



ROYAL DANISH DEFENCE COLLEGE

**Post Conference Report**  
NDU-RDDC Roundtable:

# **FUTURE TRENDS OF CONFLICT AND PEACE:**

NAVIGATING STRATEGIC THREATS AND RISKS  
IN CHANGING GLOBAL POWER DYNAMICS

24-25 June 2024, Copenhagen, Denmark



Jointly Organised by  
**National Defence University & Royal Danish Defence College**

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## Introduction

International affairs are changing. New power centers are developing, while old relationships wither and new ones appear. This is happening in the realms of geopolitics, economics and diplomacy forcing analysts, researchers and decision makers to revise their analysis, revisit assumptions and reflect upon their perspectives. Several scholars argue that the world order finds itself in an age of uncertainty as increasing levels of great power competition and shifts in power risk an increased level of global fragmentation and a widening gap between states, as well as increased risks of confusion, miscommunication and misunderstandings among states.

As such, it is important for all states to reflect upon and discuss possible future changes in global politics in order to make necessary preparations. There are a number of inherent difficulties in trying to predict the future. The art of strategic foresight as a way of envisioning future scenarios or trends (and assessing the implications) is often criticized as being vague and ambiguous, if not simply outright speculation or “crystal ball science”. However, as this post-conference report reflects, the use of such structured knowledge practices enables us to think about the future in a scientific way. In this regard, strategic foresight is a tool to advance nuanced and diverse analysis through academic discussion among experts from very different institutions. It goes without saying that we cannot predict the future, but we can think about a number of future trends or scenarios, which enables us to analyze and plan accordingly.

In a joint endeavor to advance our understanding of the things to come, the National Defence University (NDU) of Pakistan and the Royal Danish Defence College (RDDC) collaborated on a joint two-day roundtable conference in Copenhagen hosted by the RDDC.

The conference was titled: “Future Trends of Conflict and Peace: Navigating Strategic Threats and Risks in a Changing Global Power Dynamic”, and focused on topical issues of security and defence, drawing lessons from Europe and South Asia. The conference included an opening keynote, two working sessions and a whole-day workshop covering various topics:

1. Working Session 1: Emerging issues of security: The climate-security nexus
2. Working Session 2: After October 7th 2023: Implications and spill-over
3. Workshop: Collaborative Trend Analysis

Each working session featured presentations from both NDU and RDDC, followed by plenary debates. On the second day, a full-day workshop was conducted which included guided group discussions, and plenary debate. Overall, the joint conference was part of a series of long-standing RDDC and NDU collaborative research activities, including

numerous joint ventures since 2014.

Once again, it was proven how the constructive relationship between the two institutions provides an excellent platform for mutual learning. Through candid discussion and deliberating upon ideas with an academic approach, the NDU and RDDC were able to further their understanding of otherwise sensitive topics of strategic importance. Building on long-term institutional trust and mutual respect, all participants remained curious, while at the same time accepting diverging views – put differently, the participants “agreed to disagree”.

The following report summarizes the findings from the discussions and workshop at the conference. Respecting the Chatham House Rule, which the conference was held under, the authors have strived to balance perspectives, include nuances, and highlight points of disagreement.

# PROGRAMME

**DAY 1**  
**24<sup>th</sup> June 2024**  
**Seminar Day 1**

## Introductory Session

Time (hours)	Activity	Remarks
0845-0900	Arrival, Coffee/Tea and Registration	
0900-0915	Welcome and introductory remarks by heads of delegations	
0915-1000	Key-note by Jeffrey Saunders, Chief Technology Officer and Strategic Advisor from the Danish National Defence Technology Centre	
0945-1000	Q&A	
1000-1015	Short break	

## Working Session 1: Emerging Issues of Security: The Climate-Security Nexus and Societal Resilience

Time (hours)	Activity	Guest Speaker	Remarks
1015-1020	Introductory Remarks by Moderator from Pakistan	Ms. Gul Andam Mian	
1020-1045	Presentation A - from Pakistan	Dr. Khalid Mahmood Shafi, Dir ISS	<i>Topic: The climate-security nexus in Pakistan: How is climate change integrated into security and defence now and in the future?</i>
1045-1110	Presentation B - from Denmark	Dr. Ole Wæver, Professor of International Relations at the Department of Political Science, University of Copenhagen	<i>Topic: The climate-security nexus viewed from Europe: How is climate change interacting with security and defence now and in the future</i>
1110-1150	Interactive Session		
1150-1200	Wrap-up by Moderator	Ms. Gul Andam Mian	
1200-1300	Lunch		

## Working Session 2: After October 7<sup>th</sup> 2023: Implications and Spill-Over

Time (hours)	Activity	Guest Speaker	Remarks
1300-1305	Introductory Remarks by Moderator from Denmark	Mr. David Vestenskov, Director of Centre for Stabilisation	

1305-1330	Presentation C - from Denmark	Dr. Thomas Brønd Vladimir, Assistant Professor	<i>Topic: The war in Gaza – Implications and predictions for Europe</i>
1330-1355	Presentation D - from Pakistan	Amb. Farukh Amil	<i>Topic: The war in Gaza – Implications and predictions for South Asia</i>
1355-1450	Interactive session		
1450-1500	Wrap-up by Moderator	Mr. David Vestenskov, Director of Centre for Stabilisation	

**DAY 2**  
**25<sup>th</sup> June 2024**  
**Seminar Day 2**

**Workshop: Collaborative Trend Analysis**

<b>Time (hours)</b>	<b>Activity</b>	<b>Guest Speaker</b>	<b>Remarks</b>
0900-0915	Arrival, Coffee/ Tea and Registration		
0915-0930	Presentation of workshop program by Moderator from Denmark	Mr. Jens Vesterlund Mathiesen, Special Consultant	
0930-1200	Workshop Session 1: Collaborative Trend Analysis		
1200-1300	Lunch		
1300-1400	Workshop Session 2: Continuation and conclusion of Trend Analysis		

**Closing Session**

<b>Time (hours)</b>	<b>Activity</b>	<b>Remarks</b>
1400-1415	Closing Remarks	
1415-1430	Break	
1430-1530	Guided tour at Kastellet	

DAY 1

**OPENING KEYNOTE:  
STRATEGIC FORESIGHT**

## Opening Keynote: Strategic Foresight

The conference began with an opening keynote from Jeffrey Saunders, Chief Technology Officer and Strategic Advisor from the National Defence Technology Centre in Denmark. With the presentation titled “Strategic Foresight: A discussion on defence and security applications - What could, would, or should happen in the future?”, Mr. Saunders gave a brief introduction to the practical uses of strategic foresight as a tool in security and defence.

### Key Takeaways:

“Strategic Foresight”, “Foresight”, or “Future Studies” refer to concepts and frameworks that enable us to contemplate and investigate the future. This is often implemented within organisations (including militaries) to discern certainties and uncertainties, thereby facilitating debates on otherwise speculative and contentious issues. Mr. Saunders highlighted how foresight processes thrive in environments that encourage diverse opinions and make implicit understandings explicit – a so-called “safe space” for speaking out, and sharing perspectives. In all organisations, this involves substantial knowledge-work in order to challenge dominating perspectives and foster a more inclusive and critical dialogue about future trends and scenarios.

Strategic foresight in the context of security and defence is a tool for guiding strategic and military choices. It is especially important in the security and military domain to have established and structured 'foresight practices', as the nature of military organisations dealing with matters of national security on an everyday basis tends to be hierarchical and closed, due to the handling of classified information and military culture.

While there exists a number of foresight practices, trend analysis is a common and widely used tool for grasping major future developments. Identifying and analysing trends (including 'megatrends') involves identifying opportunities, barriers and friction points, as well as understanding who benefits and who loses from these trends. Mr. Saunders stressed how the backgrounds (geography and history) of participants doing trend analysis play a significant role, as trends are viewed very differently from different perspectives.

Finally, the keynote stressed the importance of being agile and adaptable in the defence context, particularly in understanding the deployment and integration of new technologies. The current geopolitical changes necessitate military institutions to think in a systematic and structured way about the future, unfolding a range of plausible scenarios and addressing key questions about what is probable, plausible, and possible. These inquiries, combined with normative questions about desirable outcomes, can help guide strategic decisions for institutions such as the RDDC, and NDU. As further discussed in the Q&A, the use of networks and collaborative workshops – as conducted later at conference – is an effective tool for understanding each other's perspectives on the future, which, in turn, advances the quality of the analysis.

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<sup>1</sup> Read more about the National Defence Technology Centre here: [www.nfc.dk](http://www.nfc.dk)



DAY 1

**WORKING SESSION-I**

THEME OF THE SESSION

**EMERGING ISSUES OF SECURITY:  
THE CLIMATE-SECURITY NEXUS AND  
SOCIETAL RESILIENCE**

The first working session at the conference focused on climate change as a 'new' or 'emerging' issue of security. Specifically, the session revolved around the implications of climate change and how this is interconnected with issues of national security – *climate-security nexus*. The effects of climate change unevenly affect the most marginalized and vulnerable groups globally.

Denmark and Pakistan are prominent examples of this global inequality. According to the Notre Dame Climate Vulnerability and Readiness Index with data from 2021, Denmark is considered the 4<sup>th</sup> most climate-proof country in the world, while Pakistan is ranked 150<sup>th</sup>. Similarly, according to the Global Climate Risk Index, with data from 2019, Pakistan was ranked as the 15<sup>th</sup> most impacted country by extreme weather events, while Denmark was ranked 82<sup>nd</sup>. However, given the global and all-encompassing nature of climate change, addressing this threat demands insights into the climate-security nexus, as well as how this is at present integrated into the realm of security and defence now and in the future. The first working session discussed this with a specific focus on Pakistan and Europe.

### **Key Takeaways:**

The interconnection between climate and security is becoming increasingly apparent. As of such, the usage of the 'climate-security nexus' is becoming more common. Despite this, there is still much debate about how these are connected, and what the implications are.

Pakistan faces significant climate risks being very vulnerable and one of the least prepared countries. Key issues include intensifying heat waves, water scarcity, air pollution causing premature deaths, and societal anxiety exacerbated by poor climate governance. Pakistan's most polluted cities are among the world's worst, highlighting the severe impact of air quality on public health. Despite contributing negligible to global emissions when looking at emissions per capita, Pakistan is severely affected by climate change, emphasizing the importance of including indigenous perspectives in climate action plans. Due to the gravity of the threat it faces, Pakistan has been at the forefront in pursuing the case of global climate justice at the political level, however, despite pledges, no international financial assistance seems forthcoming. The UN loss and damage fund is a case in point.

In Pakistan's context, having a regional perspective is crucial, particularly regarding water disputes with its Eastern neighbour under the Indus Waters Treaty (IWT), which impacts millions of people due to droughts and monsoon variability. Historical military conflicts, such as the Siachen Glacier conflict in 1984, have further strained ecological conditions.

The connection between climate change and the realm of defence and military is fairly new topic of academic and practical inquiry. As explained by one presenter, climate change has first become

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<sup>2</sup> The ND-GAIN Country Index summarizes a country's vulnerability to climate change and other global challenges in combination with its readiness to improve resilience. It aims to help governments, businesses and communities better prioritize investments for a more efficient response to the immediate global challenges ahead. See more here: <https://gain-new.crc.nd.edu/ranking>

politicised, then securitized, and most recently, it is becoming militarized. The last step is still ongoing, and even described by participants as “controversial” due to its novelty, and direct influence on national security institutions. Focusing on this, the *climate-military nexus* can be approached in three ways:

1. **Military as First Responders:** Militaries often respond to climate-induced disasters, playing a crucial role in humanitarian assistance and disaster relief. As climate change intensifies, the military's role in such responses is expected to grow. The United Nations predicts that climate change will increasingly influence peacekeeping operations, an area where Pakistan can contribute significantly due to its extensive experience.
2. **Operational Vulnerability:** Climate change adversely affects military operations, particularly in terms of readiness and equipment vulnerability. Harsh weather conditions can impede military effectiveness, necessitating climate-resilient planning and protection for weapon systems. Pakistan's military is facing operational vulnerability in the Siachen conflict. Military operations must adapt to increasingly unpredictable weather patterns, ensuring logistical and operational resilience, as well as educate and train officers to manage this.
3. **Military Emissions:** There is very little data on the global emissions by the militaries of the world. One estimate suggests that the total military carbon footprint is approximately 5.5% of global emissions (equivalent to the total emissions of Russia). Although not yet mandatory, some militaries voluntarily report their emissions to international organisations, or for domestic purposes, such as the Danish Armed Forces. To mitigate this, it is crucial to pursue “green defence” solutions, which involve transforming military technology and production facilities to lower emissions. The first step is accurately measuring and collecting data on emissions, a necessary prerequisite for the effective management and reduction of emissions across all military operations.

The session highlighted that climate change has been high on the global agenda since 2007, with significant attention from institutions like the UN Security Council and recognition through the Nobel Peace Prize for climate research. Focusing on the climate-security agenda, the debate has focused on preparing for climate-induced conflicts and refugees resulting from climate change, as well as the mitigation argument, which emphasizes avoiding such scenarios through proactive climate action. To address a new security issue, such as climate change it is essential to anchor this to traditional security concern, and then broaden the scope. This requires innovative thinking and unconventional solutions for military organisations. Despite understanding the gravity and urgency, managing climate-change is difficult as military planners and political decision-makers tend to focus on traditional security threats.

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<sup>3</sup> The Global Climate Risk Index 2021 analyses to what extent countries and regions have been affected by impacts of weather-related loss events (storms, floods, heat waves etc.). Human impacts (fatalities) and direct economic losses were analysed. The most recent data available — for 2019 and from 2000 to 2019 — were taken into account. See more here: <https://www.germanwatch.org/en/19777>

DAY 1

**WORKING SESSION-II**

THEME OF THE SESSION

**After October 7<sup>th</sup> 2023:  
Implications and Spill-over**

The second working session at the conference covered the implications and spill-overs from Hamas' attack on Israel on October 7<sup>th</sup>, 2023. The events transpiring since October 2023 are only the latest chapter in the conflict that began in 1948, which has since ignited into a full-scale war, with global ramifications. Focusing on the situation today, the session sparked a discussion of the possibility and global responsibility of mediating a longstanding conflict between two parties who hold vastly different views and readings of the events since 1948, thus, serving as a foundational struggle. The divergent views of territorial claims have magnified and polarized the global community, complicating the possibility of creating a coherent stance and thereby an internationally backed solution. Global implications have followed; retracting rapprochement between Israel and Saudi Arabia, and resulting in regional instability in the Middle East, fuelled by the involvement of proxies and non-state actors.

During the session, predictions for potential conflict resolution were discussed by presenting insights and viewpoints from a European and a South Asian perspective. Ultimately, it transcended into a discussion on how modern geopolitics deals and engages with arguments rooted in mythology, colonial pasts and undoing global injustices.

### **Key Takeaways:**

The ongoing conflict and the continued loss of human lives in Israel/Palestine have caused grievances and great divisions between primarily Muslim countries and the West. It was argued that the current war in Gaza unmasked existing unequal structures of global institutions, and underlined the double standards of the Western rule-based order on human rights violation and global responsibility, hereby prompting a broader discussion on impunity.

The different perspectives amongst the participants were notable for this session. For instance, the different readings of the historical events leading up to October 7<sup>th</sup>, were reflected in the wording of the attack, which was either described by Danish participants as a “terrorist attack” being “part of the “ongoing conflict between Israel/Palestine”, or by Pakistani participants as a “Genocide in Gaza”. These different assessments reflect the current divisions amongst the international society, as Muslim countries have remained firm in their uniformed support to the Palestinian people, whereas European countries predominantly have shown support for Israel. However, as the conflict prolongs, the Western support to the Israeli government has slowly diminished, as the actions of the Israeli Defence Forces (IDF) on the Palestinian people become more and more apparent. Ultimately, a stronger support in favour of the resistance of the Palestinian people has emerged globally.

The session also included a future outlook on the global implications. One of the speakers/participants described a generational shift in the perception of warfare deriving from the current situation in Gaza. The digitalization and prevalence of social media conditions the world to watch alongside as the events unfold through their screens. As a result, large parts of the society are mobilised to become actively involved in the politics of these issues. Resultantly, it was argued that if Israel's impunity is prolonged and the double standards and global inaction continues, it will cause uprisings of radicalization and increase anti-Semitism and anti-western attitudes, which could spread beyond regional borders. Thus, the only solution is negotiations, otherwise, the war will continue, thus approaching the “issue” from a different angle.

DAY 2

**WORKING SESSION-III**

THEME OF THE SESSION

**Collaborative Trend Analysis**

Building on the discussions during the first seminar day, the third session was an interactive workshop, where all participants engaged in a collaborative trend analysis discussing future challenges and opportunities. The concept and format of “Collaborative Trend Analysis” was developed and facilitated by the RDDC, with the purpose of identifying relevant trends in a specified region and within a given timeline. For this seminar, the focus was on the Middle East as the selected region in a 10-year timeframe.

The objective of the workshop was twofold. First, to reflect on, discuss and map future developments with insights from both a European and a South Asian perspective. Second, to uncover and confront our own assumptions and preconceptions as well as learn about each other's positions and motivations. Putting it differently, the workshop produced knowledge-work on two levels, as all participants identified trends, discussed these and mapped them (see Figure 1), but also learned more about the motivations and foundations of other participants.

Throughout the workshop, it became evident that participants associated a concept with a specific meaning closely tied to a historical understanding, which differed depending on the geographical context.

The workshop was structured into four different parts: 1) identifying, 2) discussing, 3) placing and 4) presenting the relevant trends. The participants were divided into three different groups, which aimed to combine perspectives and participants from the NDU and the RDDC. Each group was tasked to 'brainstorm' and identify a number of trends, and then narrow these down to four. Afterwards, the groups were tasked with placing the trends on a graph ranging in their probability and impact, creating a four-field table of four possible combinations as shown below.

### **Key Takeaways:**

Based on the group discussions 12 individual trends were identified amongst the groups. In this process, it should be noted that there were disagreements about the final position of some of the trends between groups (this is pictured below as dotted stripes reflecting other potential positions). The disagreements reflected how some groups would place the trends in respective higher or lower impact and probability. A notable example of this is the issue of migration, which was heavily discussed, as the perspective differed between the RDDC and the NDU participants. Participants from the RDDC typically judged the impact of migration as very probable and impactful; whereas the NDU - acknowledging the high probability of migrant flows - judged this to be a low impact issue given that the rate of migration is already present and existing. The participants discussed how this reflected different societal and



security discussion regarding migration across the regions. In Europe, the issue of migration was already heavily politicized, especially since so-called “European refugee crisis” in 2015. This, 'securitized' the issue, framing it as a broader security border issue, threatening the functionality of the EU. In South Asia, migration is viewed as a constant aspect of society, and with less implications for national security. Pakistan ranks as the fifth country worldwide hosting the greatest number of refugees, amounting to about 2 million refugees (using data from UNHCR). Ultimately, it can be derived that the closer the trend is to perceived status quo of the given participant, the less impactful the trend estimated to be.

The final list of the trends and their positions can be seen in Figure 1.

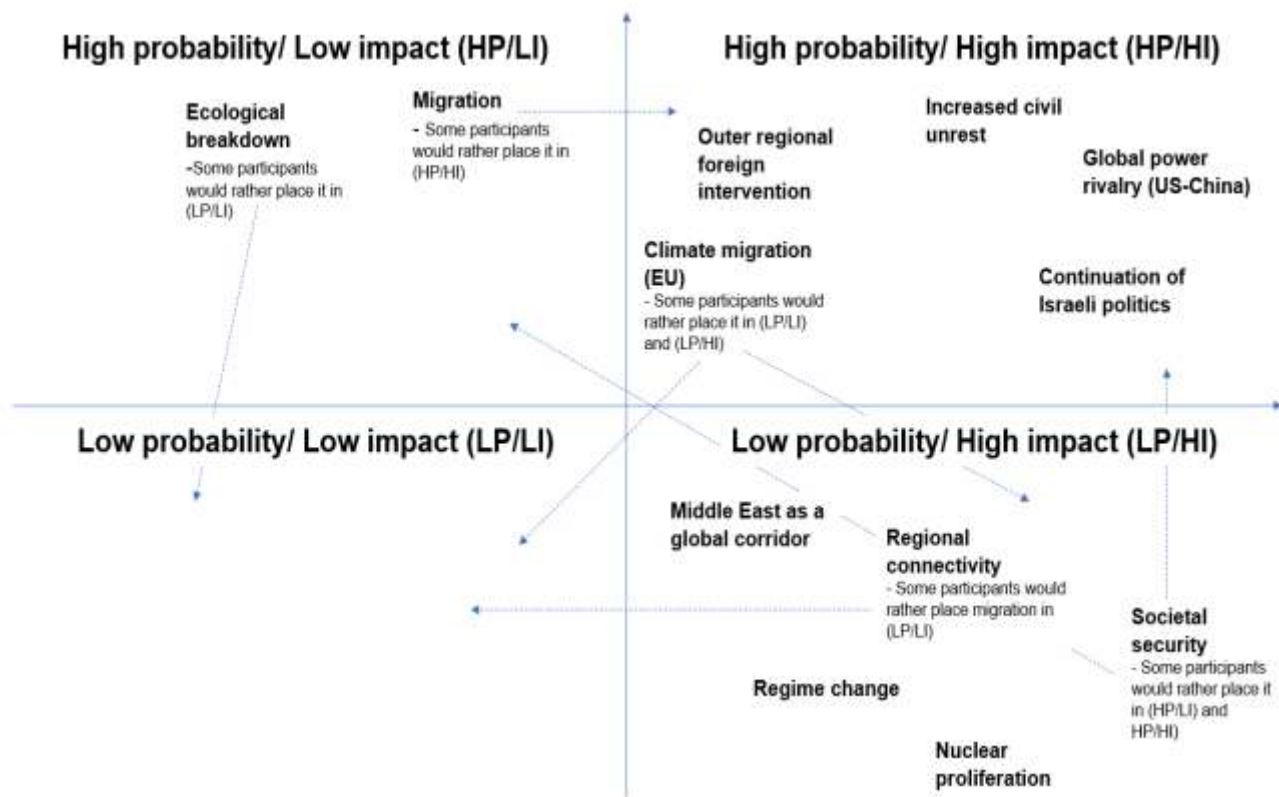


Figure 1: Trend Probability/Impact Matrix

<sup>4</sup> [unhcr.org/refugee-statistics/](http://unhcr.org/refugee-statistics/)

# PICTURE GALLERY







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