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Balancing security and long-term goals amid mounting crises

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Climate disasters, economic instability and armed conflict are now unfolding in rapid succession, with impacts that accumulate and reinforce one another. The profound reshaping of global value chains, driven by the digital and energy transitions, may itself be contributing to economic and political tensions, as public and private actors seek to secure their place in the emerging economy. Reorienting the economy around decarbonization, resilience and ecosystem protection lays the foundations for a robust long-term response, reducing dependence on fossil fuels and minimizing vulnerabilities.

Despite these advantages, however, the shift towards sustainability is far from a foregone conclusion. The accumulation of crises is primarily generating a climate of deep uncertainty and instability, compounded by the risks created by the adversarial strategies of powerful actors that no longer play by the rules. Security—physical, military, economic, supply-related and, more broadly, in relation to market access—has returned to the top of the agenda. Although energy security would, in theory, be best served by reducing fossil fuel consumption, the immediate

response has been to diversify energy sources, since electrifying end uses (such as electric vehicles and heat pumps) is a medium-term process, as is the decarbonization of electricity generation.

In such a context, it might seem that there is little room left to make the case for cooperation and solidarity among nations, as opposed to strategies of competition, confrontation or narrowly defined national interests. Nor, one might think, is there much space to pursue environmental and social sustainability goals, rather than dismantling regulations perceived as obstacles to the exercise of power.

Since Donald Trump's return to the presidency of the United States, other countries have had time to observe, and in some cases experience first-hand, these unilateral security strategies. Several lessons are beginning to emerge. First, securing supply chains may entail additional costs, but it can also divert investment away from competitiveness. Economic decision-makers are therefore being called on to strike the right balance between security and competitiveness. They must also reconcile efforts to protect national economic sectors with the need to position themselves in the markets of the future.

Against this backdrop, cooperative solutions that foster solidarity, together with a focus on long-term objectives, can help navigate the internal contradictions of economic goals. These include choosing a path of moderation to reduce dependencies, building balanced industrial value chains, and pursuing plurilateral or multilateral cooperation agreements rather than imposing outcomes by force. Such options already appear credible in areas such as access to critical minerals and the technologies needed to process them, even for dominant actors, as illustrated by the more than 50 countries invited by the US Secretary of State to take part in collective efforts to secure access to these minerals.^{[1](#)}

Economic operators need, above all, stability and predictability. They are aware of the inevitable interdependencies between countries and sectors, whether through material flows, natural resources, technologies or data. Chaos and unpredictability may serve as a strategy of power in the short term, but they are difficult to sustain over time.

IDDRI is therefore laying the groundwork for maintaining or restoring predictability through three main courses of action.

At the **international level**, existing initiatives to rebuild the capacity for international cooperation must be strengthened. This means both restoring political legitimacy and practical effectiveness to multilateral institutions, whose role remains irreplaceable despite being widely contested today, and developing less universal, more partial, plurilateral alliances between countries for which cooperation is a condition of survival: the "middle powers" mentioned by Canadian Prime Minister Mark Carney,^{[2](#)} but also the most vulnerable countries. Through its capacity to foster dialogue between blocs and between countries, and its ability to persuade on the basis of rigorous analysis of economic conditions within value chains, IDDRI supports the emergence and consolidation of these plurilateral arrangements, so that they can become cornerstones in the reconstruction of multilateral cooperation.^{[4](#)}

Europe lies at the heart of networks of material, economic, political and military dependence. Once this reality is strategically acknowledged, it also places Europe among the key players with both the means and the responsibility to show that security is better achieved by managing these interdependencies than by pursuing the illusion of self-sufficiency. Europe is also a continent with experience of long-term sustainable development policies. Its dependence on the natural resources of others means that it must offer balanced partnerships, or risk becoming strategically irrelevant. To this end, IDDRI is doing everything in its power to ensure that member states, stakeholders and the sectors concerned can transform the continent's economy and renew the social contract associated with this new economic model. At the same time, it is engaging from the outset with international partners and with both long-standing and more recent allies across all regions of the world on the political processes that will

guide this transformation. Without these partners, the project cannot succeed; they are also essential to rebuilding global cooperation.

Finally, ensuring security at the macroeconomic and military levels is an essential task for states, but it is not enough to secure a long-term future at a time when **societies** themselves are becoming increasingly sceptical of politics. Citizens seem prepared to support candidates whose main promise is simply to do the opposite of whatever has been tried so far, as a matter of principle and regardless of the lessons of experience.

In many countries, the social legitimacy needed to implement any project of political transition is still lacking, all the more so when that project requires the long-term vision needed to break free from the litany of crises. This legitimacy must be rebuilt patiently, by listening to citizens while also respecting the broad orders of magnitude whose necessity the IPCC and IPBES are making ever clearer.

This means understanding the concerns of citizens and organized stakeholders as part of rebuilding the social contract around the need for protection and security at the level of households and individuals, as well as their aspirations for prosperity, equality and a good life. The challenge is to connect short-term needs for security with long-term promises, both for individuals and through local forms of mobilization. Here too, IDDRI is working to show, through examples in the areas of food and mobility,⁴ that it is possible to combine security, protection and long-term aspirations.

1

<https://www.state.gov/releases/office-of-the-spokesperson/2026/02/2026-critical-minerals-ministerial/>

2

<https://www.weforum.org/stories/2026/01/davos-2026-special-address-by-mark-carney-prime-minister-of-canada/>

4

In 2026, in particular, IDDRI, in conjunction with the European Council on Foreign Relations (ECFR), will coordinate the T7 process:
<https://www.iddri.org/en/reseau/think-7>

4

<https://www.iddri.org/en/themes/lifestyles>

BIODIVERSITÉ

CLIMATE

PACTE VERT EUROPÉEN

GOUVERNANCE

MODES DE VIE

ENJEUX SOCIAUX

NÉGOCIATIONS INTERNATIONALES

COOPERATION POLICY