Previous strategic initiatives have positioned China as a leader in advanced technologies, electric vehicles and rare earth mineral production—sectors critical to global supply chains. Observations of expanding Chinese engagement at grassroots levels in various regions suggest a deliberate, multilayered strategy to strengthen economic and geopolitical influence through infrastructure development and collaboration with local governments.

Concerns were also raised regarding Western nations’ shifting political stances and their impact on international credibility. Recent developments, including disputes over deportation agreements involving Nigeria, Ghana and the United States, underscore growing sensitivities in diplomatic relations. Such inconsistencies may undermine Western influence, particularly as nations like China present themselves as stable and cooperative partners across the Global South.

The conversation further addressed systemic risks associated with technological infrastructure and space activity. Increasing incidents of near-Earth asteroids and delayed detection highlight weaknesses in global Early Warning Systems, while recurring digital infrastructure failures, such as recent DNS outages affecting major cloud providers, reveal vulnerabilities in supposedly resilient networks. These disruptions serve as a reminder of the fragility of interdependent systems and the potential for cascading failures affecting critical sectors, including aviation and communications.

Overall, the session highlighted three intersecting challenges:



Addressing these risks will not only require consistent policy alignment and greater investment in early warning technologies, but also renewed international collaboration in order to strengthen resilience in an increasingly interconnected world.



GLOBAL GEOPOLITICAL AND CYBERSECURITY DEVELOPMENTS

The conversation highlighted ongoing shifts in international relations, particularly regarding Israel, Russia and Ukraine. Observations indicate changing perceptions within the United States and Jewish communities, signalling a declining view of Israel as an uncontested ally. Comparative responses to sporting restrictions for Russian and Israeli athletes reveal global scrutiny of Western policies with potential long-term implications for international norms and reciprocal actions.

Cybersecurity and critical infrastructure were noted as growing concerns, particularly following recent disruptions in major service providers, underscoring vulnerabilities in single-point dependencies and the risk of retaliatory cyber activities from states dissatisfied with asset freezes or sanctions.

Strategic military positioning was also discussed, including increased U.S. involvement in Australian seaports and the broader Indian Ocean region, highlighting ongoing concerns over maritime choke points and global trade security. Moreover, the discussion emphasised not only the complexity of international power dynamics, but also the erosion of the West's perceived moral authority and the need for careful consideration of policy decisions with far-reaching consequences.

Overall, the key message is that geopolitical, economic and cyber challenges are deeply interconnected, with evolving global perceptions that could reshape the landscape over the coming decades.



CYBER CRISIS MANAGEMENT AND ORGANISATIONAL PREPAREDNESS

During the recent quarterly crisis management drill, which focused on a simulated cyber-attack scenario, several key observations were made regarding organisational readiness and understanding of complex cyber threats. During the conversation, it was acknowledged that a single exercise is insufficient, emphasising the need for repeated drills and exposure to a variety of scenarios to enhance resilience.

The exercise highlighted a significant knowledge gap among participants regarding technical cyber operations. Many struggled to comprehend the technical briefings, illustrating the complexity of modern cyber risks and the necessity for continuous learning and education across all levels of the organisation. The drill reinforced the importance of structured communication and collaborative learning to ensure preparedness for real-world cyber incidents.

Overall, the session demonstrated that effective crisis management requires ongoing training, repeated scenario-based exercises and the cultivation of both technical understanding and adaptive response strategies within leadership and operational teams.

MILITARY ADVANCEMENTS AND CYBER SYSTEM VULNERABILITIES

Ukraine's rapid development into a weapons superpower was further underscored during the session. European governments are increasingly supporting production of advanced warfare technologies, signalling a transition from traditional, resource-intensive military models towards more agile and technologically driven approaches. Observations suggest that the United States may be lagging behind in drone technology relative to Ukraine with potential parallels to Russian capabilities, which may be influenced by Chinese technology. This represents a notable shift in the balance of military hardware and strategic capabilities.

Additionally, the discussion addressed systemic vulnerabilities in critical IT infrastructure. Modern digital systems, designed for efficiency have become highly interdependent, creating single points of failure that could disrupt essential services. The overemphasis on cost reduction and short-term economic considerations has undermined resilience, exemplified by failures such as the Amazon Web Services outage impacting government ID systems. This highlights the urgent need for re-evaluating infrastructure design, prioritising redundancy and long-term risk mitigation to prevent cascading failures across society.

In conclusion, the discussion underscored the dual challenges of adapting to rapid technological advances in defence while addressing growing systemic risks in digital infrastructure, both of which have far-reaching implications for national security and societal stability.

MARITIME FORCE AND THE SHIFTING SECURITY ORDER

Deep concerns were raised about the ethical and legal implications of maritime strikes conducted near sovereign coastlines against individuals suspected of criminal activity, questioning whether such actions set a dangerous precedent for extraterritorial use of force.

During the session, it was emphasised that the potential erosion of the rule of law when kinetic measures are justified primarily by national-security rhetoric and highlighted connections between counter-drug operations in Venezuela and shifting regional assistance—including adjustments in support to Colombia—that may further complicate political and security dynamics.

In summary, the session concluded that greater security and stronger scrutiny, together with transparent accountability, are essential foundations for preserving international norms and regional stability.



Photo by Jeffrey Blum
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SYSTEMIC RISKS AND RESILIENCE IN COMPLEX GLOBAL SYSTEMS

Drawing on principles from Charles Perrow's *Normal Accidents*, it was highlighted that the interaction of multiple autonomous systems inherently produces a high likelihood of cascading failures. Modern infrastructures, including critical IT networks and national power grids, are becoming fragile and brittle with minimal elasticity to absorb shocks. Economic incentives further exacerbate vulnerability, as service providers profit from normal operations but do not bear significant losses during systemic failures, leaving end-users exposed.

National-level resilience frameworks are shifting focus from traditional risk and hazard assessment to the evaluation of consequences, recognising that modelling extreme 'black sky' events—such as widespread power outages or satellite network failures—is largely speculative. Indicators of impending systemic crises include the rising frequency of minor accidents, unexpected large-scale events and increasing recovery times. These trends suggest escalating vulnerability and the potential for significant societal disruption if unaddressed.

Amid these concerns, examples such as Chernobyl illustrate the resilience of natural ecosystems when human interference is removed, demonstrating the potential for environmental recovery. The conversation ended with an emphasis on the urgent need for proactive strategies to mitigate systemic fragility and enhance societal and environmental resilience.

GEOPOLITICAL STRATEGY AND SPACE RISK MANAGEMENT

One of the main subjects was China's strategic trajectory, emphasising the continued uncertainty surrounding its long-term objectives. Observers noted that the Western world remains largely unable to anticipate Chinese strategic decisions, highlighting a persistent asymmetry in geopolitical insight and capability.

Attention was also given to space and orbital risk management. The UK and European Union have developed national and regional space strategies, putting the spotlight on security, defence and systematic oversight of space activities. NASA's recent analysis on orbital debris highlights the growing concern over space junk, focusing on the costs and benefits of mitigation, tracking and remediation. While most debris burn up upon atmospheric entry, incidents of material reaching Earth demonstrate the tangible risks posed to infrastructure and public safety.

All in all, the session further emphasised the importance of strategic foresight in both global geopolitics and technological domains. Key takeaways include the need for enhanced understanding of competitor intentions, investment in robust early warning and mitigation systems together with careful evaluation of the cost-benefit balance in addressing emerging risks in space. These insights are critical for shaping national and international resilience strategies in an increasingly complex and ever-evolving world.

SPACE WEATHER, ASTEROID RISKS AND GLOBAL PREPAREDNESS

There are growing risks associated with space weather phenomena and asteroid impacts, which expose critical vulnerabilities in global infrastructure and security. Recent solar flare activity has already demonstrated significant operational challenges; in May of the previous year, more than 5,000 satellites required emergency manoeuvres to avoid damage from a solar eruption—actions that consumed limited on-board fuel reserves and highlighted the fragility of satellite-dependent systems. Historical reference to the 1859 Carrington Event underscored the potential severity of a modern recurrence, given the world’s reliance on GPS, satellite communications and geocoded weaponry.

Discussion extended to the cyclical nature of solar activity, which follows a seven- to nine-year pattern, suggesting the likelihood of further disruptive events in the near future. Concerns were also raised regarding asteroid threats with current assessments indicating a 1.5% chance of a significant impact by 2032—potentially doubling to 3% based on recent projections. Even a modest-sized asteroid could produce catastrophic consequences if it were to strike a populated area, causing widespread destruction and severe atmospheric effects akin to historical volcanic events such as Krakatoa.

Efforts by NASA, China, India, Japan and the ESA to develop asteroid deflection technologies reflect the seriousness with which these risks are viewed at an institutional level. However, the session emphasised the need for coordinated global responses, rather than fragmented, nation-specific strategies. The consensus highlighted that threats from solar activity and space debris transcend national boundaries and require more than international collaboration, proactive planning and sustained investment to safeguard these systems from potentially irreversible disruption.



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MANAGING UNCERTAINTY AND SYSTEMIC COMPLEXITY

Traditional statistical models, which rely heavily on historical data were noted as being insufficient for predicting outcomes within interconnected systems of systems. As modern risk landscapes evolve beyond linear and predictable patterns, the limitations of backward-looking data become more pronounced, reducing the reliability of conventional quantitative approaches.

The conversation highlighted the importance of focusing on consequence management rather than solely on causation analysis. Given that many future disruptions cannot be precisely forecasted or modelled, resilience strategies must prioritise preparedness, adaptability and recovery planning. It was also noted that as systems become more complex and interdependent, the severity and scale of potential failures are likely to increase, making proactive consequence management critical.

In conclusion, the session stressed that a necessary shift in risk governance is crucial—from attempting to quantify uncertainty through outdated models to embracing flexible scenario-based planning that involves the unpredictable nature of modern systemic risks.



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SOCIAL
TRANSFORMATION
AND HUMANITARIAN
CHALLENGES



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HUMANITARIAN STRUGGLES AND POLITICAL DELUSIONS

A rare moment of optimism from Ukraine was highlighted during the session, reflecting on improving local conditions following years of hardship. The return of children from Russian captivity underscored ongoing humanitarian challenges amid persistent regional instability.

Attention then shifted to the broader geopolitical stage with sharp criticism of exaggerated political narratives surrounding the Nobel Peace Prize and U.S. leadership. The conversation pointed out the growing disconnect between political rhetoric and tangible policy, emphasising that economic and personal interests continue to drive global decisions more than principles or diplomacy.

Overall, the conversation concluded with reflections on the deep social and political divisions within the United States, warning that escalating polarisation could soon manifest in open conflict.

EMERGING PANDEMIC RISKS AND GLOBAL HEALTH PREPAREDNESS

Recent discussions highlight a resurgence of zoonotic threats, with H5N1 avian influenza now reportedly reaching regions previously unaffected, including Heard Island and parts of Australia. The virus has already caused significant mortality among seabird, penguin and seal populations, raising concerns about potential spillover to poultry and other livestock. Early detection and containment are critical, as minimal lapses in biosecurity could facilitate rapid transmission.

Ongoing outbreaks of Ebola and Monkeypox in parts of Africa remain active concerns, compounded by reduced global health surveillance capacity. Funding reductions to key international and national public health institutions, including the World Health Organisation (WHO) and UK-based research programmes, have weakened sentinel and rapid response systems, increasing vulnerability to emergent pandemics.

The current landscape underscores the importance of proactive monitoring, investment in disease surveillance, as well as contingency planning for zoonotic and human-transmissible pathogens to mitigate the risk of widespread outbreaks.

POLITICAL TRANSITION AND YOUTH-LED REFORM MOVEMENTS IN NEPAL

Significant political developments in Nepal followed the resignation of former Prime Minister Oli and the formation of an interim government under Sushila Karki ahead of national elections. The transition has reshaped the political landscape with established parties such as the Nepali Congress and the Communist Party facing mounting pressure from newly registered political groups and reformist movements. A major catalyst for this shift was the youth-led protest on September 9, driven largely by Generation Z activists demanding transparency, modernisation and the inclusion of non-partisan leadership in the country's governance.

While the interim government has made strides in placing qualified professionals in technical and administrative roles, its stability remains uncertain due to ongoing legal challenges in the Supreme Court concerning the earlier dissolution of parliament. Questions have also arisen regarding the government's ability to maintain public order and protect infrastructure amid recent unrest.

The youth movement continues to call for technological advancement without censorship and for political independence from entrenched party structures. However, concerns persist about possible external influence and foreign funding shaping these mobilisations. In summary, Nepal stands at a critical juncture, balancing between generational reform and the broader geopolitical interest of Western powers seeking influence in the country's evolving democratic trajectory.

YOUTH ACTIVISM AND THE NEW GLOBAL RESOURCE ECONOMY

The rise of youth-led movements across regions including Bangladesh, Indonesia, Nepal and the United States pointed out their growing influence on political discourse and governance. These movements, driven by frustration with corruption, inequality and stagnation, reflect a broader global shift towards activism and reform in response to entrenched power structures.

In recognition of UN Day, the dialogue highlighted the organisation's eight-decade commitment to peacekeeping, human rights and social welfare through investment in core sectors like infrastructure, healthcare and education. However, it questioned whether global governance remains effective amid mounting geopolitical tensions and societal unrest.

Economic observations pointed to changing investment patterns with major investors redirecting capital from traditional industries such as construction towards sectors focused on sustainability and technological innovation. The slowdown in large-scale development projects was linked to an increasing emphasis on regenerative engineering and nature-positive initiatives aimed at conserving critical resources.

Overall, it is crucial to stress that water scarcity may emerge as the most pressing global challenge in the coming decades, underscoring the need for sustainable management and international cooperation to prevent potential conflicts—often referred to as the 'war of water.'

CONCLUDING REMARKS

STRENGTHENING COLLECTIVE RESILIENCE AND GLOBAL ENGAGEMENT

The evolving humanitarian and strategic risk landscape underscores the critical importance of collaboration, adaptability and foresight in addressing complex global challenges.

The International Federation of the Red Cross's planned workforce reduction exemplifies the financial strain confronting humanitarian organisations at a time when demand for assistance continues to grow. These constraints highlight the urgency of strategic resource allocation and the development of innovative funding models to sustain vital operations.

Meanwhile, the ISRM's Global Crisis Watch initiative continues to advance global risk intelligence, with its expansion towards monthly worldwide dissemination marking a significant step in enhancing situational awareness and informed decision-making across sectors. Moreover, the Women in Strategic Risk chapter demonstrates the value of inclusive leadership, diversity and shared learning in strengthening resilience within the professional community.

Ultimately, the collective progress reflected in these efforts reinforces the need to sustain a culture of global connectivity and mutual support—ensuring that both individuals and institutions remain equipped to navigate uncertainty with integrity and resilience.



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