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1993-2026 THIRTY-THREE YEARS OF POLICY FORMULATION AND ANALYSIS

REALPOLITIK, INTERNATIONAL LAW AND CYPRUS



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Throughout history, conflict and the pursuit of interests have been defining characteristics of the international system. Although reference is often made to International Law and morality, their actual influence in politics is rather limited.

For historical and other reasons, both Greece and Cyprus placed particular emphasis on International Law. Above all, there was an expectation that International Law would help deliver satisfactory solutions to national issues. This approach is rather unrealistic. Certainly, International Law is a useful instrument and should be utilized accordingly. However, the foreign policy of states cannot exclusively rely on it.

It is Realpolitik that largely directs, or at least decisively shapes, developments. Over time, Great Powers have tended to promote their objectives including protecting their spheres of influence as they defined them. They pursue such policies even when their relevant actions conflict with International Law. The Russian invasion of Ukraine is a recent example.

The Monroe Doctrine of 1823 has consistently influenced US foreign policy. It effectively made clear that regimes in the American continent that were not friendly to the US would not be tolerated. There have been many instances of US intervention in Latin America. A notable example was the overthrow of Chilean President Salvador Allende on 11 September 1973 by General Pinochet. Several analysts indicate that there was American involvement in that coup. In the current context, the recent arrest and abduction of Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro continues this policy in the most cynical manner. It remains to be seen to what extent this approach will continue in other Latin American countries and beyond.

Other powers, such as Russia and China, also consider that they possess their own spheres of influence. According to their perspective, these spheres should be accepted or at least tolerated. Theorists of the Realist School of Thought in the US acknowledge this reality. For this reason, they repeatedly

argued that NATO's continuous eastward expansion would eventually provoke a Russian reaction.

It is of critical importance that leaders of nations understand the characteristics of the international environment, which is undergoing constant change. If they do not, the cost for their countries can be extremely high. In this regard, it has been argued that Ukraine could have maintained its territorial integrity if it had pursued a policy of strict neutrality. In the case of Cyprus, the demand for self-determination was legitimate. However, its realization was not feasible, as Greece did not prioritize confrontation with Turkey over Cyprus. Eventually, Turkey invaded Cyprus on July 20, 1974 following the overthrow of President Makarios by the Greek Junta. Greece and Britain did not react. And Turkey suffered no cost for its actions in Cyprus. More or less, Turkey's violation of international law was tolerated. At some point the Security Council of the UN asked the two communities to continue to negotiate for a solution to the Cyprus problem. Effectively, Turkey became a third party to the conflict.

Regardless of what occurred in the past, it is essential to maintain a balance between Realpolitik and International Law in the foreign policy of the Republic of Cyprus. For the same reason, I consider all forms of excesses and any departure from the Aristotelian Golden Mean as detrimental. This approach should apply to all aspects of Cyprus's foreign policy.

At present, a major priority of the EU is Ukraine. The Republic of Cyprus, which holds the rotating presidency of the European Council in the first six months of 2026, supports this policy. This is so despite the fact that Ukraine systematically avoids taking a position on the Cyprus issue. Nicosia should consistently raise the Cyprus problem as a major European concern. After all, the Republic of Cyprus is a member of the EU, whereas Ukraine is not.

Above all, it is important for Cyprus, despite its small size, to promote clear and specific positions within the EU and the international system. Although the international system is largely anarchic, every effort must be made to advance the view that even a minimum framework of principles is required to govern relations between states. Furthermore, consistency is of decisive importance, and the practice of "double standards" must be set aside.

WHEN PUBLICS PORTEND POLICY: SHIFTING VIEWS ON TRANSATLANTIC TRUST



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The Munich Security Conference (MSC) report is an annual document meant to set the tone for three days of discussions among some of the world's preeminent geostrategic policymakers. The blunt, two-word title of the 2026 edition, "[Under Destruction](#)", makes clear an uncomfortable truth plaguing the transatlantic relationship in recent years: Policy differences between the United States and Europe have made once unshakable allies increasingly incompatible. As the United States both seeks to withdraw from and unilaterally control the international order, Europeans have begun viewing the country as less of an ally and more of a liability, particularly for collective security.

Despite [assurances](#) by Secretary of State Marco Rubio that the U.S. will not abandon Europe, the United States is clearly pulling back from the Continent in several key areas. Recent transatlantic breakdowns include the U.S. decision to [turn over](#) two key NATO commands to the Europeans and Washington's [diminishing](#) commitment to the war in Ukraine. Perhaps the most significant breach of trust, however, stems from U.S. President Donald Trump's aspirations to [annex](#) Greenland, a self-governing territory within the Kingdom of Denmark, a NATO ally. Trump walked back recent comments during January's World Economic Forum in Davos, but the impact on European leaders and publics alike will be lasting.

The forthcoming publication of a 2025 Bertelsmann Stiftung and Bertelsmann Foundation survey on transatlantic partner reliability will show that 70% of Europeans believe it is time for the EU to "go its own way". This is a dramatic increase from 2017 when, during the first Trump administration, just a quarter of respondents advocated for a break with the United States. Public sentiment corresponds to increased calls for European strategic autonomy from at the governing level, with French President Emmanuel Macron leading the charge. This call to action is echoed by the 71% of respondents who believe the EU should play a more active role in world affairs.

German Chancellor Friedrich Merz was initially more skeptical of shifting away from Washington for security and economic reasons, but illusory visions of continuing historical reliance on the Americans were shattered when he declared the end of the "[Pax Americana](#)" in a December 2025 speech. Merz doubled down at Munich, asserting that the U.S. claim to leadership has passed, and the postwar international order "[no longer exists](#)".

The Bertelsmann survey also shows that a majority of respondents in Europe and the United States believe that NATO membership protects their countries against "threats to peace". Perhaps surprisingly, more Americans (72%) than Europeans (64%) support this view. However, Europeans are increasingly unconvinced that the United States is the alliance cornerstone. A February 2026 [survey](#) by POLITICO revealed that far fewer British, French and German respondents believe that their country's relationship with Washington protects them from enemies, compared to 2025 data. In all three countries, confidence that the partnership provides security fell by double-digit percentages in the past year. Furthermore, just 18% of Germans and 20% of French believe the United States is a reliable ally, with 50% and 44% respectively outright disagreeing.

Despite the clear lack of trust, the Bertelsmann survey finds that a plurality of Europeans still identifies the United States as their most valuable ally. Americans feel the same way about Europe. But it is hard to believe that this trend will continue, particularly as the Greenland affair has prompted many European leaders to reexamine all dependencies on the United States, from energy to technology to defense. Europe will need to rely on new partners to safeguard itself, and recent EU trade agreements with [Canada](#), [India](#) and [Mercosur](#) countries indicate that the shift is already underway. If these so-called middle powers can band together, as Canadian Prime Minister Mark Carney called for in his landmark [speech](#) at Davos, they will be able to negotiate with global hegemony from a position of collective strength.

For all the pessimism about the Euro-Atlantic alliance, neither European leaders nor their publics are calling for a complete pivot away from Washington. Many areas for cooperation remain, including on critical minerals, space policy and countering China. Not to mention that completely cutting off the U.S. would be nearly impossible; the U.S. provides about [60%](#) of the EU's liquified natural gas needs, an arguably irreplaceable energy lifeline, especially as sanctions on Russia remain in place. But the days of transatlantic tranquility are over.

Ultimately, for Europe to truly exercise strategic autonomy, it needs to act fast and with one voice. It does neither well, but there is hope. The market impact of the EU's threat to deploy its [Anti-Coercion Instrument](#) in response to Trump's threats to annex Greenland is seen as a key reason for his backing down. Chancellor Merz has [implored](#) Europe to learn to speak the language

of power to survive among global giants, including the United States. The learning curve may be steep, but the moment has never been more right.

THE DAY AFTER IRAN: POWER, STRATEGY, AND THE UNANSWERED QUESTION



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Once again, the debate over Iran is framed as a stark choice between strength and weakness, action and inaction. Between good and evil. This is a false binary. The real question is not whether the US can use military force against Iran, but what problem such force is meant to solve, at what cost, and — more importantly — what unintended consequences may follow, regionally and globally.

Military power is a tool. It is not a strategy. When force becomes a substitute for political clarity of purpose, it creates the illusion of decisiveness while storing up strategic failure. The first question, therefore, must be simple and explicit: what is the objective? Ending Iran’s nuclear ambitions? Restoring credible deterrence? Constraining ballistic missiles? Changing regional behaviour? Ending support for non-state actors? Regime change? Or all of the above? History is unambiguous. Wars launched without a clearly defined end state rarely end on favourable terms.

The current crisis is marked by intense signalling rather than open conflict. A substantial US military deployment is accompanied by public warnings and parallel references to a possible deal with Tehran. Against this backdrop, Iran has engaged in indirect talks while insisting that any engagement be conducted on what it calls equal terms — confined to a narrow nuclear agenda rather than the broader security concerns raised by Washington. At the same time, Tehran continues military exercises and warnings of retaliation and wider escalation. Recent incidents, including the US shoot-down of an Iranian drone approaching a carrier group, underscore how tightly military signalling and escalation are now intertwined.

Coercive diplomacy

Washington is engaging in classic coercive diplomacy: pressure designed to compel concessions without crossing the threshold into war. It is not stable, but neither is it accidental. As Sun Tzu observed, “the supreme art of war is to subdue the enemy without fighting.” The danger, however, lies not in

signalling itself, but in miscalculation, i.e., misreading intent, overestimating control of events, or underestimating escalation.

This posture is consistent with the US National Security Strategy (NSS) issued by President Trump in November 2025. Hard lessons have been drawn from Vietnam, Iraq, and Afghanistan. The NSS moves away from regime change as a declared objective, prioritising national interest, stability, and restraint over externally imposed political transformation. Endless wars, large-scale occupations, and open-ended nation-building are no longer viewed as viable instruments of US statecraft — as the recent US surgical military intervention in Venezuela has illustrated. Instead, emphasis has shifted toward sanctions, diplomatic isolation, hybrid tools, and economic pressure — all backed by credible military deterrence. Force is not removed from the table, but it is no longer presumed to be the default answer. Any intervention must demonstrate a clear strategic objective, proportional means, and a credible political end state.

All politics are local

Foreign policy does not operate in a vacuum. As the late US Speaker Tip O’Neill famously observed, all politics is local. This truism remains valid even in moments of international crisis. With midterm elections approaching, domestic considerations shape decision-making in Washington. Voters are weary of distant wars with unclear purpose. Markets react sharply to instability. Energy prices, investor confidence, and economic sentiment matter. Strength plays well in domestic politics. Open-ended wars do not. This helps explain the tension between rhetoric and restraint that characterises the present moment.

The regional paradox

As I have argued elsewhere (<https://cyprus-mail.com/2025/06/29/israel-iran-and-the-strategic-recomposition-of-the-middle-east>) the confrontation involving Iran, Israel, and the US is not episodic but systemic. It is part of a deeper strategic recomposition of the Middle East — including the Gulf — in which old diplomatic frameworks are eroding and deterrence increasingly substitutes for diplomacy.

Regional actors face a dilemma rarely acknowledged in public debate. Many want Iran contained, deterred, and constrained. Some advocate outright regime change. But few want Iran shattered. Saudi Arabia’s recalibration reflects this tension. Public calls for restraint coexist with private warnings that inaction could embolden Tehran. Israel’s posture is similarly layered. Its core objectives remain unchanged, but current restraint reflects tactical judgment rather than strategic retreat. Timing and risk matter.

At the same time, regional diplomacy is also in motion. Oman hosted a first round of indirect US–Iran talks on 6 February 2026 — a shift from Istanbul that Tehran insisted upon, following earlier facilitation efforts by Turkey, Qatar, Egypt, Saudi Arabia and others. Washington and Tehran signalled a willingness to continue engagement. The fact that indirect talks have taken place does not mean that Washington has accepted a nuclear-only frame. On the contrary, the core divergence over ballistic missiles, regional behaviour, and support for non-state actors remains unresolved — a point the US underlined by announcing fresh oil and petrochemical sanctions within hours of the talks’ conclusion. What this underscores is that even at moments of acute tension, diplomatic channels remain active. Deterrence and dialogue now operate in parallel, often uneasily.

The paradox is simple. A triumphant Iran is dangerous. A chaotic Iran may be worse. Fragmentation, proxy escalation, and uncontrollable retaliation would place the region on permanent edge. Stability and predictability — not victory — remain the unspoken regional demand.

The EU’s quiet alarm

The EU watches the crisis with particular unease — and Cyprus feels it immediately. Any major conflict involving Iran would produce direct consequences: energy, trade and financial disruptions, migration flows, and renewed instability across the Mediterranean and the Levant, affecting economic stability, security planning, and regional credibility in real time. At a time when the EU is already stretched by the war in Ukraine, the demands of defence rearmament, and an increasingly unpredictable US decision-making environment, a Middle East war would not be a distant theatre. It would be felt quickly and directly.

This explains Europe’s emphasis on de-escalation and diplomacy. It is not naïveté. It is vulnerability. It is strategic prudence.

Russia, China, and nuclear proliferation

The growing coordination between Iran, Russia, and China adds another layer of complexity. Joint military exercises scheduled among Iran, Russia, and China, together with political signalling, do not amount to a formal alliance. Moscow and Beijing are unlikely to fight for Tehran, but they benefit from Western distraction and strategic overload.

Escalation hardens blocs, narrows diplomatic space, and accelerates the fragmentation of an already strained international order. A wider conflict would therefore serve interests well beyond the region — and not those of stability. One likely global consequence, particularly if a US strike on Iran coincides with the protracted war in Ukraine, is the erosion — if not collapse

— of the remaining institutional constraints on nuclear proliferation. The expiration on 5 February 2026 of the New START (Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty) between the US and Russia, leaving the two largest nuclear arsenals without binding limits, underscores how fragile those constraints have become.

The deterrence lesson drawn by many actors is stark. Iran was struck during the twelve-day war last June precisely because it did not yet possess nuclear weapons; nuclear-armed states such as North Korea are not. For Iran, and for other astute observers, this reinforces a dangerous but rational conclusion: that nuclear capability, not compliance, is the ultimate guarantor against intervention. That lesson, once absorbed, does not remain confined to one case. It spreads — and with it, the logic of proliferation.

The unanswered question: the day after

The most conspicuously unanswered question is the day after an attack on Iran. What follows a strike? What replaces the current order if it collapses? Regime change is a slogan, not a plan. Nuclear knowledge cannot be bombed away. Proxy networks do not disappear with command centres. Fragmentation creates vacuums that history shows are quickly filled, rarely benignly.

The danger, therefore, is not simply escalation, but consequence without ownership. When the political end state is undefined, force risks becoming an act of demonstration rather than an instrument of strategy. In diplomacy, there is rarely a final full stop. Only pauses, recalibrations, and the continuing necessity to shape an agreement both sides can own — the only kind capable of outlasting escalation.

POST-CONFLICT OPTIONS FOR EUROPEAN SECURITY



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Preliminary remark

International order consists of the fundamental rules, principles and institutions that define the format of the relationship between states. There is a strong dialectical connection between the structure of the international relations (bipolarity, unipolarity or multipolarity), the state of the international relations (Cold war, peaceful coexistence, détente) and collective defense alliances and collective security institutions. The structure of international relations shapes the international environment, which in turn dictates the necessity, form, and focus of security arrangements creating a feedback loop where each element reinforces or transforms the others. A failure in one of the links in this logical connection leads to unforeseen developments in the international relations. This is exactly what happened in the central link of international relations - in relations between Russia and the West, which resulted in the devastating Ukrainian conflict.

Collapse of the old world order

The Paris summit of 1990 was a climax of Grand détente. It marked the formal end of the Cold War in Europe with its pivotal **Charter of Paris for a New Europe. It** announced that “the era of confrontation and division of Europe has ended” and envisioned “a new era of democracy, peace and unity”. The Paris summit or the end of the Cold war happened when Europe was still bipolar. Gorbachev did not have any intentions to dissolve the USSR. He sincerely believed in socialism with a human face. The bipolarity ended with the collapse of the USSR one year later. The old world order with its common rules of the international behavior in Europe - the Helsinki Decalogue - stopped to exist but the new one did not arise. Which is why the Ukrainian conflict can be viewed not only as a creation of the Russia-West conflicting views about security arrangements in Europe or rivalry in the post-Soviet space but also as a final stage of transition to new world order. The outcome of the Ukrainian conflict will crucially determine the nature of this order - fundamental rules, principles and institutions that define the governing arrangements between states.

Post-conflict options for European security

Two scenarios should be excluded at once from the list of possible options. The first and the worst scenario is a nuclear escalation of the conflict. It should be excluded not because it is unrealistic. On the contrary, it is still likely but it would make all speculations about the future of European security irrelevant.

The second and best scenario – the final peace in Ukraine should be also excluded because it is unrealistic. History knows very few examples of this kind. Generally speaking, final peace is essentially the same as the concept of “The Perpetual Peace” of Immanuel Kant. In his 1795 essay *[Perpetual Peace: A Philosophical Sketch](#)* he stated that “No treaty of peace shall be held valid in which there is tacitly reserved matter for a future war¹,” explaining that such a pact is merely a truce, not true peace. One of these grounds is revanchism, that is, the lack of reconciliation between states and more importantly societies. It took almost 20 years to France and Germany have reached full reconciliation. This was facilitated by their membership in the main Western unions – NATO and European Economic Community. Obviously, this is not the case between Russia and Ukraine after much bloodshed and devastation.

Two years ago, three scenarios were considered by the West: Russia’s victory, Ukraine’s victory, and a compromise option. Four options of security guarantees to Ukraine have been discussed in the Western strategic community.

The first option - **“the so called Germany model”** – means the division of Ukraine into two parts and the entry of the territory controlled by Kiev into NATO. Not surprisingly Russia was strongly against this scenario.

Next, **the so-called Israel model**: A relationship modeled on the US-Israel partnership that focuses on arms, training, and military assistance and could help Ukraine to deter future Russian aggression.² It would be kind of informal strategic alliance, since Israel does not have a formal mutual defense pact like NATO members. But here the question arises whether it is possible to imitate special relations between states, which share geopolitical interests, common values, and experience of cooperation in defense in intelligence.

The so-called Cyprus model: Ukraine’s membership in European Union and the EU security guarantees for its members, which are enshrined in Article 42(7) of the TEU. Although the Cypriot model offers some political solutions

¹ Immanuel Kant. **A Philosophical Sketch by Immanuel Kant 1795**. Union of European Federalists, <https://federalists.eu/federalist-library/perpetual-peace/>

² [Emma Ashford, Kelly A. Grieco](#) . Red Cell: The Promise and Pitfalls of an “Israel Model” for Ukraine. July 5, 2023. <https://www.stimson.org/2023/red-cell-the-promise-and-pitfalls-of-an-israel-model-for-ukraine/>

for new candidate countries with unresolved territorial issues, it is only a “semi-precedent”, since Cyprus received a strong support from Greece.³ But this is not the only one obstacle. Although Ukraine’s membership in EU is supported by Brussels, the key precondition is still Ukraine’s compliance with the Copenhagen criteria.

The South Korea model: South Korea’s postwar economic trajectory and powerful air defenses could serve as an example for Ukraine if the United States backs Kyiv as it did Seoul, President Volodymyr Zelenskyy suggested.⁴ But this scenario is very “iffy”. True, the United States maintains a significant military presence in South Korea (ROK)⁵, but Trump has vowed not to put boots on the ground in Ukraine, insisting Europe would have to “frontload” a future peacekeeping force.

Nowadays there is only one scenario on the table: a new division of Ukraine and Europe and consequently a new cold war or confrontation. Hence, even after the end of the conflict; mutual trust will be lost for many years to come. In other words, it means a return to the bloc-based approach to European security, which will be significantly different from the past, since the configuration of the blocks will be different. The US creeping withdrawal from Europe will contribute to the Europeanization of NATO, that is, the integration of the EU strategic autonomy with NATO structures.

Hopefully, within the confrontational scenario, both hard-line and softer options are possible. The main question is where the dividing lines will be drawn in Europe and how they will be defined in the peace agreement. A peace agreement is not a panacea, but it is still a preferable option than freezing the conflict. Actually, there are two thorny questions with regard to the possible peace agreement: security guarantees to Ukraine and territories. Kyiv wants a "clear understanding of security guarantees" before it could make any decisions about other contentious issues. But even within the Western community there is no unanimity on these questions.

The main difference between the US/Russia and EU peace plans is what should go first: a ceasefire agreement or a peace treaty. Washington and Moscow are in favour of a package deal while Europeans say that ceasefire must precede peace talks. Donald Trump is ready to talk about security guarantees after a peace deal is signed and doesn't want the US troops to be a part of the equation. More importantly, it has not been decided what "Article

³ Denis Cenusă. CENUSA: The Cyprus precedent for Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia. Intellinews PRO July 4, <https://www.intellinews.com/cenusă-the-cyprus-precedent-for-ukraine-moldova-and-georgia-283580/>

⁴ Sebastian Starcevic. South Korea could be a model for postwar Ukraine, Zelenskyy says. Politico, September 4, 2025. <https://www.politico.eu/article/volodymyr-zelenskyy-south-korea-post-war-ukraine-us/>

⁵ The US is present in South Korea with approximately 28,500 personnel under [United States Forces Korea](#) (USFK), established after the 1953 armistice.

5-like" security guarantees would look like in practice. Europeans are ready to lead a multinational force in Ukraine but they want US to be part of the equation. The US-brokered peace talks between Russia and Ukraine in Abu Dhabi inspire not so much optimism as hope for an end to the warfare.

The specificity of the current stage of the Ukrainian conflict is that military actions are being waged not for victory (previously interpreted by the West as a strategic defeat for Russia), but for the conditions of a peaceful settlement. These conditions must translate into a compromise between the security interests of Russia, Ukraine and the West, primarily Europe. It is precisely these conditions that will determine the contours of future European security.

INSTITUTIONS OR GUNS?



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It is a contemporary variation of the historic dilemma “butter or guns,” which captured the trade-off between prosperity and power.

According to the Article 2(4) of the Charter of the United Nations—the core provision of international law—there are two fundamental goods protected: national sovereignty and territorial independence. It states that all members shall refrain from the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any state. Yet, history is replete with examples of unilateral actions undertaken in violation of the foundational principle of international law, namely the prohibition of the use or threat of force against any independent and sovereign state.

The dominant question is therefore why international law is violated and why the Trump administration acts according to the “power politics” rather than on the basis of international law. This question is problematic, as it interprets international relations not as they are, but as they ought to be. It omits three fundamental factors that determine the behavior of states—democratic and non-democratic alike: power, national interest, and the anarchy of the international system. Let us examine how these three factors explain U.S. intervention in Venezuela.

Power: Missing the Forest for the Trees

By focusing on Trump, we forget that we are referring to the United States—the global hegemon. In 1999, under the Democratic administration of Bill Clinton, the United States unilaterally and without UN authorization bombed the sovereign and independent state of Yugoslavia, justifying the intervention as “humanitarian” in order to halt the armed conflict between Serbs and Albanians. One year earlier, in 1998, the same administration, again unilaterally and without UN authorization, bombed the sovereign and independent state of Iraq in cooperation with the United Kingdom, citing violations related to inspections of weapons of mass destruction.

In International Relations theory, power determines state behavior. In the field of international political economy, according to hegemonic stability theory, the international economic system is more stable when there exists a dominant hegemonic state willing and able to provide leadership. Conversely, when the hegemon experiences decline or a deficit of power, the stability of the entire international system is endangered. Naturally, the hegemon is also more prone to employ the “stick”—that is, coercion—in order to impose compliance.

National Interest

Access to energy resources constitutes a matter of national security for the United States and is directly linked to the preservation of its power and survival—especially when such access is threatened by its principal competitor, China. Under Chávez’s administration in Venezuela, foreign oil companies were restricted, significantly affecting U.S. firms. Consequently, U.S. sanctions against Venezuela followed.

According to data from the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), in 2023 Venezuela possessed the largest proven oil reserves in the world (303 billion barrels), followed by Saudi Arabia (267 billion barrels). According to the U.S. Energy Information Administration (EIA), 68% of Venezuela’s oil exports are directed to China, making China its largest buyer, while the United States accounts for 23%. Although the Chinese market is larger due to population size, it should not be overlooked that the maintenance of China’s power—like that of any state—depends on access to energy resources. Thus, the Venezuela–China energy relationship poses an even greater threat to U.S. interests.

As reported by Reuters in September 2025, the Chinese company China Concord Resources Corp (CCRC) installed a floating oil production platform in Lake Maracaibo as part of a major project to boost output and develop two oil fields (Lago Cinco and Lagunillas Lago) under a 20-year agreement with Venezuela’s state oil company PDVSA. Accordingly, U.S. sanctions against Venezuela are embedded within a broader framework of protecting U.S. national interest, where energy security and the containment of Chinese influence constitute central strategic objectives. China’s expanding energy presence in Venezuela not only challenges U.S. economic interests but also undermines its broader geopolitical influence in Latin America.

Moreover, China’s strategy of securing energy resources is not confined to Venezuela. According to the U.S.–China Economic and Security Review Commission, in 2016 an international arbitral tribunal ruled that China’s claims in the South China Sea lacked legal basis. Nevertheless, through the construction and militarization of artificial islands and the assertion of extensive maritime zones, China seeks control over resource-rich areas, infringing upon the sovereign rights of other states.

Anarchy: Who Sets the Rules of the Game?

International institutions such as the United Nations (UN) and the World Trade Organization (WTO) were established to mitigate anarchy—the absence of a higher authority above states. Their aim was to institutionalize a framework of international rules and regulations in order to render the global economic and political system more predictable and stable. However, these institutions were not created on equal terms nor by any superior authority. Their agenda and priorities were shaped by the interests of the most powerful states, ensuring that the international order would reflect the prevailing balance of power.

As a result, international institutions function less as neutral regulators and more as arenas of power politics, where powerful states exert disproportionate influence over decision-making and rule interpretation. When their interests are served, rules are presented as binding; when strategic objectives are at stake, rules are bypassed or selectively applied. Thus, international anarchy is not eliminated but reproduced under an institutional guise, with the question “who sets the rules of the game?” ultimately answered by the distribution of power within the international system.

For example, within the UN, the principle of “one state–one vote” does not apply in the Security Council, where five permanent members (the United States, Russia, China, France, and the United Kingdom) possess veto power. In the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the United States holds approximately 16–17% of voting power, as votes are allocated according to economic weight and financial contributions.

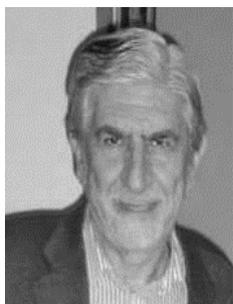
International law and institutional rules were primarily created to limit the destabilizing consequences of anarchy and the unchecked exercise of power. However, the liberal institutional framework has never operated as equally binding upon all states. Rather, it was constructed in a manner that left strategic gaps, historically filled by power and the pursuit of national interests. A strictly binding system of rules would primarily constrain great powers, amounting to a self-limitation of their power, as they would relinquish their principal instrument of survival and influence within the international system.

From this perspective, U.S. policy does not represent a deviation from an idealized international normality but rather an application of the core principles of political realism, as taught in introductory International Relations courses. States have always acted—and continue to act—according to realist principles, with the scope and intensity of such behavior directly proportional to their level of power. Within the same framework, China and Russia seek to upgrade their regional and international roles by questioning American hegemony: the former through a more subtle and multidimensional revisionism, the latter through more direct and confrontational practices. By

contrast, the European Union appears unable to rise to the occasion, remaining partly an economic union rather than a unified state entity with consolidated strategic power.

This observation does not negate the importance of international law. For states of lesser power facing revisionist behavior from stronger neighbors, international law is not merely a normative framework but a fundamental tool of security and deterrence. Although often applied selectively by great powers, it remains the only universally accepted reference point that constrains the legitimacy of power and allows for the internationalization of disputes. Consequently, for smaller states, “institutions” combined with credible deterrent armed forces and strategic planning are essential; for great powers, “guns” remain the ultimate instrument.

THE MIDDLE EAST VOLCANO: POWER PROJECTION, REGIME SURVIVAL, AND THE RISK OF REGIONAL CONFLAGRATION



Stephanos Constantinides
University Scholar

Despite the intense rhetoric of the American president and his declared intention to overturn elements of the post-World War II international order, the tangible outcomes of his foreign policy remain limited. His approach has often relied on rapid, highly publicized actions designed to generate an immediate perception of strength and decisiveness. Such actions, however, frequently lack long-term strategic consolidation. They serve domestic political communication more effectively than they alter structural balances of power - a dynamic consistent with structural realist expectations regarding systemic constraints.

This pattern is evident in several cases. The arrest and transfer of Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro to the United States, for example, created headlines but didn't overthrow the venezuelan regime. Similarly, the aggressive use of tariffs reshaped trade rhetoric without producing clear strategic gains. In Eastern Europe, the war in Ukraine-despite prior claims that it could be ended within 24 hours-continues unabated, underscoring the limits of declaratory power in complex geopolitical conflicts.

The Middle East as a Systemic Flashpoint

The Middle East currently represents the most volatile subsystem within the broader international order. From a structural-realist perspective, the region illustrates the dynamics of overlapping security dilemmas, where defensive measures are interpreted as offensive threats, creating spirals of escalation. The persistence of the Gaza war and the absence of a political resolution to the Palestinian question reinforce the structural instability of the regional order.

Iran at the Center of Strategic Tension

The Middle East as a Systemic Flashpoint The Middle East currently represents the most volatile subsystem within the broader international order. The war

in Gaza remains unresolved despite diplomatic initiatives and the establishment of high-profile peace mechanisms. Israeli military operations continue, as does settlement expansion in the West Bank. The structural roots of the Palestinian question—territorial sovereignty, statehood, security guarantees, and demographic realities—remain unaddressed. Even after massive destruction and accusations of genocidal practices, Israel has not achieved a decisive political resolution. The Palestinian issue therefore persists as a long-term destabilizing factor. From a structural-realist perspective, the region illustrates the dynamics of overlapping security dilemmas. Regional actors—state and non-state alike—interpret defensive measures by adversaries as offensive threats, creating spirals of escalation that external powers struggle to control.

At present, the central strategic challenge for Washington is Iran. Although declarations have been made that Iran’s nuclear program was effectively neutralized, monitoring reports from the International Atomic Energy Agency continue to document the technical status of enrichment capabilities, underscoring the gap between political rhetoric and verification-based assessment.

Iran sustained significant damage during recent hostilities, yet it also demonstrated deterrent capabilities. Its doctrine reflects asymmetric balancing: compensating for conventional inferiority through missile forces, drone systems, and proxy networks. Assessments of these capabilities are regularly documented in *The Military Balance* published by the International Institute for Strategic Studies.

The episode reinforced Iran’s doctrine of asymmetric deterrence: compensating for conventional inferiority through missile forces, proxy networks, and strategic depth. The subsequent domestic uprising in Iran—and its violent suppression—revealed the regime’s vulnerabilities but also its resilience. Thousands reportedly died. External involvement appears to have played a role, particularly in Kurdish regions, where casualties were high and foreign intelligence services were allegedly active. Reports indicated that the U.S. State Department purchased approximately 7,000 terminals of SpaceX’s Starlink satellite service, with 6,000 allegedly diverted into protester networks after internet shutdowns. If accurate, such actions would contradict official claims of non-involvement and suggest direct interference in Iran’s internal affairs. There were also reports of intercepted shipments of weapons and cash. Nevertheless, the protests cannot be reduced to foreign manipulation. Iran faces severe economic hardship driven by sanctions, structural inefficiencies, and endemic corruption. Domestic grievances provided genuine social fuel for unrest, even if external actors sought to exploit it.

This posture aligns with offensive-realist expectations that regional powers seek to maximize deterrent capacity in anarchic environments. At the same

time, internal unrest within Iran reveals the dual pressure of external containment and domestic economic strain.

Negotiation or Regime Change?

Negotiations between Washington and Tehran have yielded limited progress. Iran appears willing to accept constraints similar to those contained in the JCPOA framework, yet broader American demands target ballistic missile development and regional alliances. Such demands strike at the core of Iran's deterrence architecture.

Under these conditions, the prospect of escalation increases. Structural realism suggests that when core security instruments are threatened, states resist concessions that undermine long-term survival.

Escalation Risks and Maritime Vulnerability

The Strait of Hormuz represents one of the most critical chokepoints in the global energy system. According to the U.S. Energy Information Administration, a substantial proportion of globally traded petroleum passes through this corridor. Any disruption would therefore have systemic economic repercussions.

Iran's asymmetric maritime doctrine emphasizes saturation tactics using relatively low-cost drones and missile systems against high-value naval assets. Such strategies exemplify the security dilemma in practice.

Reports suggest that following the 12-day war, Iran received high-tech defensive materials from China, while Beijing allegedly provided electronic countermeasures against foreign intelligence operations. Russia is also said to have offered assistance. If these accounts are accurate, Iran's strategic depth is reinforced by great-power backing, complicating any military calculus. Escalation Risks and Maritime Vulnerability One reported factor influencing American hesitation is the presence of Chinese naval assets, including the scientific vessel Ocean No. 1, allegedly equipped with advanced radar systems and escorted by destroyers. It is claimed that such assets may provide Iran with maritime surveillance data and satellite imagery related to U.S. deployments. Whether fully accurate or not, such reports affect strategic perceptions and risk assessments. American naval forces in the Persian Gulf face asymmetric threats. Iran's doctrine emphasizes the use of swarms of inexpensive drones—such as Shahed models—against high-value naval assets. Saturation tactics could impose disproportionate costs on technologically superior adversaries. The reported aggressive approach of a Shahed-139 drone toward the USS Abraham Lincoln near the Strait of Hormuz illustrates the evolving nature of maritime confrontation.

Conclusion: Between Deterrence and Catastrophe

Multiple war scenarios are now conceivable, ranging from limited precision strikes to broader regional confrontation. Structural pressures, alliance dynamics, and great-power competition intersect in ways that heighten systemic risk.

A large-scale conflict would fundamentally reshape regional balances and potentially accelerate fragmentation within the international system. Whether deterrence mechanisms and diplomatic channels can prevent such an outcome remains uncertain.

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**THE HUMANITARIAN CRISIS IN THE SUDAN AND THE
“DEPERSONALIZATION” OF THE VICTIMS. INTERNATIONAL CRIMES,
VIOLATIONS OF FUNDAMENTAL HUMAN RIGHTS, SERIOUS
VIOLATIONS OF INTERNATIONAL HUMANITARIAN LAW**



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This paper refers to the tremendous humanitarian crisis that is currently underway in the Sudan. It is attempted to shed light on an extraordinary and urgent situation, that has not been sufficiently highlighted in the public sphere. In addition, it is attempted to stress the worthlessness of the committed international crimes, violations of fundamental human rights, and serious violations of International Humanitarian Law. Acts, behaviors, violations, and crimes of the Sudanese Armed Forces and the Rapid Support Forces are examined. Many of these acts lead to the “depersonalization” of the victims, to recall the term introduced by Mireille Delmas-Marty¹, for specific international crimes, including crimes against humanity.

The Annual Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights A/HRC/61/24 of 13 January 2026² is used as a basic source reference. This Report, prepared pursuant to Human Rights Council Resolution 57/2³, depicts the situation of human rights in the Sudan from 16 November 2024 to 15 November 2025. It includes information obtained through interviews with 778 sources, analysis of photographs, satellite imagery and video footage, of other United Nations reports and authorities’ statements, and of information from other sources.

The applicable international legal framework includes International Humanitarian Law, International Law of Human Rights and International Criminal Law.

¹ - Mireille Delmas-Marty, Antonio Cassese, *Juridictions nationales et crimes internationaux*, Presses Universitaires de France - PUF, 2002.

- Mireille Delmas-Marty, “Violence and Massacres - Towards a Criminal Law of Inhumanity?”, *Journal of International Criminal Justice*, Oxford Journals, Oxford University Press, 2009, pp. 5-16, <http://jicj.oxfordjournals.org/content/7/1/5.full>

² <https://docs.un.org/en/A/HRC/61/24>

³ <https://docs.un.org/en/A/HRC/RES/57/2>

It's already been 3 years since the conflict in the Sudan has started. The conflict has evolved to a war. It should be noted that there are serious concerns not only regarding the unity of the Sudan but also regarding the stability of the broader region.

During the aforementioned period (16 November 2024-15 November 2025) the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) documented the killing of at least 5359 civilians.

Both parties to the conflict employed explosive weapons with wide-area effects in populated areas, even in densely populated residential areas, often without prior warning. So, by conducting airstrikes and shelling, both parties have violated the principles of distinction, proportionality and precaution, under International Humanitarian Law.

Furthermore, there were continued attacks by both parties against civilians and other protected persons, such as humanitarian and health workers, who were often deliberate targets. In particular, more than 48 humanitarian and health personnel were killed. Once again, the principle of distinction and the legal framework concerning the protected persons under International Humanitarian Law were violated.

The principle of distinction was, also, violated by attacks on civilian and specifically protected objects, conducted by both parties. As a matter of fact, OHCHR documented 33 attacks against schools and educational personnel. The World Health Organization documented 71 attacks on healthcare. OHCHR documented more than 19 attacks on humanitarian operations, such as humanitarian aid convoys. Markets were often targeted. Religious facilities were targeted, too.

Water was instrumentalized and targeted in this armed conflict as well, following the armed conflicts in Syria, in Ukraine and in Gaza.⁴ Indicatively,

⁴ For further study,

- Virginia Balafouta, "The protection and management of transboundary rivers in relation to international peace and security and the promotion of human rights. Integration of related issues to International Criminal Law, with references to the Middle East", International Conference "Contemporary Geopolitical Readings of the Wider Middle East: Security, Economy, Politics, Culture", National and Kapodistrian University of Athens, European Public Law Organization (EPLO), Athens, 2017, Volume *Contemporary Geopolitical Readings of the Wider Middle East: Security, Economy, Politics, Culture*, Leimon Editions, Athens, 2018, pp. 95-118.

- Virginia Balafouta, "International peace, human rights, and prevention of international crimes through transboundary rivers' governance. The case of the MENA region", *Policy Paper*, 1/2020, Cyprus Center for European and International Affairs, University of Nicosia, Nicosia, Cyprus, January 2020, p. 29.

https://www.unic.ac.cy/wp-content/uploads/sites/41/Policy-Paper_1-2020.pdf

- Virginia Balafouta, "The extraterritorial application of rules of International Law in Gaza, in the light -also- of the International Court of Justice Advisory Opinion on the 'Wall'", Annual

in the aforementioned Report, is mentioned that Rapid Support Forces drone strikes on electrical infrastructure in Kosti, White Nile, which crippled water treatment systems, were linked to a cholera outbreak, as residents were forced to consume water from untreated sources.

OHCHR documented reports of forced recruitment, mobilization and exploitation of children, by both parties. Such actions constitute war crimes.

Furthermore, summary executions of civilians accused of collaboration with the opposing party were committed by both parties, often occurred when one party seized control of areas previously held by the other party.

Concerning sexual violence, the evidence is heartbreaking. During the reporting period, OHCHR documented 337 incidents of conflict-related sexual violence, involving rape, gang rape, attempted rape, sexual slavery and torture, and other forms of sexual violence, by both parties, affecting at least 452 victims.

Arbitrary arrests and detentions, by both parties, were increased abruptly. In fact, OHCHR documented the detention of 825 individuals, during the aforementioned annual period. It should be emphasized that detainees were subjected to torture and other forms of ill-treatment, and that the detention conditions were inhumane. In particular, extreme overcrowding, poor ventilation, lack of food and water, and insufficient sanitation, were led to a significant number of deaths in custody. It was, also, documented an outbreak of cholera, causing the deaths of more than 300 detainees.

A pattern of enforced disappearance of persons, by both parties, was documented, with OHCHR recording 336 individuals who had been reported missing in the reporting period. In the framework of International Law, enforced disappearances beyond a self-contained crime, as enshrined in the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance, may be included in the wider context and constitute a way of committing international crimes. During a period of an armed conflict they constitute war crimes, when they are committed intentionally, according to the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court. Furthermore, they constitute crimes against humanity, when they are committed as part of a widespread or systematic attack directed against any civilian population, and the perpetrators have intent and additional awareness that their acts are part of that widespread practice.

Conference of the Hellenic Society of International Law and International Relations on the topic: "The War in Gaza and the Question of Palestine. History, Law, Politics and Geostrategy Approaches", Panteion University, Greek Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Athens, 20-22 December 2023. Collective Volume "The Gaza War", *Cahiers de Droit International et de Politique Internationale / Tetradia of International Law and International Politics*, Special Issue, Volume 10/2024, I. Sideris Publications, Athens, June 2024, pp. 131-140.
https://isideris.gr/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/e-Tetradia_10_Book.pdf

The rights to freedom of expression, peaceful assembly and association were grossly violated. Concerning the right of expression and the access to information, the following should be noted. 11 journalists and media workers had been killed, 16 journalists and media workers had been arbitrarily detained, 6 had disappeared. Arbitrary detentions were imposed to persons who were expressing anti-war views or criticizing the conflict, often triggered by phone inspections revealing content interpreted as indicative of “collaboration” with the opposing side. Bans to international and regional media, disruptions to telecommunications, restrictions to Internet were documented.

The Sudan is facing an unprecedented food crisis, dramatically affected the core content of people’s right to food. Moreover, the people’s right to safe drinking water is strongly violated. It should be highlighted that over than 17.3 million people lack access to safe drinking water due to service disruptions, infrastructure attacks and power outages, resulting -among other things- to outbreaks of waterborne diseases, such as cholera.

Furthermore, the right to health is seriously undermined, having in mind that only 16 per cent of primary care facilities and 14 per cent of hospitals remained operational.

In addition, the Sudan is facing one of the World’s worst education crises, with about 13 million children out of school, many of whom had lost more than two years of education since the beginning of the conflict.

According to the International Organization for Migration (Displacement Tracking Matrix operations)⁵, the conflict in the Sudan has continued to fuel the World’s largest displacement crisis, with an estimated 7.2 million people internally displaced and approximately 4.3 million people fleeing into neighbouring countries since the beginning of the conflict. It should be stressed that over half of the internally displaced persons were reportedly children. It should be noted that the rights of persons with disabilities were severely affected during displacement.

As far as return movements are concerned, according to the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs⁶, over one third of women reported worsening security upon return, with rising gender-based violence, forced marriage and harassment.

In the field of the administration of justice, OHCHR documented serious and systematic violations of the international standards, by both parties. In areas controlled by the Sudanese Armed Forces, there was a pattern of harsh judicial sentencing, including the death penalty or life imprisonment, against

⁵ <https://dtm.iom.int/reports/dtm-sudan-mobility-update-22>

⁶ <https://reliefweb.int/report/sudan/giha-gender-snapshot-returnee-women-and-girls-september-2025>

individuals accused of affiliation or collaboration with the Rapid Support Forces. There is evidence about trials without transparency, with coerced evidence, and defence lawyers' intimidation. In Rapid Support Forces-controlled areas, there was no formal justice system and there were documented emergency courts directly linked to security forces.

In conclusion, the magnitude of the multifaceted humanitarian crisis that the people in the Sudan are experiencing becomes clear. It is important from both legal and humanitarian perspective to attempt to shed light on such urgent outrageous situations. International crimes, violations of fundamental human rights, serious violations of International Humanitarian Law are documented. For some of these crimes the term "depersonalization"⁷ of the victims is appropriate, revealing that the perpetrator of these crimes does not target a specific individual because of his personality, because of his particular individual characteristics, but the victim is in the eyes of the perpetrator an anonymous and expendable "tool" to achieve his goal. The recommendation of the High Commissioner, to the international community, to press the UN Security Council to refer the entire situation in the Sudan to the International Criminal Court, is extremely important.

⁷ Mireille Delmas-Marty, ..., Ibid.

ON THE VERGE OF EGO-POLITICS IN INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS



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International relations are undergoing a period of turbulence and uncertainty. The international security landscape is worsening; international law, the norms and the system of collective security established after WW II are being marginalised. The prohibition of the use of force and the peaceful resolution of disputes with respect for human rights, enshrined in the UN Charter, in numerous resolutions, and recognised as mandatory rules of international law, are being challenged as never before. Raw power politics are replacing political interaction and militarism supersedes diplomacy.

With the end of the Cold War, many were quick to talk about the universal domination of the so-called Western world. Some for the "end of history". Today, one can witness with certainty that it is the opposite that has happened, that we are now living in a multipolar era. This is a reality that various international actors and powerful states are unwilling to accept, whilst with particular intensity engaging in dangerous policies of power assertion and double standards, attacking multilateralism and attempting to impose anew hegemonial paradigms - along the lines of post-modern colonial blocks. The means vary from tariffs, trade and economic blockades, untargeted sanctions with heavy socio-economic consequences upon those on whom they are imposed and local populations, to enforcement through military force.

Most strikingly, one can point out the US driven attempts to officially position NATO against China, since the military pact's summit in June at the Hague, the crisis caused by Trump's aggressive claims over Greenland, the unparalleled support of Israel's plans regarding Gaza and the illegal colonization of Palestine as a whole. The bold US intervention in Venezuela and the abduction of the country's elected president and his family, constituting a flagrant violation of the UN Charter and customary international law.

Furthermore, the EU's professed weakness to play an active role as an advocate for substantive multilateralism and rules-based, peaceful cooperation calls into question its own founding principles and decapitates itself from self-declared existential values. This is professed not only through

the tacit compliance or half-hearted reactions of EU officials and institutions. But also, by its ongoing misguided insistence on fuelling the war in Ukraine through militarism - which undoubtedly has entrenched insecurity and instability and allowed for further violations of international law - rather than contributing to its termination. Another crucial misstep, to put it mildly, is the EU's institutional silent acquiescing - despite the rejection of participation by numerous EU member states - in Trump's so-called Board of Peace. The hypocrisy of silently observing the creation of this heavily capitalised initiative by the US, after having strapped UN funding, is unprecedented. An initiative that - worryingly enough - does not comply with the UNSC Resolution 2803, that lacks legal authority and mandate, and according to Trump's claims should be able to intervene (unilaterally) in conflicts. Hence, intentionally sidelining the UN, its structures and mechanisms, international law and the collective security system created after WW II all together.

Against today's complex and harsh security environment, the prevalent dilemma for the international community at large, including for the EU, is among two diverse courses of action that will determine the shape of our world in the years to come: (a) accept the global weakening or even complete dismantling of international, regional and local mechanisms intended to prevent and reduce crises, in the name of "pragmatism" and on the rails of power politics; or (b) revamp observance to the core principles agreed to govern international relations, of international law in particular, ranging from social justice to peace. Inevitably, it is this second path which can only produce an orderly, principles-based and hence truly functioning international relations system.

We need to hold, without exceptions, on the thread that was sawed in the UN Charter, the Declaration on Principles of International Law concerning Friendly Relations and Co-Operation among States (1970), the Manila Declaration (1982), the Final Act of Helsinki (1975) and several other documents, prescribing the most overarching principles on state behaviour and the fundamental significance of peaceful settlement of disputes in international relations. Whilst problematising at the same time on how to strengthen institutions entrusted with the proliferation and safeguarding of those principles (i.e. UN, OSCE), on how to improve or reform their respective mechanisms against the dangerous polarisation around military schemas. Simultaneously, we must work for the eradication of economic and social inequalities as they do bolster instability and conflicts. And inevitably, focus on concerted policies to overcome common challenges such as the climate change and the perseverance of humanity's common heritage.

The customary paradigms of international relations, of collective security and international law are crumbling. Yet, the diagnosis will remain futile unless leadership deposes populism, unless the world is seen anew for what it really is, a wholeness of interconnected realities and interests, the continuity of

which will always be pertinent on pillars of global endorsement, hence of peaceful cooperation.

FROM CLEAR-CUT POLARITY TO UNSTABLE TRANSITION: TRUMP 2.0 AND THE POST-UNIPOLAR RESHUFFLING OF THE INTERNATIONAL SYSTEM



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Polarity is often treated as a relatively stable descriptor of international structure (unipolar, bipolar, multipolar). Yet the post-Cold War record suggests that polarity can be better approached as a *moving* outcome of power redistribution, strategic adaptation, and shifting threat perceptions, rather than as a settled endpoint. In that sense, the international system since the early 2010s has increasingly resembled a transitional configuration: the “unipolar moment” has faded, but no clear replacement has consolidated. The result is an era characterized less by a readable polarity than by systemic reshuffling, which tends to increase instability, encourage risk-taking, and widen “power deficits” and spirals of instability in contested regions.

The pathway into this transition is closely linked to the limits of post-1991 US primacy. A measurable indicator of systemic evolution is great power interventionism and how it evolves over time. Great powers display varying degrees of willingness to make use of military force against weaker states, sub-state or non-state actors, depending on systemic constraints at the time. In the early post-Cold War period, the United States displayed an interventionist pattern that differed from Cold War offshore balancing: the sole superpower at the time could project intense power at a global scale with few peer constraints, and its legitimizing rhetoric expanded from containment to order-building (human rights, democratization, counterterrorism). Over time, however, the costs of expansive engagement, especially in the Middle East where massive land forces deployments took place, interacted with domestic constraints and war fatigue, producing a retrenchment dynamic that became visible by the early 2010s. This shift did not mechanically reduce US power, but it altered perceptions of US willingness to pay costs, and perceptions are often sufficient to trigger opportunistic revisionism.

From a systemic perspective, the post-2011 period saw rivals changing the course by probing the edges of US commitments while consolidating influence through military pressure (Russia in its near abroad), infrastructure and finance (China across multiple regions), and proxy networks (Iran in the

Middle East). The strategic response in Washington, formalized in the post-2017 reorientation toward great power competition, was an attempt to replace global primacy strategies with a Cold War-like balancing logic: prioritize, mobilize coalitions, and constrain challengers by combining military, economic, and technological statecraft. In other words, US strategy began moving away from universal order-management and toward selective competition across key theaters.

Trump 2.0 intensifies this prioritization logic in ways that matter for polarity. The National Security Strategy of the United States of America (November 2025) explicitly frames strategy as an exercise in sorting, ranking, and limiting commitments. Most notably, it elevates the Western Hemisphere from background assumption to central strategic theater, stating that the United States will “assert and enforce” a “Trump Corollary” to the Monroe Doctrine to keep the hemisphere free of hostile foreign incursion or ownership of key assets, while protecting supply chains and access to strategic locations. Whatever one thinks of the doctrine’s normative implications, analytically it signals a structural adaptation: in a less permissive global environment, the United States seeks to harden its home region, deny rival footholds, and reduce vulnerability to geoeconomic coercion. This is great power balancing expressed as re-affirmation and consolidation of regional hegemony.

Trump 2.0’s approach to ending the Russia–Ukraine war fits the same logic. In early 2026, US-brokered talks in Geneva reflect this diplomatic drive, even as public reporting indicates persistent disagreement on territory and security guarantees, and limited progress on practical arrangements. The polarity implication is ambiguous: de-escalation could reduce immediate systemic risk and shift US resources towards other priorities, especially Indo-Pacific competition.

Iran is the third lens through which Trump 2.0’s balancing posture becomes visible. In February 2025, the administration issued National Security Presidential Memorandum NSPM-2, reestablishing “maximum pressure,” explicitly aiming to deny Iran all paths to a nuclear weapon while countering its regional network. The 2025 NSS then claims that “Operation Midnight Hammer” in June 2025 “significantly degraded” Iran’s nuclear program. By February 2026, the administration’s public posture combined negotiation with explicit threats of use of force if talks fail. Here again, the systemic logic is consistent: prevent an adverse regional shift (a nuclear-capable Iran that could reshape deterrence and alliance behavior). Furthermore, applying maximum pressure or military force to provoke a regime change (exploiting the social unrest against the theocratic regime) could deprive China from a regional partner. Yet, precisely because the system lacks a settled polarity and a shared enforcement hierarchy, this style of episodic coercion carries escalation risks and can intensify regional security dilemmas and reshape alignments in unexpected ways.

Taken together, Trump 2.0's Monroe-centered hemispheric emphasis, his drive to compress the Ukraine conflict, and his coercive posture toward Iran all resonate with the post-2017 US reorientation toward great power balancing. They are attempts to manage competition through prioritization, denial, and selective escalation control. At the same time, despite post-2011 re-adjustment of perceptions regarding US primacy and the rise of revisionism by US rivals, so far Trump 2.0 interventionism has faced no significant resist by peers. This observation supports this article's broader assumption: the system is not clearly bipolar or multipolar, but transitional. Uncontested unipolarism is not the case any more as Russia's revisionist surge and China's order-forming attempts showcase, but there seems to be no match vis-a-vis D. Trump's selective hegemonic interventionism. Intense interventionism in the 1990s-2000s accelerated the end of the "unipolar moment" and provoked counter-hegemonic concentrations of power. In the current conditions, the likelihood of prolonged instability is even higher because economic power is more evenly distributed and, therefore, US hegemonic advantage is more contestable. Against this backdrop, rival great powers, particularly China, may be motivated to increase their military capacity and international influence to hedge US hegemonism. Furthermore, multiple actors perceive openings, commitments appear more conditional, and local balances become harder to stabilize. The "post-unipolar reshuffling" thus remains a period of heightened uncertainty, where strategic adjustment by the leading power can reduce some risks while amplifying others, and where inter-state violence becomes more, not less, structurally plausible.

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