

EDITORIALE

LEADER

by

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NORTH-WEST PASSAGE: THE BATTLE FOR NATURAL RESOURCES

The cover photo of this issue, taken from the AIGAA (*Associazione Italiana di Geologia Applicata e Ambientale*) calendar, shows the Nigardsbreen glacier, in Norway. I have chosen this photo so that I can visually introduce the topic of this short leader straight away. Readers of this journal will forgive me if once more I am addressing political-economic issues, but the increasingly close relationship that they have with geo-environmental aspects has now become so evident and strategic that it places the matter at the core of the political agendas of governments worldwide. As stated every day by the so-called “greats” of the Earth, this bond is so intimate and close that I am inclined to speak in terms of Geological Econo-Politics.

If we correlate all this with the changing and evolving scenarios of geological-environmental risk at the global scale, then it becomes clear that we must deal with it now.

In my previous leader article, entitled “The Long Black Swan”, I had referred to a world mired in a tangle of polycrises, or rather in a global systemic crisis unlike anything seen in the last 80 years, at least from our point of view and our privileged vantage point, the European one.

In the same leader, I had recalled my previous one (2/2023), in which I argued that 2024 would be a pivotal year, as widely debated at the World Economic Forum in January 2024, a year potentially involving “*many risks for future geopolitical orders and for a number of crucial aspects: conflicts, future alliances, environmental policies, and economic crises. This is why it is fair to refer to a turning point for our planet in the next two or three years, apart from and well beyond natural disasters risk alone.*”

Sadly, today, even more so than 6 months ago, I must concede that my prediction was all too easy: the level of global risk has risen even further. It has done so because the principles and foundations that for decades have governed the relations within the global community, and that have supported the functioning of recognised global institutions, primarily the United Nations, are completely collapsing.

It has become increasingly clear that the law of the jungle now prevails. And the strongest beast in the jungle no longer

hesitates to claim that he will not be deterred in its pursuit of new resources, territories, and strategic routes, and that he is ready to sweep away any diplomatic obstacle and rule of international law. If we were at least able to understand, without ever justifying, such behaviour and actions undertaken by autocratic leaders, the same methods and approaches are being adopted today by what has been, until recently, viewed as the world’s largest democracy. Certainly, anyone who, like me, remembers the war in Vietnam, the dictatorships in Latin America, the control of Panama, the two Gulf Wars, and the long and tragic Israeli-Palestinian conflict will also remember the slogans shouted in the streets during the protests against US imperialism. So, we are hardly naïve; we can read and interpret the past 80 years of global history. But today something has changed; a mechanism has been set in motion that leaves us bewildered and unprepared: a sharp turn for the worse, as unpredictable as it is perverse.

This is now unmistakably apparent, as I already pointed out in leader 1/2025, in US universities and the research community. The nation that once stood as a beacon of science and the advancement of knowledge for all other countries is now emerging as the epicentre of regression and obscurantism: it is being denounced by the few who dare to speak up, while many scientists and academics remain silent for fear of retaliation. This is a development that no one would have imagined only months ago, let alone a year ago.

Let us now turn to the title of this leader and the cover photo. As I am writing, an unprecedented crisis is unfolding: the US is prepared to challenge NATO (and thus, in a sense, challenge itself?) in order to acquire Greenland, with its ice, priceless resources, especially geological ones, its strategic position, and the opportunity to control the polar route; hence the title of this leader: “North-West Passage”.

All this will involve new and unpredictable risk scenarios at all levels.

Greenland is not a land like any other. It is the penultimate trove of nearly pristine nature left on our planet, the ultimate being Antarctica (Fig. 1). It remains the only territory, albeit

perhaps not for much longer, where study and research activities are carried out solely within the framework of long standing international treaties: the last corner of the planet where interna-

tional law, global scientific cooperation, and progress of science and knowledge fortunately stand as pillars of coexistence that still shape the international agenda.

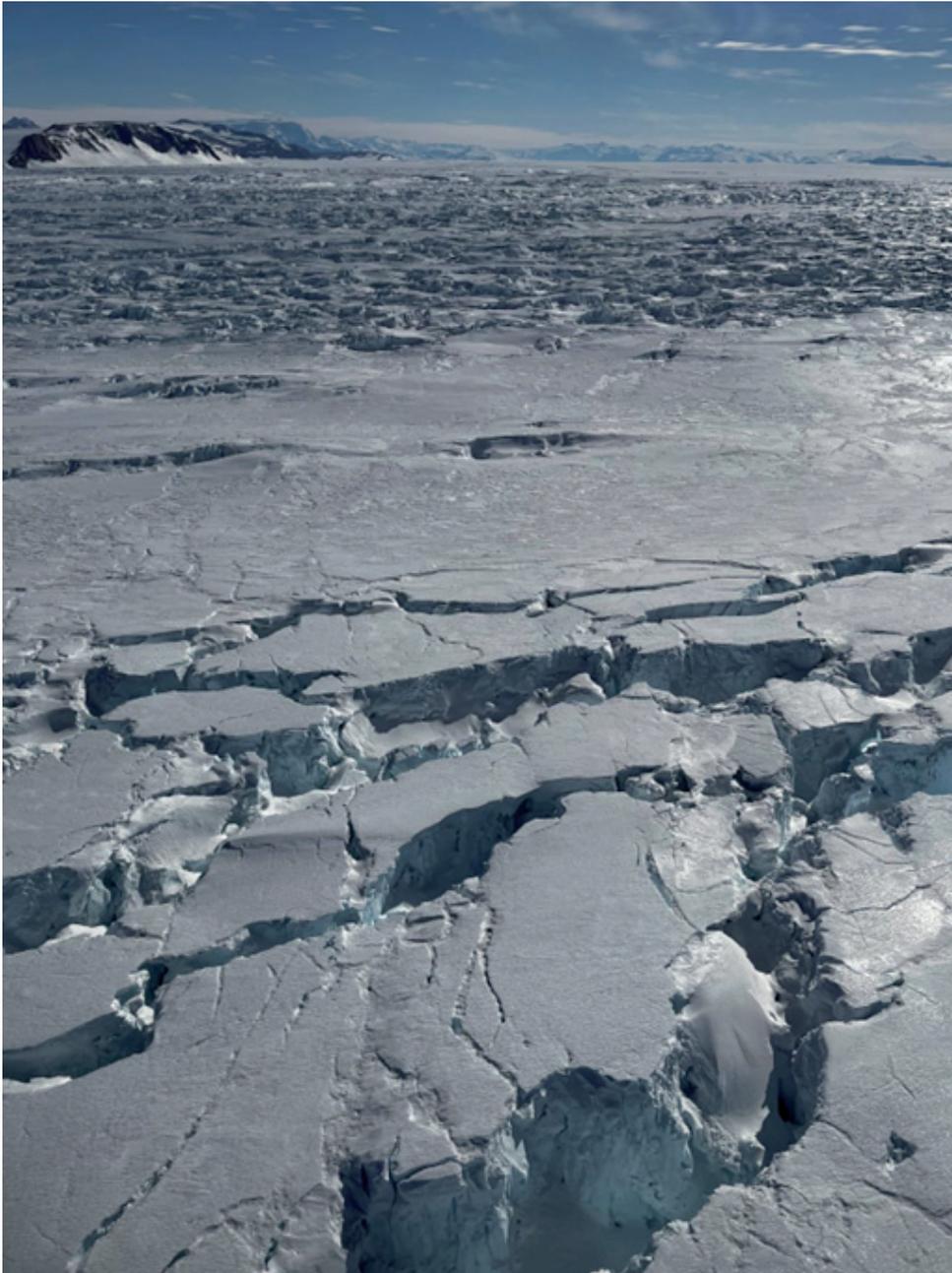


Fig. 1 - Davis Glacier, Antarctica (Courtesy of Dr. Salomon Hailemikael)