

SUNNY'S SENTINEL · HORIZON WATCH

Global Futures Outlook

*Forward projections across war, cyber, AI, nuclear, energy,
grid, water, food and financial systems*

2026 – 2029 · Issued 19 September 2026 · Review quarterly

How to read this document. Nothing here is a prediction. Each entry is a **structured projection**: what is already in motion today, the pathway it most plausibly follows, a timeframe, and a probability band for the *direction* rather than the exact event. Every projection names its **leading indicators** — the observable signals that tell you it is coming — and its **falsifier**, the observation that would prove it wrong. Judge the document by whether the indicators are firing, not by whether you like the conclusion.

Bands. **HIGH** the trend is already underway and the pathway is visible **MODERATE** plausible given current trajectories, dependent on decisions not yet taken **LOW** possible, contingent on a trigger that has not occurred. A HIGH band means high confidence in the *direction*, never in a date.

Contents

I	War & Military Escalation
II	Cyber & Critical Infrastructure
III	Artificial Intelligence Security
IV	Nuclear & Radiological
V	Energy, Fuel & Refining
VI	Electric Grid & Power
VII	Water
VIII	Food & Agriculture
IX	Financial & Markets
X	U.S. Domestic & Civil Stability
—	The Twelve Indicators · Readiness Mapping

I. War & Military Escalation

Iran war resolves by negotiation or expands to a regional war

MODERATE

WINDOW: 3–12 MONTHS

Iran has now formally conveyed conditions to end the war — all fronts, frozen funds released, naval blockade lifted. That is the first off-ramp offered since the conflict began, and it creates a genuine fork rather than a slope.

Two pathways. Negotiated: phased sanctions relief in exchange for verified standdown, brokered through Qatar or Oman, with the Houthi file separated from the Iranian file and settled later. **Expanded:** the Red Sea campaign continues to widen, Iranian radar and advisors entrench at Bab el-Mandeb, Saudi Arabia is drawn into sustained retaliation, and the Gulf becomes a multi-party war.

Leading indicators. Formal U.S. counter-offer; any movement on frozen Iranian assets; naval blockade posture changes; Houthi strike tempo against Saudi energy nodes; Gulf state air-defense activations.

Falsifier. Six months of no movement on any of Iran's three conditions and no further strikes on Saudi infrastructure — that would mean a frozen, low-grade conflict instead.

Russia–NATO friction escalates below the Article 5 threshold

HIGH

WINDOW: ONGOING – 24 MONTHS

Hybrid activity — drones, sabotage, undersea cable interference, assassinations — is already a standing campaign. The sanctions law just signed adds economic pressure, which historically raises sabotage tempo rather than lowering it.

Leading indicators. Drone incursions into NATO airspace; sabotage arrests at defense plants; cable damage in the Baltic or North Sea; GRU/SVR indictments; German, Danish, Polish defense-contractor incidents.

Falsifier. A negotiated Ukraine settlement that holds for two consecutive quarters with a verified ceasefire.

Taiwan Strait pressure peaks around diplomatic windows, not randomly

HIGH

WINDOW: CONTINUOUS; ACUTE AT EACH SUMMIT

Beijing is running a documented leverage campaign ahead of the 24 September Washington summit. The pattern is consistent: pressure concentrates immediately before and after high-level meetings, then relaxes.

Leading indicators. PLA median-line crossings above 30 aircraft in a day; declared live-fire zones; coast guard boardings; amphibious or ro-ro massing in Fujian ports; MFA "reunification timetable" language.

Falsifier. A sustained drop in incursions for 30+ days alongside restored military-to-military talks.

II. Cyber & Critical Infrastructure

A disruptive cyber-physical event against U.S. infrastructure within 24 months MODERATE

WINDOW: 6–24 MONTHS

The tanker boardings this week moved the threat from theory to confirmed practice: malicious cyber activity on a U.S.-bound vessel, with federal boarding. Pre-positioned access inside water, power and telecom networks remains the standing finding of U.S. agencies.

Most likely target classes. Water and wastewater utilities (lowest security maturity, highest societal impact); municipal and cooperative electric utilities; port and terminal operations; pipeline SCADA and metering.

Leading indicators. CISA emergency directives naming a sector; sector-specific advisories from WaterISAC, NERC or the Coast Guard; upticks in living-off-the-land intrusions at utilities; a named attribution statement.

Falsifier. Two years of declining ICS advisories plus verified sector-wide patching gains.

Ransomware against hospitals, schools and municipalities keeps rising regardless of geopolitics HIGH

WINDOW: CONTINUOUS

This lane is economically driven and tracks the cost of AI-assisted attack tooling, which continues to fall. Expect higher volume and shorter dwell times rather than novel techniques.

Leading indicators. Ransomware leak-site activity by sector; insurance premium movement; state-level emergency declarations after attacks.

Patch windows compress from weeks to days HIGH

WINDOW: NOW – 18 MONTHS

Public exploit code now follows disclosure within hours, not weeks. Federal patch deadlines already run as short as three days. Organizations on weekly or monthly cycles are structurally exposed.

Leading indicators. Exploit code appearing in the same week as a CVE; KEV additions accelerating; vendors shipping out-of-band emergency fixes.

III. Artificial Intelligence Security

AI-mediated intrusion becomes the default, not the exception **HIGH**

WINDOW: ALREADY UNDERWAY

The same week produced a confirmed frontier-model breach of three live companies, one model used to compromise another lab's staff accounts, a browser extension capable of hijacking five AI assistants, and an AI coding assistant that recommended poisoned software which was then accepted and spread through roughly a hundred repositories. Four distinct failure modes, seven days.

What changes next. Expect AI agents to appear as an intrusion vector in incident reports within two quarters, and to be named as a contributing cause in a regulated-industry breach within a year.

Leading indicators. An AI incident reported to a data-protection regulator (already happened once, in Spain); enterprise policies restricting agent permissions; insurers writing AI-specific exclusions or endorsements.

Falsifier. Mandatory pre-deployment agent sandboxing plus independent evaluation becoming standard — that would slow the trend materially.

An AI misattribution or AI-assisted targeting error causes a real interstate incident **MODERATE**

WINDOW: 6–30 MONTHS

The near-boarding of a vessel on AI-assisted intelligence this week is the template. The failure mode is not a machine deciding to attack; it is a human acting on accelerated analysis that compressed the verification step.

Leading indicators. Any confirmed incident where AI-assisted analysis contributed to a military or enforcement action; oversight hearings; revised targeting-review doctrine.

Falsifier. Mandated human-verification doctrine for AI-assisted intelligence published and enforced across agencies.

IV. Nuclear & Radiological

No nuclear weapon use; continued brinkmanship and doctrinal signalling **HIGH**

WINDOW: 12–36 MONTHS

The distinction that matters: **nuclear weapons will not be used** in any projection in this document — the cost structure remains prohibitive. What will continue is nuclear *signalling*: exercises, test notifications, treaty suspensions, posture changes, and rhetoric aimed at coercive effect.

The real risks are second-order. Accidents and misread exercises during high tensions; civil nuclear plants in or near conflict zones (Zaporizhzhia is the standing example) losing offsite power or external cooling support; radiological material in an unstable state.

Leading indicators. IAEA incident reporting; NRC event notifications; offsite-power loss events at conflict-zone plants; test-site activity; shifts in declared alert postures.

Falsifier. Renewed arms-control engagement with verification — currently absent.

Proliferation accelerates in response to demonstrated conventional weakness **MODERATE**

WINDOW: 24–60 MONTHS

Watching a major power's conventional deterrent get tested in a live war reduces the perceived value of conventional forces for other states. The likely direction is enrichment-capability expansion framed as civilian, which is exactly the ambiguity that generates crises.

Leading indicators. IAEA safeguards access disputes; enrichment announcements; withdrawal from inspection regimes; new civil reactor programs with thin commercial rationale.

V. Energy, Fuel & Refining

Fuel prices stay volatile and elevated through the Iran war's next phase **HIGH**

WINDOW: 3–12 MONTHS

Two chokepoints are simultaneously stressed: Hormuz under an explicit Iranian export-block threat and a "safe passage" payment economy, and Bab el-Mandeb with strikes reaching a capital city and Iranian radar reportedly installed on the coast.

What moves what. Red Sea disruption lengthens routes around Africa — higher freight, higher insurance, slower delivery. Hormuz disruption is a different order of magnitude entirely: it would reprice global crude within days.

Leading indicators. War-risk insurance premiums; Baltic and container freight indices; tanker routing away from the Red Sea; physical crude differentials; refinery outages.

Falsifier. A durable Iran settlement plus verified Houthi standdown restoring Red Sea transit.

Refined-product prices decouple further from crude — diesel and jet are the squeeze points

MODERATE

WINDOW: 6–24 MONTHS

Refinery capacity, not crude supply, has been the binding constraint for years. Any disruption at a major refining complex shows up in distillate prices first and hardest, and that flows into freight, farming and heating.

Leading indicators. Refinery utilization rates; distillate inventories versus five-year average; crack spreads; heating-oil and diesel seasonal moves.

VI. Electric Grid & Power

Demand growth outruns supply in several regions — the constraint is equipment, not fuel

HIGH

WINDOW: NOW – 36 MONTHS

Data-center, electrification and industrial load growth is colliding with a grid whose capital cycle is measured in years. Transformer and switchgear lead times remain the hard ceiling — you cannot build interrupters faster than the factories make them.

Consequences. Interconnection queues lengthen; reserve margins tighten in the fastest-growing regions; rate increases accelerate; large loads get deferred, curtailed or contracted behind the meter.

Leading indicators. RTO capacity auction clearing prices; reserve-margin forecasts; transformer lead times; utility capital plans; curtailment notices for large loads.

Weather-driven outage events get larger and last longer

HIGH

WINDOW: CONTINUOUS

Independent of cyber threat, the physical system is being stressed harder: higher peak demand during heat events, more intense storms, and aging distribution plant in exactly the oldest parts of the network.

Leading indicators. Mutual-aid activations; peak-demand records; distribution-transformer failure rates; utility wildfire-mitigation de-energizations.

A combined cyber-plus-weather event — where an intrusion degrades response rather than causing the outage

MODERATE

WINDOW: 12–36 MONTHS

The subtle scenario, and the more likely one: an intrusion that does not trip a breaker but compromises the systems used to *manage* restoration — SCADA visibility, dispatch, outage-management platforms — turning a recoverable storm outage into a long one.

Leading indicators. CISA advisories naming OMS or SCADA products; utility reports of loss of visibility without loss of service; drills that specifically test degraded-visibility restoration.

VII. Water

Colorado River shortage conditions persist; tier reductions become structural HIGH

WINDOW: ONGOING – 36 MONTHS

Reservoir levels in the basin remain the binding constraint for the Southwest. The pattern is now structural rather than drought-contingent: negotiated reductions, tiered shortage declarations, and increasing pressure on agricultural allocations.

Leading indicators. Lake Mead and Lake Powell elevation; Bureau of Reclamation tier declarations; state-level allocation negotiations; municipal restriction stages.

Localized water failures from aging infrastructure rather than scarcity HIGH

WINDOW: CONTINUOUS

Boil-water notices, main breaks and treatment failures are the daily reality, and water utilities have the lowest cyber-maturity of any critical sector. For most households the practical risk is a multi-day local loss of potable water, not a regional shortage.

Leading indicators. Boil-water notice frequency; main-break rates; WaterISAC advisories; utility capital-replacement backlog; state regulator consent orders.

VIII. Food & Agriculture

Food price volatility driven by energy and fertilizer, not harvest failure **HIGH**

WINDOW: 6–24 MONTHS

Modern food cost is substantially an energy cost — ammonia fertilizer is made from natural gas, and every input moves on diesel. Fertilizer is the transmission channel from the Gulf to the grocery aisle.

Leading indicators. Natural gas prices in producing regions; ammonia and urea spot prices; diesel retail; FAO Food Price Index; fertilizer export restrictions.

Falsifier. Sustained low gas prices plus normal harvests across two consecutive seasons.

Export-corridor disruption concentrates risk in a few chokepoints **MODERATE**

WINDOW: 6–24 MONTHS

Grain and fertilizer supply pass through a small number of corridors — the Black Sea, the Mississippi system, the Strait of Malacca. Each is a single point of failure for a specific commodity chain.

Leading indicators. Vessel insurance for Black Sea transit; barge rates and river-level advisories on the Mississippi; export bans by major producers.

IX. Financial & Markets

Volatility regimes become more frequent and shorter **HIGH**

WINDOW: CONTINUOUS

The macro pattern for the next several years: instead of one long calm punctuated by a crash, expect repeated sharp risk-off episodes — energy shocks, sanctions announcements, election outcomes, cyber events — each lasting days to weeks rather than months.

Leading indicators. VIX term structure inverting; gold and Treasuries bid together; credit spreads widening while equities hold; oil implied volatility rising.

Payment and settlement disruption is a real but lower-probability tail **LOW**

WINDOW: 12–48 MONTHS

A sustained outage of card processing, RTGS settlement or a major clearing house would be the most disruptive civilian event in the entire document. It is also the least likely — these systems are segmented, redundant and heavily monitored. It belongs in planning because its consequence is severe, not because its likelihood is high.

Leading indicators. Prolonged processor outage; central bank emergency settlement notices; coordinated bank IT advisories; deposit-insurance stress commentary.

Practical hedge. Cash on hand and paper records. That is the entire mitigation, and it is cheap.

X. U.S. Domestic & Civil Stability

Foreign-linked plots against Jewish, Israeli and dissident targets continue **HIGH**

WINDOW: CONTINUOUS; ACUTE AT HOLIDAYS

The documented record includes a convicted IRGC operative recruiting stay-behind agents, a Kata'ib Hezbollah commander discussing attacks in New York, California and Arizona, a transfer of a 35,000-name target list, and 18 executed attacks across Europe in three months. The holiday calendar concentrates the risk.

Leading indicators. Diplomatic expulsions tied to Jewish targets; European arrest tempo; DOJ national-security indictments; ADL/CST/Europol alerts; incident clustering around religious observances.

Lone-actor and small-cell violence rises with the 2026 election cycle **HIGH**

WINDOW: NOW – 14 MONTHS

Online radicalization is the FBI's stated leading domestic threat, and election cycles concentrate both grievance and target visibility. Expect the tempo to rise into the voting period and to persist past it.

Leading indicators. Threat volume reported by state fusion centers; candidate security incidents; protest-related arrests; online threat escalation against officials.

Pressure on press access and institutional trust intensifies **HIGH**

WINDOW: CONTINUOUS

White House press credentials have been pulled from three outlets during an active war. Whether the information environment gets better or worse is a function of demand from readers, which makes the practical response to maintain primary sources yourself rather than depending on any single outlet.

The Twelve Indicators

If you track nothing else in this document, track these. Each one is observable in open sources and each is a reliable precursor to a projection above. Two or more firing simultaneously means move to a higher readiness tier.

#	Indicator	What it precedes
1	Iranian assets unfrozen or blockade relaxed	Negotiated end to the Iran war; oil price relief
2	Houthi strike tempo against Saudi energy nodes rises	Sustained Gulf war; crude repricing
3	PLA incursions exceed 30 aircraft in a day	Taiwan crisis window; pre-positioned cyber use
4	Xi visit confirmed or cancelled outright	Near-term Taiwan trajectory
5	CISA emergency directive naming a specific sector	Imminent ICS campaign; possible disruption
6	War-risk insurance or freight indices spike	Monthly fuel and goods price increase
7	RTO capacity auction clears at record price	Regional power cost and reliability stress
8	Reclamation issues a new shortage tier	Southwest water restriction escalation
9	Ammonia or urea spot price breaks upward	Food price increase 2–3 quarters later
10	VIX inverts its term structure	Sharp risk-off episode beginning
11	Diplomatic expulsion tied to a Jewish target	Holiday-window plot risk
12	AI incident reported to a regulator	AI liability and compliance regime forming

Readiness Mapping

Every projection above maps to preparation you already hold. This is why the documents exist as a set rather than as separate downloads.

Projection	What already covers it
Energy & fuel volatility	Cody exit strategy — stored fuel, half-tank rule, 20–40 gallon reserve

Grid & outage events	Grid-down communications plan — power banks, solar, crank radio, P.A.C.E. ladder
Water failure	Family protection guide — 1 gallon per person per day for 30 days plus a gravity filter
Food price and supply	Gentle 90-day food reserve; the five-household mutual-aid group
Financial volatility and settlement tail	Cash in small bills, spread accounts, paper statements
Cyber and AI threats to your own systems	AI security hardening checklist — credentials first, then agent permissions
Civil disorder and local hazard	Cody exit strategy — four tiers, AMBER-not-RED rule
Information warfare	<i>Ahead of the Wire</i> source playbook and the SENTINEL console

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