

At Tenth CIBA Global Forum, Leaders Examine How Rising Geopolitical Uncertainty Is Fostering Innovation in Trade and Investment



By Mary Lorson
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As geopolitical uncertainty reshapes global markets, leaders from business, government, and academia gathered in New York City in April for the tenth Global Forum of the Center for International Business Acceleration (CIBA), to examine how persistent geopolitical uncertainties are creating innovating approaches to cross-border trade and investment. Marking CIBA's tenth year, the forum highlighted New York State's growing role as a global business hub—and the increasingly central roles that AI innovation, domestication of global supply chains, and partnerships at various levels now play in resilience, competitiveness, and trust.

Founded in 2016 and registered as a nonprofit in 2023, CIBA has evolved into a convening platform linking academic institutions, policymakers, and internationally engaged firms. Opening the forum, CIBA President and Founder **Elena Iankova** gave an overview of CIBA's founding at Binghamton University and the support it has received from statewide and federal organizations, as well as its partnership with the Cornell SC Johnson College of Business and Binghamton University's Office of Entrepreneurship and Innovation Partnerships on the Soft Landing New York program. Iankova also shared an update on CIBA's initiatives, highlighting its four core programs—the Annual Global Trade and Investment Forum; Export New York; Select New York (a revision of Soft Landing New York); and Global Business Consulting, Training and Education—all aimed at fostering job creation, investment attraction, and international connectivity. “We aim to be a thought leader and a networking powerhouse, between academia, businesses, and local, state and federal governments, fostering economic growth and job creation in the State of New York.”

In his remarks, Cornell SC Johnson College of Business Dean **Andrew Karolyi** admitted to wearing “two hats” in the proceedings. As Dean of the Cornell SC Johnson College of

Business and Chair of the CIBA Board, he stressed CIBA's multistakeholder focus. "We believe the way to drive systems-level change—especially in moments like this—is by bringing business, government, and academia together around shared challenges." Karolyi said. "This work is core to who we are at Cornell."



Sponsors of the event were Empire State Development Corporation, Cornell SC Johnson College of Business, the U.S. Department of Commerce, the Greater Binghamton Chamber of Commerce, the Center for Supply Chain Analytics at the University at Buffalo School of Management, the Koffman Southern Tier Incubator at Binghamton University, Carbonix Materials, and AL Consulting Group. **Jeff Janiszewski**, senior vice president for strategic business development and Global NY at platinum sponsor Empire State Development Corporation, informed participants of his organization's mission to help businesses adapt to shifts in supply chain and take advantage of opportunities for diversification.

Keynote: Trade and AI Are Now Inseparable

The forum's keynote address was delivered by **Joshua Meltzer**, principal for Global AI Policy at Amazon Web Services and a former senior fellow at the Brookings Institution. In a talk titled *The Blending of Trade with AI Amidst Global Uncertainty*, Meltzer laid out a clear message: AI is no longer a separate technology conversation—it is becoming foundational to how global trade works. "AI is a general-purpose technology," Meltzer said. "It will apply to everything—from how companies select markets and customers to how they manage logistics, compliance, and supply-chain risk."

Drawing on global data, Meltzer noted stark differences in AI adoption. Roughly 30 percent of firms in the United States report using AI, compared with about 22 percent in other advanced economies—a gap largely explained by firm size, management practices, and infrastructure. "Big firms are adopting AI faster than small firms," he said, "in part because

they're better at training workers and giving them permission to experiment." Globally, access remains uneven. "About half the world is still offline," Meltzer said. "In parts of the developing world, low AI adoption isn't about lack of interest—it's about internet access, infrastructure, and basic capacity."



For trade, the implications are profound. AI is already transforming logistics, warehouse management, and factory automation, while enabling companies to map supply chains in greater detail—often driven by regulatory pressure around forced labor or climate risk. "Companies are now looking three, four, five tiers deep into their supply chains," Meltzer said. "That simply wasn't possible at scale before AI."

He emphasized that AI's impact on trade goes beyond goods. "In the U.S., about 55 percent of exports are digitally enabled," Meltzer noted. "That creates enormous opportunity—especially for services and software firms—if trade rules support cross-border data flows."

Yet Meltzer warned that rising trade restrictions, data localization requirements, and regulatory fragmentation are increasing costs and limiting AI's potential. "A lot of AI runs in the cloud," he said. "The critical questions for firms are: Can I access cutting-edge models? Can I train them on my data? And can I move that data across borders securely?"

When asked about winners and losers, Meltzer was candid. "Everyone is still experimenting," he said. "The firms that succeed will be the ones that think comprehensively—not just about automation, but about embedding AI into new products, new services, and new business models."

A Multilateral View on Rethinking Resilience in Global Trade and Investment

The first panel, *Building Global Trade and Investment Resilience in a Time of Uncertainty: A Multilateral View from New York*, explored these themes from an international business and government perspective. Moderated by **Jeff Janiszewski**, senior vice president for strategic business development and Global NY at Empire State Development, the panel featured **Georges Ugeux** of Galileo Global Advisors, **Sven Oehme** of the European-American Business Organization, **Ivo Konstantinov** of the American Chamber of Commerce in Bulgaria, and **David Bryce**, Canada's trade commissioner in New York.



Ugeux, asked how the global trading system is affected by rising geopolitical tensions, answered that the U.S. has historically been the biggest promoter of multinational trade agreements, but that Trump's approach is counter these agreements, and since the system is breaking up there will be new agreements and alliances. (He cited Mark Carney's speech at Davos in January 2026.) International trade is changing into a multipolar construct and the United States will be one pole of many, not the dominant power in a regional world. "The challenge is to adjust our mindset, and it will be easier to work on the regional basis." The postwar multilateral trade system is giving way to a more regional, multipolar model. "The United States is no longer *the* pole," he said. "It is *a* pole—and companies need to adjust their mindset accordingly."

Oehme reinforced the importance of optimism, pointing to the enduring strength of the transatlantic economy. (He offered the study *Transatlantic Economy 2026*, as a download, calling it "the Bible for transatlantic trade, showing opportunities and developments"). "More than \$6 billion is traded between the U.S. and Europe every day," he said. "There is

no stepping back from that. America and Europe need each other.” New York State as a trade capital can be open to the outside world like other global trade regions.

Konstantinov and Bryce highlighted energy, advanced manufacturing, and defense as sectors under particular pressure—and opportunity—as firms diversify supply chains through nearshoring and friendshoring strategies. “Resilience today,” Bryce noted, “means building partnerships that can absorb shocks.”

Konstantinov commented on the global sources and usage of natural gas, and asserted that the US administration needs to be consistent in its policy of unleashing American gas dominance. The U.S. has large gas reserves but doesn’t control liquefaction or prices, and the U.S. trucking sector spends too much on fuel and drivers. He suggested that the U.S. learn from the European model.

David Bryce brought the perspective from Canada, and was asked which sectors are experiencing the biggest shifts, pressures, opportunities. Canada has at least 14 embassies in the United States. Core themes include resilience, pressure, opportunity. Canada has increased its EV investment, through project funding, energy policies. Also pipelines and rail infrastructure for coast-to-coast shipping from Nova Scotia to Europe. Aerospace and defense provide big opportunities for companies. The PM’s goal is to build a Canadian industry around aerospace and defense, bringing defense spending up to 5% GDP.

The panel took questions leading to a wide-ranging discussion of other energy sources; 70% of Ontario’s energy is nuclear, and there’s a fast-growing trend of data centers being developed along with dedicated small modular reactors (SMRs).

Voices from the Frontline: Making It in America

A second panel, *Voices from the Frontline: International Leaders on Making It in America*, emphasized the foreign investors’ reactions to the rising geopolitical uncertainty. It brought together global CEOs navigating U.S. markets. Moderated by **Matthew Sawyer**, adjunct professor at NYU, the panel featured **Sylvain Dronet**, CEO of France’s Andros North America; **Yasmine Mansson**, co-founder of Sweden’s STHLMYC Communications firm; **Cherry Lin**, CEO of Carbonix Materials LLC, a subsidiary of Taiwan Carbon Materials Corp.; and **Marcela Miguel Berland**, president and CEO of Latin Insights LLC.

Despite tariffs and uncertainty, panelists agreed the U.S. remains indispensable. “The U.S. is a high-income market with global influence,” Berland said. “Success here travels well.” Dronet emphasized long-term commitment. “We’ve been here since 1976,” he said. “The fundamentals—talent, universities, consumers—are still strong.” Trust, culture, and values emerged as critical differentiators. Mansson described trust as “deeply emotional,” built on curiosity and empathy, while Lin noted that U.S. customers tend to be more direct. “If our materials are qualified here,” Lin said, “we can sell anywhere.”



AI surfaced repeatedly as a strategic issue. “**AI matters more than tariffs,**” Dronet said. “It will determine how we source, produce, and stay relevant over the next 50 years.”

Supply Chains, Semiconductors, and Batteries

A third panel focused on the domestication of global supply chains as an innovative approach to deal with the rising geopolitical uncertainty. The panel was moderated by **Milind Sohoni** of the University at Buffalo and presented both the business and government perspective in two key sectors of the New York State economy – semiconductors and battery storage. **John Taylor** of Empire State Development’s GO-SEMI initiative outlined New York’s leadership in semiconductors, citing investments by Micron and GlobalFoundries. **Baasit Ali Shaik Sulaiman** of C4V discussed efforts to localize battery manufacturing, while **Balki Iyer** of Bridge Green Upcycle highlighted recycling and “urban mining” as essential to resilience.

This group of three experts took apart the specific operational considerations. Bringing back manufacturing is not just relocating one manufacturing unit but the whole supply chain. A big topic is how to bring semiconductor manufacturing back into the **U.S.** Each offered presentations and took questions.

John Taylor of Empire State Development's GO-SEMI initiative outlined New York's leadership in semiconductor investment, citing major commitments from Micron and GlobalFoundries and noting that semiconductor jobs are strong economic multipliers—well-paying positions that do not require undergraduate degrees. Public-private R&D

partnerships are accelerating, he said, supported by substantial New York State tax incentives.



Baasit Ali Shaik Sulaiman of C4V described the complex, layered challenge of localizing battery manufacturing. Bringing production home, he emphasized, is not simply a matter of relocating a single facility—it requires reconstituting the entire supply chain from raw materials to finished cells.

Balki Iyer of BridgeGreen Upcycle addressed what may be the most underappreciated dimension of supply chain resilience: the recovery of critical minerals through recycling and "urban mining." "We are throwing away critical minerals and buying them back," he said. "That's a strategic failure—and an opportunity." Together, the three presentations made a unified argument: true supply chain resilience is not built at the finished-goods level. It is built upstream, in materials, minerals, and manufacturing infrastructure—and it requires long-time horizons and coordinated investment.

AI as Strategy, Not Substitute

The forum emphasized the importance of AI innovation with a panel on *Using AI for Competitiveness: How U.S. Companies Can Take Advantage of AI to Become Worldwide Market Leaders*. Moderated by **Fernando Gomez-Baquero** of Cornell Tech, the discussion featured **Chansam Kim** of SAIL, **Dr. Richard Liang** of Graphen Health, and **Grant Pollack** of Ballou Stoll P.C.



“The goal of AI is to de-risk, not to replace judgment,” Liang said. “The future is human–AI collaboration.” This resonated with Selma Bartholomew, President of Legacy Pathways, whose work focuses on connecting professional development priorities with school systems.

Investing in Innovation and Partnerships

The forum concluded with a session titled *Growing from Within: Investing in Innovation and Partnerships*, moderated by **Elena Iankova** and featuring Dean **Andrew Karolyi** and **Steven Altman**, senior researcher and director of NYU's DHL Initiative on Globalization.

Karolyi drew on his research into innovation, patenting, and cross-border capital flows to ground the day's themes in empirical findings. "Nothing happens without robust economic and financial development," he began. His emerging markets research demonstrates that R&D investment is most consequential in sectors most dependent on external financing—and in countries with a higher concentration of such dependence.

On cross-border M&A, Karolyi and his co-authors had analyzed some 86,000 transactions and found that shareholder returns are strongest when innovative acquirers enter less innovative markets and convert short-term investments into long-term commitments. "These returns can motivate an acquirer to invest outside their domicile," he said—a finding with direct implications for the kind of foreign direct investment CIBA works to attract to New York State. His research on serial acquirers further found that U.S. investors feature prominently among the most successful, in large part because of the integrity of the U.S.

regulatory environment—a competitive advantage that participants throughout the day had implicitly relied upon, even as they debated the country's shifting trade posture.



Steven Altman offered a corrective to easy pessimism. Despite the turbulence of recent years, he reminded the group, international flows remain at record highs. His team's *DHL Global Connectedness Report* tracks the patterns of those flows by volume, country, and region, and the picture it reveals is nuanced. Onshoring has accelerated in strategically sensitive industries. Regional trade contracted significantly over the past two years. Greenfield foreign direct investment, however, performed well—a signal that long-term confidence in productive capacity has not collapsed even where short-term trade flows have been disrupted.

Throughout the day, one message was clear: **in a fragmented world, competitiveness will depend on how well institutions align technology, talent, and trust.** Sylvain Dronet called upon the proverb: “The chair has four feet for a reason—diversification is stability.”