

# THE STOCKHOLM GEOPOLITICS SCENARIOS

Exploring Security, Sustainability, and Development  
in a World of Growing Uncertainties



## Draft brief 3 December 2018

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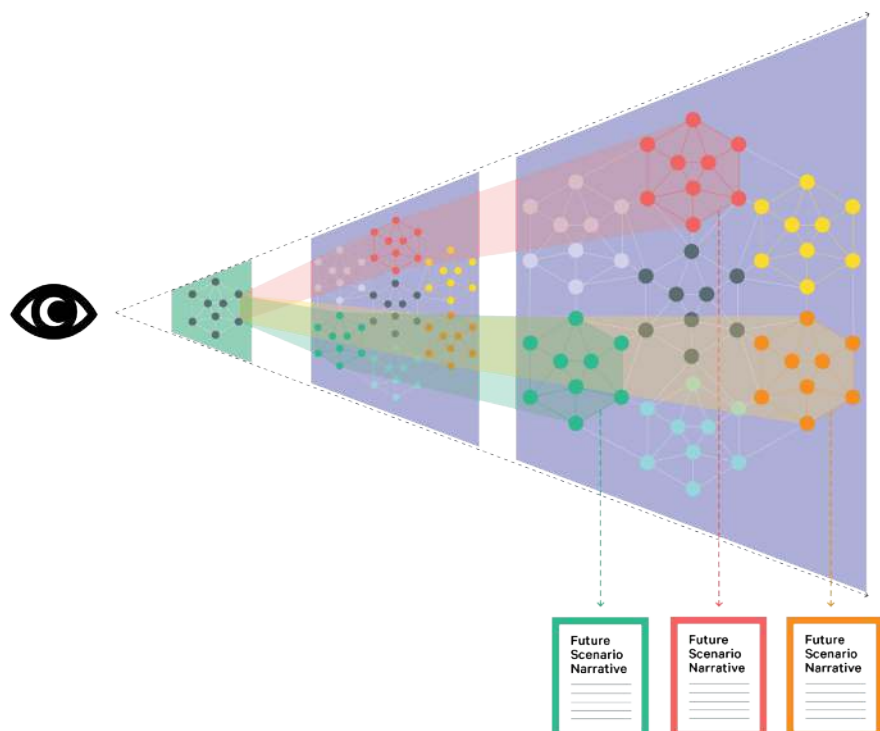
## Introduction

Scenarios are used for understanding and preparing for an uncertain future. Historically, exploratory scenarios have been employed separately by experts working in security, human development, and environmental change. The Stockholm Geopolitics Scenarios aim to combine insights from these areas and craft a comprehensive set of portraits of four plausible world configurations in 2050.

Drawing on a range of experts from different fields the scenario set was developed during a series of workshops where participants identified key drivers of change, described the relationships between them, and imagined pathways leading to the four different worlds in 2050. The process involved an innovative combination of methodological approaches, including analysis of actors and their environment<sup>1</sup>, intuitive logics<sup>2</sup> using cyclical causality<sup>3</sup> to establish the scenarios logics and cross-impact balance<sup>4</sup> analysis to explore how dominant drivers play out in each of the scenarios.

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Figure 1: Exploratory scenarios help us expand our thinking beyond the boundaries of today, develop narratives for possible futures, and identify pathways to move from here to there.



The scenario set was generated from combinations of uncertainties that participants rated as being most important, seen from the vantage point of Swedish actors' opportunities to navigate changing geopolitical landscapes in ways that combine competitiveness with a contribution to a global sustainability transformation:

- **Shift** depicts a world where authoritarian states try to maximize national interests through technology driven development within an evolving global trading regime.
- **Deal** portrays a future dominated by a large Eurasian trading area with powerful green tech companies vying for scarce resources.
- **Mosaic** describes a world driven by local preferences, with a focus on resource efficiency and societal value.
- **Fracture** illustrates a multi-polar future where antagonistic regional blocs compete for influence and resource access.

The four scenarios mark cornerstones in a continuum of uncertainty about plausible future developments. As such the Stockholm Geopolitics Scenarios can be used for understanding the confluence between security, development, and environmental change, and for aiding actors as they strategize for a changing and uncertain world.



### Shift

In 2050 the world is dominated by authoritarian governments trying to maximize national interests through technology driven development within an evolving global trading regime. Coalesced around crisis, this world remains fragile as the global governance regime reconstitutes itself to reflect the changing players at the table, while growing inequality, polarization, and discontent continue to brew underneath.

Following the economic crash of 2020, which in scale far exceeded the mortgage and lending collapse of 2008, countries around the globe found themselves teetering on the edge of ruin. The crisis, coupled with mounting damages from extreme weather events, growing domestic inequality and polarization, and increasing flows of international migration made room for authoritarian leaders to gain power by appealing to traditional values and national pride. The EU was no exception and has since dissolved.

Yet despite initial public support for authoritarian politics, bold rhetoric alone was not enough to satisfy citizens for long. In the 2030s, leaders set to work investing in industry and technology, as well as re-making the international global

order in their image, in an effort to preserve their power both at home and abroad. Even with the shift towards authoritarianism and nationalism, major countries are more interested in cooperation than conflict, with many turning to the export-oriented approaches of China, Japan, Taiwan and other Asian technological leaders as a model.

By 2040, the World Trade Organization had re-emerged as the central governance mechanism for international trade, now led by an expanded coalition of international powers, dominated by Brazil, India, China, and South Africa.

As naturally antagonistic governments try to cooperate, the world is in a state of flux.



### Deal

In 2050 the global economy is dominated by the Eurasian Deal – a trading regime centred around powerful green tech companies, underpinned by progressive social policy reform. As the global economic paradigm has shifted, countries dependent on fossil fuels or with few key resources have faced an increasingly difficult situation.

By the mid 2020s China had embarked on a more liberal and cooperative development path, paving the way for growing trade and investment links with EU countries. At the same time, following an increasing number of extreme weather events, a broad consensus was growing that fossil fuels posed a substantial threat to human security. Conditions were ripe for creating a new trading hub, focused on green technologies and sustainable solutions.

Public pressure against fossil fuels, combined with competitively priced renewable energy, triggered the EU and China to enter a bilateral trade deal banishing fossil fuel subsidies and forming the world's largest trading area. This initiated a rapid transition away from fossil fuels with other progressive nations joining the compact, including several subnational actors in the US, despite a lack of federal support. By the late 2030s green tech companies had begun dominating the political agenda, with nation states playing more of a supporting role.

Through the 2030s the gap grew between the Eurasian Deal countries and the rest of the world, with Russia and other former fossil-fuel dependent economies experiencing steep recessions and internal turmoil and growing extremism.

In the 2040s global economic growth began to slow as a result of growing resource scarcity, leading to volatile commodity markets and strong competition for new strategic resources and intellectual property rights.

By 2050, companies are vying for critical resources and for power, trying to come out on the right side of the deal. It

is a divided world with sharp contrasts between different countries depending on their capacity to participate in and benefit from the deal.



## Mosaic

By 2050 the world is a mosaic of liberally minded and values-driven local societies that, despite a limited global trade volume, interact with one another in a variety of different constellations. While there is relatively slow growth in the global economy, the quality of growth has improved considerably, particularly in terms of resource efficiencies and social indicators.

A series of financial crises in the 2020s had rippling effects across global financial systems and led to a deep crisis with social repercussions around the world. Globalization came to an abrupt halt and existing power structures were challenged. The EU broke up, the US Federal Government was severely weakened, and the China Belt and Road Initiative came to an end.

In the 2030s the breakdown of global trade made it necessary to find new ways of utilizing local assets, skills and resources. Initiatives around the world took inspiration from the pre-crisis momentum that had been built around the UN Agenda 2030, and progressive actors began working in networks of best practices.

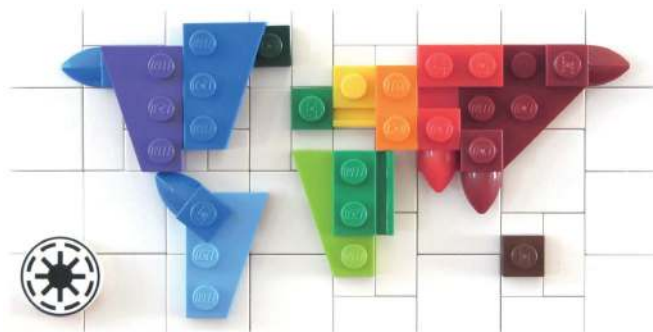
By 2040 a new form of Keynesianism had re-established global financial stability, promoting new business models and allowing local areas the flexibility to address different development goals. In many places, however, the absence of a sufficient local resource base combined with the lack of global governance structures conserved pre-crisis equity gaps, creating development traps, growing tensions and vulnerability to emerging hostile powers.



## Fracture

The multipolar world of 2050 is divided between different regional powers with diverging goals and values, conflicting interests, and with separate spheres of client states. While some regions fare better than others, overall economic development has stagnated as result of the reversal of globalization, allowing for only very basic living conditions in large parts of the world. In better-off places the level of wealth depends on how efficiently resources are utilized domestically or within a sphere of interest.

The 2020s saw growing tensions between global and regional powers. China's assertive investment push via the Belt and Road Initiative escalated trade conflicts, not least in



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relation to an increasingly protectionist US. Russian fossil-fuel based power politics cast shadows over a weakening EU as eastern and central European countries, Germany included, had chosen to meet basic energy needs through Russian controlled pipelines.

The situation worsened through the 2030s, with increasing resource-driven conflicts and growing controversy in the UN system over the key underpinnings of the international rules-based order, including basic concepts such as human rights and free trade. The conflictual situation was further deepened by escalating migration in the wake of a series of severe droughts, which in turn further securitized national policies.

After the collapse of the UN system in 2040 the world fractured into five antagonistic regional blocs in a world characterized by shrinking economies, productivity losses and resource-intensive practices.

In order to break out of this vicious circle and re-establish sound economic relations the core EU countries have begun making progress in exploring coalitions of the willing based on mutual advantage.

## Conclusion

These four distinct futures present different opportunities and challenges for societies as we move towards 2050. The pathways we embark upon will have significant consequences for economic growth, combating climate change, and human security around the globe (Figures 2 and 3, reverse). The Stockholm Geopolitics Scenarios can be a useful tool for navigating our uncertain world.

## Endnotes

- 1 Emery, F. E. and Trist, E. I. (1965). The Causal Texture of Organizational Environments. *Human Relations*, 18(1). 21–32.  
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Figure 2: Model of global GDP/capita under each scenario. Results are percentages compared to current levels.

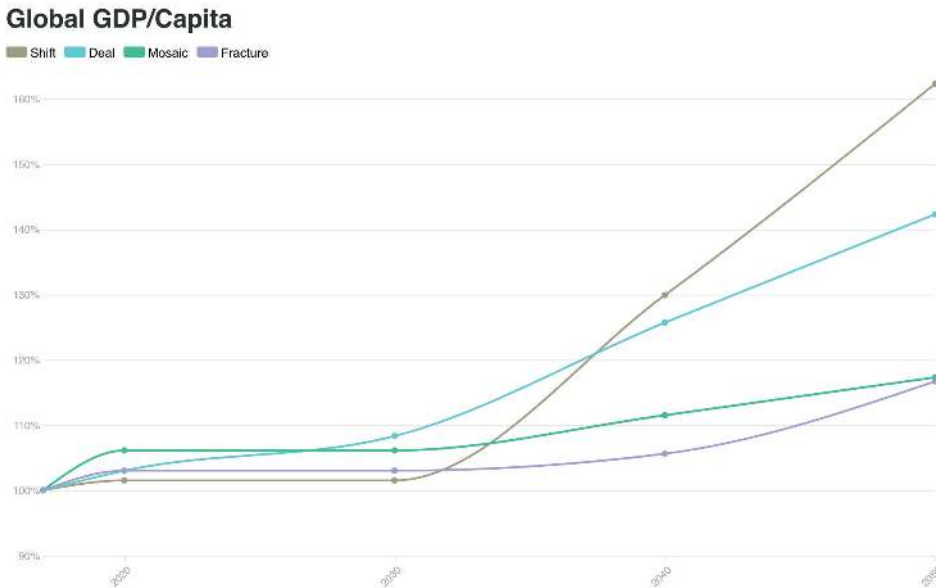
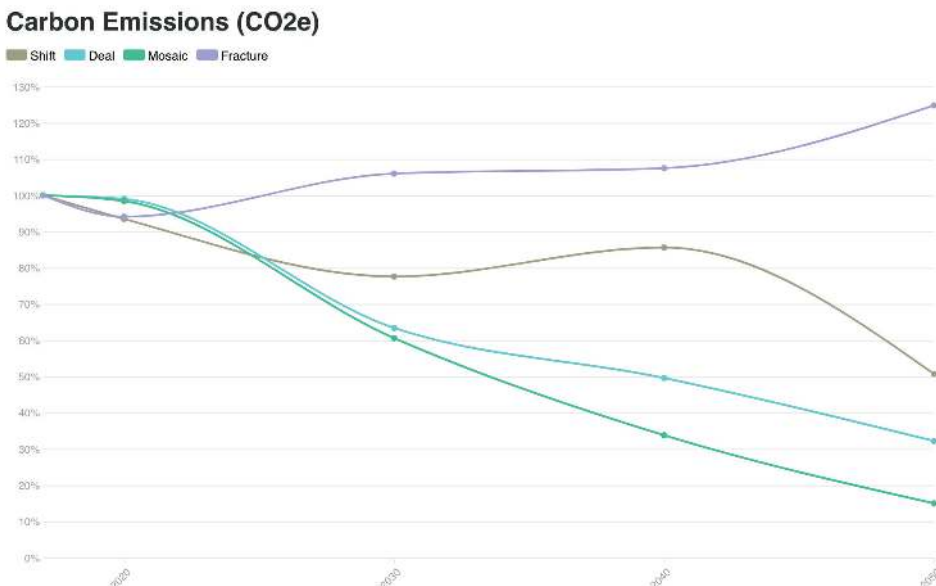


Figure 3: Model of carbon emissions (CO<sub>2</sub> equivalent) under each scenario. Results are percentages compared to current levels.



Mistra Geopolitics is a research programme that examines the dynamics of geopolitics, human security and environmental change. The programme critically explores the interactions between geopolitics, security, global climate and environmental change, with results that are especially relevant for Sweden and Swedish actors.

The program brings together diverse disciplines and research approaches spanning peace and conflict; human security; global environmental governance; global environmental change; and the effectiveness of domestic, regional, and global policy-making.

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