Editorial

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I cannot start this editorial without reference to the events that happened in Israel. As I have stated on several previous occasions, when other momentous events have been unfolding, the journal is not a current affairs publication. My editorial is written a while before publication and the narrative has inevitably moved on by the time you read it. As professionals in our chosen sphere of activity we are acutely aware of how quickly things can go wrong, how our assumptions of security can be illusionary and how the consequences of failure can be rapid and devastating. Some of our readers will have dealt with casualties in tragic accidents, others will have been involved in wars and a few might even have confronted terrorists directly. Surely, however, none will have had to deal with the systematic murder, mutilation, rape and abduction of innocent citizens — including babies and girls at a peace celebration. That such people might get killed in warfare is sadly indisputable but only as indirect casualties, not as the prime targets of the attack.

Moving to more predictable (although perhaps indirectly connected) matters, the world does seem to be in the midst of political and social upheaval. Global trends such as mass migration, changing political and trade alliances, energy shortages, climate change and escalating food commodity prices are affecting all countries. All nationalities blame their governments, not for the things they could have done better but for the global events over which they have no control. This is a recipe for a period of intense instability, uncertainty, and significant social change. Add to this mix the emergence of artificial intelligence (AI) as a potent force in restructuring the fundamental nature of work and the next decade is likely to be more than interesting.

In research work I have recently completed for DRI International, the fastest growing short-term worry among business continuity professionals is the expectation of extended power cuts this winter. This is not only due to short-term gas shortages but also the increasing demand for electricity and the systemic failure of grid capacity to expand adequately. This worry is shared across all regions but is particularly strong in the US. On a similar pattern the fastest growing longer-term strategic concern is shortages of natural resources — not only oil, gas and water but also the rare metals essential to creating electric vehicle (EV) batteries and other green technologies.

We are starting to see new political alignments. While no serious political parties challenge the need to reduce carbon emissions, there are gaps (even chasms) opening up in the methods by which these goals can be achieved. In simple terms the spilt is between those who see carbon reduction and net zero targets as demanding fundamental limitations on accepted lifestyle and those who see these issues as an opportunity to create a society with new green technologies that improve lifestyles for everyone. They are probably both too idealistic — neither approach will

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work completely. Commentators often quote public support for climate change measures but not what happens when they directly impact domestic budgets and living standards which are already stretched by random global changes.

What concerns me is our real lack of knowledge about what actually will happen to specific countries and areas if global temperatures rise as projected. I heard an eminent professor of physics and a specialist on climate science speaking at a private event recently. He does not want to be identified but his argument was that we can predict very accurately the rise in average earth temperatures at different levels of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere ('just basic physics' he claimed), but no modelling system yet invented can make any meaningful prediction of how that will change the temperatures in any particular country or city. As climate change is not practically reversible, everyone should make plans for adaption to a new normal, but no-one knows what that will be. An average of 1.5°C temperature rise will not be consistent — some regions might be much higher, others much lower. Some places might have catastrophic conditions, others barely impacted — no scientists know, or probably can ever know, until they get more empirical evidence. Vastly expensive adaptation plans based on speculation and unvalidated assumptions are not going to solve our problems.

As the old Chinese curse is supposed to say (although it is likely to be apocryphal) 'May You Live in Interesting Times'. I think we do and are soon about to find out if the true meaning of that curse still applies today.