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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, and conflict.

Here's what you need to know this week:

- UN investigation finds Russia tortured Ukrainians to death
- 40,000 march in Spain against amnesty for Catalan separatists
- Nagorno-Karabakh's 120,000 Armenians may leave for Armenia
- OPEC cartel controls the high petroleum prices
- Earth's stability and ability to support civilization at risk
- Rhino number rebound as global figures reveal a win for conservation

SPECIAL EDITION: UKRAINE

UN investigation finds Russia tortured Ukrainians to death. Russian occupiers [tortured Ukrainians](#) so brutally that some of their victims died and families were forced to listen as they raped women next door, a UN mandated investigative body has found.

Ukraine launches missile strike on Russia Black Sea Fleet headquarters. The Russian governor of Sevastopol said firefighters were battling a blaze, and more emergency forces were being brought in, indicating that the fire could be massive. Ukraine has claimed that the [Russian Commander of the Black Sea Fleet has been killed](#), although Russia says casualties were minor.

Russia plans huge defence spending hike in 2024. Russia plans a huge [hike in defence spending](#) next year, swelling to 6% of GDP, up from 3.9%

in 2023 and 2.7% in 2021. The increase will raise government expenditure by 26%.

POLITICS

40,000 march in Spain against amnesty for Catalan separatists. Tens of thousands of Spaniards protested in Madrid against possible plans by acting Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez to [grant an amnesty to Catalan separatists](#) to keep himself in office after an election he failed to win.

Son of ousted Gabon leader, Ali Bongo, charged with treason and corruption. Bongo's eldest son [Noureddin Bongo Valentin](#) and former presidential spokesman Jessye Ella Ekogha, as well as four others close to the deposed leader, have been charged and placed in provisional detention.

Germany's Foreign Minister joins growing criticism of EU migration deal with Tunisia. She joined a growing chorus of critics of the [European Union's new migration deal with Tunisia](#), saying human rights and procedural faults ruled it out as a blueprint for the future.

China and Timor Leste form strategic partnership, upgrading their bilateral ties. China and Timor Leste have upgraded their bilateral ties to a [comprehensive strategic partnership](#), aiming to give Beijing more influence in the region, while also satisfying the young half-island nation's desire for stronger ties with major economies.

Solomon Islands PM snubs meeting with US president, praises China's 'global security initiative'. The second [US-Pacific Leaders' Summit](#) will be held at the White House this week. The Solomon Islands prime minister has declined the invitation due to "domestic issues". China has funded a new national stadium and infrastructure developments for the upcoming Pacific Games, which will be held in November.

Uganda to attempt to facilitate re-unification of Somalia and Somaliland. Uganda has agreed to facilitate the mediation process between [Somalia and Somaliland](#). Somaliland broke away from Somalia in 1991 and has since struggled to gain international recognition.

CONFLICT

Nagorno-Karabakh's 120,000 Armenians may leave for Armenia. The [120,000 ethnic Armenians](#) of Nagorno-Karabakh may leave for Armenia as they do not want to

live as part of Azerbaijan and fear ethnic cleansing, the leadership of the breakaway region said.

Russia reorganises in Africa after Prigozhin's demise. Russia's Deputy Defence Minister and the GRU military intelligence agency have made several trips to Africa. They are seen as the main organisers of the [post-Prigozhin era of Russian relationships with Africa](#) following the Wagner Group chief's death.

At least 40% of Colombia's ELN rebels could reject peace deal. At least 40% of fighters from Colombia's ELN rebels could reject a potential [peace deal](#) being negotiated with the government, citing reluctance to surrender profits from drug smuggling and illegal mining.

Chinese erect 'floating barrier' in disputed South China Sea shoal. The Philippines has accused China's coast guard of installing a "[floating barrier](#)" in a disputed area of the South China Sea, saying it prevented Filipinos from entering and fishing in the area. The Philippine government plans to dismantle the barrier.

DR Congo President seeks withdrawal of UN peacekeepers this year. The mission, called [MONUSCO](#), took over from an earlier UN operation in 2010 to help quell insecurity in the DRC's east where armed groups fight over territory and resources. Tshisekedi's pronouncement comes just weeks after the East African Community extended the mandate of a regional force in DRC.

Somalia seeks a delay in the withdrawal of AU Peacekeepers. Somalia has asked for a 90-day delay in the withdrawal of AU peacekeepers on the grounds of being ill-equipped to [withstand al-Shabab insurgents](#). The Somali government is requesting for a UN embargo on arms to be lifted to give the government a better fighting chance.

ECONOMICS

OPEC cartel controls the high petroleum prices. It is estimated that [the cartel makes \\$2.8 billion a day](#) or \$888 billion in 2022. OPEC has 13 members and led by Saudi Arabia who produce about a third of OPEC's production.

Global economic growth forecasts slashed. The global economy is forecast to grow 2.7% next year, according to the OECD. The [world's economy in 2024](#), will be dragged down by persistent inflation and ongoing problems in China.

Multi-day protests over economic crisis grip Ghana's capital. Hundreds of demonstrators gathered in the Ghanaian capital, Accra, for a third day of [anti-government protests linked to economic hardship](#) that have led to dozens of arrests. The gold, oil and cocoa-producing nation has been battling its worst economic crisis in a generation brought on by spiralling public debt.

US, China form economic working groups in sign of better ties. The US and China are establishing two working groups to discuss economic and financial issues, the [latest sign of a thaw in relations](#) between the world's largest economies.

A monopoly-busting Amazon lawsuit brought forward by FTC. The Federal Trade Commission has been preparing a complaint since at least the start of this year targeting an array of [Amazon's business practices](#). If successful, it could lead to a court-ordered restructuring of the company's \$1.35 trillion market cap.

DEVELOPMENT

Earth's stability and ability to support civilization at risk. A new study carried out by the University of Copenhagen discovered that six out of the nine planetary boundaries that ensure stability and liveability on Earth have been transgressed, which has led researchers to conclude that more [focus is needed on interactions between the boundaries](#) to preserve the planet.

Gene-edited spider silk 6x stronger than bulletproof Kevlar. The research team integrated spider silk with silkworms, a process known as localization, by introducing spider silk protein genes into silkworms' genetic material. They have created a kind of [fibre about six times tougher than Kevlar](#), an extremely lightweight and strong fibre often used in bullet-proof vests.

Company builds powerful 500cc one-stroke engine. The engine has no cylinder head in this motor, no crankshaft, no camshaft, and no valves. It's [lighter and more powerful than a conventional engine](#) and it will initially be used in EV cars as a booster. It can also run off hydrogen.

Largest asteroid samples ever collected from deep space land on Earth. A NASA space capsule carrying the [largest soil samples](#) ever scooped up from the surface of an asteroid has streaked through Earth's atmosphere and parachuted into the Utah desert.

Israel has unveiled its AI-assisted next-gen 'Merkava' tank. After 5 years of development, this new tank is stated to be crucial to the nation's future, as it has been designed to hit enemy forces before they can strike and will [improve operational effectiveness](#).

SOCIAL

Rhino number rebound as global figures reveal a win for conservation. There has been an [increase to 27,000 rhinos](#) at the end of last year, which is received as a sigh of relief. However, the numbers remain concerning and further action needs to be taken.

World's oldest wooden structure found in Zambia. The [structure dates back 476,000 years](#). It was intentionally shaped with wooden tools to create stable joints, attesting to the cognitive skills of Homo sapiens' forebears. Embedded in clay and further preserved by a high-water table, scientists say the structure was made from the logs of a large-fruited willow tree.

Research suggests you're more at risk of bankruptcy by chasing financial success. Research has found those who believe they are able to "[manifest](#)" their own financial success through positive thinking are more inclined to make risky investments, and have a higher likelihood of ending up bankrupt.

Murdoch Family Trust controls the news empire. When Rupert Murdoch dies, his four children will have control of the family trust with equal voting rights. The [trust controls the media empire](#). How the siblings align, and vote will determine who controls the empire.

Blue light exposure in male rats leads to early puberty. A new study is indicating that, in male rats, exposure to blue light may result in early puberty. [Blue light](#) is a type of light that is emitted by electronic devices such as smartphones, tablets, computers, and televisions, as well as by energy-efficient LED lighting.

PEACEBUILDING

[Conductive Space for Peace](#) has launched the [Innovators Hive](#), an online library and community space aimed at sharing innovations that strengthen local leadership in the peacebuilding and development sectors. The hive was developed in order to encourage increased connection among peacebuilders, particularly on efforts to support innovation by local leaders.

The [Carter Center](#) and [Team Democracy](#) have announced a new partnership to promote transparent and trustworthy electoral processes in the US. The effort aims to strengthen the core values of democracy and electoral integrity defined in the [Candidate Principles for Trusted Elections](#), a national, cross-partisan effort co-led by the Carter Center and the [Gerald R. Ford Presidential Foundation](#) and supported by over 70 organizations across the country. The Candidate Principles deemed necessary for a healthy constitutional democracy include integrity, nonviolence, security, oversight, and the peaceful transfer of power.

The [Life & Peace Institute](#) has organized “[Knowledge Café](#)” events where youth community leaders and international donor representatives can converse over tea and coffee about subjects like “localization” and flexible funding. The first Café included recipients of micro-grants from seven youth-led Community-Based Organizations in Nairobi’s informal settlements. The micro-grants had minimal restrictions and were designed to empower young people to design and manage projects in their communities that supported social cohesion in advance of and during Kenya’s general elections. At the end of the projects, the youth asked to continue to engage with the international donors.

Recent publications document research and provide advice on preventing and de-escalating violence at US public meetings and voting sites. The Anti-Defamation League has released a guide for [Responding to Extremist Disruptions at Public Meetings](#). The Bridging Divides Initiative has published a guide for public officials regarding [De-escalation and Communication Around Contentious Meetings](#). The Brennan Center for Justice and Giffords Law Center to Prevent Gun Violence advocates banning guns from places where votes are cast in [Guns and Voting: How to Protect Elections After Bruen](#). States United Democracy Center has identified at least 23 “election deniers” who now hold statewide offices in *The Election Denier Landscape*.