

## SUMMARY NOTES:

# FT Executive Briefing: Guiding Principles for Shaping Future Business Geopolitics, Talent and Organisational Resilience

CRF and Headspring hosted an in-person event for senior HR leaders, Guiding Principles for Shaping Future Business: Geopolitics, Talent and Organisational Resilience. Featuring expert insights from Alec Russell, Foreign Editor at the Financial Times, and Björn Beam, former CIA officer and Head of Geopolitical and Technology Research, Headspring Faculty, the session explored how geopolitical dynamics are reshaping leadership priorities amid sustained global volatility.



### ABOUT CRF

Corporate Research Forum (CRF) is a research-led learning network dedicated to building the capability of HR leaders and their teams to drive organisational performance.

Through more than 30 years of research and practical expertise, we have developed a deep understanding of the ways HR can contribute to business outcomes – what works, what doesn't and in what circumstances. We support our network of over 275 organisations through an evolving programme of evidence-based insights: delivering expert led events, facilitated peer exchange, personalised and timely answers through our AI research tool and impactful technology-enabled learning – all informed by research and shaped by practice. Our focus enables HR to become a more strategic, future-ready function delivering consistent and measurable value tailored to the needs of your organisation.

For more details on how your organisation can benefit from being part of the CRF network, please contact:

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### ABOUT HEADSPRING

Headspring's mission is to help organisations build purposeful business cultures through bespoke learning and development solutions. A leader in the design of corporate education, Headspring combines the academic rigour and innovative approach of IE Business School with the business insight and global perspective of Financial Times journalists to deliver transformative learning and consulting solutions. To learn more, visit: [Headspring – Customisation at Scale](#).

If your organisation could benefit from integrating Financial Times insight into leadership and talent development programmes – or if this discussion has sparked further interest – we invite you to explore Headspring's [FT Executive Briefings](#). These briefings provide leaders with expert, independent insight into the key trends shaping business today, each designed around an organisation's specific learning needs.

### OFFER

[FT Executive Briefings](#): We would like to invite attendees to explore our bite-sized L&D programmes that offer critical thinking skills, comprehensive insights, and an unbiased perspective essential for navigating today's complexities.

# THE NEW WORLD (DIS)ORDER

Alec Russell, Foreign Editor of the Financial Times, argued that organisations can become so focused on daily global events that they lose sight of bigger structural trends, including those outlined below.



Alec Russell,  
Foreign Editor,  
Financial Times

in LINKEDIN

## THE CHINA SHOCK 2.0

- The first 'China shock' was the wave of low-cost manufacturing that entered global markets around 30 years ago. The current second shock involves an extraordinary boom in high-end manufacturing which is reshaping markets across the world and disrupting industries, including highly developed sectors in Europe.
- For example, the output of one Chinese manufacturer of electric car sensors has risen from 20,000 units in 2019 to an expected 10 million in 2026, while the price has fallen from around \$30 per unit to less than \$2. Similar trends are visible in other high-end manufacturing sectors.
- For large European manufacturing companies, this raises a difficult strategic question: do they work with Chinese competitors, at the risk of becoming dependent on them, or try to resist their advance?

## THE DAWN OF THE A LA CARTE WORLD – AND THE AGE OF THE MIDDLE POWERS

- The post-Cold War era of US dominance now appears to be fading, creating more space for countries to hedge their bets and balance relationships with both China and the US in ways that were not possible before. This can be described as an 'à la carte' world. For example, Pakistan is navigating the world stage skilfully as a multipolar state with relationships across China, Iran and the US.
- As America retreats, a growing number of countries see opportunities for greater freedom and flexibility. These are the 'middle powers': countries seeking greater room to manoeuvre in a more fragmented global order. Some may eventually become great powers, but it is unlikely that they will come together as a coherent third bloc due to conflicting interests.

## PEAK POPULISM?

- Some commentators have argued that Viktor Orbán's election defeat in Hungary may signal 'peak populism'. However, Russell cautioned that it is too early to read this as a wider rejection of populism. Orbán's defeat may have had more to do with corruption concerns and voter fatigue after 16 years in power than with a rejection of his ideas.
- It remains highly plausible that other European populist parties - such as the AfD, Reform UK or the Rassemblement National - could come to power within the next few years.

## POST-TRUMP AMERICA

- The most significant election day this year is likely to be the US midterms. Current expectations are that the House of Representatives could shift to the Democrats, with growing speculation that the Senate could change too.
- This raises two questions: what Democrats should do if they regain control of Congress, and what impact that would have on Trump. Russell suggested that Democrats should avoid spending time on impeachment and instead focus on key issues and identifying a strong successor for the 2028 election. Any impact on Trump is likely to be felt more at home than on the global stage, given presidential control of foreign policy.

# THE MODERN LEADER AS GEOPOLITICAL STRATEGIST

Bjorn Beam, ex-CIA and Head of Geopolitical and Tech Research, Headspring Faculty, outlined how leaders should recognise that they are already acting as geopolitical strategists - decisions about workforce capability, reskilling, mobility and resilience are now deeply shaped by geopolitical conditions. Rather than seeing this as a niche concern, organisations need to approach this as a core part of how they plan and lead:



**Bjorn Beam, ex-CIA and Head of Geopolitical and Tech Research, Headspring Faculty**

**in LINKEDIN**

- Geopolitics can no longer be treated as a background issue for business. This requires a broader understanding of how different forces now interact.
- For example, AI is not just about the tools themselves, but where the data sits, the talent needed to build and manage it, the constraints involved in moving it across borders and the cyber risks that surround it. There is a growing risk of hybrid warfare; since 2022 Russia has doubled its hybrid attacks across Europe.
- Climate change is now a central part of industrial policy and has implications not only for operations, but also for migration, workforce planning and long-term resilience. At the same time, changes in tariffs, border rules and visa regimes are making it harder for organisations to move talent to where it is needed.

## INTERCONNECTED RISK

The wide-ranging impact of the Iran conflict illustrates the interconnected nature of the current global system. Even if a truce were reached quickly, the wider ramifications would continue to be felt across energy, technology, food, migration and domestic politics. The effects are compounded rather than isolated:



### ENERGY

In the United States, fuel prices had already risen sharply, including in key swing states, affecting how people travel, behave and feel about the economy.



### TECHNOLOGY

Around 30% of global helium - an essential component in semiconductor production and in cooling data centres - comes from Qatar and cannot be stored for long periods. Disruption therefore creates inflationary pressure on technologies that underpin the modern economy.



### FOOD AND MIGRATION

Much of the world's fertiliser comes from the Middle East. Given that this is currently crop-planting season in the Northern Hemisphere, a sharp drop in fertiliser supply could lead to a major drop in output. Millions could face starvation as a result of the conflict, raising the prospect of increased migration and, in turn, a further rise in right-wing populism.

Rather than dealing with one crisis at a time, Europe now faces multiple overlapping pressures, including the implications of the Iran conflict for Russia's actions in Ukraine and China's stance towards Taiwan.

For example, with more than 90% of advanced semiconductors coming from Taiwan, and Taiwan playing a key role in helping the US track Chinese nuclear submarines, the implications of any conflict would be profound. The wider lesson for organisations is the need to build in strategic redundancy: preparing for disruption before it happens, rather than assuming systems will continue to function as planned.

# Q&A

## **Q: WHY HAVEN'T THE DEMOCRATS COME FORWARD WITH A COMPELLING ALTERNATIVE TO TRUMP?**

A: Many in the Democratic Party appear cautious about being the first to stick their head above the parapet when facing such a strong political ecosystem. The Republican fundraising system is also outperforming the Democratic one. As a result, Democrats are unsure which angle to take and are wary of committing too early. It is also still early for people to come forward for presidential nominations, which traditionally happens after the midterms.

## **Q: HAS TRUMP SET A NEW PRECEDENT FOR PRESIDENTIAL NORMS, AND CAN THE RESULTING DIVISIONS BE REPAIRED?**

A: One of the underlying messages from government officials around the world, including traditional American allies, is: we do not know whether we can trust America now. Democrats may return to office and bring a steadier, more consistent administration, but how can other countries be confident that America will not swing back again four years later? More hopefully, many parts of the American system have proved to be robust. They may have been bruised, but they have not been destroyed. At the same time, while the US continues to hold presidential elections and midterms, there is concern about the loss of expertise from the system.

## **Q: IF GEOPOLITICS IS SO UNSTABLE, SHOULD WE BE DOING SOMETHING ECONOMICALLY TO MAKE OURSELVES MORE RESILIENT?**

A: The simple answer is yes. However, it is not easy to make large, radical changes to economic policy. The broader challenge is how to prepare for 'durable disorder': the ability to thrive both in periods of instability and when conditions are more favourable. This means rethinking how economies and industries operate, building in redundancy and spare capacity for when things do not go to plan.

## **CRF UPCOMING EVENTS**

### **SAVE THE DATE:**

**HR Leaders Briefing with Katie Martin, Markets Columnist, Financial Times**

Wednesday 17 June | 18:00-21:00 BST, London

Our next FT Executive Briefing will take place on Wednesday 17 June where we will be joined by Katie Martin, Markets Columnist, Financial Times and Björn Beam. The session is designed for senior HRDs only and has very limited capacity. Save the date and register interest in attending by contacting [events@crforum.co.uk](mailto:events@crforum.co.uk).

### **INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE**

Turning Uncertainty into Advantage  
Monday 5: Wednesday 7 October 2026  
Malta

### **ASPIRING GROUP HRD**

Developing the Leaders of Tomorrow  
CRF Learning Programme:  
August 2026: February 2027  
London

### **FURTHER READING**

**CRF. 2025.** [The Changing Role of the HR Leader](#)

**CRF. 2025.** [Future-Ready Talent Management](#)

**CRF. 2026.** [The HR Function and Risk Management](#)