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Welcome to this week's Future Trends - the must-read weekly briefing covering the changing face of global politics, economics, development, social, and conflict.

Here's what you need to know this week:

- Ukrainian blood bank and airbase among the latest targets of Russian strikes
- Thailand close to forming a government
- Ethiopia declares state of emergency following clashes in Amhara
- Cubans struggle as peso loses half its value in a year
- James Webb telescope captures brilliant new images of dying star
- China wants to mobilize the entire nation in counter-espionage

SPECIAL EDITION: UKRAINE

Russia damages nearly 40,000 tonnes of grain in Ukraine. Since pulling out of the landmark [Black Sea grain export deal](#), Russia has intensified its attacks on facilities vital for Ukrainian grain shipments. The damaged grain was meant to be distributed to some African countries, China and Israel.

Ukrainian blood bank and airbase among the latest targets of Russian strikes. Ukraine's Air Force said 70 air-assault weapons were fired overnight at the [Khmelnyskyi region](#) in western Ukraine, around 300 kilometres south-west of Kyiv, with 10 bypassing air defences.

Ukraine calls Jeddah talks productive, Russia calls them doomed. A senior Ukrainian official said that talks in Saudi Arabia designed to make headway towards a peaceful settlement of the [war with Russia](#) had been productive, but Moscow called the meeting a 'doomed attempt to swing the Global South behind Kyiv'.

POLITICS

Thailand close to forming government. Thailand's Pheu Thai party is set to nominate a real estate tycoon to become prime minister as it takes the lead in an effort to form a government. The [Move Forward party](#), who obtained the largest share of the vote, was sidelined after the military dominated senate became worried about its reform agenda.

Former Pakistan prime minister Imran Khan sentenced to three years in prison. Legal experts say a conviction in the case could end Khan's chances of participating in national elections that are due to be held before early November. He was sentenced for [selling state gifts](#).

India's Supreme Court suspends Rahul Gandhi's two-year defamation jail term. India's supreme court has suspended [Rahul Gandhi's](#) two-year prison sentence for defamation, paving the way for him to return as an MP and to run in next year's general election.

Venezuela Supreme Court orders restructuring of country's Red Cross. The Supreme Court ordered a broad and diverse restructuring of the [Venezuelan Red Cross](#), and the dismissal of the president and members of the board of directors. It also ordered the prosecution of outgoing directors. Red Cross International strongly opposes the actions.

Senegal authorities arrest opposition frontrunner, ban his party, and cut the internet. Senegal's government has dissolved a major opposition party. [Ousmane Sonko](#), an opposition figure, has been seen as a threat to the ruling party ahead of the 2024 election. Sonko has been accused of calling for insurrection, conspiring against the state, threatening national security and other charges.

CONFLICT

Ethiopia declares state of emergency following clashes in Amhara. Ethiopia's federal government declared a [state of emergency](#) following clashes in the Amhara region between the military and local armed fighters, citing that the clashes are quickly becoming a security and economic crisis.

ECOWAS considering a military intervention in Niger. The West African bloc may create a [military intervention in Niger](#) if the government is not restored. They have performed six military intervention in West Africa since 1990.

Philippines accuses China of water cannon attack in Spratly Islands. Philippine coast guard said [China fired water cannon](#) at Philippine boats that were heading to resupply the country's soldiers on the Spratly Islands, parts of which are claimed by both countries. China said the boats were trespassing in its territory.

Iran runs military drills on disputed islands claimed by UAE. Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard has launched military exercises on islands whose ownership is disputed by the UAE. The actions increase tensions in the [Middle East](#) which are accompanied by a rising US military presence. Emirati leaders have claimed the islands belong to them.

Militant attacks in Pakistan have increased substantially. Armed group attacks in Pakistan have [increased by 79%](#) during the first half of this year. The worst attack occurred in July with a suicide bombing at a political rally in Pakistan's northern province killed at least 54 people, and injured 200 others.

ECONOMICS

Cubans struggle as peso loses half its value in a year. The Cuban peso was trading on the informal market at an all-time low of 230 to the dollar, slumping to half its value a year ago as consumers struggle with surging [inflation](#) and scarcity of goods.

Australian barley tariffs to be scrapped by China. China has dropped its 80% tariff on Australian barley. The tariff was part of a long-running and high-profile [trade war](#) between the two nations. The \$1 billion yearly trade in barley halted once the tariff was introduced.

Eurozone unemployment rate hits record low. Eurostat, the EU's statistical agency, stated the single currency bloc's [unemployment rate](#) was 6.4%, a sign that the region's labour market remains strong despite weak economic growth.

China to relax internal migration rules to kickstart economy. The Ministry of Public Security announced plans to lower the bar for obtaining an [urban hukou](#), or household registration. Beijing wants local governments to cancel hukou restrictions in cities with fewer than 3 million people.

The heat wave is driving up gas prices. Gas prices jumped 15% in the past week as the [heat wave](#) hitting Texas and Louisiana slowed oil refineries down.

Hurricane season may also impact refineries and push up prices, further complicating the Fed's efforts to rein in higher prices.

DEVELOPMENT

James Webb telescope captures brilliant new images of dying star. A team of astronomers at the University of Manchester used the telescope to capture images of the iconic [Ring Nebula](#), which is approximately 2,600 light-years from earth.

IEA says coal use hit an all-time high last year. [Coal consumption](#) increased by 3.3% to hit a fresh record high of 8.3 billion metric tons in 2022, the International Energy Agency.

Sudan: Six million people face famine. More than six million people in the war-ravaged Sudan are facing high levels of [food insecurity](#) according to the UNHCR. It warns that hunger and displacement due to the war is spiralling amid ongoing fighting.

Uganda ends UN human rights operations. The UN human rights office in Uganda will close after Uganda refused to renew an agreement allowing the UNHCR to operate. The closure comes amid concerns over [human rights](#) violations including extrajudicial killings in Uganda, and a new law that prescribes the death penalty for some homosexual acts.

US scientists hit new fusion energy milestone. US scientists at the federal Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory in California announced that they achieved net energy gain in a [nuclear fusion](#) reaction for a second time — this time with a higher energy yield.

SOCIAL

CHART: [The rapid loss of Antarctic sea ice](#)

Simple fragrance method produces major memory boost. Research into aromas while sleeping sparks [226% cognitive increase](#). A fragrance introduced to the bedrooms of older adults for two hours every night for six months, memories skyrocketed. Imaging revealed better integrity in the brain pathway called the left uncinate fasciculus which connects the medial temporal lobe to the decision-making prefrontal cortex.

China wants to mobilize the entire nation in counter-espionage. The call to popularize anti-spying work among the masses follows an expansion of

China's [counter-espionage law](#) that took effect in July. The law, which bans the transfer of information related to national security and unspecified national interests.

Google and Meta set to remove news links to Canada over Online News Act. Meta will remove news from its platform and end local publisher deals before the law comes into effect. Additionally, Alphabet will remove Canadian news links from Google News and from Google Discover after the [new law](#) forces digital giants to compensate media outlets.

Kenya suspends Worldcoin iris scans over privacy and security concerns. The US company [Worldcoin](#) which is aiming to build a global database of iris images for identity recognition in global financial applications. Thousands of people received free currency in exchange for a retinal scan but has been banned in Kenya citing privacy concerns.

PEACEBUILDING

[On her substack *Unraveled*, journalist Amanda Ripley is publicizing “conflict hacks,” actions that defuse everyday conflicts.](#) Faced with conflict over a range of issues, a school superintendent in Middletown, Ohio asked for help from “positive gossipers” who showed up at school board meetings, told jokes and stories of community and encouraged participants to disagree constructively. The FX show *Bear* features a chef who now uses his fist to draw circles around his heart (a gesture that means I’m sorry in sign language) to apologize, and to say “let’s talk about this later.”

[A youth-led research team has produced a guide for designing youth-centric and innovative employment programs](#) based on a study in Iraq, Kenya, and Guatemala. The guide highlights the need to redefine success in the learning-to-earning journey, provide mental health support for job seekers, mainstream support to navigate self-employment and entrepreneurship, and equip job seekers with practical experiences and skills. [IREX](#) partnered with youth researchers on the project.

[Minneapolis chef Yia Vang is introducing the Twin Cities to the food and culture of the Hmong ethnic group from Southeast Asia.](#) He operates a counter inside a food hall in Minneapolis and has had stands at the Twins baseball stadium and Minnesota’s state fair. Vang also hosts two television shows and a podcast about Hmong culture. The twin cities are home to the largest population of Hmong in the US;

most immigrated as refugees from Asia after the Vietnam War when the CIA recruited Hmong for covert missions.

The Rotary Club of Cameron Park, California collects used bicycles and delivers them to Folsom State Prison, where inmates repair them. Rotarians then deliver as many as 500 of the repaired bikes each year to school children from low-income households and to organizations serving homeless people, veterans, refugees, and families displaced by wildfires.