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Editor's Note

Padraig O'Malley
University of Massachusetts Boston, padraig.omalley@umb.edu

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Editor's Note

Padraig O'Malley

University of Massachusetts Boston, padraig.omalley@umb.edu

After the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1991 and the dissolution of the Soviet Union, Francis Fukuyama wrote *The End of History and the Last Man*. He argued that the evolution of humanity had reached an end point with the triumph of Western liberal democracy, anchored in the Bretton Woods Agreement post WWII, as the final form of government. A rules-based order was in place and in the process of being universally accepted and being adhered to.¹

History, however, has had the last laugh.

Liberal democracies are under siege. In this upheaval of the world order—the old order is frayed and flagging, what will replace it has yet to emerge. The unipolar world of the 1990s where the United States was the single hegemonic power has been replaced by a multipolar world in which China is competing with the United States to become *pari passu*.

David Sanger's book *New Cold Wars* explores the resurgence of great power rivalries and the simultaneous confrontations between the United States, China, and Russia and how the assumptions of the post-Cold War era, where economic globalization and the expansion of free markets were expected to foster stability and American hegemony, have proven to be flawed.² Sanger delves into the erosion of the "Washington Consensus" and the failure of multiple US administrations to recognize the looming threats posed by an increasingly assertive China and a resurgent Russia.

Sanger poses critical questions: Will Vladimir Putin's mistakes in Ukraine lead to his downfall or prompt him to resort to nuclear weapons? Will China invade Taiwan, the semiconductor capital? Will China and Russia deepen their partnership to undermine American dominance? And can a politically divided America still lead the world in this new era of great power competition?

What was heralded as a forthcoming age of democracy on the rise across the globe has proved otherwise. The number of liberal democracies has declined from a peak of forty-four in 2009 to only thirty-two in 2022, while the number of closed autocracies has increased from twenty-two in 2012 to thirty-three in 2022. According to the V-Dem Institute's 2024 Democracy Report, democracy declined or "autocratization" was ongoing in forty-two countries in 2023, home to thirty-five percent of the world's population, while democratization was taking place in eighteen countries hosting only five percent. Autocracies are becoming bolder and less concerned about international opinion. Indicators of liberal democracy, such as high court independence and executive oversight, have declined in twenty-five to thirty-two countries in recent years, as autocratization intensifies.³ In the June 2024 European elections, the far right made huge gains, especially in France and Germany, threatening the centrist consensus at the heart of the Union.

The Republican Party in the United States has veered sharply to the right, to a more authoritarian mode. Donald Trump has vowed, if he is elected to the presidency again, to do away with many of the checks and balances that underline its institutions and expand the power of the president. Loyalty to the president will take precedence over loyalty to the constitution, the Department of Justice will become a personal fiefdom.

Padraig O'Malley is the John Joseph Moakley Professor of Peace and Reconciliation at the John W. McCormack Graduate School of Policy and Global Studies, University of Massachusetts Boston.

An unrestrained Trump, possibly withdrawing the US from NATO, ending financial aid and military hardware shipments to Ukraine, giving Vladimir Putin free rein in Ukraine, and imposing prohibitive tariffs on China would redraw the global geopolitical map overnight.⁴ Europe is undergoing its own transformation: deep internal divisions within EU member countries grow as once marginal right-wing parties in Italy, Hungary, France, Germany, the Netherlands, Hungary, Spain, Poland, and Finland have either gained a foothold in government or may be on their way to doing so.⁵

Meanwhile, military alliances and strategic partnerships are multiplying—NATO, including new members Finland and Sweden; the US, Japan, South Korea, and the Philippines, in the Asia Pacific; and the Quad, a loose strategic relationship between the US, India, Australia, and Japan—while some partners such as Singapore, Vietnam, and Indonesia are deepening security ties with the US to hedge against China’s rise. In the Middle East, the Axis of Resistance—a loose coalition of groups—Iran, Hezbollah in Lebanon, Syria, and peripherally Hamas and the Houthi in Yemen, and various Shiite militias in Iraq, such as those under the umbrella of the Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF) pose an ongoing threat to Israel and Western interests in the region. China and Russia have deepened their strategic partnership. China is a pivotal conduit for goods for Russia’s defense industry and their two economies have become interconnected.⁶

In 2003 and 2005 the journal published two volumes on war. A selection of the articles became the book, *Sticks & Stones: Living with Uncertain Wars*. “Sticks and Stones,” of course, refers to Albert Einstein’s response when he was asked what would be used to prosecute wars in a post nuclear exchange world.⁷

Twenty years on, we are not yet at that point, but warnings about the use of tactical nuclear weapons (with an explosive reach approaching the atomic bomb in Hiroshima in 1945) have entered the conversation in a troubling way, especially Vladimir Putin’s threats over Ukraine.⁸ We are getting used to hearing about circumstances in which they might be used. What was once verboten has become normalized.⁹ The Doomsday Clock is set at ninety seconds to midnight, the closest to midnight since its inception in 1947. Geopolitical and technological factors are intertwined, creating different and often unforeseeable consequences. Among these factors are a) the collapse of the WWII rules-based world order and no agreement on what should take its place, b) the proliferation of military alliances, c) tensions between the United States and China over Taiwan and the South China Sea, d) an untamed nuclear North Korea, e) Israel-Iran confrontations in the Middle East with the US committed to Israel’s defense, f) the evolution of drone warfare, with some drones programmed to hit specific targets and fly in swarms, g) AI programmed weapons that can work autonomously, h) the sophistication and proliferation of non-state actors such as the Houthi and Hezbollah, and i) climate warming as huge swaths of the world, especially in the Middle East, race past the 1.5°C threshold set by the United Nations and become uninhabitable, and scarce resources such as water literally dry up.

The conduct of war in the twenty-first century has evolved significantly from that of the twentieth century, reflecting changes in technology, geopolitics, and the nature of conflict itself.¹⁰ Among the main drivers transforming the ways in which warfare is carried out are the following. a) Asymmetrical warfare: in the twentieth century, conflicts often involved conventional warfare between nation-states with relatively similar military capabilities. The twenty-first century, however, has seen a rise in asymmetrical warfare between state and non-state actors, with vastly different military capabilities and strategies. This includes guerrilla warfare, terrorism, and cyberattacks. b) The digital revolution has introduced cyber warfare as a critical component of modern conflict. State and non-state actors engage in hacking, disinformation warfare, and

cyberattacks to disrupt, degrade, or spy on each other's infrastructure and communications. c) Hybrid warfare combines conventional military tactics with irregular tactics. It blurs the lines between military and civilian targets, and between war and peace, making it more challenging to identify aggressors and respond effectively. d) The use of unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs), commonly known as drones, and the development of autonomous weapons systems represent a significant shift. These technologies allow for remote or automated engagement in conflict, reducing the risk to human soldiers and changing the dynamics of surveillance, targeting, and strikes. e) The privatization of war: there has been an increase in the involvement of private military and security companies (PMSCs) in conflicts. These entities offer a range of military and security services, from logistical support to direct combat roles.

According to a February 2024 article in *Foreign Affairs*, "The Perilous Coming Age of AI Warfare," at least thirty countries use defense systems that have autonomous modes. Some analysts say that it is only a matter of time before "drones will be used to identify, select, and attack targets without help from humans."¹¹ Paul Scharre of the Center for a New American Security outlined a number of possible near-term futures, from autonomous drone swarms battling each other "as independently as high-frequency trading bots to the possibility that AI may be given authority over existing nuclear arsenals."¹² He calls for governments to agree to human supervision of military, ban AI weapons that target humans, and protocols that only humans have control over nuclear weapons. "Without limits, humanity risks barreling toward a future of dangerous, machine-driven warfare," Scharre writes, and the window to act is "closing fast." Other analysts disagree with his conclusion of a possible apocalyptic future, but most agree that in future wars, big data will play a pivotal role. "It [a military] will have to master digitized information flooding through the battle space," he writes. "Humans simply do not have the capacity to do this." AI most probably will.

In the Israel-Hamas conflict there are credible investigations showing that the Israeli Defense Force (IDF) uses two systems Habsora (the Gospel) and Lavender, AI algorithms to identify targets in Gaza, the former to identify where the army believes militants are operating from and the latter used to compile a "kill list" of suspected combatants. The IDF, as it does all matters related to its security, denies the report.¹³

The Ukraine-Russia War is the best example of how the near future in warfare between states might be conducted. Ukraine is fostering innovation through initiatives like the Brave1 Cluster, a technology incubator that supports collaboration between the defense sector and industry, enhancing its innovative bandwidth. Over 300 companies are involved.¹⁴ This has led to the development and testing of numerous drones and unmanned ground vehicles (UGVs), many of which have already been deployed in combat scenarios.

The *Washington Post* calls Ukraine a "super laboratory of invention" regarding autonomous weapons innovations.¹⁵ Some Ukrainian UGVs are equipped for direct combat and tactical missions. Its naval drones, "Sea Baby" and Toloka, the country's uncrewed underwater vehicles, have disabled one-third of the Russian fleet in the Black Sea and opened a passageway for exports of grain, the sustenance of the Ukrainian economy.¹⁶

Other drones are armed with machine guns and are used to attack enemy positions, conduct reconnaissance, and provide fire support. Despite these advancements, the deployment of UGVs also presents challenges, including vulnerability to enemy drones (dogfights in the air), but further technological refinement will enhance their effectiveness and survivability on the battlefield.¹⁷

Starlink, a satellite internet service provided by SpaceX, has become a critical component of Ukraine's military communications infrastructure. It enables Ukraine to maintain high-speed, reliable communication channels for various military and civilian applications, especially in the

face of Russian attempts to disrupt its telecommunications. After a cyberattack by Russia that disabled a significant portion of Ukraine's satellite communications network, managed by Viasat, the Ukrainian government reached out to SpaceX. Elon Musk, the CEO, activated Starlink service over Ukraine and sent terminals to the country. This quick deployment allowed Ukraine to reestablish its communications capabilities, crucial for command and control of military operations. Starlink's low-orbit satellite network has provided Ukraine with several strategic advantages. It has enabled real-time communication and coordination across military units, which is vital for operational success in a dynamic battlefield environment. The service, which the Pentagon pays SpaceX for, has also supported the use of drones and other technology-dependent systems, enhancing Ukraine's surveillance and reconnaissance capabilities.¹⁸ However, there is evidence that Russia has pierced the Starlink veil and has been purchasing Starlink terminals on the black market for its troops' use.¹⁹

Russia has responded to these developments with its own innovations.²⁰ The key developments include the following. a) Artillery shells: Russia is on track to produce nearly three times as many artillery shells in 2024—almost three million—as the United States and Europe combined (about 1.2 million). This includes receiving over one million rounds from North Korea. b) Russia has significantly increased the production of its Iskander-M ballistic missiles, and the Kh-101 cruise missile, from thirteen to thirty, and c) relied heavily on “kamikaze” drones. d) Russia has acquired Fateh-110 and Zolfaghar short-range ballistic missiles and Shahed drones from Iran, which it has deployed in large numbers to strike Ukrainian infrastructure and military targets.²¹ e) Glide bombs: Russia has been using glide bombs, which are old Soviet dumb bombs equipped with guidance kits, as one of its most effective aerial weapons against Ukrainian troops, and f) supersonic missiles, specifically the Kinzhal (Dagger) air launched ballistic missile, which can travel at Mach 10 (over 7,600 mph) and is designed to evade Ukraine's air defense systems. The US-supplied Patriot missile has intercepted some of these, despite their speed of approach.

The articles in this volume address different facets of how war and peacemaking are undergoing structural changes in the first decades of the twenty-first century. Some wars are of the old-fashioned type, but with technological differences. In Ukraine the trench warfare is reminiscent of WWI, despite a variety of technological innovations. Russian and Ukrainian forces engage in the closest thing to face-to-face combat. Costly battles are fought over inches of ground, which can change hands on numerous occasions. But Ukrainian troops, even in their trenches rely on their laptops and phones to pinpoint Russian troop movement and as I have described, a wide variety of home manufactured drones, adapted for multipole uses.

In his wide-ranging essay “New Technologies in Wars, Old and New,” Lord John Alderdice, guest editor of this special issue of the journal, *The Changing Character of War and Peacemaking*, and a member of the House of Lords Select Committee on International Relations and Defence, among his many distinguished affiliations, observes that the constant advancement of drone capabilities is merely part of a larger story. Drones are integrated into a hybrid approach that is continuously evolving and developing, following the principles described by Brian Arthur. He highlights that technologies not only adapt through changes to their individual elements, such as miniaturization and increased power, but they also combine with one another, giving rise to novel structures and capacities.

Just as the character of war is changing, he writes, so too is the nature of peacemaking. A survey of “experienced negotiators from the UN and other national and international agencies and NGOs” revealed “an almost universal sense that the old ways of peacemaking no longer worked but that it was not yet clear what might replace them.”

Alderdice warns against a future described by the philosopher John Gray, where “instead of the belief that humankind, albeit in fits and starts, was moving inexorably toward a peaceful, rational, liberal, well-ordered, and prosperous future, he says that we are falling into a world dominated by authoritarianism, intolerant nationalisms, and unreason.” Gray argues that the relatively short period when the liberal trajectory seemed to be in the ascendant was, in historical terms, a passing blip, an aberration that is already dissolving away.

As an alternative, Alderdice suggests three developments that may point toward the next evolutionary way station for humankind: the emergence of complexity science, an appreciation that our emotions are a positive evolutionary advantage rather than a flaw to be overcome, and a focus on relationships rather than solely on individuals.

Drawing on psychodynamics as a framework, Eugen Koh provides an analysis of the factors heightening the risk of armed conflict between the two superpowers in the “Psychological Risks of War Between the United States and China.” The article delves into how the deteriorating US-China relationship—marked by a shift from collaboration to competition, mutual perceptions of enmity, and escalating threats exacerbated by historical traumas—can precipitate a collapse of rational thinking and unleash uncontrollable emotionality.

Koh underscores the perils of disregarding or exploiting these trauma-related sensitivities for domestic political expediency or strategic gains, as such actions risk escalating accidents into conflicts, and conflicts into outright war. Drawing upon the concept of Thucydides’s Trap, which posits the inevitability of conflict when a rising power challenges an established one, Koh explores pathways to circumvent this dynamic.

Central to Koh’s proposed psychodynamic approaches is the need to anticipate and counter regressive forces driven by fear, contain overwhelming emotionality, and restore the capacity for nuanced, complex thinking to find creative solutions to potential impasses. It accentuates the criticality of recognizing and managing the emotional and cognitive factors that can fuel conflict escalation between the two powers.

In “Employing Multi-Agent AI to Model Conflict and Cooperation in Northern Ireland,” Katherine O’ Lone, Michael Gantley, Justin E. Lane, and F. LeRon Shults develop a multi-agent artificial intelligence (MAAI) model to investigate the primary catalysts of conflict and cooperation in Northern Ireland’s post-Agreement era. Insights from the model reveal that perceptions of fairness and emotions of sadness are leading drivers of cooperation. Conversely, anxiety and perceived moral authority stand out as prominent instigators of conflict.

The article contextualizes these findings within prior computational modeling efforts focused on Northern Ireland, the social psychological literature on intergroup conflict, and the prevailing geopolitical landscape. It outlines MAAI’s potential for providing policymakers with powerful digital tools to model and predict conflict and cooperation dynamics and discusses previous modeling work on intergroup conflict and reconciliation in Northern Ireland, which laid the foundation for their research. The methodological approach, including sentiment analysis and creating a “digital twin” to simulate conditions for social stability (or instability) in Northern Ireland, is outlined, with a focus on the implications of removing “peace walls.” Ultimately, the authors advocate for leveraging MAAI technology to inform policymaking while addressing ethical considerations surrounding its application in peacebuilding and reconciliation initiatives.

In “Brothers and Sisters from Another Mother—Promoting Inter-cultural Understanding, Conflict Reduction, and Solidarity Among Partner Forces in the Sahel,” Alain Tschudin and James Smith, cognizant of the changing nature of warfare and of global extremist challenges, propose

fresh innovations in the training of international and African partner forces tasked with collaborating to address security threats in the Sahel region.

This article advocates for a contemporary peacebuilding approach rooted in transformative, dialogical methodologies that promote greater intercultural understanding between local security forces and their external allies. They emphasize the complexities of cultural pluralism in combat, including the importance of shared language. Such an intervention is posited as cost-effective, sustainable, adaptable, and replicable, fostering unity, shared understanding, and reducing direct and indirect violence such as green-on-blue casualties and resentment toward diverse troops. It heightens motivation, strengthens solidarity in the field, aligns efforts toward shared goals, and enhances operational effectiveness, ultimately contributing to conflict reduction and a more enduring peace.

Kumar Ramakrishna argues in “Understanding the Indirect Strategy Moment in Global Affairs” that the ongoing conflict between Russia and Ukraine highlights the relevance of “indirect strategy” in modern geopolitical competition. While the prospect of an end to the fighting remains uncertain, the threat of escalation through nuclear weapons has emerged as a worrying possibility. However, this overt military conflict is an anomaly compared to the past decade, where he says low intensity “‘hybrid conflict’ has been the norm in the standoff between Moscow and Kyiv. Hybrid conflict broadly refers to the methods and tools used by individual state or non-state actors to pursue their objectives, spanning the conflict continuum from disinformation to cyber war, energy supply disruption, and traditional warfare. Moscow had in fact been engaging in hybrid conflict with Ukraine since the 2014 intervention” in eastern Ukraine by Russian troops in unmarked uniforms, the so-called “little green men.”

“Russian President Vladimir Putin’s decision to switch to an outright ‘special military operation’ in February 2022,” Ramakrishna writes, “has not yielded the desired outcome of Ukrainian military and political capitulation.” Instead, US intelligence assessed that Russia has suffered staggering losses, including eighty-seven percent of its active-duty ground troops and two-thirds of its pre-invasion tanks. He continues, “Against such a backdrop, it is not far-fetched to imagine that a ceasefire between Kyiv and Moscow might eventually ensue. Putin may then revert to his previous and relatively far more cost-effective hybrid warfare playbook as the main means to secure his geopolitical objectives vis-à-vis Kyiv.”

Ramakrishna notes that a recurring theme in this “indirect strategy moment” is that the line between peace and war has become increasingly blurred. Adopting an “indirect strategy lens” is crucial to frame current and ongoing geostrategic developments across various issues and domains, “from economic and technological de-risking to the preservation on domestic socio-political cohesion in the face of foreign influence campaigns by hostile state actors.”

The opening premise of Cedric de Coning’s “Coping with the Complexity of the Changing Character of War: Toward a New Paradigm of Adaptive Peace” is that conflicts and related casualties continue to rise, underscoring the inadequacy of the mainstream approach to peace and security. It contends that a critical factor behind the international community’s faltering peace and security efforts lies in the inherent shortcomings of the prevailing approach and methodology employed to foster, maintain, and build peace in conflict-ridden societies. This article advocates for a paradigm shift: an adaptive mindset that embraces the dynamism and unpredictability of conflict environments, and a context-specific methodology that can effectively address the underlying drivers of violent conflict and foster lasting peace. By doing so, it offers a new lens through which to navigate the evolving character of war and peace. By reframing our understanding of conflict’s complexities and embracing adaptive methodologies, de Coning

argues, we can transcend the limitations of predetermined strategies. This shift in perspective is pivotal to achieving lasting peace in volatile environments where linear models have consistently fallen short.

As the quest for a lasting solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict continues, Ciarán Ó Cuinn maintains in “Muscat, Madrid, Ulster, and the Holy Land: the MEDRC Model of Environmental Peacebuilding in a Revived Middle East Peace Process,” that MEDRC stands out as a unique institution facilitating the Middle East peace process through environmental diplomacy. While other initiatives have faltered, MEDRC’s distinct institutional and operational approach to conflict resolution has enabled its perseverance.

Examining MEDRC’s methodology, he writes, holds significance not only for combating transboundary climate and environmental threats but also for leveraging these challenges as entry points into peace processes. This article presents, for the first time, the detailed elements of the MEDRC Model and its underlying Conflict Resolution Process Guidelines, exploring their broader implications for environmental peacebuilding and a revitalized Middle East peace process.

Through this exploration, the article sheds light on the potential of environmental diplomacy to transcend deeply rooted conflicts. It offers insights into the design and implementation of peace processes that harness the power of shared environmental challenges as catalysts for dialogue, cooperation, and ultimately, lasting peace. By examining the transferable elements of this approach, the article offers insights for practitioners and policymakers seeking innovative pathways to address complex, protracted conflicts through environmental cooperation and diplomacy.

In “The Middle East: From an Inflammable Region to A Resilient Land of Opportunities; A Case Study of EcoPeace Middle East’s Unique Approach to Conflict and Environmental Action,” Yana Abu Taleb and Thalsa-Thiziri Mekaouche observe that while the global community strives to limit temperature rise to 1.5°C, the Middle East is projected to experience a four-degree increase. Vast swaths of the region will become uninhabitable during the extended summer months. This climate vulnerability is further compounded by dependencies on food imports and reliance on fossil fuels. Additionally, the Middle East is the world’s most water-scarce region, straining ecosystems, economies, and population well-being. Moreover, it is already grappling with high levels of conflict and violence. The ongoing Israel-Hamas war has caused over 36,000 deaths in the first seven months, and they point out that the region already had the world’s highest number of battle-related deaths (26,270 in 2021), primarily due to the escalating conflict in Yemen.

Amid this convergence of crises, EcoPeace Middle East, a 2024 Nobel Peace Prize nominee, has developed a theory of change that seeks to simultaneously address climate change and conflict resolution in Jordan, Israel, and Palestine. This article focuses on their paradigm and offers “insights into the prospects of reversing the narrative attached to the Middle East: from a climate-vulnerable and conflict-prone region to a resilient and peaceful land of opportunities.”

In “Pioneering the Digital Frontier: CMI’s Approach to Forward-Looking Dialogues,” Johanna Poutanen and Felix Kufus outline how the CMI – Martti Ahtisaari Peace Foundation (CMI) integrates technology-enhanced foresight methods into dialogue and mediation efforts. Digital tools, such as software dedicated to data analysis and visualization, play a pivotal role in their approach by allowing for broad-based data collection and participatory analysis. Interactive visual aids foster collective sense-making and aid in challenging the entrenched mindsets of conflict stakeholders. They explain how foresight approaches can be employed “to develop shared future visions and facilitate collaboration even in the context of stalled peace processes.” The article provides an overview of CMI’s work in integrating these methods into future-oriented

dialogue processes across various countries, including Yemen, Libya, Palestine, and Armenia. The fundamental aspect of this approach is the utilization of software that aids in mapping and displaying diverse stakeholder perspectives, grounding discussions in factual realities, and facilitating participatory scenario-building. The article concludes by presenting two case studies that illustrate CMI's use of digitally augmented foresight in dialogue processes in Armenia and Libya, suggesting key benefits, limitations, and broader potential of foresight and accompanying digital approaches for peacemaking.

In “Scaling Expertise: A Note on Homophily in Online Discourse and Content Moderation,” Dylan Weber examines how online discussions naturally tend to favor homophily, meaning users prefer interacting with content and people similar to themselves. This tendency, he shows, leads to a narrower range of information and a higher risk of spreading misinformation. He interrogates the widespread presence of homophily in online discourse and its negative impacts. Additionally, he evaluates the current moderation systems used by major social media platforms, noting their inadequacies in addressing these structural issues. Finally, Weber proposes a new moderation framework focused on “scaling expertise,” which aims to handle the vast scale of online interactions while being sensitive to different contexts and cultures.

Finally, In “Personal Reflections from a Grassroots Peacebuilding Journey,” Mark Clark shares his diverse experiences over thirty years, working at the intersection of leadership development, complexity, and conflict. It highlights the author's journey across various conflict regions, including Iraq, where he was Minister for Youth and Sports in the Paul Bremer era that followed the ousting of Saddam Hussein by a US-led coalition, violence reduction and post-conflict reconciliation initiatives in Papua New Guinea, humanitarian work in remote areas in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and his thirteen years as CEO of Generations For Peace, the Jordan-based global international peacebuilding organization supporting grassroots peacebuilding efforts in fifty-two countries.

Peacekeeping and peacebuilding are two different areas of intervention and require separate, though on occasion overlapping, strategies. The sum of his experiences lead Clark to prescribe a number of variables as necessary to underpin successful peacemaking—courageous leadership, high-quality data, participatory engagement that engages diverse perspectives in generative dialogue, and accountability and incentive mechanisms. The sum of his experience leads him to conclude that peacemaking and peacebuilding should be essentially viewed as a change process—an adaptive leadership challenge within complex adaptive systems.

Recurring themes that emerge from these eleven articles are a) the geopolitical landscape is both unstable and dynamic, b) too many crisis situations have too many tipping points drawing not just countries but alliances into conflict, and c) the lines between war and peace are increasingly blurred, not auguring well for the near.

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