



**HUMAN DEVELOPMENT  
RESEARCH INITIATIVE**  
REIMAGINING DEVELOPMENT

**Research Proposal:**

# GLOBAL RISKS TEAM

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## ABSTRACT

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Physical, economic and environmental security form a key pillar of human development. Whilst the majority of the world's low-income and particularly middle income countries today are experiencing improved health care, educational and economic outcomes in comparison to much of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, their progress is also often at the mercy of a plethora of global risks. These risks take many forms, such as terrorism, environmental degradation and disease outbreak, but are all bound by the collective uncertainty they impose on the process of development. It is out of this understanding that the Global Risks team of the Human Development Research Initiative (HDRI) operates. Given the uncertainty that these global risks pose to the development process, for the 2017/2018 year the team will centring its analysis on the concept of 'grey zones'.



## PROJECT OVERVIEW:

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Although grey zones are an increasingly popular theme in academic discussions and publications, no concrete definition of the concept exists. Indeed, the literature surrounding the debate over the definition is nearly as robust as that surrounding the actual theory. On the most basic level, a grey zone is “an intermediate area between two opposing positions” or “a situation, subject, etc., not clearly or easily defined, or not covered by an existing category or set of rules”. In this section, we will provide a set of more specific definitions, namely grey zone conflicts, political grey zones, grey zone regions and moral grey zones. Throughout our publications this year, we utilize one or more of these definitions.

### Grey Zone Conflicts:

The most prevalent and arguably most established theory of grey zones in the field of international relations is that of grey zone conflicts. These types of conflicts involve aggressive and coercive activities aimed at achieving political objectives but fall short of formal warfare. The aggressors purposefully craft and adopt strategies that “remain below the threshold of traditional military conflict and open interstate war”. These tactics are implemented gradually, allowing the actor to slowly make gains without causing international alarm and thereby without triggering formal response processes. The nature of these ‘grey zone strategies’ range from mild, such as minor propaganda campaigns, to severe, such as providing direct support for guerilla or opposition groups. Recent examples include the Russian invasion of Crimea, ISIS seizing land in Iraq and Syria and China’s deployment of ordinary fisherman to further expansionist claims in the South China Sea.

### Political Grey Zones:

Another understanding of grey zones was presented by Thomas Carothers in his article “The End of the Transition Paradigm”. He focuses on models of democratic transition and discusses political grey zones, states that are “neither dictatorial nor clearly headed towards democracy”. Although they have some democratic elements, such as limited space for opposition parties, regular elections and democratic constitutions, they suffer from democratic deficits, such as low levels of political participation (with the exception of elections), corruption and abuse of power among government officials and low levels of trust in state institutions.



### Grey Zone Regions:

Adopting a geopolitical lens, we can characterize a grey zone as a region that is *de jure* part of one state but is *de facto* controlled and/or governed by another state or non-state actor. These areas are not necessarily in a state of war, but they are nonetheless not in one of peace. They suffer from stunted or even nonexistent development, weak rule of law regimes and/or heavy militarization. Parts of Mexico dominated by cartels and Eastern Ukraine are two examples.

### Moral Grey Zones:

A more philosophical perspective on grey zones was established by Primo Levi in his seminal work *The Drowned and the Saved*. Drawing on his experiences in Auschwitz, Levi discusses the role of prisoners who collaborated with the Nazi officers against the other prisoners. Their behavior existed a moral grey zone, a “poorly defined” space “where the two camps of masters and servants both diverge and converge”. In other words, they acted in ways that were simultaneously understandable and morally reprehensible, that were not technically wrong in the legal sense but questionable in the ethical sense.

These four principal understandings of grey zones will guide our analyses this year and provide a basic underlying theme.



## METHODOLOGY AND DELIVERABLES:

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### *Thematic*

HDRI is first and foremost a think tank for research related to development. Whilst the term ‘development’ encompasses a broad range of concerns, ultimately it should generally link back to human well-being. As such, our pieces should aim to always make clear the link between what we are researching and how this impacts development.

For example, if one is conducting research on the impact of say, terrorist activity in a given country, the analyst should link this back to its impact on the development process in that country.

### *Methodological*

What are the best indicators one can use to assess each of these dimensions? Ultimately these questions must be answered by the analyst, but there are some broad guidelines the group will aim to bear in mind and follow.

1. A grey zone need not be limited to the territory of a particular state. In fact, sometimes limiting an analysis to only state borders does not make sense. For example, it would probably make more sense to consider a grey zone if one is analysing ISIS activity that encompasses both Iraq and Syria, rather than just Syria alone.
2. Following on from this, it is crucial that one always bear in mind the three principle levels of analysis often used in international relations - international, national and local.

The use of indicators: in order to maintain some continuity throughout the pieces, we will include a summary box of sorts with a set of common indicators to go along with each chapter. These can be grouped. For example, categories may include economic, environmental, geopolitical, societal and technological risks.



Table One: Examples of Risks

Economic	Environment al	Geopolitical	Societal	Technologica l
Illicit trade	Extreme weather events	Weapons of mass destruction	Involuntary large scale migration	Data fraud or theft
Unemployment or underemployment	Natural Disasters	Terrorist Attacks	Food crises	Cyberattacks
Extreme Inequality	Man-made environmental disasters	Interstate conflict	Water crises	
	Failure of climate change migration and adaptation	Failure of national governance		

Although the indicators used will naturally depend on the topic at hand, it is also worthwhile taking note of the data sources and others sorts of indicators available to us for each chapter in the final publication, such as the following:

- a. Terrorism and its impacts
  - i. Freedom house:** a ranking of press freedom in countries across the world. Link: <https://freedomhouse.org/>
  - ii. The OECD better life index:** This is a set of indicators developed by the OECD which seeks to measure well-being across countries using a variety of indicators. Categories include diverse indicators such as income, health, community, civic engagement, safety and gender disparities. The breadth of indicators used allows it to give a more holistic view than GDP figures alone.
  - iii. PRIO data:** There are separate datasets for governance, armed conflicts, geographical risk factors (such as diamond deposits) and more. Link: <https://www.prio.org/Data/>.
- b. Environment
  - i. OECD better life index:** see above
  - ii. World Bank Environment data:** Looks at a huge range of environmental indicators such as % of arable land, % of forest



area, CO2 emissions and so on. Link: <https://data.worldbank.org/topic/environment>.

**iii. OECD environmental data and indicators:** similar to the World Bank data, also contains a variety of indicators one could use. Link: <http://www.oecd.org/env/indicators-modelling-outlooks/data-and-indicators.htm>.

c. Governance

**i. Freedom house indicators** (see above).

**ii. OECD better life index** (see above).

**iii. World Bank Worldwide Governance Indicators:** <http://info.worldbank.org/governance/wgi/#home>.

**iv. Ibrahim Index of African Governance:** link: <http://mo.ibrahim.foundation/iiag/>.

Final Deliverable:

The final publication, under the format of a portfolio, will consist of several sub-sections (sub-sections identified include security, environment and governance as discussed above).





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