



INSIGHT · DISCOURSE · ACTION

CDRC *Digest*

April 2025, Vol. 9 NO. 3

Content

Page 1

The 2025 Raisina Dialogue: Navigating Multipolarity and Mediation in a Fragmented World

The Raisina Dialogue 2025: Navigating a Fracturing Global Order



<https://www.orfonline.org/>

CDRC is a non-profit, independent Ethiopia-based policy institute engaged in research and analysis. The Centre looks at opportunities and key challenges in the Horn of Africa, and focuses on policy ideas on development, sustainable peace and security.

The CDRC Digest is the Centre's publication which endeavors to provide an African perspective on political, economic and social developments as well as mechanisms of sustaining peace and security in the Horn of Africa, the African continent and beyond. The publication is based on dialogue, rigorous research and analysis.

A publication of the Centre for Dialogue, Research and Cooperation (CDRC), in partnership with the Royal Norwegian Embassy in Ethiopia.

CDRC Digest Team:

Abdeta Dribssa Beyene, Ph.D (Executive Director)
Amb. Kasahun Dender (Deputy Executive Director)
Wegene Mengistu (Senior Researcher)
Yidnekachew Mitku Ph.D (Senior researcher)

Centre for Dialogue, Research and Cooperation
Ethio-China Friendship Avenue
Medina Tower 5th floor
Tel: +251 11 470 0370/73
Email: info@cdrcehiopia.com
www.cdrcehiopia.com

The 2025 Raisina Dialogue: Navigating Multipolarity and Mediation in a Fragmented World

The Raisina Dialogue 2025: Navigating a Fracturing Global Order

The Raisina Dialogue, held in March 2025 in New Delhi under the theme Kalachakra—People, Peace, Planet, reaffirmed its status as one of the world’s premier platforms for high-level dialogue on geopolitics, leadership, and multilateral governance amid growing global instability. Organized by the Observer Research Foundation (ORF) in strategic partnership with the Government of India, the conference brought together an influential assembly of former heads of state, current foreign ministers, military leaders, scholars, business executives, and civil society representatives—all engaged in addressing the pressing challenge of sustaining international cooperation in an increasingly fragmented world.

While ORF operates as an independent foundation (think tank), its deep collaboration with Indian policymakers ensures that the Dialogue not only reflects but also actively shapes India’s foreign policy priorities. Over the years, the forum has gained remarkable prominence, particularly as traditional multilateral institutions—such as the UN Security Council and WTO—struggle with gridlock, leaving a vacuum for agile, pluralistic platforms like Raisina to foster pragmatic solutions, although some critique the forum to be much more Eurocentric.

This note synthesizes key insights from select sessions, offering a lens into the crisis of the existing world order and the nascent structures that may replace it, or where the existing is heading. Given the Dialogue’s parallel session format, no single observer could capture every discussion, and thus, this analysis does not

claim to be exhaustive. Nevertheless, the debates underscored four critical themes:

1. The Erosion of Collective Security – With great-power rivalries intensifying and regional conflicts multiplying, participants dissected the failure of deterrence frameworks and the risks of ad-hoc alliances replacing rule-based systems.

2. Economic Decoupling and Fragmented Globalization – Sessions on trade, technology, and supply chains revealed a growing divide between competing economic blocs, with nations increasingly forced to choose between resilience and interdependence.

3. The Rise of Minilateralism and the Challenges of War and Peace in Hybrid Warfare – As multilateralism falters, smaller, issue-based coalitions (e.g., the India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor or the Quad) were highlighted as emerging tools of diplomatic adaptation. The War in Europe has become a space for emerging challenges as well as lessons learned.

The Dialogue made clear that the world is not merely experiencing temporary turbulence but rather a fundamental reordering—one where forums like Raisina may well become the incubators of new, albeit fractured, ideas for an emerging international system.

A central theme at this year’s Dialogue was the future of negotiation and mediation in addressing global challenges—from armed conflict to climate change, economic inequality, and governance

crises. The Dialogue raised critical questions about the impartiality of mediators in contemporary diplomacy and whether they can genuinely represent the voices of affected societies. Many participants expressed concern that while states continue to lead formal mediation processes, there remains a significant gap in integrating the perspectives of victims and marginalized communities. This disconnect undermines the legitimacy and long-term sustainability of peace and development outcomes.

Speakers at Raisina emphasized the need for inclusive mechanisms that incorporate grassroots voices, particularly in conflict-affected societies. Processes that fail to engage with ordinary citizens—not just elites—often result in agreements that lack broad societal acceptance. Questions were raised about how victims and local communities can be meaningfully heard, especially in transitional justice processes and post-conflict reconstruction efforts. Ensuring these voices are reflected not only strengthens the moral authority of peacebuilding initiatives but also enhances the likelihood of durable reconciliation and social cohesion.

Furthermore, the Dialogue highlighted the growing recognition that economic interests are inseparable from political and social negotiations. Injustice, inequality, and exclusion are often root causes of instability. Therefore, any attempt to mediate or negotiate peace must address the economic grievances of communities, including access to resources, employment, infrastructure, and services. Economic justice must be central—not peripheral—to discussions on global order and governance.

This year's Dialogue also unfolded against the backdrop of a world increasingly fractured by violence, nationalism, and geopolitical rivalry.

Many participants noted the paradox that those who were once the architects of the international order are now among its main challengers. The post-World War II rules-based system is eroding, with power becoming more dispersed and unpredictable. Wars that were once seen as aberrations now appear to be reshaping the very architecture of international relations. The foundational principles of peace, dialogue, and law are under assault, prompting a reevaluation of what constitutes legitimacy in global governance.

In this context, middle powers have begun to assert themselves more forcefully. Countries such as India, Brazil, South Africa, Indonesia, the UAE, and Turkey are no longer passive participants but are actively shaping debates about the future of the international order. While these states advocate for preserving the rules-based system, they are also frustrated by the inconsistencies and double standards of larger powers, whose actions often contradict the very norms they helped establish.

As a result, middle powers are adopting harder, more independent stances in multilateral negotiations, pushing for reforms that reflect the realities of a more multipolar world.

In sum, the 2025 Raisina Dialogue offered a sobering yet constructive space for reflection on the future of global mediation, accountability, and cooperation. The discussions made clear that resolving today's most pressing challenges requires not only renewed diplomatic engagement but also a fundamental reimagining of how international systems function, who they serve, and how legitimacy is defined. Only by broadening participation, integrating economic justice, and challenging outdated power hierarchies can the international community begin to rebuild a global order that is more equitable, inclusive, and resilient.

Policymakers' Evolving Perceptions of Globalization

In today's era of geopolitical fragmentation, globalization is no longer perceived as an inevitable or universally beneficial force. Instead, it is increasingly seen as a double-edged sword that must be managed strategically. Policymakers now approach globalization through three interrelated lenses. First, there is a clear reassessment of the balance between risk and reward. The war in Ukraine, intensifying U.S.-China decoupling, and recent supply chain disruptions have revealed the vulnerabilities of hyper-globalized economic systems. As a result, leaders are shifting their focus from maximizing efficiency to building resilience. Concepts like "friend-shoring," reshoring, and domestic industrial policy are gaining traction as states seek greater control over critical supply chains.

Second, the traditional boundary between economic policy and national security is dissolving. Trade and investment decisions are increasingly shaped by security considerations, as evidenced by semiconductor export bans and restrictions on critical minerals. The West's "de-risking" agenda reflects this shift, embedding national security concerns in development and trade strategies. Finally, globalization itself is becoming more fragmented. Rather than functioning as a unified system, it is splintering into competing blocs—such as the U.S.-EU alliance, the China-Russia axis, and a cohort of Global South "swing states." In this context, policymakers are asking a new set of questions: Which globalization? On whose terms?

How Geopolitical Tensions Are Reshaping Economic Strategies

The current geopolitical landscape is fundamentally transforming fiscal, monetary, trade, and investment strategies across the

globe. On the fiscal and monetary front, defense budgets are rising sharply. NATO countries are aiming to meet the 2% GDP defense spending target, and countries like Japan and India are ramping up their military expenditures in response to perceived regional threats. These shifts divert public resources away from social spending, raising concerns about long-term development priorities. Simultaneously, there is a marked revival of industrial policy, with major economies deploying subsidies to promote strategic sectors. The U.S. CHIPS Act and the EU Green Deal are emblematic of this trend, though they risk triggering global subsidy wars.

Monetary policy is also fragmenting. Financial sanctions, particularly the freezing of Russia's foreign exchange reserves, have accelerated the push for moving away from the dollar. BRICS countries actively explore additional payment systems to reduce reliance on the U.S. dollar, reflecting a deeper reconfiguration of the global monetary order. In the domain of trade and investment, the era of "slowbalization" is well underway. The World Trade Organization forecasts a meager 1.7% growth in global trade for 2024, and regional trade agreements such as the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework (IPEF) and the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) are supplanting multilateral mechanisms.

Technology and data are now battlegrounds for sovereignty and strategic control. Export restrictions on advanced technologies—including artificial intelligence, quantum computing, and rare earths—are leading to the creation of "tech iron curtains" between rival blocs. Investment flows are increasingly scrutinized through a national security lens, with mechanisms like the EU's Foreign Direct Investment Screening Regulation imposing tighter controls on cross-border capital.

How Developing Nations Can Navigate Uncertainty

Developing nations must adopt multi-layered strategies to navigate the growing complexity of the global environment. In the short term, crisis resilience is paramount. Many countries are enhancing their commodity buffers—such as India’s wheat reserves—to cushion against price shocks and supply disruptions. Regional financial mechanisms like the Chiang Mai Initiative are being leveraged to reduce dependency on the U.S. dollar through local currency swap lines.

Over the medium term, structural adaptation is key. Countries like Vietnam and Mexico are already capitalizing on their geopolitical neutrality to attract investment through the "China+1" supply chain diversification strategy. Meanwhile, calls are growing for reforming international debt frameworks. Coalitions of developing nations are advocating for a more inclusive and effective multilateral debt relief process, with the G20’s Common Framework under particular scrutiny for reform.

In the long term, institutional leverage will define the strategic capacity of the Global South. South-South blocs such as BRICS+, ASEAN, and the African Union are increasingly being positioned as platforms for collective bargaining in trade negotiations and multilateral forums. There is also a strong push for climate finance bargaining, including the demand for debt pauses or relief tied to achieving Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly for climate-vulnerable nations.

Redefining Global Governance: A Roadmap for the Global South

The Global South now has a critical opportunity to redefine its role in global governance. Within the G20, there is potential to move beyond

symbolic participation toward real influence. Countries like India, Brazil, and South Africa could lead the formation of a "Development Bloc" to advocate for structural reforms. Key demands could include tying debt relief to SDG-related investments and pushing for waivers on green technology transfers within trade agreements.

Reforming the Bretton Woods institutions remains a critical priority. The current distribution of voting power within the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank no longer reflects global economic realities. Together, China and the entire African continent account for only 11% of IMF voting rights, despite representing roughly 40% of global GDP when measured in purchasing power parity.

There is also growing recognition that these institutions must develop new instruments—such as allocating Special Drawing Rights (SDRs) to respond to climate shocks—to better serve the needs of the Global South. However, while such reforms are essential, they are likely to face resistance from countries that risk losing influence and voting power. As a result, underrepresented nations may increasingly pursue the creation of alternative mechanisms—a necessary but challenging path in an already fragmented global order.

Alternative institutions are also rising in prominence. The New Development Bank (NDB), spearheaded by BRICS, offers faster lending without the conditionalities imposed by Western-led institutions. Similarly, a BRICS-led digital currency alliance could provide an alternative to SWIFT and help member states bypass sanction-related financial risks. These developments reflect a broader movement toward building parallel institutions that reflect the priorities of emerging economies.

The New Rules of the Game

The post-2020 global landscape requires a shift toward what might be called “Realpolitik Globalization.” For developing nations, this means exploiting great power competition to their advantage—leveraging China, the U.S., and the EU against each other to attract investment and secure favorable terms. Demographic leverage, especially through large youth populations, can also be used as a bargaining chip in shaping global market narratives. Above all, institutionalizing Southern agency—whether through reform of the G20 or the creation of parallel governance structures—is essential to avoid marginalization in a rapidly bifurcating global order.

Those who fail to adapt to these new dynamics risk becoming pawns rather than players in an emerging economic Cold War. Crucial debates remain unresolved: Can the G20 survive as a consensus-driven forum amid intensifying U.S.-China rivalry? Will the rise of cryptocurrencies and the digital yuan undermine the IMF’s monetary dominance? And is “strategic non-alignment” a sustainable long-term posture for mid-sized economies caught between competing blocs? The answers to these questions will shape the trajectory of the Global South in the coming decades.

The Impact of Geopolitical Crises on Development Goals

The contemporary geopolitical environment—shaped by the war in Ukraine, heightened U.S.-China tensions, conflicts in the Middle East, and accelerating climate disasters—has significantly shifted global priorities. In many cases, long-term development objectives have been sidelined in favor of immediate security and economic imperatives. Governments and international financial institutions are

increasingly channeling resources toward defense, strategic competition, and crisis response. As a result, critical development goals in areas such as poverty alleviation, education, and healthcare are being deprioritized and underfunded.

This shift has manifested in several notable ways. First, there has been a reallocation of aid and budgetary resources. Traditional development assistance is being diverted toward military support and economic security initiatives. Western countries, for example, have redirected billions in development funds to support Ukraine’s war effort. At the same time, domestic economic policies now heavily favor investments in strategic sectors, such as semiconductor supply chains, over traditional development programs. According to the OECD, global defense spending has surged by 13% since 2022, even as official development assistance (ODA) has largely stagnated.

Second, many low-income countries are grappling with debt and austerity pressures that have intensified due to rising interest rates, inflation, and global economic instability. Over 60 such countries are now in or approaching debt distress, forcing governments to prioritize debt servicing at the expense of critical social investments. In numerous cases, more national funds are allocated to creditors than to healthcare, education, or infrastructure—exacerbating inequality and halting progress on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Third, the fragmentation of global cooperation is eroding the consensus and collective action necessary for effective development financing. Multilateral institutions such as the United Nations are being weakened, WTO mechanisms are under strain, and competing geopolitical blocs are undermining coordinated efforts. Rather than aligning around a shared humanitarian vision, major powers like the U.S., China, and the EU are pursuing rival economic and security agendas,

leaving many developing nations stranded in a fractured international system.

Ring-Fencing Development Financing Amid Security-First Policies

To prevent development objectives from being permanently overshadowed by security imperatives, governments and international institutions must adopt innovative strategies that protect development financing and integrate it within broader crisis response frameworks. One such strategy is the creation of sovereign development funds. These would require governments to allocate a fixed percentage—say, 5 to 10 percent—of defense or crisis-response budgets to parallel development efforts, such as food security programs or renewable energy initiatives. This approach would help ensure that increases in security spending do not cannibalize essential investments in human development.

Blended finance models offer another solution. Multilateral development banks, such as the World Bank and the African Development Bank, should work more closely with private investors to co-finance resilient infrastructure and social programs. These partnerships can help fill funding gaps left by declining public budgets. Additionally, debt-for-development swaps should be expanded as a tool for restructuring unsustainable debt. Agreements that redirect debt payments toward local SDG-aligned projects, like Ghana's 2023 debt deal that freed up resources for education, provide a promising model. A critical conceptual shift is also needed—one that redefines development as a form of preventive security. This involves adopting frameworks that explicitly link investment in development to conflict prevention and stability. For example, climate adaptation projects that reduce water scarcity or mitigate displacement can directly lower the risk

of conflict. In this light, development is not ancillary to security—it is foundational to it.

Leadership for a Development-Centered Crisis Response

Addressing these challenges will require coordinated action from a diverse coalition of stakeholders committed to recentering development in global policy. The Global South, particularly through platforms like the G77 and the African Union, can play a leading role. Countries such as India, Brazil, and South Africa are well-positioned to champion a "Development First" agenda in multilateral forums, advocating for crisis responses that also finance SDG progress. Middle powers, including nations like the United Arab Emirates and Norway, also have a critical role to play. With significant sovereign wealth funds at their disposal, they are uniquely positioned to bridge the divide between humanitarian aid and security financing, channeling capital into sustainable development initiatives. At the institutional level, reforming the UN development system to give greater voice and representation to the Global South is essential to ensuring that SDGs remain central to global crisis management.

Philanthropic foundations, including the Gates Foundation and Open Society Foundations, can complement state efforts by providing targeted funding in areas often neglected by public budgets—such as pandemic preparedness, vaccine equity, and education. These actors can help buffer development priorities from the shocks of geopolitical volatility.

Sectors Most at Risk from Deprioritization

Several sectors are particularly vulnerable to being deprioritized in the current security-dominated policy environment. Climate adaptation is one such area. Despite its critical importance, it remains underfunded and is now

competing with energy security priorities. The resurgence of fossil fuel subsidies, which reached \$1.3 trillion globally in 2023, underscores the scale of the challenge.

Public health is another sector at risk. Following the initial surge in pandemic-related funding, global health budgets have declined, leaving vital programs—such as vaccine distribution and zoonotic disease surveillance—dangerously under-resourced. Similarly, education faces a significant funding gap. With a \$200 billion annual shortfall in financing for SDG4, and with millions of children displaced by conflict in places like Ukraine and Afghanistan, the prospects for universal education are increasingly bleak.

Food systems are also under strain. Fertilizer shortages and export bans—such as those imposed by India and Russia—are threatening smallholder farmers and exacerbating hunger in already vulnerable regions. Meanwhile, digital inclusion efforts are faltering. The rapid advancement of technologies such as AI and 5G is widening global disparities, as investment flows remain concentrated in strategic or allied countries, bypassing the world's poorest populations.

A Fork in the Road

The securitization of global policy risks creating a class of “development orphans”—nations and communities left behind in the new age of geopolitical competition. To avoid this outcome, the world must embrace a “Dual Mandate” approach, in which crisis responses are deliberately designed to support development goals. Ukraine’s reconstruction, for instance, could be tied to the EU Green Deal, ensuring that immediate post-war recovery also lays the groundwork for long-term sustainability.

Leadership must come from actors who understand that human security and sustainable development are not mutually exclusive but fundamentally interdependent. Without this recognition, the SDGs will become collateral damage in an age marked by perpetual crisis.

The road ahead hinges on difficult but essential questions. Should BRICS+ establish an independent development fund to reduce dependence on Western-led institutions? Can climate reparations be structured as a form of security insurance, providing vulnerable nations with predictable support for climate-induced instability? And will AI-driven technological leapfrogging offer a viable substitute for traditional development aid—or will it instead exacerbate global inequalities? The choices made now will determine whether the world moves toward a future of inclusive growth or deeper fragmentation. The urgency to act has never been greater.

Reflections on the Changing Global Reality and the Future of Peacemaking

In an extensive and thought-provoking conversation on the evolving global order and the future of peacemaking, a series of presentations brought to light critical and often unsettling dynamics shaping international affairs. The discussion reflected the growing complexity of global politics, the shifting roles of different categories of states, and the structural weaknesses of current multilateral mechanisms. Below is a synthesis of key insights drawn from the conversation.

One of the central observations was the widening space being created for middle powers amidst the intensifying rivalry between major global powers. While the world’s most powerful states are increasingly consumed by their strategic confrontations—particularly the United States,

China, and (Russia?)—middle powers are stepping in to fill the vacuum. Many of these states are seizing the opportunity to extract political and economic advantages from both sides while simultaneously increasing their military spending to bolster their strategic autonomy. This phenomenon reflects a recalibration of power relations, where influence is no longer the exclusive domain of the great powers but is also being actively pursued by assertive, capable middle powers.

However, the limitations of these middle powers are also becoming evident, particularly in high-stakes conflicts such as the war in Ukraine. Despite their growing assertiveness, these states find themselves excluded from critical diplomatic processes—partly because, in some cases, there are no genuine negotiation tables at all. The Ukraine conflict has become a geopolitical proxy war rather than a peace process, and leaders like Donald Trump have floated unilateral "solutions" that bypass the norms of multilateral diplomacy. Middle powers, many of whom have taken clear positions in the conflict, are further constrained in their ability to act as neutral facilitators. Their credibility as mediators is compromised by their own geopolitical alignments.

The conversation reflected on a time—albeit brief—in the post-Cold War period when the unipolar moment allowed for some successful mediation efforts. During that era, a dominant great power had both the means and the legitimacy to enforce norms and intervene in conflicts, often with international backing. Today, the resurgence of great power rivalry has thrown the global order into disarray. States are increasingly faced with a choice: either invest in maintaining a fragile international order or watch it disintegrate into spheres of influence and transactional diplomacy. This reality raises uncomfortable questions—such as the

hypothetical annexation of Greenland by the U.S.—about the limits of the existing security architecture. What would NATO do in such a scenario, given its foundational principle of collective defense?

NATO's core purpose, after all, has always included the use of force or the threat thereof. This raises further complications for the future of peacekeeping, which traditionally relied on the impartiality of the intervening force to maintain peace. With the erosion of consensus in international institutions, we now face the prospect of peacekeeping operations being entangled in partisan interests. What happens when we are left not with neutral peacekeeping but with partial deals backed by supposedly impartial forces? Can we clearly distinguish between peacekeepers, peace enforcers, and political stakeholders in today's context? Moreover, are middle powers in a position to impose peace settlements on others, as some Cold War-era states once did, or have the conditions for such imposition disappeared altogether?

The need for an agreed peace is urgent, but also complicated. In conflicts like Ukraine, both sides publicly express a desire for peace, but their visions of peace are incompatible. The recognition that both parties want peace may offer a useful entry point, yet it is only the beginning. The real challenge lies in defining the kind of peace that is feasible and acceptable to all actors involved. Is it a cold peace, an armistice, or a political settlement based on territorial compromise? Without a credible mechanism to negotiate and enforce such agreements, the rhetoric of peace becomes little more than a political posture.

Developments in Mali and the greater West African States offer a sobering reminder of the limits of traditional peacekeeping in today's fractured global environment. The Malian government's decision to expel UN peacekeepers was not just a rebuke of international intervention

but a signal that the political will for comprehensive peace is absent. Although rebel activity continues to destabilize the country, for the government, maintaining the status quo appears more politically advantageous than negotiating a difficult peace. What about ECOWAS members whose governments are overthrown through instrumentalizing popular grievances and the inability of the AU to agree on the way forward of the previous rules, such as the unconstitutional change of government, which are unfit for the purpose? This raises a strategic question: can the international community make the status quo more costly than peace, thereby incentivizing political compromise? Regional actors like Algeria, which have adopted distinct diplomatic strategies, may hold a part of the answer.

The growing complexity of crises in the Sahel—including in Burkina Faso and Niger—further demonstrates how regional dynamics, foreign interference, and internal political fragmentation, with internal grievances on existing leaders, converge to create intractable situations. The Wagner Group's involvement in these areas is often cited as a major factor, yet the real drivers of conflict lie in the decisions of national armies, political elites, and the failure of institutions. While ECOWAS, the African Union, and the United Nations remain engaged, they often lack the decisiveness and internal coherence to shift the course of events. This underlines the need for innovative solutions that transcend conventional peacebuilding templates and are rooted in local realities.

In these Sahelian contexts, existing institutions are widely distrusted, leaving a vacuum that the UN has traditionally filled. Yet the current toxic polarization within the United Nations Security Council has rendered the institution nearly impotent. Ironically, one of the permanent members—who should safeguard the rules-

based order—is seen by many as the initial aggressor in several of today's crises. This has shattered confidence in the impartiality and credibility of the system, pushing the idea of a rules-based order to the margins of serious geopolitical discourse. Increasingly, it is being consigned to the museum of international law—honored in principle but ignored in practice.

The final question posed in the discussion is perhaps the most fundamental and urgent of our time: Can we reimagine a global order that places non-aggression at its core and firmly rejects the practice of altering borders by force? This is not simply a moral question, but a strategic one, touching on the very foundations of international stability. History is replete with examples—past and present—of wars waged under the pretext of revisionism, often with catastrophic consequences. A future order must be built on the premise that state sovereignty is inviolable and that disputes, however entrenched, must be addressed through dialogue, not through tanks and missiles.

To construct such a normative architecture, one must go beyond abstract ideals and embed non-aggression, mutual respect, and peaceful coexistence into enforceable international norms. This would require a revitalization of existing institutions like the United Nations, particularly the Security Council, whose paralysis in the face of great power conflicts has weakened faith in multilateralism. It would also demand the empowerment of regional organizations, greater accountability mechanisms for violations of international law, and a more inclusive rule-making process that reflects contemporary global realities—not just the post-World War II balance of power.

But what instruments exist to compel or persuade those who benefit from the current status quo? The tools are imperfect, but not absent. Targeted economic sanctions, international legal

proceedings, reputational costs through public diplomacy, and collective diplomatic isolation remain viable levers. At the same time, meaningful negotiations—grounded in interests, not illusions—must be offered as alternatives to coercion. States will only buy into a revised global order if it provides security, economic benefit, and recognition—particularly for rising powers whose ambitions are often met with suspicion rather than engagement.

Ultimately, the answer to these questions will shape not only the outcome of current flashpoints—from Ukraine to Gaza to the South China Sea—but also the viability of international cooperation in the decades to come. If the global community fails to elevate principle above expedience, the result will be an increasingly fragmented, insecure, and unstable world.

Now is the time to invest in a vision where the legitimacy of state behavior is no longer judged solely by might or strategic value, but by a renewed global commitment to peaceful norms, just settlements, and genuine multilateralism. This requires moral clarity, institutional courage, and political will. It is not naïve to hope for such a future—it is imperative.

Reaffirming the Norms: Borders, Order, and the Struggle for a Just Global System

At the heart of what binds the global community is a fundamental norm: the sanctity and inviolability of internationally recognized borders. This principle, born out of the horrors of past world wars and colonial expansions, was designed to prevent future territorial ambitions from escalating into violent conflict. In today's turbulent international climate, it is more important than ever to reaffirm this core value. Expansionist rhetoric, language, and territorial claims—whether aimed at Greenland, Canada, Panama, or elsewhere—must not be normalized.

It kicks states into survival mode and destabilizes them. Such discourse, even if presented hypothetically or strategically, undermines the very fabric of international peace and stability. If allowed to fester, it sets dangerous precedents and encourages others to follow suit, destabilizing fragile regions and disrupting global order.

While the current international system appears to be in critical condition—some might say in the geopolitical emergency room—it is important to emphasize that it has not yet died. The global order, as constructed in the aftermath of World War II, still provides the foundation for diplomacy, trade, and multilateralism. However, it is not without flaws.

The founding architects of this order failed to create mechanisms that could apply the rules uniformly, particularly when it comes to regulating the excessive use of force. The result has been a system where some states wield influence without being held accountable, thus eroding trust in the system's integrity.

In this context, the concept of non-alignment becomes more ambiguous and even problematic. Against what, exactly, are countries non-aligned? The so-called "rules-based order" was crafted by a small group of powerful nations, not through an inclusive global consensus. This has left many in the Global South, including much of Africa, questioning whether the system truly offers a level playing field. One must resist the temptation to equate the governance of global politics with the functioning of international sports organizations. Unlike the International Cricket Council, which sets rules for a fair game among teams, the global order has been skewed by asymmetries of power, influence, and enforcement. Justice in international affairs has often been selective, favoring those who write the rules and punishing those who defy them without the backing of power.

This imbalance reveals the transitional nature of the current international system. If peace is to be preserved, then paradoxically, states must be prepared to defend it—not through militarization for its own sake, but through investments in collective security, rule enforcement, and diplomacy. The United States, which for decades played the role of global hegemon and enforcer of the post-1945 order, is now grappling with the cost and inefficiency of maintaining that role. Its foreign policy oscillations—between interventionist liberalism and isolationist populism—reveal a deeper struggle over whether and how to uphold a global order it once championed. What one is witnessing, across spectrums, is not merely a reflection of Trump-era politics, but a broader and enduring trend. The question now confronting the U.S. is not whether it will step back from global leadership, but how it can do so without being dethroned from the helm.

This shifting landscape calls into question whether rising powers like China and regional actors such as Iran can operate within the established rules-based order. There is an urgent need to reimagine a system that accommodates new power realities without abandoning the core norms that underpin global stability. The challenge is that existing global structures have distributed power through visible veto points, denying a role to new entrants, and making reforms untenable, forcing those on the side to look for parallel options. However, one must also confront the uncomfortable truth that it is not just rogue states or non-state actors that violate international norms—it is often the member states themselves, including those who helped shape the system. These violations, transgressions, and acts of impunity reveal a major contradiction: those responsible for upholding the rules are frequently the first to break them. This undermines credibility and

leaves smaller, less powerful countries—particularly in Africa—in a deeply vulnerable position.

For African nations, the call is simple yet profound: global players must respect the rules they claim to uphold. Too often, geopolitical interests have led to those rules being conveniently discarded. Selective application of international law, military interventions without mandates, and proxy conflicts waged in the name of regional stability have done untold damage to the continent. African states cannot afford to remain passive observers in this unfolding drama. They must demand not just inclusion but respect for the principles of sovereignty, territorial integrity, and non-aggression.

One promising avenue for pursuing alternative solutions lies in leveraging forums like the Club de Madrid, which brings together former heads of state and government to foster democratic dialogue and conflict resolution. These platforms can serve as neutral spaces to develop bold new ideas for peacemaking, grounded in inclusivity and mutual respect. Resolving regional problems through such innovative mechanisms may offer more realistic prospects for peace than relying solely on dysfunctional global institutions.

Finally, the ongoing conflict between Russia and Ukraine, and the quiet but consequential communications between figures like Donald Trump and Vladimir Putin, underscore the critical question of compromise. Who will make the first move? Who is prepared to step back, swallow political pride, and pursue a sustainable peace? As with many global crises today, the answers remain elusive. But what is clear is this: unless there is a reinvestment in norms, a restructuring of power dynamics, and a reassertion of shared responsibility, the global order may not survive its next emergency.

The Transatlantic Relations and Europe

At the recent Munich Security Conference, Senator J.D. Vance's remarks to the European audience did not sit well with many European leaders and policymakers. His emphasis on a realist approach—advocating for engagement with the world as it is, rather than based on hypothetical "what if" scenarios—clashed with the broader European sentiment, which is largely driven by normative principles and a commitment to a rules-based international order.

During the conference, a Ukrainian official addressed the participants, signaling that Ukraine is prepared to enter into a truce and take initial confidence-building measures based on the outcomes of the Jeddah meeting. However, the official firmly stressed that any peace process must respect Ukraine's territorial integrity, which remains a non-negotiable condition for achieving lasting peace and stability. Acknowledging the complexity of the situation, the official admitted that a comprehensive peace agreement might not be achievable shortly.

Ukraine also expressed concerns regarding potential discussions between President Putin and President Trump. Ukrainian officials hope that any tele-conversation between the two leaders will not come at the expense of Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity. Ukraine remains steadfast in its refusal to accept the occupation of approximately 20% of its territory by Russia, viewing it as an unacceptable violation of international law.

Despite the ongoing war, Ukrainian officials conveyed a sense of strategic control over the situation. They highlighted the active and strong diplomatic engagement underway with European partners, aimed at bolstering support for Ukraine's cause. Ukraine insists that Russia

has not achieved its strategic objectives and continues to advocate for a "just peace"—one that restores its sovereignty and territorial wholeness rather than freezing the conflict. Whether this reflects the reality on the ground or not needs further investigation.

The crisis in Ukraine has also deeply affected neighboring Moldova, a country grappling with the consequences of instability in its region. Moldova is hosting millions of refugees and faces renewed tensions in the breakaway region of Transnistria. Moldovan leaders emphasized that Ukraine's defense is not merely a national endeavor but a defense of all of Europe's security. This solidarity is rooted in tangible realities, not abstract ideals. Moldova stressed the urgent need for upgrading Europe's defense capabilities, advocating for a "peace through strength" approach alongside a bridge-building mentality to reduce tensions. Security guarantees are of paramount importance to Moldova. Its officials argued that sovereignty and territorial integrity must be protected by robust mechanisms because a breach in one region could encourage similar violations elsewhere.

Latvia, for its part, drew historical parallels by recalling its 100-year struggle against occupation, culminating in the regaining of independence in 1990. Latvian representatives warned that abandoning the region would have dire consequences for peace and stability in Europe.

While peace remains the overarching goal, there was a consensus that it is not merely a formal agreement that guarantees it. Instead, true peace must be rooted in respect for sovereignty and the agency of the nations involved. Participants stressed that no country should dictate the fate of another sovereign nation, and Ukraine's voice must remain central to any peace process, the reality, however, might be a different story.

Hungary presented a distinct perspective,

diverging from the liberal mainstream approach. Hungary's leadership emphasized a "No War, No Gender, No Migration" policy, positioning itself as a vocal advocate for an immediate negotiated peace. Hungarian officials argued that Ukraine and Russia should engage directly in negotiations and that international efforts should prioritize facilitating peace rather than perpetuating war. Hungary refrained from sending arms to Ukraine and highlighted the severe energy challenges exacerbated by the war, including electricity and gas shortages. With 1.3 million displaced individuals within Hungary's borders, Prime Minister Viktor Orbán launched his own peace initiative, advocating for a ceasefire that could have prevented further loss of life and territorial devastation had it been heeded.

Hungary further underscored that Europe has been living under the shadow of instability for too long and that peace in Central Europe is urgently needed. Some participants expressed cautious optimism that former President Trump's peace efforts might eventually bear fruit, while others stressed that hostility between Europe and Russia must be brought to an end to create space for genuine reconciliation.

Concerns were also raised about the current trajectory of U.S. policy, with accusations that the U.S. administration is shifting burdens onto its allies rather than sharing them. Such a trend, participants warned, could severely undermine peace and stability in the region. Additionally, the looming expiration of key nuclear arms control agreements poses a serious threat to global security. Without renewed commitments to arms control, the risk of escalation and miscalculation could increase dramatically.

Finally, there was a renewed call for a "Europeanized" approach to peace. Participants

suggested leveraging France's nuclear deterrence capacity as part of a broader European security framework. However, there was also acknowledgment of the current leadership vacuum within the coalition and the urgent need for both a Plan A and a contingency Plan B. Currently, no viable Plan B exists, which exacerbates the sense of uncertainty. Participants agreed that deterrence, arms control, and a transformation of adversarial relationships are critical to moving forward. Some proposed the concept of a buffer zone as a trust-building measure to bridge the profound deficit of confidence between Russia and the West.

AI and Information Technology

A critical tension facing global diplomacy today is the trade-off between the fear of becoming unpopular and the necessity of making difficult decisions. Often, an unwillingness to say "no" perpetuates a dangerous no-war, no-peace situation, freezing conflicts rather than resolving them. In this volatile environment, the identification of "black swan" scenarios—rare and unpredictable events with major impact—remains a strategic imperative for any serious policy planning exercise.

Technology and innovation, meanwhile, have evolved into a pervasive force—"everything, everywhere, all at once." These developments bring both unprecedented challenges and remarkable opportunities. Yet, the national, regional, and global surge in geopolitical competition has exposed a hard truth: the tools, instruments, and institutions inherited from the post-Cold War era are no longer fit for purpose. The complexity of global challenges leaves many countries struggling to answer the fundamental question: "How does one do it?"

In grappling with this complexity, nations face the daunting task of building resilience across

multiple dimensions—military, economic, technological, and societal. It raises a profound dilemma: can one construct an army and economy resilient to all shocks at once? Technologies, geopolitics, partnerships, and national resilience are now deeply intertwined and must be addressed holistically.

Given this interdependence, there is a pressing need to examine the contours of difficult and disruptive technologies. Are policymakers asking the right questions? Are they framing the challenges and solutions appropriately? Institutional adaptation is urgent, but equally critical is cultivating institutional and intellectual resilience. Bureaucracies must evolve to match the pace of change. As the adage (probably Mike Tyson's) goes, "Everybody has a plan until they get a first-time punch in the face"—a reminder of the dangers of static thinking in a dynamic world.

Cognitive biases also hinder decision-making, and overcoming them requires a paradigm shift in how strategies are formulated and executed. Artificial Intelligence (AI), for instance, is revolutionizing economies, governance, and societies. Policy planners must not only digitize their operations but also democratize AI access, using it as a tool to fight climate change and to govern the "new objects" — technologies and phenomena not fully accounted for in existing frameworks.

Concrete steps are being taken in this direction. A new data center established in Paris, through a partnership with the UAE and other like-minded countries, demonstrates the potential of combining ecosystem development with national strategies. These partnerships are crucial to attracting investment, fostering innovation, and integrating private sector dynamism with scientific advancement.

However, the lack of geopolitical cohesion is forcing some countries to create parallel infrastructures, adopting whole-of-government approaches toughened to meet the challenges of today's environment. There is growing recognition of the need for a national security response that treats technological infrastructure, investment, and innovation ecosystems as integral to strategic resilience.

China's rise, some argued, has presented particular challenges, especially regarding infrastructure projects, private sector dynamics, and citizen engagement. There is an urgent need to protect populations from the vulnerabilities created by AI-generated technologies. Technology is now a tool that determines dominance on battlefields—both physical and digital—shaping pathways of vulnerability and resilience alike.

Meanwhile, the vibrant transatlantic alliance is under strain. Challenges in supply chains, shifts in NATO perspectives, and competition in tech industries are reshaping traditional security and economic alignments. In countries like the UAE, a pragmatic balance is struck by prioritizing national needs while simultaneously fostering innovation ecosystems tailored to specific sectors, such as climate action and technological advancement.

Key motivators such as fighting climate change and integrating innovative mechanisms are driving national policy frameworks. Building a robust talent pool and upscaling it remains essential, along with securing supply chains, developing access to critical minerals, expanding investment pools, and promoting value addition. Through convergent interests and shared priorities, countries can develop more coherent national policy frameworks and deeper engagement mechanisms that are better suited to the demands of a rapidly changing world.

Europe Debates Its Future: Security, Defense, and Strategic Partnerships

1. The Imperative for Increased European Defense Spending

At the heart of Europe's evolving strategic debate is a growing consensus that the United States may be justified in urging Europe to significantly raise its defense spending. For too long, Europe has relied heavily on American military support, creating vulnerabilities that are no longer sustainable given today's geopolitical realities. There is increasing acknowledgment that European nations must assume primary responsibility for their own security architecture. Importantly, investing in defense should not be viewed as appeasement of Washington or specific political figures like former President Trump, but rather as a necessary measure to safeguard Europe's way of life, maintain stability, and uphold the values upon which the European Union was founded.

2. Returning to Economic Fundamentals: Free Trade and Strategic Partnerships

Another key theme that emerged was the need for Europe to revisit the principles that underpinned its postwar success—primarily free trade and economic integration. Several participants stressed that Europe should return to these foundational economic ideals and resist the impulse toward protectionism. Strengthening economic ties with major democratic powers, particularly India, was seen as crucial. By engaging more robustly with India, Europe could enhance its global economic resilience, diversify its partnerships, and mitigate the risks associated with overdependence on any single bloc, whether it be the United States, China, or Russia.

3. Ukraine: Excluded from the Table, or on the Menu?

Concerns were sharply raised regarding the

trajectory of the global diplomatic response to the Ukraine crisis. Luxembourg, in particular, voiced apprehensions that Ukraine is increasingly being sidelined in negotiations about its future. There is a disturbing perception that Ukraine is no longer a full participant at the negotiating table, but rather an object of negotiation itself—"on the menu" rather than at the table. This prompted broader reflections on the international rules-based order, the need for genuine respect for sovereignty, and a critical examination of historical narratives around liberation and invasion. Upholding these principles is essential if Europe wishes to preserve its moral authority and leadership on the world stage.

4. The Call for a Unified European Defense Structure

There was strong agreement on the urgent necessity for the European Union to establish a unified command structure to coordinate its military efforts more effectively. A "coalition of the willing" was proposed to allow for agile, rapid responses to emerging threats. Participants acknowledged that Europe had spent years engaging in rhetorical escalation without sufficiently preparing militarily, leaving it now under serious financial and strategic pressure. The existential threat posed by Russia demands not just rhetorical solidarity but real capabilities. Proposals included the creation of a joint European arms industry to ensure defense production independence. Despite fiscal anxieties, participants were clear: without credible security guarantees, peace and prosperity in Europe cannot be sustained.

5. Europe's Strategic Vulnerabilities and the Reality of Two-Front Challenges

The debate also underscored Europe's inability to effectively address simultaneous challenges: the military threat posed by Russia and the economic pressures stemming from escalating U.S. tariffs. Participants cautioned that Europe must face

reality: investing in security is not about responding to U.S. pressure, but about protecting Europe's fundamental way of life. Europe can no longer afford to underinvest in defense while hoping geopolitical tensions will dissipate. Strengthening resilience on both fronts is now seen as a strategic necessity rather than a choice.

6. Turkey's Complex but Crucial Role in European Security

Turkey's role in Europe's future security architecture was the subject of significant discussion. Opinions diverged: while some participants viewed Turkey skeptically, seeing it as a "Trojan horse" for Russia within NATO, others emphasized Turkey's essential contributions, particularly in managing Russia's behavior in the Black Sea. Turkey's decisive role in securing the Black Sea grain deal and its firm stance against Russian demands were cited as evidence of its indispensable value to European and transatlantic security.

Participants called for greater recognition of Turkey's importance, especially given its military reach in the Black Sea and Baltic regions. Renewed engagement through the OECD and broader acknowledgment of Turkey as a major security actor were proposed. Some also suggested reviving discussions around Turkey's accession to the European Union as a long-term strategy to anchor Ankara firmly within Europe's institutional and strategic framework.

7. Building New Security Alliances and Frameworks

In addition to strengthening ties with Turkey, participants advocated for the creation of broader security alliances involving non-EU countries such as Norway and the United Kingdom. The aim would be to establish a comprehensive security umbrella that promotes mutual protection and prevents conflict among

member states. There was discussion of creating alternative global partnership frameworks that reinforce common interests, uphold shared values, and provide collective security guarantees outside the traditional EU and NATO structures.

Turkey could play a central role in this new architecture, particularly by contributing ground forces. The vision is to ensure peaceful coexistence within NATO, while building new, flexible coalitions capable of addressing emerging threats effectively. A contrasting perspective on Europe emerged during a separate panel discussion, where the emphasis was placed on the "America First" doctrine. This viewpoint underscored the strategic recalibration of the United States, highlighting a shift away from multilateral commitments and a growing expectation that Europe must take greater responsibility for its own security and geopolitical positioning. The message was clear: under the banner of national interest, the U.S. is less inclined to play the traditional role of guarantor for European stability, thereby compelling European nations to rethink their dependencies and assume a more autonomous role in global affairs. In the evolving global order, Europe has long benefited as a geopolitical free rider—a peaceful and prosperous "garden continent" shielded by American security guarantees and largely removed from the harsh realities of global competition. However, that era of relative complacency is over. Europe now faces the imperative to rethink its strategic posture and redefine its role in global security. The emergence of unpredictable leadership in the United States, especially under President Donald Trump, revealed the fragility of transatlantic guarantees and forced European leaders to confront the limits of their dependence. As a result, Europe must now recalibrate its place between the East and the West, balancing autonomy with strategic alignment.

The broader international system is undergoing a moment of disarray. Fragmentation and instability have become defining features of the current global order, standing in sharp contrast to the human instinct for cooperation. What we are witnessing is not a passing crisis but a structural transformation that touches every aspect of global governance—from trade and security to climate and digital regulation. This period of profound change is a wake-up call for all actors, reminding them that the assumptions that shaped post-Cold War internationalism are no longer tenable.

Historically, the world found stability in a posture of modesty and curiosity—a willingness to listen, learn, and compromise. But today, that mindset has been replaced by competition, cynicism, and insecurity. For some, especially in the Global North, this transition is not just uncomfortable but even painful, as it signals the loss of long-held privileges and assumptions about the permanence of Western dominance.

In contrast, the Global South is navigating this moment of transformation with strategic caution. It is not driven by nostalgia or reactive nationalism, nor should its actions be interpreted as such. Rather than romanticizing past struggles or overemphasizing historical grievances, many southern states are seeking to contribute constructively to a multipolar future. However, the internal fragmentation within the Global South—driven by political instability, economic disparity, and regional rivalries—risks undermining its ability to assert new ideas on the global stage.

This tension could derail the South's ambitions unless a new global equilibrium is established—one that includes robust frameworks for arms control, ethical governance of artificial intelligence, and cooperative cybersecurity standards. Looking ahead, the emerging world

order may coalesce around four major powers—the United States, China, India, and Russia. These states are positioned to shape the rules and norms of the future, with Europe potentially joining their ranks if it strengthens its internal cohesion and develops a more assertive and coherent foreign policy.

The Evolving Face of Modern Warfare: Insights from the Raisina Dialogue

The Raisina Dialogue brought into sharp focus one of the most critical security challenges of our era—the rapid transformation of warfare, particularly through the lens of hybrid threats. Distinguished experts from both Western and Global South nations converged to analyze how technological disruption is reshaping conflict dynamics in an increasingly volatile geopolitical landscape.

Technology as the New Battlespace Arbiter

A central consensus emerged: technological superiority has become the decisive factor in modern warfare. From AI-driven surveillance systems to autonomous drone swarms, the digitization of combat has fundamentally altered power calculations between states. However, this revolution presents a double-edged sword. While advanced militaries leverage cutting-edge systems, the proliferation of these technologies has also empowered non-state actors and smaller nations to punch above their weight—as starkly demonstrated in Ukraine's innovative use of commercial drones against Russian armor.

The dialogue highlighted an urgent paradox: as militaries race to modernize, the breakneck pace of technological change creates unprecedented uncertainty. Governments now face the herculean task of continuously upgrading equipment while ensuring their personnel can effectively operate increasingly sophisticated systems. This challenge

is particularly acute for major developing powers like India, which must balance legacy systems with next-generation capabilities across diverse threat scenarios.

The Cognitive Battlespace: Where Wars Are Won and Lost

Beyond hardware, participants emphasized a more profound shift—the migration of conflict into the psychological domain. Traditional kinetic wars, while still relevant, are now perpetually accompanied by information warfare campaigns. The "battle of the mind" has emerged as the new frontline, where narratives are weaponized through social media algorithms and deepfake technologies. India's experience with cross-border misinformation campaigns illustrates how destabilizing this dimension can be, blurring lines between civilian and military spheres.

Success in this environment demands a holistic approach:

1. **Adaptive Training** – Military education must evolve beyond physical drills to include digital literacy and psychological resilience
2. **Integrated Intelligence** – Combining HUMINT networks with AI-powered data analytics to counter next-gen threats
3. **Civil-Military Fusion** – Ukraine's public-private defense partnerships demonstrate how societal mobilization amplifies military capacity

Lessons from the Ukrainian Crucible

Ukraine's asymmetric defense against Russia offered several paradigm-shifting insights:

1. **Drone Warfare Democratization** – Kyiv's ability to mass-produce unmanned systems (reportedly thousands weekly) has rewritten conventional force requirements
2. **Private Sector Mobilization** – The Ukrainian model of tech startups pivoting to

defense applications shows how PPPs can become force multipliers

3. **The Dual-Use Dilemma** – Ukraine's emerging drone expertise raises complex questions: Could post-war Ukraine become Europe's defense innovation hub, or might its technologies proliferate to dangerous actors?

The Hybrid Warfare Imperative

As conventional and unconventional threats converge, militaries must master hybrid tactics—simultaneously countering cyber incursions, economic coercion, and irregular proxies while maintaining traditional deterrence. The Raisina deliberations made clear that future conflicts will be won not by isolated technological edges, but through whole-of-society resilience that blends:

- Advanced weapons platforms with cognitive dominance capabilities
- Military professionalism with civilian expertise mobilization
- Kinetic operations with perpetual information engagement

This multidimensional battlefield demands nothing less than a revolution in military affairs—one that updates Clausewitzian principles for the algorithm age while preserving the timeless importance of trained, adaptable personnel. As the Ukraine war demonstrates, even the most advanced technologies falter without proper organization and human ingenuity behind them. The nations that will thrive in this new era are those that can marry cutting-edge capabilities with institutional agility and societal cohesion.

Reimagining Military Preparedness for the Hybrid Warfare Era: Lessons from Afghanistan and Beyond

The war in Afghanistan serves as a sobering case study in the complexities of hybrid warfare, where conventional military superiority often proves

inadequate against asymmetric threats. The conflict underscored the urgent need for armed forces to develop an intellectual foundation capable of integrating new technologies while maintaining the flexibility to adapt legacy systems. This demands more than incremental upgrades—it requires a fundamental doctrinal overhaul that prioritizes agility, innovation, and multi-domain interoperability.

A critical challenge lies in procurement strategies. Many militaries remain shackled to yesterday's technology, struggling to reconcile decades-long acquisition cycles with the breakneck pace of modern warfare advancements. The question is not merely whether legacy systems can be retrofitted, but whether they can meaningfully contribute in an era where drone swarms, AI-driven targeting, and algorithmic warfare dominate. For instance, how does a traditional kinetic air defense system counter 1.5 million unmanned micro-vehicles (UMVs) executing synchronized suicide missions? Can existing jamming technologies keep pace with autonomous systems that continuously evolve via machine learning? The answer lies not in isolated upgrades but in systemic transformation—embedding modularity into procurement so that platforms can rapidly integrate emerging countermeasures.

The U.S. Procurement Paradox: Legacy Systems vs. Modern Threats

The U.S. defense apparatus, long the global benchmark for military innovation, now faces a critical dilemma: Is its legacy procurement system still fit for purpose? While the Pentagon's recent push for the Defense Offensive and Governmental Expenditures (DOGE) framework aims to streamline acquisitions, bureaucratic inertia and risk-averse contracting often stifle disruptive innovation. Compare this

to Ukraine's improvisational brilliance against Russia—where civilian tech firms rapidly repurposed commercial drones into lethal battlefield tools. If the U.S. were pressed into a high-intensity conflict, could its defense-industrial base pivot with similar speed?

The Ukrainian model offers key insights:

1. **Agile Manufacturing** – Shifting from monolithic defense contractors to decentralized, small-to-medium enterprise (SME) networks capable of rapid prototyping.
2. **Software-Defined Warfare** – Prioritizing open-architecture systems that allow real-time updates, ensuring platforms remain relevant amid evolving threats.
3. **Budget Reallocation** – Moving away from trillion-dollar legacy programs (e.g., manned fighter jets) toward scalable, attritable systems like loitering munitions and electronic warfare pods.

Yet, challenges persist. Retooling factories for drone production might take months, not years, but software integration—particularly for AI-enabled systems—demands a cultural shift in military testing and validation. Moreover, defense budgets must incentivize risk-taking, rewarding iterative failure over the traditional "perfect system" mentality.

A New Doctrine for Algorithmic Battlefields

The future of warfare belongs to those who can outthink and out-adapt their adversaries. This requires:

- **Dynamic Procurement:** Structuring contracts to allow mid-cycle tech insertions, ensuring systems evolve alongside threats.
- **Electronic Warfare (EW) Superiority:** Developing scalable jamming ecosystems capable of disrupting drone swarms without relying solely on costly kinetic interceptors.

- **Public-Private Fusion:** Emulating Ukraine's "startup battlefield" approach, where civilian innovators collaborate directly with military end-users.

The alternative is obsolescence. Militaries that fail to bridge the gap between industrial-age procurement and information-age threats will find themselves outmatched—not by superior firepower, but by superior adaptability. The lesson from Afghanistan and Ukraine is clear: Doctrine must move at the speed of innovation, or defeat will move at the speed of war.

Key Takeaways for Strategic Reform:

1. Hybrid Warfare Demands Hybrid Procurement – Systems must be designed for continuous evolution, not static deployment.
2. Ukraine's Model is a Blueprint, Not an Exception – Decentralized, agile defense production must become the norm.
3. The Mindset is the First Battlefield – Without cultural change in military acquisitions, even the best technology will arrive too late.

Ukraine as Europe's Future Hybrid Warfare Technology Hub

Should the war in Ukraine come to a conclusion, the country is well-positioned to become Europe's foremost hub for hybrid warfare technology. Throughout the conflict, Ukraine has demonstrated remarkable ingenuity in drone warfare, electronic countermeasures, and asymmetric tactics—innovations that have already reshaped modern combat. Unlike conventional defense industries hampered by bureaucratic inertia, Ukraine's wartime environment has fostered a dynamic, startup-like defense ecosystem. Agile private firms, driven by necessity, have been able to rapidly prototype, test, and deploy solutions that outmaneuver more established but slower-moving adversaries.

As Europe faces growing threats from both state and non-state actors, it will increasingly look to Ukraine for cost-effective, battle-tested systems—particularly in domains like unmanned aerial systems, cyber defense, and AI-driven decision-making tools. However, this opportunity also presents a series of critical dilemmas. Will Ukraine's post-war defense sector align with European security priorities, or might its technologies spread to rogue actors in search of battlefield advantage? NATO and the EU must proactively engage Ukraine to ensure that its innovations strengthen collective defense efforts while guarding against destabilizing proliferation.

The Six Pillars of Modern Warfare: Speed as the Ultimate Advantage

In the evolving landscape of 21st-century conflict, speed is no longer an advantage—it is the defining factor of victory. Mastery of six critical domains will determine the winners of future wars:

First, Persistent Surveillance is essential. The ability to maintain continuous, real-time intelligence not only deters aggression but also enables swift, preemptive responses to unfolding threats. Second, Robust Data Sharing between military branches, allied forces, and AI systems ensures decision dominance through rapid situational awareness.

Third, the nature of elite military personnel is changing. Human Capital must now include cyber operatives, drone pilots, and AI specialists, complementing traditional combat expertise. Fourth, Electromagnetic Spectrum Dominance—the capacity to jam, spoof, and control signals—will determine the outcome of engagements long before the first shot is fired.

Fifth, Mass Munition Production has proven decisive. As seen in Ukraine, expendable and scalable weapons like drones have outperformed

rare, high-cost platforms. Finally, Logistical Supremacy, through agile supply chains and technologies such as 3D-printed spare parts, could mean the difference between victory and collapse.

Any nation that fails to keep pace in one or more of these domains risks strategic paralysis—unable to act before adversaries dictate the conditions of conflict.

India–US Partnership: From Defense Trade to Co-Innovation

The United States-India relationship stands out as a dynamic and multifaceted partnership, distinguished by its unique structure featuring regional verticals, investment frameworks, and connectivity initiatives such as the I2U2 Group (India, Israel, UAE, and the United States). This framework emphasizes not only geopolitical cooperation but also economic collaboration, technological innovation, and infrastructure development. The enduring commitment to deepening this partnership highlights the recognition that the evolving global order demands trusted alliances rooted in shared interests and common democratic values.

Modern foreign policy, particularly in the U.S.-India context, increasingly integrates the roles of non-state actors, including NGOs and multinational technology companies. Technology, being both disruptive and transformative, has redefined the boundaries of diplomacy and security. Policymakers now understand that engagement must move beyond traditional state actors to include the private sector and civil society in shaping resilient, forward-looking strategies.

To effectively counter shared global threats, India and the United States must evolve their relationship from a traditional buyer-seller

defense model into a dynamic co-innovation partnership. This transformation begins with joint investment in emerging technologies. Critical sectors such as artificial intelligence, quantum computing, and cybersecurity should be co-developed rather than simply traded.

Equally important is the modernization of defense doctrines. The two nations must move beyond Cold War-era strategies and adapt to the new realities of grey-zone warfare, misinformation campaigns, and the deployment of drone swarms. Moreover, the rise of non-state actors requires the establishment of robust frameworks to attribute proxy attacks and deter them, even while operating under the veil of plausible deniability.

However, the greatest hurdle remains India's slow procurement systems, which clash with Silicon Valley's rapid innovation cycles. Overcoming this requires not only institutional reform but also the adoption of experimental testing pipelines. Soldiers must be able to trial prototypes in real-world exercises, not just in labs. Only then can the India–US partnership become a genuine engine of defense innovation.

The Private Sector's Rising Role: From Suppliers to Warfighters

The battlefield is no longer the exclusive domain of nation-states. The rise of companies like Starlink has shown that private firms can dramatically alter conflict dynamics—sometimes in a matter of hours. By bypassing traditional state control, these companies can provide critical infrastructure and operational support, effectively becoming non-state warfighters.

This new reality brings both opportunities and risks. The diffusion of power means that tech giants—through satellite connectivity, cloud computing, or algorithmic targeting—can now

influence the outcomes of wars. Hybrid warfare's impact is also gendered. For instance, cyberattacks on hospitals and utilities disproportionately affect women, who often bear primary responsibility for household survival during crises. Meanwhile, many countries remain unprepared. Cyber resilience gaps in health care systems, maternity wards, and emergency services leave vulnerable populations exposed. As private firms become central to national defense, the need for robust public-private coordination grows ever more urgent.

Hyperwar: When Technology Outpaces Governance

Modern warfare is unfolding at "hyperwar" speed, where decisions must be made in seconds, not weeks. Technologies like AI-enabled drones, deepfake propaganda, and quantum hacking evolve far faster than national security structures can respond. Traditional governance mechanisms—such as quarterly meetings of security councils—are ill-equipped for this velocity. The result is a growing strategic vulnerability.

Addressing this requires radical institutional agility. Governments must embed "tech scouts" within private R&D labs to anticipate and adapt to innovations in real time. Military structures must integrate capabilities across multiple domains—cyber, space, land, air, and sea—through unified commands. Just as importantly, borderless coalitions of like-minded democracies must pool technological, financial, and human resources to counter the centralized advantages enjoyed by authoritarian regimes.

Democracy vs. Autocracy: The Innovation Arms Race

The pressing question is whether democratic systems can compete with the centralized,

militarized technology sectors of autocratic rivals like China and Russia. The answer is yes—but only if democracies reform at the speed of war.

This means shortening procurement timelines by embracing battlefield testing, as seen in Ukraine. It also means elevating private companies from the role of suppliers to co-creators of military doctrine. Democracies must also prepare for what could be described as Drone Armageddon—by stockpiling autonomous systems and fortifying critical infrastructure against them.

Failure to act risks defeat without a single kinetic engagement. Democracies could be outmaneuvered in cyberspace, overwhelmed by drone swarms, and psychologically destabilized through cognitive warfare. The future will belong to those who can innovate, adapt, and deploy at the speed required by modern conflict.

Key Reforms for Survival

Three reforms are indispensable if democracies are to thrive in the era of hybrid and hyperwarfare:

1. **Make Innovation Institutional** – Military academies and war colleges must embrace Silicon Valley-style iterative thinking and embed rapid prototyping into their curricula.
2. **Gender-Aware Cyber Defense** – National cyber strategies must include protections for services and systems that are vital to women's security, especially in fragile or wartime contexts.
3. **Democracies Must Collaborate or Collapse** – From intelligence sharing and joint tech development to harmonized defense production lines, survival depends on solidarity among democratic nations.

Conclusion

The Raisina Dialogue covered a wide array of critical global issues, underscoring the complexity and interconnectedness of today's international system. One of the prominent themes was the evolving role of values in global governance—

particularly the contestation of liberal democratic principles in cyberspace. Discussions explored how American values are defended online, raising questions about the effectiveness of fact-checking, the spread of misinformation, partisan bias, and how digital ecosystems vary across different markets. In this context, the broader concern was not just about regulating content, but about who sets the standards and whose values ultimately shape global discourse.

Another key topic was the expanding role of the private sector in domains traditionally dominated by the state—not only in technological innovation but also in matters of national security. This includes the privatization of space exploration and the emergence of "astro-politics," where competition over satellite technology, orbital infrastructure, and the potential weaponization of space is becoming a defining element of great power rivalry. The question was raised: what happens when one is not on the 'right side' of weaponized technologies? From drones to AI to space-based assets, the imbalance in technological power may significantly alter strategic stability.

Data governance emerged as a central concern, particularly the issue of trust in a fragmented global digital environment. As data becomes the new geopolitical currency, states are increasingly asserting control over its flow and storage. The conversation turned to the existential question of who should be trusted with sensitive data in a globalized world. This included debate on the role of governments versus corporations, national security interests versus privacy rights, and the balance between sovereignty and interoperability.

Trade, infrastructure, and industrial strategy also took center stage. The political and strategic importance of shipbuilding industries in China and South Korea, as well as the

ownership and control of port infrastructure and global logistics networks, was examined. These developments have direct implications for global trade routes and strategic chokepoints, prompting calls for the West to rethink its approach. As manufacturing and control of critical infrastructure shift eastward, some participants argued that what remains for the West is its technological edge—a diminishing advantage if not actively preserved and strengthened.

The conversations also addressed structural shifts in the global economy. Hyper-globalization is being re-evaluated in light of rising trade-tariff barriers, geopolitical tensions, and the vulnerabilities exposed by global supply chain disruptions. Concepts such as "de-risking" and "decoupling" are no longer theoretical but are actively shaping corporate and government strategies. Alongside this, concerns about the independence of monetary institutions like the U.S. Federal Reserve, and the increasingly political role of economic advisors, reveal the blurred lines between economic and political decision-making.

The geopolitical landscape was framed by the war in Ukraine, described as the tragic reemergence of large-scale conflict in Europe. The war's economic ramifications are far-reaching—global growth is stagnating, inflation is high, and food and energy security are at risk. Meanwhile, technological advancements such as quantum computing hint at a future of production and warfare that could again redefine the balance of power.

A recurring theme was the rising prominence of the Global South, which is no longer a passive recipient of global dynamics but an active player. The concept of "Made in Africa" was discussed not only in economic terms but also in relation to the continent's changing diplomatic role. African states are increasingly asserting themselves as

mediators in conflict resolution, though the practice of mediation itself is evolving. The commodification of peace efforts and the securitization of interests have complicated the global crisis landscape, raising difficult questions about neutrality, legitimacy, and the genuine pursuit of resolution.

In sum, the Raisina Dialogue was dense with

insight and significance without overlooking the fact that it has no doubt its own ideological biases. Each topic—though complex in its own right—was interconnected with broader shifts in global politics, economics, technology, and security. The packed nature of the discussions reflects the urgency with which the world must grapple with these transformative challenges, lest it be overtaken by them.