

# GRF GLOBAL OUTLOOK REPORT 2024



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GRF Global Outlook Report 2024

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## CONTENTS

|   |    |
|---|----|
| CONTRIBUTORS  | v  |
| FOREWORD: DEVELOPMENTS IN 2024<br><i>Ambassador (R) Selim Yenel</i>   | 1  |
| ILLICIT ECONOMIES AND HYBRID VIOLENCE:<br>UNRAVELING THE BLURRED BOUNDARIES OF POLITICAL<br>AND CRIMINAL CONFLICTS IN LATIN AMERICA<br><i>Assoc. Prof. Başar Baysal</i> | 3  |
| RUSSIA-UKRAINE WAR: WIN OR DEFEAT?<br><i>Ambassador (R) Fatih Ceylan, Prof. Mitat Çelikkpala</i>  | 17 |
| INDIA: THE RISING STAR OF OUR ERA<br><i>Ambassador (R) Hasan Göğüş</i>  | 31 |
| SHIFTS IN THE MIDDLE EAST<br><i>Ambassador (R) Şafak Göktürk</i>  | 34 |
| GLOBAL OUTLOOK THROUGH THE UN PRISM:<br>THE CASES OF AFGHANISTAN AND SYRIA<br><i>Ambassador (R) Erdoğan İşcan</i>   | 39 |
| WORLD TRADE ORGANIZATION IN 2024<br><i>Ambassador (R) Selim Kunalp</i>  | 47 |
| GLOBAL GREEN TRANSITION<br><i>Prof. Levent Kurnaz</i>   | 53 |
| THE BREAKDOWN OF INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTIONS<br>AND THE END OF THE WESTPHALIAN ORDER<br><i>Prof. İlder Turan</i>   | 60 |
| THE RETURN OF TRUMP<br><i>Prof. Füsün Türkmen</i>   | 67 |



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Ambassador (R) Fatih Ceylan completed his undergraduate studies in International Relations at the Faculty of Political Science, Ankara University. Following his graduation, he pursued postgraduate studies in the United States, earning a master's degree from Rutgers and Princeton Universities. In November 1979, he joined the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Over the course of an approximately forty-year diplomatic career, he served in various capacities before retiring voluntarily in February 2019. Following his retirement, he remained actively engaged in foreign policy discussions, contributing numerous publications and analyses through leading think tanks and media platforms. At the ambassadorial level, he served as Turkey's Ambassador to Sudan (2006-2009) and later as Turkey's Permanent Representative to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) (2013-2018). His other previous overseas postings include Islamabad, Deventer (Netherlands), Düsseldorf (Germany), and Brussels, where he served as Deputy Permanent Representative at the Turkish missions to the Western European Union and the European Union. In his final role before retirement, he served as Deputy Undersecretary in Ankara, overseeing bilateral political relations (2010-2013). Currently he serves as the President of the Ankara Policy Centre (APM). He is married and has three children.

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<sup>1</sup>The views and opinions expressed in this study belong to the authors and do not reflect the official position of our institution.

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He has written for several academic publications, including *Energy Policy*, *Middle Eastern Studies*, *International Journal of Turkish Studies*, *Insight Turkey* and *Journal of Southeast European and the Black Sea Studies*. He also contributed many conference papers on Turkish foreign policy, Turkish-Russian relations, Eurasia, and Turkish geopolitics, and he regularly appears in the media to discuss related topics.

## **Hasan Göğüş**

Hasan Göğüş was born in 1953 in Gaziantep. He graduated from the Faculty of Political Science at Ankara University in 1976, specializing in international relations. He began his diplomatic career on April 28, 1977.

Abroad, he served as second secretary at the embassy in New Delhi, first secretary at the permanent mission of Turkey to the United Nations Office in Geneva, counselor at the embassy in London, and deputy permanent representative to the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe.

At the ministry's headquarters, he held positions in joint security affairs, defense agreements and implementation, served as chief of cabinet to the undersecretary, headed the Central Asia department at the Directorate General for the Commonwealth of Independent States, was deputy director general for arms control and disarmament within the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, director general for multilateral political affairs, and deputy undersecretary responsible for bilateral relations with the European Union and European countries.

During his final post at the ministry's headquarters, he was awarded the Oranje-Nassau Order by Queen Beatrix of the Netherlands for his contributions to Turkey-Netherlands relations.

As an ambassador, he represented Turkey in New Delhi, Athens, Vienna, and Lisbon. He retired from the ministry of foreign affairs on October 23, 2018. Currently, he is a member of the advisory board of the International Development Law Organization and the board of trustees of Okan University. He also writes on foreign policy for T24. Hasan Göğüş has published two books in Turkish: "Zor Başkentlerde Diplomasi" (Diplomacy in Difficult Capitals), a memoir of his 42-year diplomatic career, published by Doğan Kitap, and "Diplomasi Yazıları" (Diplomacy Articles), a collection of his opinion pieces, published by İdeal Kitap.

### **Şafak Göktürk**

Ambassador (R) Şafak Göktürk is a retired Turkish diplomat. He was born in 1957. Over the course of his diplomatic career from 1979 to 2019, he held various positions. He served as First Secretary in Athens, Deputy Head of Mission in Tehran, Consul General in Frankfurt, and Deputy Permanent Representative to the United Nations in New York. Additionally, he held the positions of Deputy Director General for the Middle East and Director General for Policy Planning. He also served as Ambassador to Egypt, Singapore, and Norway (with concurrent accreditation to Iceland).

Following his retirement, he contributes to public discussions on foreign policy through his articles and interviews.

### **Selim Kunalalp**

Selim Kunalalp was born in Prague in 1951. After completing his secondary education at Lycée Français Saint Joseph in Istanbul in 1969, he graduated from the London School of Economics in 1973. In 1973, he joined the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Between 1976 and 1978, he served as Second Secretary at the Permanent Mission of Turkey to the United Nations. From 1978 to 1979, he worked as Second Secretary and First Secretary at the Permanent Mission of Turkey to the United Nations Office at Geneva. Between 1979 and 1981, he served as First Secretary at the Turkish Embassy in Northern Cyprus. In Ankara, he held the position of Head of Section in the Private Office of the Minister of Foreign Affairs from 1981 to 1983; from 1983 to 1986, he served as Counsellor at the Permanent Mission of Turkey to the United Nations Office at Geneva. He served as Ambassador to Sweden (2000-2003) and Republic of Korea (with concurrent accreditation to the DPRK) (2003-2005). He was Director-General for Policy Planning at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in 2006-2007 and Deputy Undersecretary for Economic and Cultural Affairs at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs from 2007 to 2009. He was Ambassador, Permanent Delegate of Turkey to the European Union from 2009 to 2011 and Ambassador, Permanent Representative of Turkey to the World Trade Organization from 2012 to 2014. After retiring from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in 2014, he served as Deputy Secretary General of the Energy Charter in Brussels until 2016. In 2011, he was awarded the rank of Chevalier de la Légion d'Honneur by France.



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Erdoğan Işcan completed his undergraduate studies in Political Science and International Law at the Middle East Technical University. He joined the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in October 1978. After serving in diplomacy for over 40 years, he retired in April 2019. In October 2019, he was elected as a member of the United Nations Committee Against Torture (CAT) for the 2020-2023 term, and in 2023, he was re-elected for the 2024-2027 term. He is currently serving as Vice-Chair of the Committee. He also contributes to several think tanks.

He was a lecturer at Istanbul Kültür University from 2019 to 2023. During his long-standing diplomatic career, he held several positions both in Turkey and abroad. He represented Turkey as Ambassador to Ukraine (2005-2009) and South Korea (2009-2011), where he was also accredited to North Korea. Between 2014 and 2018, he served as Ambassador-Permanent Representative of Turkey to the Council of Europe in Strasbourg.

His previous postings include assignments in Doha, Frankfurt, Bonn, Vienna (disarmament negotiations), London (Consul General), and Geneva (Deputy Permanent Representative to the United Nations).

In Ankara, he last served as Deputy Undersecretary for Political Affairs (2013-2014). Prior to that, he held the positions of Director-General for Multilateral Political Affairs (2011-2013) and Director for the Council of Europe and Human Rights (2001-2005).

Throughout his diplomatic career, he also held independent international positions, including:

- Chair of the Committee of the Parties to the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence (Istanbul Convention) (2015-2018).
- Chair of Group of Rapporteurs on democracy education and culture (GR-C) of the Council of Europe Committee of Ministers (2017-2018).
- Member of Governing Board of the European Wergeland Centre (EWC), based in Oslo, promoting education for democratic citizenship and human rights (2017-2018).

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Prof. Füsun Türkmen graduated from Notre Dame de Sion French High School and completed her undergraduate studies with honors in the Department of Political Science at George Washington University in the United States. She earned her doctorate at the Graduate Institute of International Studies in Geneva, Switzerland, and subsequently worked as an international officer at the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA). Since 1999, she has been a faculty member in the Department of International Relations at Galatasaray University, where she served as Department Chair from 2015 until her retirement in 2022. She is currently Vice Chair of the Board of the Global Relations Forum, President of the Notre Dame de Sion High School Education Foundation, a member of the Turkish Political Science Association and the International Political Science Association, and a member of the Scientific Board of the Paris Bosphorus Institute.

She has received the Prof. Besim Üstünel Research Award twice and has been honored with the Chevalier de la Légion d'Honneur by the Presidency of France. Fluent in French, English, and Italian, she has numerous domestic and international academic publications and continues her scholarly activities.



## FOREWORD: DEVELOPMENTS IN 2024

### Selim Yenel

Ambassador (R); President, Global Relations Forum (GRF)

We are pleased to present the fifth edition of the Global Relations Forum's now-traditional annual report.

While the Russia-Ukraine and Israel-Hamas/Hezbollah wars continued unabated in 2024, the event of the year was arguably the overthrow of President Bashar al-Assad and the end of the Ba'ath regime, which had ruled Syria for over half a century. However, this development is regarded as a consequence of the ongoing impacts of Russia's invasion attempt on Ukraine, which began in 2022, and Hamas's attack on Israel last year. The key actors that had sustained the Syrian regime since the onset of the civil war in 2011—namely Russia, Iran, and Hezbollah—became preoccupied with their own challenges, leaving the regime without crucial support. Another defining feature of 2024 was the wide array of elections held across the globe, engaging a significant portion of the world's population. Some of these elections were mere formalities designed to create the appearance of legitimacy, with outcomes predetermined—such as those in Russia and Venezuela. Conversely, elections in populous nations like Indonesia, India, and Mexico, as well as unexpected elections in countries like the United Kingdom and France, attracted significant attention. A common characteristic of these elections was their tendency to bring about changes in power. Even in India, where Prime Minister Narendra Modi was widely expected to secure an easy victory, the results fell short of predictions.

On the other hand, the far-right gained considerable strength across many European countries, either coming to power or becoming coalition partners. This surge also influenced the European Parliament elections. On December 1, 2024, new members of the European Union Council and Commission assumed office for a five-year term. A notable point here is that the EU does not foresee any enlargement during this period. Naturally, the most closely watched election was the United States presidential election held on November 5. The race, initially anticipated to be between former President Donald Trump and President Joe Biden, took a critical turn mid-year. Following his weak performance in the debate against Trump, Biden was compelled to withdraw from the race. Consequently, Vice President Kamala Harris stepped in as the nominee of the Democratic Party. Nonetheless, Trump was re-elected as president, with both the Senate and the House of Representatives falling under Republican control. Considering these developments, despite facing numerous charges and lawsuits, Trump's re-election as President of the United States arguably makes him the person of the year.

His influence began to be felt even before taking office, as he formed his cabinet and made other appointments not based on merit but on loyalty.

In this year's report, our esteemed experts delve into key topics, including the focal points of violence in Latin America, the ongoing Russia-Ukraine war, the rise of India on the global stage, the evolving Middle East in light of recent developments, the United Nations' perspectives on Afghanistan and Syria, shifting dynamics in global trade and the trajectory of the World Trade Organization, the global green transformation—whose significance remains underappreciated even as it reshapes our world—the relevance of international institutions amid current conflicts, and, finally, the return of President Donald Trump, which is poised to leave a lasting mark on the years ahead. As part of the practice we initiated last year, we are pleased to publish this year's report in both Turkish and English. We wish you an insightful read.

# ILLCIT ECONOMIES AND HYBRID VIOLENCE: UNRAVELING THE BLURRED BOUNDARIES OF POLITICAL AND CRIMINAL CONFLICTS IN LATIN AMERICA

**Doç. Dr. Başar Baysal**

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## Introduction

Latin America's complex history of violence intertwines political upheavals, such as insurgencies and coups, with the rise of criminal networks involved in drug trafficking and other illegal economies. These dynamics often converge into "hybrid violence," where armed groups blend ideological aims with profit-driven agendas, blurring the lines between political and criminal violence. This paper delves into multiple dimensions of Latin America's overlapping political and criminal conflicts. First, it investigates the emergence of hybrid violence and the ways in which insurgent groups such as the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) have shifted between ideological and profit-based activities. Next, it examines how illicit economies—whether driven by drug production, illegal mining, or human trafficking—disrupt local markets, corrode institutional integrity, undermine social cohesion, and, over time, become entangled in political processes, influencing governance structures and peace processes in subtle yet profound ways.

The discussion then turns to policy responses, contrasting heavy-handed security measures with more comprehensive initiatives targeting root causes such as land inequality, poverty, and weak governance. Although hardline strategies like those adopted in El Salvador may quell violence momentarily, they have done little to dismantle entrenched criminal networks or resolve the socio-economic inequities that drive marginalized groups into illicit livelihoods. Colombia's recent peace process, on the other hand, suggests a more far-reaching but still fragile path: land reform, rural development, and crop substitution programs aimed at offering viable alternatives to impoverished communities. Even so, the limited implementation of these measures and the re-emergence of dissident factions<sup>1</sup> illustrate that political will and sustained funding are prerequisites for genuine transformation.

Ultimately, Latin America's intertwined crises of criminality and political violence cannot be solved through force alone. As the subsequent sections reveal, breaking this cycle demands a holistic approach - one that invests in social reform, professionalizes security forces, combats corruption, and fosters international cooperation against transnational criminal networks. By understanding the deep-rooted nature of hybrid violence and illicit economies, policymakers have a chance to shift from reactive, short-lived crackdowns to long-term, inclusive strategies that tackle structural inequalities, bolster state presence, and restore public trust.

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<sup>1</sup> The term "dissident factions" refers to FARC members/groups that did not disarm during the peace process or those who disarmed but later rearmed. In English, this term is commonly referred to as "FARC Dissidents."

# 1. The Rise of Hybrid Violence: The Intersection of Political and Criminal Violence

In Latin America, violence has historically emerged in multiple forms, ranging from classic political conflict to criminal activities driven by illicit economic incentives.<sup>2</sup> Political violence generally refers to violent acts committed to achieve political, ideological, or social objectives. In Latin America, political violence has historically taken the form of insurgencies, rebel movements, and civil wars aimed at transforming the political system or challenging existing power structures. Such movements often mobilize local populations around nationalist or revolutionary ideals, seeking to replace or reshape state institutions. An illustrative case is the armed revolutionary groups in Central and South America during the Cold War, which leveraged political ideologies to garner support and legitimacy.

In contrast, criminal violence arises from profit-oriented motives, typically involving activities such as drug trafficking, illegal mining, kidnapping, extortion, and other illicit enterprises. Organizations engaged in criminal violence are primarily concerned with controlling lucrative markets, rather than overthrowing governments or installing new political regimes. In Latin America, powerful drug cartels and gangs frequently fund themselves through transnational trafficking routes and local-level extortion schemes, exerting territorial control over specific regions or neighborhoods. Over the past few decades, an increasingly complex dynamic has taken shape in which these two forms of violence merge more substantively, giving rise to what many scholars call “hybrid violence.” This phenomenon involves organizations that blur the line between ideological or political aims and the pursuit of profit through illegal means.<sup>3</sup>

## Hybridization

Hybridization occurs when political violence groups adopt criminal tactics and revenue streams or when criminal organizations expand their influence into the political arena. This fusion of motives and methods leads to hybrid violence, wherein actors do not fit neatly into “purely” political or “purely” criminal categories.<sup>4</sup> On one side of the spectrum, insurgencies may engage in drug trafficking to finance their operations. On the other side, cartels may support or coerce political figures to shape regulations and policies in their favor. This blending creates a complex security environment in which state institutions and communities struggle to distinguish ideological claims from criminal objectives, making conflict resolution and governance far more challenging. One of the most prominent examples of the transition from political to criminal violence is the FARC. Originally established as a Marxist-Leninist rebel group in the 1960s, FARC aimed to overthrow the Colombian government and redistribute land to

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<sup>2</sup> Arias, Enrique Desmond. *Criminal Enterprises and Governance in Latin America and the Caribbean*. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2017.

<sup>3</sup> Koonings, Kees, and Dirk Kruijt. “Hybrid Violence and Criminal Governance in Latin America.” *Social Sciences & Humanities Open* 8, no. 1 (2023): 100623. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ssaho.2023.100623>

<sup>4</sup> Koonings and Kruijt, 2023.

the peasantry.<sup>5</sup> Over time, however, financial pressures, opportunities in the illicit drug trade, and the need to sustain extended military campaigns led the group to cultivate and traffic cocaine.<sup>6</sup>

FARC's engagement in criminal activities was not initially the core to its mission; rather, it was a pragmatic strategy to fund its ideological cause. Yet, as the profits from drug trafficking grew, the organization became deeply involved in activities such as kidnapping for ransom, extortion, and controlling local coca production.<sup>7</sup> This involvement blurred the line between ideological insurgency and organized crime, transforming FARC into a hybrid actor. Even after the 2016 peace agreement, certain dissident factions continued illicit operations, demonstrating that once insurgent groups adopt criminal economies, returning to purely political objectives becomes exceedingly difficult.<sup>8</sup>

The reverse trajectory—from criminal to political violence—can be observed in Mexico's powerful drug cartels.<sup>9</sup> Organizations like the Sinaloa Cartel, the Gulf Cartel, and Los Zetas originated with profit-maximizing, market-driven goals. However, over the years, their interest in shaping the political environment has grown in parallel with their economic power.<sup>10</sup> Cartel leaders have used bribes and threats to gain influence over local and regional politicians. In some cases, they even sponsor electoral candidates who, once in office, shield cartel activities from law enforcement or funnel public contracts to cartel-affiliated businesses.<sup>11</sup> This trend may also occur in the reverse path such as intimidating or threatening the political candidates.<sup>12</sup> Moreover, cartels provide social services, such as distributing food or funding community events, in attempts to build local loyalty.<sup>13</sup> While these acts may appear as charitable gestures, they serve a strategic purpose: fostering dependence among local populations and diminishing the legitimacy of the government.

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<sup>5</sup> Baysal, Başar. *Securitization and Desecuritization of FARC in Colombia: A Dual Perspective Analysis*. Lanham: Lexington Books, 2019.

<sup>6</sup> Baysal, 2019.

<sup>7</sup> Norman, Susan Virginia. "Narcotization as Security Dilemma: The FARC and Drug Trade in Colombia." *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 41, no. 8 (2018): 638–659. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1057610X.2017.1338052>; Gutiérrez Sanín, Francisco. "Criminal Rebels? A Discussion of Civil War and Criminality from the Colombian Experience." *Politics & Society* 32, no. 2 (2004): 257–285.

<sup>8</sup> Wyer, Frank. "Peace Versus Profit: Rebel Fragmentation and Conflict Resurgence in Colombia." *International Organization* 78, no. 4 (2024): 701–730. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0020818324000213>

<sup>9</sup> Council on Foreign Relations (CFR). "Mexico's Long War: Drugs, Crime, and Cartels." (2024). <https://www.cfr.org/background/mexicos-long-war-drugs-crime-and-cartels>

<sup>10</sup> Astorga, Luis. "Drug Trafficking in Mexico: A First General Assessment." In *UNESCO Management of Social Transformations (MOST) Discussion Paper Series* 36 (UNESCO, 1999). <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000117644>; Durán-Martínez, Angélica. "The Politics of Drug Violence: Criminals, Cops and Politicians in Colombia and Mexico." Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018.

<sup>11</sup> Arias, 2017.

<sup>12</sup> Council on Foreign Relations, 2024.

<sup>13</sup> Flanigan, Shawn T. "Motivations and Implications of Community Service Provision by La Familia Michoacana/Knights Templar and Other Mexican Drug Cartels." *Journal of Strategic Security* 7, no. 3 (2014): 63–83; Zapata Celestino, Kevin. "The Clandestine Welfare: The Role of Illicit Actors in the Provision of Social Protection in Latin America." *Journal of International and Comparative Social Policy* (2023): 1–19. <https://doi.org/10.1017/ics.2023.10>



Brazil's favelas also provide a distinct example of hybrid dynamics. Some neighborhoods bring criminals together with civic leaders, politicians, and police.<sup>14</sup> Historically, favelas emerged as communities addressing the absence of state-provided public services, with organized criminal groups (OCGs) stepping in to fill governance voids. These groups, while offering basic services such as safety and dispute resolution, have also imposed violent sociability, integrating themselves into the daily lives of residents. In favelas where criminal organizations are perceived as benign, residents may rely on them to fulfill basic needs, while the state is seen as an outsider that brings disruption of routines and violence.<sup>15</sup> State interventions, often characterized by militarized police incursions, disrupt these established subsistence routines, generating grievances among residents. This dichotomy fosters counter-frames within favelas, portraying the state as an outsider bringing disorder, while criminal organizations are seen as integral to the community's identity and survival.<sup>16</sup> These dynamics highlight the deep entrenchment of grievances and the social frames that shape mobilization in favelas.

## Consequences of Hybridization

The proliferation of hybrid violence has significant implications for governance, economics, and social stability in Latin America. First, hybrid actors undercut state authority by usurping or co-opting local government functions.<sup>17</sup> When a militia group or cartel dictates security and justice measures, the legitimacy and effectiveness of formal institutions suffer. Over time, this erodes trust between citizens and state agencies, further weakening governance structures.<sup>18</sup>

Second, violence that is both political and criminal in nature complicates peace processes and transitional justice processes. In Colombia, the persistence of illicit economies and the state's inability to fully overcome them have played a critical role in shaping post-conflict Dynamics.<sup>19</sup> After the demobilization of FARC, the power vacuum created by their departure was quickly filled by a mix of smaller, novel criminal groups, active armed factions like the ELN (National Liberation Army), and dissident FARC members who refused or abandoned the peace accords. This shift from politically motivated insurgency to predominantly criminal activities highlights the resilience of violence, sustained through the evolving hybridity of its political and

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<sup>14</sup> Arias, Enrique Desmond. "The Dynamics of Criminal Governance: Networks and Social Order in Rio de Janeiro." *Journal of Latin American Studies* 38, no. 2 (2006): 293–325. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0022216X06000721>;

Arias, Enrique Desmond. "The Impacts of Differential Armed Dominance of Politics in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil." *Studies in Comparative International Development* 48, no. 3 (2013): 263–284. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12116-013-9137-8>.

<sup>15</sup> Vilbert, Jean. "Criminal Governance and Social Mobilization in Brazilian Favelas: A Qualitative Meta-Analysis." *Politikon: The IAPSS Journal of Political Science* 56 (2023): 33–64. <https://doi.org/10.22151/politikon.56.2>

<sup>16</sup> Vilbert, 2023.

<sup>17</sup> Arias, 2017

<sup>18</sup> Vilbert, 2023

<sup>19</sup> Ezek, E. Nur, Yelda Yenel, and Başar Baysal. "Kolombiya Bağlamında Çatışma Dönemi Ekonomilerinin Çatışmanın Şiddetlenmesi, Terörle Mücadele ve Barış Sürecine Etkilerinin İncelenmesi [Impact of Wartime Economies on Escalation of Conflict, Counter-Terrorism and Peace Process in Colombia]." *Pamukkale University Journal of Social Sciences Institute* 56 (2023): 297–308.

criminal dimensions. As a result, Local communities in areas like Cauca and Nariño remain trapped between an incomplete state presence and new or rebranded armed actors vying for control.<sup>20</sup>

Finally, the human cost is enormous. Communities exposed to hybrid violence often face daily insecurity and a breakdown of social cohesion. Children grow up in environments where violence is normalized, and economic opportunities outside the illicit sphere are scarce. Moreover, the normalization of violence, coupled with other vulnerabilities such as widespread poverty and social inequality, has created a fertile ground for the recruitment of children by armed groups. This cyclical effect can perpetuate instability: marginalized populations become more vulnerable to recruitment by armed groups, which promise protection or income in regions where the state is almost absent.<sup>21</sup>

Addressing this complexity demands multifaceted responses that go beyond law enforcement. Peace negotiations must incorporate mechanisms for dismantling illicit economies, and governance reforms must ensure that political institutions can withstand corruption and coercion. Furthermore, social programs targeting marginalized youth, who are often the first recruits for these groups, can help break cycles of violence and illicit dependency. Without such interventions, hybrid violence will likely remain a persistent challenge in Latin America, undermining efforts to achieve sustainable security, democracy, and development in the region.

## 2. Illicit Economies: Financing Models of Criminal Organizations and Their Impacts

In many parts of Latin America, criminal organizations and rebel groups have built vast and sophisticated financial structures, leveraging a variety of illicit activities to generate revenue. From drug production and trafficking to illegal mining, human trafficking, counterfeiting, and money laundering, these organizations exploit undergoverned spaces and weak institutional frameworks to consolidate their power. The following are the three selected types and mechanisms of illicit economies in Latin America:

**Drug Production and Trafficking:** Drug production and trafficking are among the most common and profitable illicit economic activities in Latin America. For decades, groups in countries such as Colombia, Mexico, and Peru have cultivated, processed, and transported narcotics - most notably cocaine and heroin - on a large scale. Cartels, organized crime syndicates and hybridized rebel groups assume various roles along the value chain, such as supplying raw materials in rural zones, regulating prices and taxation, and managing elaborate transportation networks that span across borders.

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<sup>20</sup> Human Rights Watch. "Recycled Violence: Abuses by FARC Dissident Groups in Tumaco on Colombia's Pacific Coast." (2018). <https://www.hrw.org/report/2018/12/13/recycled-violence/abuses-farc-dissident-groups-tumaco-colombias-pacific-coast>

<sup>21</sup> Charles, Mathew, V. Conde, J. Sanabria, L. Calderon, D. Marmolejo, T. Castro, and B. Baysal. "La Participación de NNA en el Crimen Organizado y el Conflicto Después del Acuerdo de Paz." *Documentos OCCO*, no. 4 (2022). Observatorio Colombiano de Crimen Organizado, Universidad del Rosario.

The profitability of the drug trade is so high that many groups initially formed around political grievances, such as the FARC in Colombia, eventually expanded into drug cultivation and smuggling to finance their insurgencies.

**Illegal Mining:** Illegal mining, whether for gold, diamonds, or other valuable minerals, has emerged as another significant revenue source for armed and criminal groups.<sup>22</sup> The environmental toll - ranging from deforestation to water pollution - is severe, but the short-term financial gains make this trade attractive for these groups and local communities living in poverty. Additionally, criminal organizations or hybrid groups that control these mining operations often enforce their power through violence or intimidation, monopolizing the local economy.

**Human Trafficking:** Human trafficking, including forced labor and sexual exploitation, constitutes a less visible yet highly profitable illicit economy. In regions where border security is lax or overwhelmed by violence, or local authorities are complicit, traffickers can easily move individuals across boundaries, targeting vulnerable populations with promises of employment or better livelihoods. The social impact of human trafficking is profound, as it not only undermines human rights but also destabilizes local communities, contributing to a culture of fear and exploitation.<sup>23</sup>

One of the most immediate consequences of illicit economies is the usurpation of economic spheres by non-state actors. In many parts of Latin America, weak or absent state institutions create a governance vacuum readily filled by non-state actors. In remote regions of Colombia, for example, dissident rebel factions and other criminal organizations levy taxes on illicit drug production, setting prices and labor conditions with little to no government interference. Over time, these groups often undertake governance-like roles - from resolving local disputes to providing rudimentary public services - thereby undermining the legitimacy of formal state structures and entrenching their own power.

Mainstream views argue that involvement in drug economies transforms armed groups into criminal entities, overshadowing their political agendas and legitimacy.<sup>24</sup> By this account, rebels' resort to illicit markets marks a decisive break from their original ideological motives, effectively reducing these organizations to violent profit-seekers. However, alternative perspectives contend that labeling insurgents as "narco-terrorists" can be part of counterinsurgency efforts to delegitimize them.<sup>25</sup> In this view, revenue from illicit activities can help advance political objectives by financing both military

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<sup>22</sup> Organized Crime and Corruption Reporting Project (OCCRP). "Interpol: Illegal Gold Mining Is Devastating Latin America." (2022). <https://www.occrp.org/en/news/interpol-illegal-gold-mining-is-devastating-latin-america>

<sup>23</sup> Shelley, Louise. *Human Trafficking: A Global Perspective*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010.

<sup>24</sup> Cornell, Svante E. "Narcotics and Armed Conflict: Interaction and Implications." *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 30, no. 3 (2007): 207-227; Schmidt, Ferhana. "From Islamic Warriors to Drug Lords: The Evolution of the Taliban Insurgency." *Mediterranean Quarterly* 21 (2010): 61-77.

<sup>25</sup> Ramirez, Maria Clemencia. *Between the Guerrillas and the State: The Cocalero Movement, Citizenship, and Identity in the Colombian Amazon*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011; Acero, Camilo. "Review of the Literature on Illicit Drugs in Colombia." *Drugs & (Dis)order Working Paper* (London: SOAS, 2020).

campaigns and regulatory or governance functions.<sup>26</sup> For instance, Hough suggests that controlling the drug economy garners support from civilians involved in production, while Gutiérrez and Thomson assert that leftist armed groups may direct such funds toward sustaining peasant economies.<sup>27</sup> Some cartels or militias even provide infrastructure repair, rudimentary healthcare, or de facto law and order, portraying themselves as more responsive and accessible than the distant, and often ineffective, state apparatus.

Criminal organizations that lack an overtly political origin may similarly expand their influence into the political realm. In countries such as Mexico, drug cartels do not merely run illicit markets but also bribe or coerce politicians and officials, from local mayors to high-ranking national figures, effectively shaping public policy and impeding law enforcement.<sup>28</sup> By controlling how security forces operate or by channeling public funds toward cartel-friendly projects, these groups strengthen their foothold and limit official responses to their activities. As a result, citizens often perceive public institutions - police, courts, and elected offices - as either complicit or unable to tackle organized crime, further eroding trust in the rule of law.

Moreover, criminal groups do not only co-opt individual officials; they also distort electoral processes and public budgets to serve their interests. During election campaigns, cartels may fund or support candidates who promise leniency or strategic inaction. Conversely, those who challenge criminal networks are often harassed, kidnapped, or even assassinated, creating a climate of fear that stifles genuine political competition.<sup>29</sup> Once in office, politicians indebted to illicit groups may return the favor by directing government contracts to organizations affiliated with these actors or by continuing to undermine police investigations. Such environments of impunity and high-level collusion undercut accountability and heighten citizens' sense of vulnerability.

Beyond corrupting political institutions, the proliferation of illicit economies also exerts devastating social consequences. In many rural areas, coca cultivation becomes a primary - or sometimes the only - source of subsistence. Local residents in places like Tumaco in Colombia, faced with scarce legal employment opportunities, either collaborate with criminal enterprises or risk economic marginalization and physical harm. This entrenches a culture of violence and mistrust, as children grow up normalizing aggression and families divide themselves according to whether they cooperate with or resist local criminal syndicates. Social cohesion suffers accordingly, with community ties weakened by the constant fear of retaliation or betrayal.

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<sup>26</sup> Gutierrez Sanín, 2004; Gutiérrez, Jose Antonio and Frances Thomson. "Rebels-Turned-Narcos? The FARC-EP's Political Involvement in Colombia's Cocaine Economy." *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* (2020). <https://doi.org/10.1080/1057610X.2020.1793456>

<sup>27</sup> Hough, Philip A. "Guerrilla Insurgency as Organized Crime: Explaining the So-Called 'Political Involution' of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia." *Politics & Society* 39, no. 3 (2011): 379-414; Gutiérrez, Jose Antonio, and Frances Thomson. "Rebels-Turned-Narcos? The FARC-EP's Political Involvement in Colombia's Cocaine Economy." *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* (2020). <https://doi.org/10.1080/1057610X.2020.1793456>.

<sup>28</sup> Arias, 2017; Astorga, 1999

<sup>29</sup> Arias, 2017

Illicit economies also complicate efforts to negotiate peace or reintegrate insurgent groups into civilian life. For armed groups sustained by high-revenue activities such as drug trafficking, demobilization becomes less appealing without robust alternatives. Even in formal peace agreements, breakaway factions often reject demobilization in favor of continued profits from illicit markets. Colombia's peace process with the FARC exemplifies this dilemma: although many combatants demobilized, some dissident factions refused to lay down arms, retaining control over strategic coca-growing regions. Some rearmed upon finding that the post-conflict economy could not match the financial incentives of illicit trade.<sup>30</sup>

Ultimately, illicit economies in Latin America have deeply interwoven economic, social, and political repercussions. Activities like drug production exploit systemic vulnerabilities including corruption, poverty, and inadequate governance. Non-state actors fill gaps in authority, sometimes establishing parallel governance structures. Politically, corruption and policy manipulation erode the integrity of public institutions, allowing criminal networks to entrench themselves further. The net result is a climate of deepening mistrust in which legitimate government authority is undermined, and social bonds are splintered.

### **3. From Repressive Measures to Root-Cause-Oriented Approaches: The Mixed Record of Colombian and Salvadoran Policies**

Latin America's attempts to curb violence and illicit economies have often included robust, security-focused policies - epitomized by El Salvador's *Mano Dura* - as well as more nuanced strategies that address root causes such as poverty, land inequality, and weak governance.<sup>31</sup> El Salvador's experience illustrates both the initial appeal and enduring limitations of repressive tactics. In the early 2000s, laws criminalizing gang membership and granting security forces expanded authority reduced homicide rates in the short term. Yet mass arrests, coupled with prison overcrowding, strengthened gang networks behind bars, while allegations of extrajudicial violence eroded public trust. However, it should be noted that purely repressive tactics overlook entrenched drivers of crime, such as poverty, inequality, and lack of educational opportunities. Moreover, harsh measures can embolden authorities to adopt undemocratic practices, fueling democratic backsliding and the criminal infiltration of state structures themselves. When these heavy-handed approaches fail to produce lasting improvements, public confidence in political leaders erodes, creating a cycle of increasingly punitive measures that do little to resolve systemic issues.

Colombia presents a broader and more varied policy landscape, having experimented with repressive efforts under President Álvaro Uribe (2002–2010) and root-cause-centered measures during and after the peace negotiations with the FARC. Uribe's presidency was marked by a hardline military strategy known as "Democratic Security,"

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<sup>30</sup> Kaplan, Oliver, and Enzo Nussio. "Explaining Recidivism of Ex-Combatants in Colombia." *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 62, no. 1 (2018): 64–93. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022002716644326>

<sup>31</sup> Wolf, Sonja. *Mano Dura: Gang Suppression in El Salvador*. Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 2017.

which deployed the armed forces to recover territory and dismantle insurgent strongholds. Although his administration claimed success in reducing kidnappings and homicides, critics pointed to human rights violations and the emergence of new criminal factions, including paramilitary successor groups, that filled the void left by receding rebel forces.<sup>32</sup> Moreover, these military gains did little to transform structural conditions—such as the lack of economic opportunities in rural areas—that had fueled the conflict.

A significant shift occurred with the 2016 peace accord between the Colombian government and the FARC, which aimed to address the root causes of conflict by promoting land reform, enhancing rural infrastructure, and creating programs to substitute illicit crops. Two key initiatives under this framework were the “The Development Plans with a Territorial Focus” (PDET), focused on transforming conflict-affected regions through participatory rural development, and the Comprehensive Plan for the Substitution of Illicit Crops (PNIS), which sought to support coca farmers in transitioning to legal livelihoods through financial incentives, technical assistance, and alternative development opportunities. In principle, this integrated approach recognized that entrenched criminal economies cannot be dismantled solely through force. However, the subsequent administration under President Iván Duque (2018–2022) showed tepid support for these programs, as part of his administration’s general unwillingness to implement the peace process.<sup>33</sup> As a result, crucial elements of the peace agreement were underfunded or inconsistently implemented, weakening farmers’ incentives to abandon coca. As a result, coca production peaked in Colombia in 2023.<sup>34</sup> This highlights the vital role of state capacity and political will in turning ambitious policies into reality.

Elected in 2022, President Gustavo Petro has introduced a “Total Peace” framework, signaling a deeper shift away from traditional force-heavy security policies.<sup>35</sup> His administration has proposed decriminalizing certain aspects of the cocaine trade, engaging in dialogue with remaining armed actors, and strengthening rural development programs. While still an ongoing process, Petro’s approach reflects an acknowledgment that repression alone cannot dismantle deeply entrenched criminal economies. However, success will depend on sustained political commitment and sufficient resources to implement reforms in some of the country’s most remote and conflict-ridden areas. Compounding these challenges, entrenched criminal or hybrid networks have developed remarkable adaptability over decades of conflict, allowing them to exploit shifting conditions and further complicate efforts to stabilize and transform these regions.

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<sup>32</sup> Baysal, 2019

<sup>33</sup> Washington Office on Latin America (WOLA). *A long way to go: Implementing Colombia's peace accord after five years*. (2021). <https://www.wola.org/analysis/a-long-way-to-go-implementing-colombias-peace-accord-after-five-years/>

<sup>34</sup> United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC). “Colombia: Potential Cocaine Production Increased by 53 Per Cent in 2023, According to New UNODC Survey.” (2024, October 18).

<sup>35</sup> Maihold, Günther. “Colombia's Path to ‘Total Peace’: President Gustavo Petro Cannot Fall Back on the FARC Blueprint.” SWP Comment 2022/C 54, Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik (SWP), 2022. <https://doi.org/10.18449/2022C54>

Overall, the Colombian case suggests that while addressing root causes of violence can be more strategic and less destabilizing than Mano Dura-style crackdowns, the actual outcomes depend on long-term commitment and the operational reach of public institutions. The persistence of hybrid violence - where political grievances blur with profit-driven agendas - further demonstrates that any policy approach must balance security measures with social and economic reforms. The deeper lesson is that both direct coercive actions and longer-term, root-cause-oriented solutions must be comprehensively designed and supported. Absent robust political will and enduring state presence, measures remain vulnerable to reversal, leaving communities caught between repressive crackdowns and the persistent influence of criminal networks.

#### **4. From Symptoms to Solutions: Building a Holistic Framework for Security and Development in Latin America**

Over the past decades, Latin American governments have often relied on short-term, security-focused strategies to contain violence. While these policies, including Mano Dura approaches, offer immediate political gains and sometimes curb homicides briefly, they seldom tackle the deep-seated vulnerabilities that sustain criminal and insurgent structures. As highlighted in the experiences of El Salvador and Colombia, high arrest rates and forceful crackdowns risk exacerbating human rights abuses, fueling prison overcrowding, and entrenching a cycle of fear and distrust that undermines long-term peace. By contrast, more comprehensive policies targeting the underlying drivers of conflict - economic exclusion, social inequalities, and weak governance - are essential for lasting transformation.

A foremost priority is addressing root causes such as poverty and inequities. This is essential to breaking cycles of dependency on illicit economies like coca cultivation or illegal mining, particularly in rural areas where alternatives are scarce. Without viable options, eradication efforts often force communities back into criminal activities. Sustainable solutions require robust rural development initiatives, including equitable land redistribution, improved infrastructure, and expanded public services. Programs like Colombia's PNIS and PDET reflect these principles, though their mixed success highlights the need for consistent funding and political commitment. Additionally, combating social exclusion and reducing socioeconomic inequalities are crucial for long-term stability. Investments in education, healthcare, and targeted initiatives for vulnerable groups, such as women and young people, can empower communities and reduce recruitment into armed groups.

Yet, social and economic reforms alone do not suffice unless the state presence is tangible and trustworthy. In many conflict-ridden areas, citizens perceive the government as either absent or predatory, leading them to rely on armed groups that at least offer rudimentary services and "security". Strengthening local governance means not only dispatching police or soldiers but also establishing functioning judicial systems, transparent procurement processes, and responsive local administrations. Professionalizing security forces - through human rights training, accountability mechanisms, and community policing - can rebuild trust. Over the long haul, such



reforms also reduce corruption and curtail the impunity that criminal actors exploit. As earlier arguments also indicate, political will and continuity of policy are critical. Colombia's experiences after the 2016 peace process demonstrate how fluctuating state commitment undermines even the best-designed reforms. Lapses in implementing land reforms or substitution programs embolden dissident factions to revert to drug trafficking and illegal mining. A change in administration can result in budget cuts or policy rollbacks, eroding local confidence and allowing criminal networks to reestablish themselves. Ensuring that peace and development strategies transcend electoral cycles demands legislative frameworks and robust civil society engagement that hold future governments accountable.

Reintegration of ex-combatants and demobilized gang members, particularly within large-scale peace processes, is essential for reducing violence. Colombia's post-FARC experience highlights how incomplete reintegration programs can give rise to new hybrid organizations focused on illicit activities. Effective reintegration requires comprehensive job training, psychosocial support, and community-based reconciliation efforts, with faith organizations, local NGOs, and municipal authorities playing critical roles. The persistence of illicit economies often drives former combatants to rearm, while poorly implemented peace agreements can leave them feeling betrayed, further fueling rearmament. Failure to address these challenges and provide robust reintegration not only squanders human potential but also entrenches cycles of criminality and insurgency.

Combating entrenched corruption must go hand in hand with these other means and measures. Criminal networks thrive where officials accept bribes or cooperate for personal gain. Comprehensive transparency measures - ranging from asset disclosure for politicians to whistleblower protections - are indispensable for uprooting long-standing practices of graft. The challenge is formidable, as corruption often enjoys societal normalization and deep historical roots. However, high-profile prosecutions, robust oversight bodies, and community monitoring can gradually shift norms and reduce official complicity.

Efforts to address violence and illicit economies must be undertaken with unwavering respect for democratic principles and human rights. Strategies like *Mano Dura* have usually led to fostering authoritarian tendencies, where governments justify excessive surveillance, militarization, and suppression of dissent under the guise of security. Additionally, these policies frequently contribute to the institutionalization of corruption, as unchecked power and opaque processes create fertile ground for graft and misuse of resources. Such approaches not only undermine civil liberties but also exacerbate societal divides, eroding trust in state institutions. To avoid these pitfalls, reforms should emphasize transparency, accountability, and participatory governance, ensuring that security measures do not devolve into mechanisms of control. Upholding human rights and combating corruption is not merely an ethical imperative; it is a practical necessity for cultivating the legitimacy and social cohesion required for sustainable peace.



Finally, international collaboration is vital. Illicit markets do not adhere to national boundaries; drugs cultivated in the Andes supply consumers in North America and Europe, just as arms and capital flow across borders to sustain criminal enterprises. A holistic approach requires transit, source, and destination countries to coordinate on money laundering legislation, extradition treaties, and intelligence-sharing. Initiatives like cross-border task forces or joint patrols, if embedded in broader governance and development strategies, can disrupt trafficking routes without displacing the problem to neighboring countries.

In conclusion, reversing Latin America's cycles of hybrid violence and illicit economies necessitates moving beyond punitive crackdowns and embracing a holistic strategy that combines human development, credible institutions, and unwavering political resolve. Addressing land grievances, expanding social services, and investing in youth are not peripheral to security; they lie at its core. Similarly, robust state capacity and international cooperation create the scaffolding upon which sustainable peace can be built. While the transition from *Mano Dura* to multi-dimensional reforms is fraught with obstacles - entrenched corruption, fragmented governance, and deeply ingrained criminal networks - the examples of incremental success in Colombia point to the transformative potential of a comprehensive agenda. If pursued consistently, such an agenda stands the best chance of disarming violent actors, dismantling illicit economies, and fostering a more equitable and peaceful Latin America.

## Conclusion

Latin America's entangled patterns of political insurgency and criminal profiteering stand as a stark reminder that violence in the region is seldom a matter of isolated security threats. Instead, it emerges from a tapestry of historical grievances, socio-economic disparities, and evolving illicit economies that challenge conventional approaches to peace and governance. Although governments often turn to *Mano Dura* crackdowns, these punitive measures tend to offer only fleeting respite from violence, ignoring the structural vulnerabilities that allow armed groups to reorganize. Solution paths should address root causes of these structures like socioeconomic inequalities, weak judicial systems, underdevelopment, land inequities, and structural poverty. Another key insight is that political will and institutional consistency matter. Policies aiming at land redistribution, rural infrastructure, or substitution of illicit crops require long-term commitment and reliable funding streams to be effective. Without credible state presence, communities remain vulnerable to armed groups that promise quick profits or security, even as they entrench cycles of violence. Equally vital is the transnational cooperation and tackling corruption at every level of government.

In the final analysis, a genuine break from cyclical violence in Latin America requires a multi-layered approach that balances robust security measures with socio-economic reforms and effective governance. Latin America's future hinges on its ability to make this transition - from reactive crackdowns to sustainable, inclusive strategies that address the fundamental drivers of conflict.

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## **RUSSIA-UKRAINE WAR: WIN OR DEFEAT?**

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## **A Brief Overview of the Post-Cold War Era**

The fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 was the most tangible harbinger of the transformation of the bipolar world order. Indeed, two years later, with the collapse of the Warsaw Pact and the Soviet Union, the Cold War ended and a new era began for all global actors. In this framework, the mutual threat perceptions of the two antagonistic blocs became a thing of the past, despite regional conflicts ranging from Iraq to the South Caucasus and the Balkans. New opportunities for inter-bloc political and economic cooperation emerged.

Countries belonging to the Western bloc that won the Cold War, particularly the United States, and organizations representing the West have embraced the concepts of crisis prevention and management and cooperative security in their national security strategies and put them into practice in the conduct of their international relations. In this new era, where stability and prosperity were prioritized, the network of economic-commercial relations to meet realpolitik requirements was expanded as much as possible with an understanding away from the traditional threat environment. As a reflection of this, the victorious bloc, taking into account the acquis it had inherited from the turbulent past, set international rules on a large scale and gave impetus and content to globalization. A political process aimed at reinforcing stability and a "rules-based order" in global relations emerged.

The failure of Gorbachev's reforms aimed at keeping the Soviet Union afloat in the early 1990s, as well as the traumas caused by the decade-long Afghanistan intervention, are the causes of the "state crisis" that the Soviet era bequeathed to the Russian ruling class. The new rulers of the Russian Federation, who emerged as a new actor in the international arena, tried to overcome domestic issues such as Chechnya and Tatarstan without experiencing another unraveling, while on the other hand, they tried to maintain their country's influence in the former Soviet geography, which they characterized as Russia's immediate neighborhood, by using conflicts such as Abkhazia and Karabakh, which erupted in the South Caucasus.

Boris Yeltsin and his Foreign Minister Andrey Kozyrev, who came to power after Gorbachev's resignation, shifted Russia's foreign policy axis towards the West in the

early 1990s. Accordingly, they preferred to put Russia's relations with the US and NATO on a solid and viable footing. This attitude of Russia was reciprocated by the West. Thus, in the first decade of the post-Cold War period, a discourse focused on cooperation between Western countries/institutions and Russia occupied the agenda. Russia took part in NATO's cooperation frameworks such as the North Atlantic Cooperation Council and the Partnership for Peace from the very early stages. This cooperation was taken to a new level in 1997 with the signing of NATO-Russia Founding Act<sup>1</sup> the, which can be considered a step up compared to other NATO partnerships. The EU-Russia Partnership and Cooperation Agreement<sup>2</sup>, which Russia signed with the EU in the same year, gave a covenantal content to EU-Russia relations. In this framework, Russia became a strategic partner to be cooperated with in its relations with both the US and Europe.

A similar picture emerges when we look at Ukraine-West/Western relations in the 1990-2000 period from the perspective of cooperation. Similar to Russia's approach in developing its relations with Euro-Atlantic institutions during this period, Kyiv took part in all the aforementioned cooperation platforms and tended to strengthen its partnership relations with the West. To this end, on the one hand, economic-trade relations were diversified and networks with Western/Western institutions were enriched, and on the other hand, the NATO-Ukraine Specific Partnership Charter<sup>3</sup> was signed in 1997, representing a multilateral model of relations in the field of security.

To summarize the first decade of the post-Cold War era, the following two elements stand out as the West's strategic priorities: (1) to implement a process to integrate the former Warsaw Pact members into Western institutions; (2) to reestablish the strategic balance of terror between Russia and the West by transferring the military nuclear capabilities deployed outside Russia in Belarus, Ukraine and Kazakhstan to Russia in the geography of the former Soviet Union and ensuring that they are under Russia's command and control.

In this context analyzing the ongoing war in Ukraine today, it is useful to note that the Budapest Memorandum<sup>4</sup> of 1994, which provided for the transfer of Soviet-era military nuclear capabilities stationed in Ukraine to Russia's ownership during the process of concentrating nuclear forces/weapons in Russia, is a document that guarantees Ukraine's sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity and was signed by the US, UK, Ukraine, and Russia.

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<sup>1</sup> NATO, "Founding Act on Mutual Relations, Cooperation and Security Between NATO and the Russian Federation," NATO, May 27, 1997

<sup>2</sup> EUR-Lex, "EU-Russia Partnership and Cooperation Agreement," *EUR-Lex*, December 1, 1997.

<sup>3</sup> NATO, "Charter on a Distinctive Partnership between the North Atlantic Treaty Organization and Ukraine," NATO, July 9, 1997

<sup>4</sup> Ukraine, the Russian Federation, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, and the United States, *Memorandum on Security Assurances in Connection with Ukraine's Accession to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons* (Budapest Memorandum), Budapest, December 5, 1994, United Nations Treaty Series, no. 52241.

## The New Century and the Beginning of the End of the Global Order

In 2000, Putin took office in Russia and a year later George W. Bush in the United States. With the new century, the building blocks of the relative peace and stability of the previous decade are still in place, and the ties between Russia and the West have not radically unraveled. Despite NATO's military intervention in Kosovo and the unease it caused in the Russian leadership, Putin agreed to the establishment of the NATO-Russia Council<sup>5</sup> at the NATO meeting in Rome in 2002. This can be taken as a sign that Putin is in favor of advancing Russia's relations with the West in the security field as well. It should be noted that NATO's first post-Cold War enlargement took place in 1999 with the accession of the Czech Republic, Hungary, and Poland.

In 2002, when the NATO-Russia Council was established, the NATO-Ukraine Action Plan<sup>6</sup> came into force, elevating relations with Ukraine to the next level. This Plan evolved into the Intensified Dialogue Program<sup>7</sup> in 2005. This program is nowhere near the level achieved in NATO-Russia relations. In this context, it can be stated that the West has not moved away from positioning its relations with Russia at the level of strategic partnership and has prioritized Russia over other partners.

The beginning of the 2000s corresponds to a period in which the Bush administration, left unchallenged on a global scale, has been trying to establish a unipolar world order under the hegemony of the United States, and in this context, it has not hesitated to implement initiatives and projects that confront the Putin administration as well as its own allies.

One of the first acts of the Bush administration was the unilateral withdrawal from the Anti-Ballistic Missile Defense Treaty, which shook the US-Russia strategic relationship, although initially not deeply. This was immediately followed by the launch of the Missile Shield project to be deployed in Europe (Czechia and Poland) and subject to exclusive US control, and the invasion of Iraq in 2003 without a UNSC resolution, which brought to the surface the crisis of trust between the US and its allies. It also caused a serious rift in US-Russia relations. The fact that the US played a leading role in the accession of China to the World Trade Organization in 2001, a country that the US would later define as its biggest rival, was one of the coincidences of the new century.

The Putin administration, which came to power in the new century, has continued the approach based on protecting Russia's interests in the "sphere of influence" (Near Periphery) that Russia has defined for itself since the 1990s to the extent possible, and has also emphasized relations with the Euro-Atlantic axis in its foreign and security policies. However, under the influence of successive global developments, Putin's mindset gradually shifted towards advocating and even prioritizing the policy of

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<sup>5</sup> NATO, *NATO-Russia Council (NRC)*, NATO, May 28, 2002.

<sup>6</sup> NATO, *NATO-Ukraine Action Plan*, NATO, November 22, 2002.

<sup>7</sup> NATO, *NATO launches 'Intensified Dialogue' with Ukraine*, NATO, April 21, 2005.

balancing the Euro-Atlantic region with Russia's influence and interests in the Eurasian hinterland, which former Russian Foreign Minister Primakov reintroduced onto the stage of Russian history. The first flare of such a balancing policy was fired by Putin himself in 2005 with the following statements: "The collapse of the USSR is the geopolitical catastrophe of the 20th century."<sup>8</sup> This statement is the most succinct expression of the trauma that the dissolution of the Soviet Union has caused in the minds of Putin and his supporters, and thus the lens through which they view Russia's "Neighborhood". It can be argued that the unilateral actions taken by the Bush administration, sometimes without consulting its allies, played a decisive role in the re-emergence of this trauma inherited from the 1990s, which can be argued to have subsided to some extent.

The years between 2000-2010 were a period in which Russia overcame the "state crisis" that dominated the 1990s, its economy recovered thanks to the economic-trade relations it developed, the welfare level of the Russian society increased compared to the past, the Putin administration consolidated its unique pillars of governance, and the feelings of self-confidence in the Moscow administration strengthened in line with these developments. During this period, on the one hand, the administration's self-confidence and reputation in the eyes of the society increased, and on the other hand, it was observed that "Eurasianist" tendencies, which were essentially embedded in the past Russian history, gained prevalence in the Russian state mind. In the same period, NATO's expansion towards the East with new members began to disturb the Putin administration, and in this environment that created uneasiness for Russia, the sketches of Russian revisionism manifested themselves. In this context, at the 2007 Munich Security Conference,<sup>9</sup> Putin's harsh challenge to the US actions to create a unipolar world order and his declaration that they were determined to establish a multipolar world order, with Russia remaining as one pole, were recorded.

Without prejudice to the adolescent and shortsighted behavior of then-Georgian President Mikael Saakashvili, these words evolved into a de facto military conflict on the ground with the outbreak of war between Russia and Georgia in 2008. This war not only resulted in the loss of Georgia's territorial integrity, but also caused a significant damage to Russia-West relations in a short period of time, given the dynamics of that period. Despite this wound, Russia has not lost its status as a strategically important partner for the West. This approach of the West can be seen in the Obama administration's 'reset' policy towards Russia in 2009 and in NATO's main strategy document, the Strategic Concept, adopted in 2010.

2010 was also the year of the Ukrainian Parliament's decision that Ukraine had abandoned the NATO membership goal it had set for itself in previous years and adopted the position of a neutral country. As far as Russia is concerned, the "closest neighborhood" (Belarus and Ukraine) is still far from existential dangers. By 2014, this picture would take a completely different turn; the "Maidan Movement" in Ukraine would lead to the ouster of Ukrainian President Yanukovich and Russia's invasion and

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<sup>8</sup> NBC News, "Putin: Soviet collapse a 'genuine tragedy'," NBC News, 25 Nisan 2005, Kaynak: *The Associated Press*.

<sup>9</sup> Vladimir Putin, "Speech and the Following Discussion at the Munich Conference on Security Policy," *President of Russia Official Website*, February 10, 2007.



annexation of Crimea and destabilization of Ukraine's Donbas region in March 2014. In this context, the wedding between Russian revisionism and Russian aggression, which erupted in the later years of Putin's rule, will be seen.

Neither the search for a compromise formula (the Minsk Agreements) by two powerful European countries, Germany and France, in a quadrilateral format (Normandy Format) involving Russia and Ukraine, nor the efforts of the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission to defuse the tensions that emerged in parallel with the Russian occupation of part of Ukrainian territory, have yielded results.

The next stage of the tense and conflict-laden process is the sad picture in which the global order is shaken to the core with the wave of large-scale aggression launched by Russia against Ukraine in February 2022, and the tragic scenes reminiscent of the past two world wars are once again witnessed in the heart of Europe.

## **The Ukrainian Problematic in the Depth of Geostrategic Rivalry**

It has already been mentioned above that the US, which in the early 2000s sought to establish a globalized but unipolar world order, shifted towards a revisionist line with its invasion of Iraq in 2003. On the one hand, this line led to a rift between the US and its allies, and on the other hand, it caused uneasiness in the Russian state leadership's view of the US, even if it did not lead to an interruption in its relations with the West. Following the war in Georgia, the West's attempts to mend with Russia in order not to abandon the dialogue-agreement track in its relations with the West failed to prevent Russia's detachment from the West, and thus from its Euro-Atlantic orientation. The change in Russia's perception of NATO and Western institutions, particularly the United States, was reflected in the Russian strategies of the period. The main strategy document<sup>10</sup> released in 2009 explicitly stated the goal of "transforming Russia into a world power in a multipolar world, based on activities to promote partnership relations on the basis of strategic stability and mutual benefit".

As a result, Russia's view of regional and global developments in this period rapidly began to diverge from Western actors and institutions. The Libya operation, which began in 2011 with a French-led military intervention based on a "coalition of the willing" and later turned into a NATO operation, can be cited as a first example. This military intervention was characterized by senior Russian officials as an operation carried out by Western powers in a country within Russia's "sphere of interest" without taking Russian interests into account, and brought to the public agenda the assessment that Russia was being sidelined. It is possible to read the Libya operation as an important development that negatively affected Moscow's view of the West.

In early 2014, three years after the operation against Libya, the geopolitical agenda focused on the anti-government demonstrations in Ukraine. Moscow perceived this as a kind of "color revolution" against it and perceived the prospect of Ukraine's integration into the Euro-Atlantic axis as a threat. The result was invasion and annexation of Crimea

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<sup>10</sup> Russian Federation Security Council, *National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation to 2020*, signed on May 12, 2009. <http://www.scrf.gov.ru/documents/99.html>.



in March 2014 and the encouragement of independence tendencies in the Donbas region by separatist forces loyal to Moscow, which further strained ties between Russia and the West.

In June 2014, the terrorist spiral in the Middle East was added to the crisis in Ukraine when DAESH started its terrorist activities on the Syria-Iraq line. With the addition of Chinese rivalry to the picture, the process of radical change in global power relations at conventional and asymmetric levels begun.

Following the Biden administration's highly irregular withdrawal from Afghanistan in August 2021, in a framework that left the allied countries in the lurch, the US's Asia-Pacific orientation has become even more dimensional, further complicating global balances. The deepening US-China rivalry in the Far East, coupled with Russia's large-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, has drawn regional and global actors into the geostrategic deadlock between the great powers.

It would be optimistic to expect an end to the almost war in Ukraine in the short to medium term. On the other hand, the war in Ukraine, which has affected the whole world in terms of its parties and whose military, political and economic effects are clearly observed in the global arena, is still being pursued, albeit behind the scenes, in an attempt to conclude the war in Ukraine with a ceasefire and then a lasting peace.

## **War or Peace in Ukraine?**

It remains to be seen how the war in Ukraine will evolve, how long it will take to end, and how it will end, given its implications for Euro-Atlantic security as well as global security.

In the second half of 2024, the decisions taken at the G7, EU and NATO Summits suggest that the Western world will continue to support Ukraine militarily, financially and diplomatically, no matter how long it takes and with what intensity. On the other hand, the US and NATO seem to be avoiding a direct confrontation with Russia in Ukraine. On the other hand, despite Moscow's frequently stated red lines, including the threat of the use of nuclear force, the West continues to gradually provide Ukraine with advanced military systems.<sup>11</sup> In this context, European actors have shipped long-range offensive capabilities to Ukraine, including F16 fighter jets and the Patriot air-missile defense system. The timely restrictions on the use of long-range offensive weapons to target Russian territory were lifted in November 2024 by the United States, the United Kingdom and France, following the deployment of North Korean troops to the Kursk region based on the agreement between Russia and North Korea. In parallel, Putin declared that he accepted these decisions as a direct declaration of war against Russia by the United States and NATO in particular. Not content with this statement, in November 2024, he signed a decree declaring a "new nuclear doctrine" that lowered Russia's threshold for the use of nuclear force. On the other hand, it is noteworthy that Putin did not use the harsh rhetoric expected from him in the first

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<sup>11</sup> Mark Trevelyan and Andrew Osborn, "Putin Draws a Nuclear Red Line for the West," Reuters, September 27, 2024.

phase of the Ukrainian operation that started in Kursk in August 2024.<sup>12</sup> According to Putin, the Kursk operation was a "provocation."<sup>13</sup> In any case, it is noteworthy that in the aftermath of the Kursk operation, Putin announced his goal of transforming the Russian army into the second largest armed forces in the world after China in order to "meet the growing threats on the Western flank" by further increasing its size (180,000 troops).<sup>14</sup> To this goal he has now added what he claims is a new nuclear doctrine.

Ukraine's President Zelensky, on the other hand, has frequently called for increased aid from the West and the lifting of restrictions on the use of long-range weapons, with some success, and has sought to capitalize on the "moral momentum" that the Kiev leadership assumed it had gained in the aftermath of the Kursk operation in favor of the country's defense.

Trump's coming to power in the United States, the inability of Europe's defense industry capacity to meet Ukraine's ammunition requirements, China's indirect, if not overt, support for the Russian "war machine", the ambivalence of the Global South on various occasions, and the warring parties' inability to move away for the time being, have shown that the war in Ukraine will not end at least in 2024.

On the other hand, it is important to recognize that an approach to assessing the Ukrainian problematic based solely on the fiction of war would be incomplete in predicting the current process and the direction in which it will evolve. In this respect, it is imperative to evaluate the processes and negotiations that constitute the basis for the ceasefire and a permanent peace agreement to be signed afterwards. Based on this observation, it is observed that since Zelensky's ten-point Peace Plan<sup>15</sup> announced at the G20 Summit held in Indonesia in November 2022, there have been experiments on possible peace and its process. Therefore, it is observed that the search for peace has not fallen off the agenda alongside the spiral of war.

There is currently an irreconcilable gap between the positions of the warring parties on the terms of a possible peace. Moscow wants the annexed Ukrainian territory to be recognized as Russian territory, Ukrainian forces to withdraw from "Russian territory", the Ukrainian leadership to be "de-Nazified", and Ukraine to be neutral country, not belonging to any military bloc (especially NATO). In return, Kiev demands, as a priority, Russia's withdrawal from the Ukrainian territories it occupies, including Crimea. For Ukraine, EU and NATO membership goals are non-negotiable and it is clearly emphasized that Ukraine's future will be determined by Ukrainian society. At every opportunity, the Zelensky administration declares that they will defend Ukrainian territory with tenacity and determination until the occupation is completely over, and that they will use every means and capability at their disposal to force Russia to make peace and negotiate on terms that Kiev will set. Therefore, the aim is for Ukraine to

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<sup>12</sup> Tolga Sakman, "Ukraine's Kursk Operation and the New Phase of the War," *DİPAM*

<sup>13</sup> Reuters, "Putin Says Ukrainian Attack on Kursk Is a Major Provocation," *Reuters*, August 7, 2024.

<sup>14</sup> Reuters, "Kremlin Says Russian Army Expansion Needed to Address Growing Threats on Western Flank," *Reuters*, September 17, 2024.

<sup>15</sup> "What is Zelensky's 10-Point Peace Plan?" *Ukraine.ua* (official website), September 17, 2024.

first sign a comprehensive ceasefire with all international security guarantees, then to start peace negotiations on the basis of the above-mentioned conditions, and in any case, to provide international security guarantees that will ensure Ukraine's permanent protection against a possible future attack from Russia, which may adopt a revisionist line again in the future.

Under these circumstances, it seems unlikely that the warring parties will find a common ground for peace, but various actors of the international community continue their efforts to bring the parties together around the negotiation table. In this context, especially the second half of 2023 has been recorded as a period in which the search for peace gained momentum: A series of Ukrainian peace conferences were held in Copenhagen<sup>16</sup> in June 2023, in Jeddah<sup>17</sup> in August 2023, hosted by Malta<sup>18</sup> in October 2023 and on the margins of the World Economic Forum in Davos<sup>19</sup> in January 2024, before the Peace Conference held in Switzerland<sup>20</sup> on 15-16 June 2024. A total of 92 countries participated in the Swiss Peace Conference;<sup>21</sup> however, Russia was not among them, nor were key actors such as Brazil,<sup>22</sup> China,<sup>23</sup> and India.<sup>24</sup> The Declaration issued at the end of the conference was signed by 78 countries, including Turkey.<sup>25</sup> At the Swiss Peace Conference, various components of the Plan announced by Ukraine in November 2022 were discussed and elements that could form the basis for a possible peace were emphasized. However, instead of a concrete peace agreement, only a modest framework text for a possible peace emerged.

Ukraine aims to isolate Russia as much as possible by attracting important players of the international community to a series of peace conferences to which Russia is not invited. In this way, Ukraine hopes to secure a strong position against Russia in future peace negotiations. On the other hand, given the ongoing intensity of the war, the extent to which it has succeeded in this goal is open to question.

China, which is now a global power, has also made two important overtures to guide the possible peace process in Ukraine. The first one is the position paper<sup>26</sup> announced

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<sup>16</sup> "Copenhagen meeting helps advance Ukraine 'peace summit' plan," *Euractiv.com and Reuters*, June 27, 2023.

<sup>17</sup> Saudi Arabia kicks off Ukraine talks that exclude Russia," *Al Jazeera*, August 5, 2023

<sup>18</sup> Christopher Scicluna, "Ukraine holds peace formula talks in Malta, Russia absent," *Reuters*, October 28, 2023.

<sup>19</sup> Victoria Waldersee, "Davos 2024: Ukraine to Hold Fourth Peace Formula Talks on Sunday," *Reuters*, January 12, 2024.

<sup>20</sup> Thomas Escritt, "Ukraine Conference Joint Communiqué: Full Text," *Reuters*, June 16, 2024.

<sup>21</sup> "Final Guest List Published for Swiss Summit on Peace in Ukraine," *Swissinfo*

<sup>22</sup> BRICS Leaders Not to Attend Conference on Ukraine in Switzerland," *TASS*, June 14, 2024

<sup>23</sup> "China Will Not Attend Ukraine Peace Conference in Switzerland — Reuters," *TASS*, May 31, 2024.

<sup>24</sup> Keshav Padmanabhan, "India Opts Out of Ukraine Summit Joint Communiqué — 'Peace Requires Bringing Together All Stakeholders'," *The Print*, June 16, 2024.

<sup>25</sup> bne IntelliNews, "78 Countries Sign Limited Communiqué at Ukraine Summit in Switzerland," June 17, 2024

<sup>26</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, China's Position on the Political Settlement of the Ukraine Crisis, February 24, 2023

in February 2023. In this paper, China outlined some general principles for a lasting peace between Russia and Ukraine. The Chinese paper was severely criticized by the West.<sup>27</sup> Consequently, the paper failed to arouse the West's interest. Moscow, for its part, to be relatively distant<sup>28</sup> from the Chinese initiative, as the paper contained aspects of its "interests" in Ukraine that were not as compatible as it would have liked. It should be noted that Zelensky was cautiously optimistic<sup>29</sup> about the Chinese position paper, rather than completely dismissing it, supporting the elements of the paper that were compatible with Ukraine's goals and calling on China to use its influence over Moscow to bring the war to an end. Therefore, it is not possible to say that the Chinese position paper has received full support from the relevant parties.

China's second opening or initiative is the idea of organizing a peace conference in November 2024, with Russia among its participants. This idea is based on the contacts made at the Defense Forum,<sup>30</sup> which opened in Beijing on September 12, 2024. Former Deputy Foreign Minister of Ukraine Chalyi, who attended the Forum, announced that Xi Jinping and Zelensky would meet at a summit meeting between the two leaders and discuss the prospects for peace for Ukraine. It is understood from the contacts at the Forum that the idea of Russia's participation in the peace conference planned for November 2024 was welcomed by Ukraine. It is seen that China plays a role in the envisaged organization. The Peace Conference, which was supposed to be attended by Russia, could not be convened by the end of November 2024.

Despite all these initiatives, given Ukraine's recent large-scale drone strikes against various Russian settlements, including Moscow, and Russia's long-standing intensive missile attacks on Ukraine's critical energy infrastructure, as well as Putin's decision to increase the military presence in Ukraine the start of a full-fledged peace process for Ukraine can be perceived as a long-term prospect.

Although it is not possible to predict Russia's ultimate goals, which are adapted to the evolution of the situation on the ground, it is prudent to expect the current war to continue in 2025, unless an unexpected reverse situation emerges within Russia in the struggle against the West in and through Ukraine. Based on this observation, on the one hand, the ongoing war seems to have particularly revitalized the Russian "war machine", and on the other hand, Moscow has turned to consolidating its existing (China, Iran, North Korea) and potential (Global South) alliances to support itself. Another factor that needs to be taken into account, even if it is not agreed upon, is Putin's ability so far to garner the support of Russian public opinion. Even on the basis of these observations, there are some analyses that suggest that there are signs of a serious deterioration in the Russian economy as a result of the war.

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<sup>27</sup> Helen Davidson and Amy Hawkins, "Western leaders give cool response to China's plan for Ukraine peace talks," *The Guardian*, February 24, 2023.

<sup>28</sup> "We are grateful": Putin thanks China for Ukraine peace initiatives," *Euronews*, May 16, 2024

<sup>29</sup> Jones Hayden, "Zelenskyy Open to Considering Some Parts of Beijing's Proposals to End Ukraine War," *Politico*, February 25, 2023.

<sup>30</sup> Laurie Chen, "Xi May Meet Zelenskiy, Ukrainian Attendee Says, as Beijing Defence Forum Opens," *Reuters*, April 13, 2024.

Despite the fiction of the continuation of the war, it should be expected that both the warring parties and other actors affected by the war will continue their search for peace in the foreseeable future, with the support of the international community, in order to find common grounds that will bring peace between the two sides. The question is what kind of a basis for peace will be created as a result of these searches, and therefore, what common ground will be found to reconcile the currently irreconcilable positions of the parties. In this respect, the grounds and conditions under which the search for peace can be accelerated are as important as the current dynamics of the war process, along with the nature and scale of the concessions that will ensure peace.

Within the general picture analyzed above, it is observed that with Trump's coming to power in the US, new dynamics have come into play in terms of the peace environment. Trump and his inner circle, who reiterate on almost every occasion that they will prioritize the interests of the US in line with the "America First" discourse, are expected to take steps to stop the war in Ukraine policy, albeit not in the short term. In this context, the article by<sup>31</sup> retired Lieutenant General Keith Kellogg, who was Trump's national security advisor in his first term and is a candidate for a high-level position in his new term, on how to achieve peace in Ukraine is noteworthy. Kellogg argues that the policy pursued during the Biden era has deepened the war in Ukraine and points to the steps that the Trump administration envisages to achieve peace in 2025. In this framework, he argues that peace can be achieved on the basis of a formula based on "freezing" Russia's occupation of Ukraine and providing security guarantees that will allow Ukraine to maintain its sovereignty over the rest of its territory.

Faced with the consequences of Trump's coming to power, Zelensky's latest approach<sup>32</sup> to peace is also remarkable. Accordingly, Zelensky proposes that Ukraine become a member of NATO in exchange for temporarily leaving the Russian-occupied Ukrainian territories under Russia's control in order to guarantee the integrity of the remaining territories.

In short, in the last days of 2024, it is seen that the environment for peace in Ukraine has been revitalized. It is now becoming clear that 2025 will be a colorful year for peace in Ukraine.

## What Should Turkey Do?

Despite recent developments, it is obvious that the destructive and corrosive war in Ukraine will continue. As a regional power, Turkey's role in this process is of course important. Since the beginning of the war, Ankara has been bringing the warring parties together in Antalya and Istanbul and trying to play an active role in reaching a possible compromise. In this context, Turkey's initiatives such as the exchange of prisoners of war between the parties and the establishment of a "Grain Corridor" under the auspices of the UN are noteworthy developments in terms of softening the war climate in the region as much as possible.

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<sup>31</sup> Keith Kellogg and Fred Fleitz, "America First, Russia, & Ukraine," *Center for American Security - America First Policy Institute*, April 11, 2024

<sup>32</sup> Katie Livingstone, "Zelensky Suggests Ceding Land for Peace Deal if NATO Protects Majority of Ukraine," *Kyiv Post*, November 30, 2024.

Since the beginning of the war, Turkey, on the one hand, complied with the decisions taken by NATO, of which it was a member, and on the other hand, preferred a balanced path based on minimizing the negative effects of the war at the regional level as much as possible in the first phase. On the other hand, the fact that the war was not limited to the region, but deepened at a time when geostrategic rivalry was in full swing, caused Ankara's policy of balance to backfire from time to time in the eyes of its Western allies. The current state of war is also having a negative impact on Turkey's socio-economic balance, which constitutes a weakness that cannot be ignored in an already aggravated economic balance.

If Russia emerges from the current war with an absolute victory, it will mean a change in the borders in and around the Black Sea region and a complete shifting of regional geopolitical balances. The insecurity and threat environment that this would create in a wide geography stretching from the Balkans to Central Asia could create a picture incompatible with Turkey's long-term interests in the Black Sea region and beyond. In particular, Putin's references to the era of Peter the Great, when the Russian Tsardom was at its most widespread, and to the dominant periods of the Soviet Union indicate that the imperial impulses of today's Russian ruling class have strongly resurfaced in the 21st century. In this context, how Russia's ambitions can be curbed if it cannot be stopped in Ukraine is a serious problematic that should be questioned and closely scrutinized not only by Western allies but also by Ankara's ruling circles. While working on such scenarios, preserving the balanced nature of Turkish-Russian relations requires a kind of diplomatic-political dexterity. It should always be kept in mind that bilateral relations interact in a wide range of areas from Syria to the Black Sea, from the Balkans to the Mediterranean, which increases fragility and sensitivities.

## Conclusion

In the first half of the first quarter of the 21st century, the global order was disrupted by the burgeoning power struggle between the great powers, and in the second half, it was deeply shaken in an environment with very different characteristics and dynamics from the past Cold War.

The concrete indicators of the geopolitical and geostrategic rivalry are reflected in the main strategies of the main global powers and on the ground in all its aspects. The Russian-initiated war in Ukraine erupted at a time when geostrategic rivalry was at its peak. From this perspective, it would be optimistic to expect an end to the current war in the short term.

At the moment, there is no clear winner of the war. One has to face the fact that the meaning of absolute victory is an illusion for both sides. In the absence of peace, both belligerents will continue to bleed, and Ukraine will continue to make maximum use of innovative and destructive warfare technologies, in addition to the traditional warfare capabilities expected to come from the West, in order to balance Russia's conventional superiority and to inflict damage on Russia through them. Against this

backdrop, the world community will continue to witness a perfect war of attrition staged against it for some time to come.

The spirit and dynamics of war will of course continue to embody the search for peace. The war-peace dichotomy or equation will maintain its place in the international community. The challenges or opportunities that may arise in the coming period will be important factors in the emergence of a ground that can affect the course of the war. For peace to triumph over war, the developments in the situation on the ground, the differences in the determination and will of the warring parties compared to today, the resilience of both countries, as well as the paths to be followed by global actors and institutions that can affect the course of the war will come to the fore. In any case, even if the chances of success seem low at the moment, it can be predicted that initiatives to keep the peace process alive will continue in the face of Trump's return to power.

Under the current circumstances, it is not realistic for Ukraine to emerge from the ongoing war with a complete victory. It is also not possible to see the current gains as harbingers of an absolute victory for the future. In this context, a temporary arrangement that would restore Ukraine's sovereignty and independence, while the disputed territorial issues would be resolved in a timetabled future, may be a way out for peace. In any case, it is inevitable that the international community, and in particular the main global and regional powers, will play a key role in the concretization of credible, sustainable and enforceable security guarantees that will not undermine Ukraine's sovereignty and independence in the post-war order.

The evolution of the war in Ukraine, which has played one of the catalytic roles in dragging the global order into negativity, into a peace that meets Ukraine's national identity, honor, dignity, independence and sovereignty, as well as the future priorities and expectations of Ukrainian society, will undoubtedly be a development that will significantly serve world peace and stability.



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## **INDIA: THE RISING STAR OF OUR ERA**

### **Hasan Gögüş**

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Over the past year, India has been regarded as a rising star by international observers. With a population nearing 1.5 billion, it has surpassed China to become the world's most populous country and has overtaken its former colonial ruler, the United Kingdom, to enter the ranks of the world's top five economies, demonstrating remarkable progress. If Indian leaders can sustain this rapid growth for a few more years, they aim to become the world's third-largest economy. With these characteristics, India is a member of groupings such as G20 and BRICS. Additionally, it acts as the spokesperson for the Global South, which has replaced the Non-Aligned Movement—an organization co-founded by Nehru. Moreover, India is one of only six countries capable of launching nuclear warhead-equipped missiles. India's achievements are not limited to these. It has also attained an enviable position in space exploration. It became the fourth country, after the United States, Russia, and China, to land a spacecraft on the Moon and, in 2023, became the first country to achieve a soft landing on the Moon's south pole.

India, which consists of 28 states and 8 union territories, operates under a federal system. It is an ethnically, religiously, and culturally diverse nation. While Hindus constitute the majority, India is also home to approximately 200-250 million Muslims, making it the country with the second-largest Muslim population after Indonesia. Other religious minorities include Christians, Buddhists, and Sikhs. According to its constitution, India officially recognizes 22 different languages. What sets India apart from other subcontinent nations is its ability to sustain uninterrupted democracy since gaining independence in 1947. Despite some flaws, power has changed hands through elections held every five years.

### **General Elections Held in India Last Year**

India's most recent general elections were held in seven phases between April 19 and June 1, 2024. The primary reason for the phased voting process is the logistical challenge of providing adequate security personnel for over one million polling stations across the country. The number of registered voters was 968 million, equivalent to one-eighth of the world's population. Under Indian electoral law, there is an obligation to set up a polling station even in locations where only one voter resides. With 650 million voters casting their ballots, the election results were announced within 12 hours, thanks to electronic voting systems.

India has more than 2,500 political parties, organized at both national and regional levels. As a result, elections are generally contested through alliances. It is said that the national alliance, led by the extreme Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party

(BJP), currently chaired by Prime Minister Modi, consists of 39 parties. The Indian National Developmental Inclusive Alliance (INDIA), led by the Congress Party under the leadership of the opposition's left-leaning Gandhi family, consists of 6 national and 57 local parties. However, no one can state the exact numbers, as the parties entering and leaving these alliances are constantly changing.

Pre-election polls had nearly unanimously predicted that the BJP, in power since 2014, would achieve a landslide victory. However, the outcome defied expectations. In the 543-seat Parliament, the BJP failed to secure an absolute majority on its own, but managed to remain in power with the support of its coalition partners. In contrast, the opposition performed beyond expectations, securing 232 seats.

These elections once again demonstrated India's commitment to its nearly century-long tradition of uninterrupted democracy. With a voter turnout exceeding 65%, participation rates were higher than in most European countries.

## **The Persistently Unresolved Kashmir Problem**

India's most pressing foreign policy challenge remains the Kashmir conflict, which has led to four wars with Pakistan (1947, 1965, 1971, and 1999) and brought both nations to the brink of war twice (2002 and 2017). The Kashmir dispute is fundamentally a territorial conflict. After Britain withdrew from India in 1947, Pakistan and India emerged as two separate states, with princely states given the freedom to choose which country to join. The Hindu ruler of Kashmir, Maharaja Hari Singh, opted to integrate the region into India on October 26, 1947, despite the fact that 90% of the population was Muslim. Since then, the sovereignty of Kashmir has remained unresolved. The fact that both countries have nuclear weapons prevents an all-out war.

## **India-China Relations**

India's foreign policy challenges are not limited to Kashmir. Especially in recent years, as new power dynamics have emerged in the region, China has come to view India as its primary competitor. The two countries also have unresolved border disputes. One way the US has sought to control China's rise is to develop special relations with India. Recently, many strategically important agreements have been signed between the US and India. The most prominent of these is the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (QUAD), which was established with the participation of Japan and Australia.

US companies are expected to shift their manufacturing bases from China to India during the upcoming Trump era. This shift is perceived as a national security issue for China. Both the US and China are aware that the near-term hegemonic competition will be between two major powers.

Meanwhile, China has increased its military support to Pakistan. A critical component of China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) is the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor

(CPEC). Of the total budget allocated for the Belt and Road Project of \$1 trillion, \$63 billion is foreseen for the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor. Pakistan will be China's starting point for implementing this mega project.

India's counter-move to China's Belt and Road Project was the "India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor," which it announced at the G20 Summit it hosted last year. The US is also behind the scenes of this project, which excludes Turkey. The fact that the goods to be transported via this route will be subject to frequent loading and unloading, security issues along the route, and high costs suggest that this project will not be easily implemented.

## **China or India?**

In international circles, the question of which side has the better chance in the China-India competition is frequently discussed. India's advantage lies in its large and well-educated human capital. The fact that almost all Indians speak English fluently plays an important role in this superiority. According to United Nations data, India's diaspora ranks first in the world with 18 million. Indians live mostly in the US, UK, Canada and the Gulf countries. It is possible to come across many Indian academics in universities in America, Indian doctors in hospitals, and high-level Indian officials in international organizations. An Indian national was appointed as the head of the World Bank two years ago. Indian CEOs run 21 technology giants, including Alphabet (Google), Microsoft, IBM, YouTube and Adobe. However, due to the slow functioning of the Indian bureaucracy, inadequate infrastructure, and widespread bribery and corruption, India cannot attract as much foreign investment as China.

## **Turkey-India Relations**

Turkey's relations with India have always been overshadowed by Pakistan. However, especially during the War of Independence, India supported Turkey financially, and the Turkish liberation movement was a source of inspiration for India's independence. The strong support Turkey has given Pakistan on the Kashmir issue over the past 5 to 10 years, along with the Modi government's occasional discriminatory treatment of the Muslim minority, deviating from traditionally tolerant Indian policies, has led to a decline in relations between the two countries. High-level visits between the two countries have come to a standstill. Narendra Modi has yet to set foot in Turkey during his 10-year tenure as prime minister. The meetings between President Erdoğan and Prime Minister Modi are held in third countries on the margins of international meetings. There is a misconception in India that Turkey has formed an alliance against it, along with Pakistan and Azerbaijan. Within this framework, India is developing its relations with Greece and Armenia.

Turkey's closeness and friendly ties with Pakistan should not prevent it from developing good relations with India. A way should be found to improve relations with India, which is the focus of global attention, without offending Pakistan.

## SHIFTS IN THE MIDDLE EAST

### Şafak Gökürk

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2024 has been a tumultuous year for the Middle East, even by its punishing standards. In its unsettled state, the region has again demonstrated its infinite capacity to draw all manner of violent interest from within and without.

There are reasons that render the current phase a decidedly perilous one. Festering disputes and confrontational postures already had the potential to deepen the region's woes. But the Middle East itself is part of a wider geography which is in flux. The entire central belt of Eurasia has been braving the winds of geopolitical shift in its east and west. This exposure has progressively weakened the longstanding moorings of its resident states even as they make their own claims for more independent or bigger roles. And these are accompanied by efforts of major powers to contain geopolitical erosion.

All this makes the ongoing war in Ukraine and the battlefronts in the Middle East elements of that wider fluidity. This reality, in turn, aligns countries with distinct agendas (like Russia and Iran) across the belt or interlinks the fate of each war theatre with another, such as Israel's battlefronts against Iran and its proxies with the Syrian proper. Their outcomes can be as far reaching as they can go in that vast space.

Indeed, they have been. The combined effect of Russia scaling down its military presence in Syria to prioritize its aggression against Ukraine and Israel's all-out offensive against Iranian and Iran-backed military and logistical platforms in response to Hamas's ill-conceived October 7, 2023, attack has left Assad with a depleted army, unwilling to fight for his dwindling fortunes. The reorganized and replenished Islamist armed groups spearheaded by the HTS in Idlib moved once they saw the opening and seized on the opportune moment. It was swift and decisive. Gone was the Assad regime, Iran's crown jewel in the region and Russia's strategic foothold in the Mediterranean. Prior to the latest wars in Gaza and Lebanon, and the unprecedented direct exchanges between Iran and Israel, the region was already reshaping. This was the underlying cause of the ensuing regional wars—mimicking civil wars—as suppressing the true revolutionary nature of the demonstrations became a shared imperative for affected regimes and others seeking to keep the winds of change from crossing their borders. Meanwhile, the economic and political power shift towards East Asia was already influencing the Arab East, mainly clustered in the Gulf. As the years went by, their alignment along the Indian Ocean-Pacific axis became more pronounced. The Arab West, lined up along the Mediterranean coastline, on the other hand, continued to interact with the Euro-Atlantic space, even as China economically and Russia militarily made inroads to the region. And it was this Middle Sea basin where the 2011 uprisings had left a deeper legacy.

The Abraham Accords reached under the initiative of the first Trump Administration, which enabled Israel to firmly break its second tier of political isolation in the wider region, should be seen both as a function of the Gulf's changing priorities and as a regional realignment in facing the destabilizing, nuclear-threshold Iran.

Europe was still recoiling from the trauma of jihadist terror and waves of refugees—which further complicated its relations with Muslim citizens and residents, and in turn elevated racist populism to the political mainstream—when Russia launched its all-out aggression against Ukraine. Europe turned further inward even as Russia, with critical support from China, could sustain its costly war in Ukraine while maintaining its key posture in the Middle East. Substantial U.S.—and European—support to Ukraine mostly stabilized the frontlines, but EU's and major European powers' profile in the Middle East shrank further, while the U.S. tried to build on the emerging consensus on common security among like-minded states so that it could devote more of its time and energy to the challenges in the Pacific.

Planning is a necessary procedure but can suddenly become wishful thinking if it is overtaken by evolving dynamics. Such has been the fate of many of late in the Middle East. A quick overview of where things stand now will also reveal their sorry state.

Let me begin with Syria, the latest focus of events. Whatever the factors were whose confluence brought the swift downfall of the Assad regime, the Syrian people are already moving into their new context. Yes, those factors—not the least the current prominence of HTS, the leading militia outfit with its thorough Islamist-jihadist pedigree—render Syria's current trajectory an exceedingly fluid one. But they too are bound by the new environment they were instrumental in bringing about.

The defining feature of this new context is that the autocracy, as it existed until December 8, 2024, has totally collapsed. This is markedly different than the case in Egypt in 2011 where the regime survived by midwifing a controlled transition and dispensing with the discredited name at its top, and reverted to old ways at the first opportune moment; in Tunisia where the constitutional coalition proved insufficient in dismantling authoritarian control; in Jordan and Morocco where weaker dissent was easily co-opted by the system; or in the rudimentary states of Libya and Yemen where the downfall of longtime autocrats unleashed strife among disparate groups for similar superiority. HTS might well press for its version of authoritarianism, if by rounding its sharper edges at least in the short term, but other actors who are expected to make their own claim for future governance will progressively grow in number and size. HTS and its allies meanwhile will enjoy no congenial relationship with the stakeholders of the former regime as did the new rulers notably in Tunisia and Egypt. Most important of all, although Syrian people surely know it was the HTS-led forces which caused the regime's eventual demise, they still see the outcome more as a burst to freedom than as a victory for these former rebels. Bad scenarios are among probabilities, but Syria today has the makings that can offer better ones. So, Syria, if with all its unknowns, emerges as one factor that will help reshape the Middle East.

Israel's elimination of Iranian and Iran-backed challenges in its vast neighborhood is a novel element in the Levant's strategic outlook. Israel is now basking in its comprehensive success which has changed the security calculus in a way it has not witnessed in its 76 years of existence. But this moment of victory -and hubris- may well be prone to creating new perils for the Jewish state if realism continues to elude the thinking of both its government and wider public. Israel currently has one effective tool, hammer, and nothing else. It is so carried away by its swing that even its only contingency for the downfall of Assad in Syria has been to occupy more Syrian territory and bomb out the remaining hardware of the already dilapidated Syrian army. This is explained as preemptive action. Well, it is outright hostility to whoever will eventually take over in Syria. The longer-term ramifications of this precipitous act might far exceed its presumed advantages.

An even more perilous prospect awaits Gaza and the West Bank. The Gaza war is winding down. Hamas is now the fully isolated -and militarily decimated- outer outfit of the battered Iran-led axis of resistance. Hamas has no future in Gaza, but what will be Gaza's own future? Almost the entire strip is uninhabitable. No one will spend a penny there at the behest of Israel. And Israel may be harboring its final say: making it altogether inhospitable for Palestinians. Its deliberate targeting of civilians and the mass starvation it has imposed since October 2023 leaves little room for a digestible scenario. Israel is not concerned about the inhumane conditions the Palestinians are in, let alone their legitimate rights. This brings us to the bigger part of the picture: The West Bank. Except for a very few reasonable voices like Ehud Olmert, the gentlest ideas emanating from both officialdom and think-tanks mainly center on Dubai-like arrangements for a further shrunken Palestinian presence in the West Bank. The current military calculus makes Israelis in general think that two-state settlement is irrelevant. Under the circumstances, it depends on which segment of the political spectrum you listen to, to hear about versions of expanding Israeli sovereignty over the Occupied Territories. With Netanyahu's darling Trump counting days to take over the U.S. Presidency, the prospect for an independent Palestinian state is increasingly seen as a totally unrealistic proposition.

But Israel's future as a state within secure and recognized boundaries under today's terms is at least equally unrealistic. One-state solution may be touted during a victorious moment, but that hardly ensures peace and security in the longer run. Even today, Egypt and Jordan will legitimately resist any effort if that one-state solution entails the displacement of Palestinians from the Occupied Territories. Israel's current military preeminence vis-à-vis its adversaries is blinding it. In the past, the question of Palestine was treated by Arab states as a national rallying point, and not much else. Palestinians were put up with their own predicament. No longer. The Arab peoples' bond with their regimes has frayed beyond repair, especially in the Mediterranean basin. 2011 saw the bursting of accumulated social stress. Since then, the region has never been the same except for its façade. And after the initial uprisings and the ensuing turmoil and wars, the Arab transformation is now entering its third phase with Syria. The peoples' voices will gradually but surely make a comeback. This will be a process in which Palestinians' legitimate aspirations merge with other Arab peoples' want for dignity and freedom, unencumbered by political expedients. Israel will be well-advised to think of the kind of neighborhood it will then have to live in.



Indeed, governments in the region have reason to be preoccupied by the sudden change of course in Syria not only for the uncertainties it entails but also for the simple fact that a fellow autocratic regime has eventually, and totally collapsed. It is a powerful example. Moreover, this was the regime which the League of Arab States had only recently rehabilitated to its ranks.

With Iran on its back foot, Iraq will act more independently in charting its domestic affairs as well as its relations with its neighbors. In fact, the stance of the Iraqi government in not further involving the country in the activation of the Iran-led network -including Iraqi Shiite militia- to prop up Assad during his fateful days has betrayed the limits of Shiite solidarity on national grounds. Iraq has rightly judged, given especially its bitter experience with Al Qaeda and ISIS when Iraq and Syria merged into a single battleground, that even its Shiite majority was no guarantee to protect it under those circumstances. Iran has not only lost many of its military platforms in the region, but its claim as the bulwark of Shiite interest and security has also taken a serious blow. This may be a turning point in the two countries' relations after 2003.

Iran finds itself between a rock and a hard place. The viability of its Islamist regime and its regional policies are closely interrelated. Iran engages with the Middle East not just to widen its footprint as a regional power, but more so to consolidate the standing of its ideology which exceeds its borders. Its regional muscle in turn serves as a pillar for the regime's domestic credibility. When domestic dissent is rife, it becomes more assertive and aggressive beyond its borders. Now, the outlook is bleak on both fronts. Their mutually reinforcing role in projecting strength might switch to projecting weakness. It currently has a frail revolutionary leader and a soft-spoken president. After this fateful year, its nuclear program will loom large. This program never stood on its own. It has always been a dimension of Iran's regional schemes. And Trump, with his own stern views on Iran, is about to roll his sleeves up. The interconnectivity between Iran's domestic and international fronts, also given the deteriorating state of its economy, might push the country into greater rigidity or pull it towards a more amenable posture. Outside factors might have greater leverage this time.

Lebanon will likely move closer to its former nature. With Hezbollah bereft of its leadership ranks, battered militarily and downsized politically, hence with less Iranian meddling, the Lebanese will find a less lopsided stage to bargain for joint government. Whether this will also rekindle older hostilities is an open question. Yet one must remember that every strife in Lebanon had outside manipulators. Iran and Syria were only the more recent ones.

The Gulf states, at least in the short run, will be more at ease focusing on their own business, especially in the Indo-Pacific space. The Abraham Accords have survived the Gaza war, and relations with Israel will continue, if less conspicuously. Saudi Arabia is unlikely to follow suit without getting sufficient political assurance on future Palestinian statehood. That is also where Saudi reticence will likely stop. On the other hand, the nuclear technology leveraged by the U.S. to lure the Saudis into agreement is dependent also on other factors like the future of Iran's nuclear drive and proliferation concerns in an unstable region.



Trump has already declared that his immediate priority will be negotiating an end to the war in Ukraine. How auspicious this will be for Ukraine's sovereignty, even on its reduced territory, remains to be seen. But Trump looks determined to impress on Putin possibly also by capitalizing on Russia's weakened position in the Mediterranean. By the same token, Trump is inclined to consider Israel's security a work well in progress and Syria a matter essentially for regional players, with Turkey at the forefront.

Russia has lost its bastion in the Mediterranean, and the future of its bases on Syrian territory -even if they are downscaled- remains in doubt. It has a foothold in Hafter-controlled part of Libya, and in recent years has been undergirding North Africa—and by extension southern Mediterranean—from the Sahel. Yet, these advances do not diminish the enormity of its strategic loss caused by the downfall of Assad.

Turkey has catapulted itself to center stage in Syria following the swift victory of the HTS-led groups. Their habitat in Idlib, which provided them with shelter, autonomy, economic sustainability, training, and rearmament, had been secured by Turkey under the so-called de-confliction arrangement with Russia and Iran. Yet, unlike the "Syrian National Army", which was essentially formed and equipped by Turkey, and is considered a Turkish proxy in the region, the HTS and its allies were existing groups which depended on Turkey for its protective presence and logistics. Therefore, as these groups -together with others based in the south- have now taken territorial control over much of Syria, they are naturally asserting themselves on that foundation. Moreover, these groups have quickly transformed into a transitional government, under whose nationwide responsibility their time in Idlib is quickly becoming a distant past, and their relationship with Turkey diminishes proportionally as they engage with all neighbors and other states.

Turkey will have its own reasons to recalibrate its distance with the HTS. It has to engage with all sections and groups in Syria so as to help forge a stable future for the country. If the Turkish government evades this role, in the process, it will lose the influence it can derive from its current upper hand and will be seen as the backer of another version of authoritarianism, this time under the Islamist banner. Moreover, the entire Arab fold will see Turkey's actions as manifestations of its ideological and imperial designs. These will serve no useful purpose for Turkey. Turkey has one overriding interest in Syria: to see a free, prosperous country, at peace with itself and with its neighbors.

# GLOBAL OUTLOOK THROUGH THE UN PRISM: THE CASES OF AFGHANISTAN AND SYRIA

## Erdoğan İşcan

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## Evolution of the International Security Architecture

The international security architecture we continue to live in today was conceived during the Second World War and developed afterwards, giving due consideration to the pre-war experiences. The United Nations (UN) is placed at the center of the system. The UN Charter (1945) enjoys the status of the constituent document of the system. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) is regarded as the guiding source, outlining the framework of international human rights law that serves as the foundation for freedom, justice and peace in the world. Achieving lasting stability would create the conditions for progress towards sustainable development goals.<sup>1</sup> The principles and norms of international law, including human rights law, humanitarian law, refugee law and criminal law, have been advanced on this basis.

There have been milestones in the evolution of the international system since 1945; Cold War, Détente, the exit of the Soviet Union (and the Warsaw Pact) from the international stage, a temporary phase for unipolar world order, the rise of new global powers, direct or proxy wars aimed at redefining the balance of power and spheres of influence, global and regional power struggles...

The system is also coping with rapidly growing challenges: climate crisis, food security, migration and refugee issues, the mounting need for effective counter-terrorism measures, and rising authoritarian populism and totalitarian tendencies...

## UN Perspective on the Current Global Situation

The global security architecture is undergoing a process of comprehensive transformation. The balance of power is evolving. UN Member States either ignore or prefer to selectively implement their international treaty obligations, which they have developed on the basis of their common values and goals and to which they have become parties with their free political will. The notion of the rule of international law faces erosion. The principles proclaimed in the UN Charter are overlooked. The chances to achieve sustainable development goals are weakened. The risk of the conflict escalating from a regional to a global level should not be underestimated.

China's sphere of influence as a global power is expanding. Russia is sending a message that its potential, including its nuclear capabilities, should not be underestimated. The Global South is rising as a more influential international actor whose word must not remain unheeded.

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<sup>1</sup> United Nations, "17 Goals," *United Nations Sustainable Development*.

The West's claim to be the guardian of international law is undermined by hypocritical and self-serving actions that contradict strategic goals for international peace and security. Recently, this trend has become more evident in the context of the Russia-Ukraine war and the Israeli military operation in the occupied Palestinian territories, including the Gaza Strip, the West Bank and East Jerusalem. Such examples of the use of double standards continue to undermine its self-proclaimed ethical superiority in terms of the "rules-based international order".

Nonetheless, the sustained effective functioning of democratic institutions in the West allows for continued optimism for the future, relying on the emergence of the political will to contain the ongoing erosion.

Meanwhile, the Russia-China solidarity appears to be steady. In the UN settings, it is observed that the alignment of the Global South with the Russia-China backed positions is enhancing.

This does not mean that the positions supported by the Russia-China-Global South bloc are always in line with international law, whereas the positions pursued by the West are not always unjustified.

The international community's drifting away from the culture of compromise is leading large parts of the human society to fall into deepening inequality and poverty, which makes it even more challenging to generate the conditions for achieving the sustainable development goals.

According to the UN:<sup>2</sup>

- One percent of the world's population owns 95% of the total global wealth.
- Almost 700 million people around the world subsist on less than \$2.15.
- It is projected that the global goal of ending extreme poverty by 2030 will not be achieved, with almost 600 million people still living in extreme poverty.
- One out of six children live in extreme poverty.
- 53% of the world's population does not benefit from any form of social protection.

## **Primary Concern is the Tendency of the Political Will to Derail**

Despite the need for reform, the UN is not the main source for concern. The problem is the lack of requisite political will of the Member States, as well as the rise of opportunistic political ambitions and the growing inclination to sacrifice common objectives for short-term selfish interests.

The UN is the only global platform that brings all States together for dialogue and provides the ground to make decisions. The UN Secretariat, under the Secretary-General's direction, is the mechanism responsible for implementing the decisions taken by the States, in so far as the required resources provided (or not provided) by

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<sup>2</sup> United Nations, "Ending Poverty," *United Nations*.

the States. It does not have the strategic decision-making power; it is the body tasked with executing the decisions taken by the States. The UN is not to be blamed if States fail to take decisions or decline to provide the needed resources for their decisions.

Meanwhile, it would be fair to recognize the accomplishments of the UN.<sup>3</sup> The vast contributions of the UN to the international community cover a wide range of areas, including human rights, humanitarian law, refugees, humanitarian aid, disarmament, development, health, labour rights, combating the climate crisis, counter-terrorism as well as international peace and security.

One of the main functions of the UN is conflict prevention. It also has the capacity to play an important role in preventing internal conflicts, as it does in preventing international conflicts.

Furthermore, the UN has been providing services to countries in support of nationally owned efforts with a view to building a lasting peace. Peacebuilding activities aim at reducing the risk of relapsing into conflict and laying the foundation for sustainable peace and development.<sup>4</sup>

The publication of the UN University's Centre for Policy Research, titled "Preventing Violent Conflict During Transitions from Authoritarian Rule," describes the contrasting ways for transitioning out of authoritarian rule and how the UN can influence pathways away from violence.<sup>5</sup>

In the confines of this article, I will briefly discuss two cases whereby the UN has been intensively involved; the situations in Afghanistan and Syria.

## Afghanistan

The US and its allies, despite the fact that they had exercised effective control in Afghanistan for about twenty years, failed to ensure a lasting rule of law and public order. It was obvious that the situation could no longer be sustained. In 2021, upon the US decision to withdraw, the Taliban seized power with a speed that perhaps surprised even itself. Although the circumstances are not the same, it reminds us of the recent seizure of power in Syria by Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) with a speed that was unforeseen by most observers.

At the outset, when it was suggested that the Taliban was giving "positive" messages, I cautioned that this might be a risky approach and underlined that "The Taliban is the Taliban—let's not dream."<sup>6</sup> The Taliban's move towards democracy in accordance with

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<sup>3</sup> United Nations, "Our Work," *United Nations*.

<sup>4</sup> United Nations, "Peacebuilding," *United Nations*.

<sup>5</sup> Dirk Druet, "When Dictators Fall: Preventing Violent Conflict During Transitions from Authoritarian Rule," *United Nations University Centre for Policy Research* (UNU-CPR), May 25, 2020.

<sup>6</sup> Erdoğan İşcan, "The Afghanistan Dilemma: The Taliban Versus Urgent Need to Respond to the Humanitarian Crisis," *Global*

the universal values would have contradicted its own *raison d'être*. Meanwhile, it was usual to establish contact with the Taliban, that had taken over the administration of a UN Member State.

Nonetheless, I also stated that it would be essential for the international community to pursue a coordinated stance and review the issue of recognition and support pursuant to the steps to be taken by the Taliban. It would be crucial that this message is given resolutely during the contacts.

On the other hand, it would be a principal joint responsibility of the international community to provide the humanitarian aid needed by the Afghan people without granting premature legitimacy to the Taliban, and to prioritize the human rights and fundamental freedoms of Afghan women and girls in this context.

Those who had advised caution about the Taliban were not mistaken. The Taliban administration continued to move away from universal human rights. The Sharia enforcement has hardened. Women's rights have been grossly undone.

Recently, in addition to the broad prohibitions imposed in the field of education, women were also prohibited from studying in medical institutions. It should not be difficult to foresee the tragic consequences of banning medical education for women in Afghanistan, where women are only allowed to be treated by female health workers. The UN demanded that the Taliban repeal this decision<sup>7</sup> and reiterated its calls on the international community to protect fundamental rights and freedoms in Afghanistan.<sup>8</sup>

## Syria

In Syria, the half-century-long Assad dynasty collapsed. It had already been observed that it might not survive long after 2011 and that the changes in the international balance of power would determine its lifespan. The ongoing wars in Ukraine and the Middle East have accelerated the end of the Assad regime when its main external supporters had to re-define priorities and consequently re-allocate resources.

The end of the dictatorship was a beacon of hope for the future of Syria and its people. Now, the international community will curiously follow whether the glimmer of hope at the end of the tunnel is real or imaginary.

The structure led by the HTS, which overthrew the Assad regime and de facto took over the government in Syria, contains many radical elements. What role will this multi-fragmented structure, which has so far adhered to radical Islamist ideology and employed terror methods, play in shaping the future of Syria?

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Relations Forum (GRF), September 20, 2022.

<sup>7</sup> Ravina Shamdasani, Spokesperson for the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, "Afghanistan: The Ban on Women's Participation in Medical Education Must Be Lifted," *United Nations Human Rights Office* (OHCHR), December 5, 2024.

<sup>8</sup> Richard Bennett et al., "Afghanistan: UN Experts Reject the 'Completely Unjustified' Ban on Women's Medical Education," *United Nations Human Rights Office* (OHCHR), December 9, 2024.

Syria is an ethnic, religious and sectarian mosaic. The prospect for the Syrian people to live in an environment of political stability, social cohesion and economic prosperity will depend on the establishment of pluralistic and participatory democratic institutions and governance. The progress should be followed without prejudice, but with caution, whether the group of armed militants that seized power has the will and capacity to accomplish such a mission. Hasty judgments should be avoided.

Thus, although it is somewhat different from the Taliban's takeover of the administration in Afghanistan, which has different historical, sociological and geopolitical conditions, a similar caution needs to be maintained while following the steps taken and the progress made.

Considering Syria's domestic dynamics and the external powers eager to exert influence, all stakeholders should adopt a common goal and engage with the new administration to establish a pluralistic and participatory governance structure.

During the contacts with the HTS, this message should be conveyed in no ambiguous terms. The HTS should not be led to believe that recognition is unconditional. It should not be given carte blanche, and it should be clearly emphasized that it will be supported conditionally, to the extent that it shows the will to create the necessary conditions for stability and democratic security in Syria and that it will take concrete steps towards that goal.

It should be borne in mind that one of the main columns of pluralistic and participatory democratic governance is secularism, which respects and keeps equal distance to different faiths and convictions. It is a main pillar of democratic security. Without secularism, pluralistic and participatory democracy cannot be sustained.

Will it be possible for the HTS and other groups to transform their radical Islamist political philosophy into a pluralistic and participatory democratic approach and translate it into effective practice?

On the other hand, as in the case of Afghanistan, urgent and unhindered humanitarian aid should be provided to Syria. If Member States provide the necessary resources, the UN system has the mandate and capacity to ensure effective delivery.

## **Return of Syrian Refugees**

In the 14-year conflict in Syria, hundreds of thousands of people have died, more than a hundred thousand people have disappeared, and 14 million people have been displaced, half of whom have become refugees. Millions of Syrian refugees have resettled, mostly in neighboring countries.

Nevertheless, the ending of the Assad dynasty in Syria does in no way provide sufficiently adequate conditions for the immediate return of Syrian refugees. Political stability is yet to be established. Democratic security based on the rule of law and human rights has not been ensured. It will take a long time for economic activities to revive in the country, which has experienced immense economic destruction. Most

of the houses are uninhabitable. Time is needed to understand to what extent public services may be restored.

After Assad's departure, many European countries suspended asylum applications from Syrians. The UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) has called on European countries to reconsider their decisions. The UNHCR has published a position paper on the return of refugees to Syria. It offers the following evaluation of the current situation:<sup>9</sup>

*"At this moment in time, Syria continues to be affected by attacks and violence in parts of the country; large-scale internal displacement; contamination of many parts of the country with explosive remnants of war; a devastated economy and a large-scale humanitarian crisis, with over 16 million already in need of humanitarian assistance before the recent developments. In addition, and as noted above, Syria has also sustained massive destruction and damage to homes, critical infrastructure and agricultural lands. Property rights have been greatly affected, with widespread housing, land, and property violations recorded over the past decade, leading to complex ownership disputes that will take time to resolve. Against this background, UNHCR for the time being continues to call on States not to forcibly return Syrian nationals and former habitual residents of Syria, including Palestinians previously residing in Syria, to any part of Syria."*

The Council of Europe (CoE) Commissioner for Human Rights also reminded the European countries that have suspended the asylum applications from Syria of their obligation to "*non-refoulement*", which is a jus cogens norm of international human rights law and refugee law from which no derogation is allowed. He called on the Member States to avoid hasty returns of refugees.<sup>10</sup>

## Some Concluding Observations

The fall of the Assad dictatorship was a landmark development that has been widely welcomed and rejoiced. On the other hand, concerns about the past affiliations, ideologies and practices of the HTS-led groups that de facto took over the administration have not yet been clarified.

HTS has sent moderate messages, but has yet to pledge its commitment to pluralistic and participatory democracy. There has been no concrete development regarding the participation of different ethnic, religious and sectarian groups in decision-making processes.

It would be wrong to give unconditional credit to the HTS before concrete progress is observed. The HTS must realize that it must deserve the support of the international community. Its credibility should be evaluated based on the tangible progress towards ensuring democratic security in Syria.

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<sup>9</sup> United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), *Position Paper on Returns to the Syrian Arab Republic*, December 2024.

<sup>10</sup> Michael O'Flaherty, "As Syria Shifts, Council of Europe Member States Must Avoid Hasty Returns of Refugees," Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights, December 10, 2024.

The shared objective is to establish democratic security in Syria after a safe transition period. This can be achieved by creating the conditions for pluralistic and participatory democracy. If the new administration is able to ensure the path towards political stability, economic revival will follow. At that stage, the situation of Syrian refugees may also be reviewed.

The UN can also make a tangible contribution during the transition period in Syria. We know that a principal mandate of the UN is conflict prevention. As in international conflicts, the UN also has experience in undertaking functions in the prevention of internal conflicts and administration of peaceful transition process. During such transition processes, it is crucial to create mechanisms for truth, justice and reconciliation.

Peacebuilding activities of the UN aim at assisting countries emerging from conflict, reducing the risk of relapsing into conflict and laying the foundation for sustainable peace and development. There have been numerous successful cases in this regard.<sup>11</sup>

Policies that are developed and carried out based on real and accurate data can generate meaningful results. Policies that are aligned with radical ideological affiliations cannot provide for conditions to consolidate democratic security. They are prone to moving towards autocratic, and even totalitarian regimes.

External powers should focus on providing guidance and support to domestic actors rather than replacing them and managing societal transformation. Underestimating internal dynamics creates chaos and conflict. The primary purpose is to manage the transition process with "local ownership."

This is the message from the UN Secretary-General on December 19, 2024: "*Syria's future must be shaped by its people, for its people, with the support of all of us.*"<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> United Nations, "United Nations Peacebuilding Commission," *United Nations Peacebuilding Commission*.

<sup>12</sup> United Nations Geneva (@UNGeneva), "It is the obligation of the international community to stand with the people of #Syria who have suffered so much. Syria's future must be shaped by its people, for its people, with the support of all of us." X (Twitter), December 20, 2024.



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## WORLD TRADE ORGANIZATION IN 2024

### Selim Kunalalp

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2024 was not a good year for the multilateral system. The United Nations (UN) was helpless in the face of the wars in Ukraine and the Middle East, veto threats flew, but the UN failed to take any concrete action. It proved once again that it is not the world's gendarme. If blame is to be found here, it will be possible to find it not in the organization itself, but among its members who do not want it to grow stronger.

The same things that can be said about the UN can also be said about other international organizations. The Bretton Woods economic organizations established after the Second World War, namely the International Bank of Reconstruction and Development (IBRD), now part of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) have become increasingly controversial, with the former giving way to regional development banks and even deep-pocketed countries, notably China, and the IMF, despite its best efforts, unable to shake off its image of imposing austerity policies with high social costs.

The World Trade Organization (WTO) has also suffered from the crisis of the multilateral system. In fact, when it was established 30 years ago, it was conceived as an organization that would include a set of rules covering the whole world, and that would lead to the establishment of new disciplines and rules through negotiations over time, leading to a gradual and orderly liberalization of world trade. Its predecessor, the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT), where I spent ten years of my working life, consisted of only 75 countries before it was replaced by the WTO. The industrialized countries negotiated the rules for themselves, the developing countries did not adopt these rules and watched the developments as silent partners. In fact, these rules were largely inspired by the US legal system and applied only among industrialized countries. In exchange for not being bound by the rules, developing countries faced obstacles in developing their export markets. With a few exceptions, the Soviet Bloc countries, as well as China and the Gulf emirates, which could already sell their oil without being affected by customs walls, preferred to remain outside the system.

With the end of the Cold War and the desire of Russia and China to integrate into the world economic system, the aim was to make the system more inclusive. The aim was both to increase the number of countries and to ensure that the disciplines established were applied in a balanced manner by all participating countries, not only among industrialized countries. The 1994 Agreement Establishing the WTO, signed in Marrakesh, largely ensured this. Moreover, while the GATT's dispute settlement mechanism was political rather than legal, i.e. a country party to a dispute had the possibility to block a decision it considered unfavorable to one of its members, the WTO eliminated this possibility. The cornerstone of the new system was an Appellate Body whose members were permanently mandated. This system freed dispute settlement from political interference.

After its establishment, the WTO grew very quickly. Today it has 166 members. Those who remain outside are mainly our neighbors Azerbaijan, Iran, Iraq, Syria and some Central Asian Republics. However, the negotiation processes have been very long. For example, the accession process initiated by Azerbaijan in 1997 has not yet been finalized. Our country joined the GATT in 1951 after three months of negotiations and without paying much of an "entry ticket" fee, and from there it was automatically entitled to WTO membership. In contrast, Russia and China's membership negotiations took years. Russia's negotiations took 18 years and China's 15 years. The main reason why these processes took so long was that both countries took their time to undertake the necessary reforms to open their economies to market forces and competition. Closed, planned, state-controlled economies would not have been so easy to open up. It is also true that the EU, the US and other industrialized countries put a lot of pressure on both to open their markets. We have seen from other examples that the country wishing to become a member has no choice but to fulfill the conditions required of it.

The expansion of the WTO was a reflection of the optimism of the post-Cold War era. The socialist system had collapsed and the market economy had taken its place. The entry requirements imposed on Russia, China and other countries obliged them to comply with the same disciplines that applied to everyone else, and they were expected to implement transparent and predictable trade policies. In China, for example, prior to WTO accession, it was known that provinces had different foreign trade and tariff policies. During the accession negotiations, China had to put an end to these different practices.

The basic principles of the WTO include no non-tariff barriers other than customs duties, no discrimination among members, no domestic taxes on imported goods on which customs duties have been paid that domestic production is not subject to, and no anti-competitive subsidies for exports of non-agricultural products. These rules were considered indispensable for the system to work in a balanced way and to ensure that even small countries were not subject to political pressure from the big powers. Countries that did not abide by these rules could be sued by their trading partners, large and small, and forced to abide by them.

This time, however, the rule-making countries, particularly the United States, decided that they were working against them and began to violate the system. Interestingly, these violations have been occurring with increasing regularity and without distinction between Democratic and Republican administrations. US administrations have become increasingly vocal in claiming that China is shirking its obligation to abide by the basic rules of a competitive market economy expected from its WTO membership, particularly in the area of intellectual property. Indeed, China, especially since Xi Jinping came to power in 2012, has turned towards state capitalism, providing all kinds of facilities to large state-sponsored companies and enabling them to grow stronger abroad. It cannot be claimed that this policy has been in China's best interest in the long run. China's economy is slowing down as it moves away from a market economy. In any case, already during the Obama administration, the United States prevented the election of new members to the WTO dispute settlement mechanism and in

particular to the Appellate Body, which, as I mentioned above, constitutes one of the pillars of the organization, thus rendering it dysfunctional over time. According to US allegations, the Appellate Body has overstepped its mandate and instead of applying existing rules, it has resorted to creating new rules. However, one member of the seven-member Appellate Body has always been a US citizen. Nevertheless, a US citizen member of the Appellate Body was not nominated by the administration for a second term, but was replaced by another US citizen.

As a result, the Appellate Body virtually disappeared within a few years, as decisions in the WTO are taken unanimously and no new elections could be held to replace outgoing Appellate Body members due to the US barrier. The dispute settlement mechanism also ceased to function. It is noteworthy that the same anti-Appellate Body policy was pursued by both Democrat and Republican administrations. As in the GATT system, if a party to a dispute did not like the report and recommendations of the Panel, which played the role of a court of first instance, there was little it could do. The decision is duly appealed, but since the appeal mechanism does not work, the issue is left in the middle. In such a situation, the complaining country can see itself in a position to resort to unilateral measures to compensate for the damages it claims to have suffered. This, of course, gives large countries an undeniable advantage over small ones.

After the collapse of the Appellate Body, some countries, notably the EU, have been working and negotiating to develop an alternative appellate system, but so far without success. The imbalances that a system that would not apply to all members would create between them has apparently been the main obstacle. The pointlessness of an appeals system without the United States, still by far the world's biggest trading power, is obvious.

With the dispute settlement mechanism inactive, the negotiation process has effectively stalled. Whereas the GATT to a major liberalization of world trade, at least among developed countries, through seven rounds of negotiations between 1947 and 1995, the WTO has only been able to adopt the "Trade Facilitation Agreement" in 2013. Launched in 2001 in Doha, Qatar, the multilateral negotiating round that bears its name was effectively abandoned before it could be concluded. Some of the negotiating groups never meet, while others spend their time only generating ideas that cannot be implemented. The 2021 agreement to limit anti-competitive state subsidies in fisheries has not yet entered into force because not enough countries have ratified it. The root of the problem is that decisions are taken unanimously and in today's world, major players prefer to impose their will rather than rules. However, unlike UN General Assembly resolutions, decisions adopted in the WTO cannot be adopted by a majority as they have to be implemented by all member states. In an organization composed of sovereign states and, unlike the EU, intergovernmental rather than supra-governmental, members cannot be forced to accept obligations they do not want. As a way out, in some areas such as services and the environment, there have been attempts at negotiations between a limited number of countries, but the free-rider problem (the obligation to apply the advantages of the resulting agreements to other countries even if they do not undertake any obligations) has led to the failure of these attempts.

The result has been a return to the law of the jungle, so to speak, as the WTO has failed to fulfill its core functions, namely to resolve disputes in accordance with the law and rules, and to negotiate new rules for liberalization in its mandate areas. Disregard for the rules has taken the form of actions by the US, the EU and China, again relying on their own power. All that remains of the WTO's innovations is the process of reviewing the trade policies that countries are subject to on a regular basis. While this is an important function to ensure transparency, it is not sufficient for harmonized trade relations.

The first stone was again laid by the US, this time during the first Trump administration. Based on the national security clause of the WTO Founding Agreement, the US has started to impose additional tariffs on imports of products such as steel and aluminum from some countries, including Turkey. Under normal circumstances, such tariffs could only be justified by anti-dumping or anti-subsidy allegations or in the event of a surge in imports. However, the measures had to be based on lengthy and costly proceedings. The complaining country would have to prove that the other party was dumping, i.e. that export prices were lower than prices on its domestic market, or, in the case of anti-subsidy duties, that production or exports benefited from anti-competitive state support. Since this requires lengthy and laborious investigations, the Trump administration has taken the shortcut of citing national security needs as a justification. When I first read this news, I thought it must be a mistake, because national security justification is rarely used in politically motivated disputes. Then it turned out that the news was not wrong. The countries that were the recipients of these tariffs filed lawsuits at the WTO, but despite winning these lawsuits, the tariffs continued under the Trump administration and continued under the Biden administration.

The Biden administration has gone even further than Trump. In fact, when we look at the foreign trade policies of the US administrations after the Second World War, we see that, at least in the early period, Republicans were more in favor of a liberal trade system than Democrats. Democrat administrations have traditionally sided with labor unions that have had difficulty competing, especially in the automobile sector, and that see "job-stealing" imports at the root of their problems. However, it is understood that the Democrats partially lost the support of "blue-collar workers" to the Republicans in the last Presidential elections, claiming that they did not curb imports sufficiently. Trump's claims to protect US industry from foreign competition seem to resonate with the working population.

Given the Democrats' traditional stance, it should not have been surprising that the Biden administration did not want to lag behind Trump on protectionism. As a matter of fact, the Biden administration, claiming to pull the economy out of the depression it suffered after the pandemic, introduced an aid package worth close to two trillion dollars under the Inflation Reduction Act to support industry. Imported products would not be eligible for this package, and investors who wanted to benefit from the aid would have to produce in the US. This violated two important WTO rules: the obligation to use local content and the prohibition of anti-competitive subsidies to industrial production.

In fact, the EU did not delay too much in jumping through this door. It is a well-known fact that France has never been in favor of a liberal foreign trade policy. Under the name of industrial policy, support policies, the compatibility of which with WTO rules can be debated, have gradually started to be put into effect in EU countries. Companies were encouraged to reduce the capacity of non-EU factories and attract employment-enhancing investments to their own countries. As the individual resources of EU countries are limited, the results of this policy have not yet been very noticeable. However, the September 2024 report, commissioned by former European Central Bank President Mario Draghi himself from EU Commission President Ursula von der Leyen and containing some proposals for measures to increase the competitiveness of the EU, envisages the adoption of a support package with an annual volume of 800 billion euros. The enormity of the figure startled member states and no action has yet been taken on this report. However, it is clear that Draghi's proposals are the EU's response to Biden's IRA.

Then, on November 5, 2024, Donald Trump won the US elections with unexpected success. During the campaign, he came up with all sorts of original proposals. He repeatedly said that his favorite word in the English language is "tariff", and that he would abolish income tax and replace it with tariffs as a source of revenue. He claimed that an additional 60% tariff would be imposed on imports from China and 10-20% on imports from other countries. The fact that the amount to be collected would be far less than the amount raised from income taxes, which have proven to be economically unfeasible, does not seem to have affected him much. His claim that on January 20, 2025, when he will take office, he will impose a 25% tariff on imports from Canada and Mexico and a 10% tariff on imports from China caused panic, at least in Canada, and Prime Minister Trudeau paid Trump a visit. Trump's justification was that the two neighboring countries were not doing enough to combat fentanyl trafficking and illegal immigration. It is clear that such justifications have nothing to do with WTO rules.

Trump also wants US imports from individual countries to be offset by US exports to those countries. It is not clear how this will be implemented. It will probably not be a barter regime, as it used to be with countries that practiced a socialist economy. But even without barter, it is not clear how trade would be balanced in a free market economy.

It was not clear, at least at the time of writing, what legal basis Trump would find for suddenly raising tariffs. Since the US, like all WTO members, has "bound" its tariffs at very low rates, i.e. promised not to increase them, the normal path is closed. Trump will probably cite national security as a justification, as he did in his previous term. Doing so will lead to a barrage of lawsuits at the WTO. However, as I mentioned above, these lawsuits are unlikely to yield results as the dispute resolution mechanism is already paralyzed.

And of course, Trump's announcement that these additional tariffs will be determined in proportion to the size of the surplus in countries that have a surplus in their foreign trade with the US will lead to trade wars. The countries with the largest US deficits are

China, Germany, Japan and Korea. The countermeasures they will take will certainly lead to major trade wars. Unfortunately, our country is also likely to get its share of this storm because our trade with the US has a small surplus. As a matter of fact, it is not forgotten that the US imposed a tax on iron and steel imports from our country in the previous period.

Whether this nightmare scenario will actually be implemented is currently unknown. Such a situation is reminiscent of the 1930s. Although the rate of additional customs duties that the US started to collect with the Hawley-Smoot law was only 5%, it was enough to plunge the world into a deep economic crisis, which ended only with the outbreak of the Second World War. As I mentioned above, the main purpose of the Bretton Woods institutions established after the war was to prevent a recurrence of such a situation. It cannot be denied that they have succeeded so far.

Of course, if Trump goes down this path and triggers trade wars on an unprecedented scale, it is clear that his country will suffer more harm than good. At the very least, a sharp rise in the price of imported goods would lead to higher inflation. In such a situation, the US Federal Reserve would have to raise interest rates. It is highly likely that the dollar would rise along with it, hurting US exports and the economy in general. Some economists, however, argue that the outcome would not be so dire and that the economy would reach some kind of equilibrium and be able to absorb the tariff hikes. In any case, Trump does not seem to be worried. He seems to think that by removing barriers to oil and gas production, he will be able to drown the world in cheap hydrocarbons and thereby prevent inflation from rising, leaving aside climate change concerns that he does not share. However, many commentators, aware that this calculation is likely to fail, claim that Trump himself knows that his threats are empty and that they cannot be implemented. Time will tell what will happen.

Whatever the developments, the near future is not bright for the WTO. The rules and disciplines it represents have been violated not by one but by many countries, and there are no sanctions. The already stalled trade negotiations are unlikely to be revived in the coming period. It is also ominous that one of Trump's first appointments is Jamieson Greer, the deputy to Robert Lighthizer, who served as United States Trade Representative (USTR) during his first term as Secretary of State. Lighthizer was an outspoken opponent of WTO values. It would not be right to expect his former deputy to follow a different line. It is also worrying that other members of Trump's team are opponents of globalization and the multilateral system.

So, we should not expect much from the WTO for the next four years. The wheels will keep turning, meetings will be held, papers will be produced, but there will be no results. Perhaps the only noteworthy activity will be the ongoing trade policy review process. It can already be said that the results of these reviews will not be encouraging.



# GLOBAL GREEN TRANSITION

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## Introduction

The global green transition has become a pressing necessity rather than a mere ideal. The demand for a worldwide move toward sustainable energy and production/consumption systems gets louder as the effects of climate change and environmental degradation get more severe—manifesting in record-breaking heat waves, catastrophic floods, extended droughts, and rising sea levels. Governments, companies, and societies are sprinting to meet net-zero targets, adapt to climate shocks, and lower their emissions. Still, this change is complicated and unequal, even if it is necessary for the survival of mankind.

Fundamentally, the green transition is a sprint against time. According to scientific consensus, limiting global warming to 1.5°C is essential to preventing the most disastrous effects of climate change. However, the window for reaching this target is quickly narrowing. At the present rate of emissions, the global carbon budget for staying below 1.5°C is likely to be depleted in a few years. Implementation lags behind aspiration even as pledges to renewable energy, decarbonization, and sustainable development grow. The sheer scope and urgency of the change need unheard-of degrees of worldwide cooperation and invention, both of which are difficult in a world divided and unequal.

The unequal effects of the green transition among countries and businesses exacerbate this need even further. One could argue that green innovation and renewable energy supremacy benefit technologically advanced countries and those rich in resources. Countries with lots of sun, wind, or essential minerals are marketing themselves as worldwide centers of the green economy. Conversely, sectors and economies depending on fossil fuels are facing grave problems ranging from declining earnings for countries that export oil to employment losses in coal mining communities. These differences beg important issues concerning equality and fairness in the distribution of the advantages and drawbacks of the change.

At the societal level, the change reveals already present disparities. While poor populations—especially in the Global South—face compounded difficulties of climate impacts and inadequate resources to properly adapt, wealthier governments and localities may afford the upfront expenses of green technologies. Major companies, particularly those in polluting sectors, play a role that adds yet another level of complexity. Their deeds—or inactions—may either speed forward or impede development.

This raises a pressing question: Is it too late to avert the most severe effects of climate change? If not, who will emerge as the beneficiaries and victims of this significant transformation? The responses will shape not only the planet's course but also the balance of power, wealth, and justice in the coming decades.



## The Motivators Behind the Green Transition

At the core of this momentum are global climate agreements, technical advancements, and financial incentives, which have all altered policies, markets, and priorities on a global scale. These developments are the result of a convergence of political, technological, and financial factors in response to the urgent need to address climate change.

In 2015, the Paris Agreement appeared to have brought about a significant change in how the countries look at the global climate. The Paris Agreement established a shared framework to limit the global temperature increase to well below 2°C, with a preference for 1.5°C, by uniting nearly every country, thereby establishing ambitious climate action. Subsequent conferences of the parties (COPs) to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change have worked to enhance systems for financing, adaptability, and responsibility. At recent COPs, including COP26 in Glasgow, COP28 in Dubai, and most recently COP29 in Baku, significant emitters have pledged to achieve net-zero emissions by mid-century, or in the case of China and India, by 2060 and 2070, respectively.

Additionally, these pledges forced collaboration between governments and non-governmental organizations, such as municipalities and companies, in order to expedite the process of change. The global framework has also encouraged countries to incorporate climate targets into their energy policies. The development of renewable energy investments, energy efficiency, and low-carbon technologies became the topics of daily discussion. The Paris Agreement provides a roadmap for global and collective action and remains the cornerstone of the green transition, even though some implementation gaps remain.

The availability of sustainable energy has significantly increased as solar panels, wind turbines, and battery storage have become more affordable due to improvements in renewable energy technologies. In many regions of the world, solar and wind power are presently the most cost-effective sources of electricity. More dependable and efficient energy systems are enabled by advancements in grid-scale battery technologies, which address intermittency issues.

The integration of artificial intelligence and digital technology is crucial for the transformation of current energy systems. Peer-to-peer energy trading is made feasible by blockchain technology, and artificial intelligence algorithms enhance grid stability, demand pattern prediction, and energy efficiency. Developments in energy-efficient materials and hydrogen fuel further broaden the decarbonization toolkit.

The green transition has also changed global investment preferences and requirements. Environmental, social, and governance standards are currently among the most significant factors that influence global investor behavior and direct funds toward more sustainable businesses. Green bonds, sustainable loans, and climate funds are currently among the most popular financial instruments, as they facilitate the expansion of renewable energy initiatives and the proliferation of low-carbon infrastructure.

Companies are also beginning to respond to consumer demand for sustainability and market pressure. Businesses are prioritizing supply chain decarbonization, reducing waste, and implementing circular economy models. Additionally, governments are employing subsidies, tax incentives, and carbon pricing systems to motivate individuals and organizations to adhere to more stringent standards.

The green transition is being advanced by the convergence of technical innovation, global accords, and economic changes. The speed and inclusiveness of this development remain uneven as the world strives to meet its climate targets, which raises significant questions about efficacy and equality of the human populations.

## Winners of the Green Transition

The green transition is not only a global imperative but also offers a transformative opportunity that will redefine economic hierarchies, corporate landscapes, and local communities. Although this transition phase requires global cooperation, its benefits are not evenly distributed among different countries. Some countries, industries, and communities are better positioned to emerge as clear winners due to their access to resources, technological leadership, and proactive adoption of renewable energy solutions.

The nations that possess sufficient natural resources and technological expertise are among the biggest beneficiaries of the green transition. For example, China has become a worldwide leader in solar panel manufacturing by producing more than 70% of the solar panels globally. This position gives not only an economic advantage but also a strategic one, as clean energy technologies are increasing their importance at the heart of geopolitical power.

Europe is also taking a similar position and working on becoming a pioneer in green hydrogen initiatives. To advance the decarbonization of transportation and heavy industries, countries like Germany and the Netherlands are investing heavily in hydrogen infrastructure. Meanwhile, the demand in resource-rich countries for critical minerals such as cobalt in the Democratic Republic of Congo and lithium in Australia and Chile is rising, as these elements are indispensable for battery technologies. If managed sustainably, this resource wealth can enhance economic growth and generate employment opportunities.

The green transition has provided a nurturing environment for innovative companies to prosper. Tesla, for instance, has brought about a fundamental change in the market for electric vehicles (EVs) and has set new benchmarks for sustainability and profitability. The Danish renewable energy firm, Ørsted, has also positioned itself as a worldwide leader in offshore wind energy and shows how the shift from fossil fuels to clean energy can be environmentally sound and financially beneficial at the same time.

Startups and new entrants can also find opportunities in the green economy. Companies that concentrate on energy storage, smart grids, and carbon capture are building momentum, disrupting conventional energy markets, and generating a new competitive landscape. The changing innovation landscape underscores the opportunity for businesses to gain from the transition.

Communities that have switched to renewable energy enjoy considerable local socioeconomic benefits. For instance, solar microgrids have enabled energy independence for villages in rural regions of India and Sub-Saharan Africa, thereby transforming lives by supplying electricity to clinics, schools, and businesses. In developed nations, areas transitioning from coal to renewable energy sources—such as the Ruhr region in Germany—often see job creation in the wind and solar sectors and this creation exceeds opportunities related to fossil fuels.

The winners of the green transition will be those who adapt early, make strategic investments, and leverage their unique advantages. For the transition to benefit everyone rather than just a select few, this success must be balanced with a dedication to justice.

## Losers of the Green Transition

Although the green transition promises a sustainable future, it comes with its share of challenges and losses. Specific nations, industries, and communities experience notable disruptions as global economies shift towards renewable energy and sustainable practices.

Nations heavily dependent on fossil fuel exports rank among the most susceptible to change in the green transition. Countries like Russia, Saudi Arabia, and other Gulf states obtain most of their gross domestic product from exporting oil and gas. The gradual transition to renewable energy on a global scale puts these revenue streams at risk, with the potential to destabilize their economies. As an illustration, with the European Union speeding up its green transition, significant suppliers of fossil fuels to the bloc are encountering diminished demand and contracting markets. These nations face the challenge of diversifying their economies. Some countries, such as the UAE, have begun investing in renewable energy and technology sectors, while others are falling behind and risking long-term economic stagnation. The transition period may increase social and political unrest as these governments may struggle with decreasing revenues and increasing unemployment in sectors dependent on fossil fuels.

Industries that depend on traditional energy sources or resist innovation also face significant challenges. The coal mining industry has been consistently diminishing, leading to some job losses in numerous areas reliant on coal. The oil and gas industries are also seeing fewer investments. The global financial institutions are putting more weight on ESG criteria, which means they care more about green projects than fossil fuel projects. Another sector experiencing strain is the automotive industry. Established car manufacturers who are sluggish in adopting electric vehicles (EVs) risk ceding market share to nimble entrants like Tesla. The decline in vehicles with internal combustion engines jeopardizes a complex supply chain, resulting in job losses within manufacturing and related sectors. The resource-constrained communities encounter distinct challenges during the green transition. The high initial costs of renewable technologies like solar panels and electric vehicles pose obstacles to their adoption and worsen existing inequalities. The deficiencies in infrastructure and restricted access to financial resources increase these expenses in developing countries. Moreover, with

the tightening of global climate policies, communities that depend on carbon-heavy industries for jobs are at risk of economic marginalization. If there are no targeted interventions, these disparities could worsen, leading to areas of disenfranchisement and opposition to climate action.

Although the green transition is essential, we need to tackle these inequities. International organizations and policymakers must ensure that the transition benefits almost everyone, providing assistance to those who suffer during this transition. It is only by advancing just transition that we can lessen the dangers and guarantee worldwide success in the battle against climate change.

## Are We Too Late Already?

The green transition is urgent because we have no time left to avert catastrophic climate change. Experts underline that the carbon budget available is diminishing rapidly. The present paths of worldwide emissions, combined with present inadequate measures, bring us to the question: Have we already missed the chance to avert the most severe effects of climate change?

The idea of a carbon budget serves as a clear reminder of the limits we encounter that are finite. The IPCC states that if emissions continue at the current rate, the carbon budget for keeping temperatures below 1.5°C will be depleted in only a few years. Once this threshold is surpassed, the likelihood of crossing climate tipping points increases significantly. We should also keep in mind that 2024 was already about 1.6 °C warmer than pre-industrial levels. Breakdown of the Atlantic Meridional Overturning Circulation (AMOC) or melting of the polar ice caps are two examples of tipping points that could set off a chain of events that would speed up further global warming and make it much harder to stop it.

Feedback loops complicate the situation. As an example, the melting of Arctic ice diminishes the albedo effect on Earth, which raises heat absorption and speeds up ice loss. In the same vein, thawing permafrost emits methane, which is a powerful greenhouse gas. These self-reinforcing cycles highlight the urgency of taking immediate and decisive action to reduce emissions and stabilize the climate system. If we pass the 2°C warming limit, we would be living in a drastically different world.

Even with global accords such as the Paris Agreement and increasing dedication to net-zero objectives, there is still a considerable divide between promises and actual measures. Due to inadequate funding, political opposition, or bureaucratic inertia, many countries are failing to meet their commitments. In particular, developing countries have difficulty accessing the resources needed for the transition, while developed nations frequently do not fulfill their commitments to climate finance funding levels.

Additionally, the pace of fossil fuel phase-out is much slower than necessary to halt global warming. The uptake of renewable energy is speeding up, but it is not currently replacing fossil fuels at a pace sufficient to achieve the necessary reduction in emissions. Actually, in many countries, renewable energy is an additional resource

added to the energy mix. The ongoing investment in new oil and gas production facilities underscores a dangerous disconnection between climate objectives and market realities.

In these grave admonitions, there are grounds for measured hopefulness. Technological progress in renewable energy, battery storage, and green hydrogen is driving down costs and enhancing scalability. There has never been greater global awareness of climate issues, which is fueling grassroots initiatives, corporate accountability, and government action.

Some countries are demonstrating that a rapid transition is possible. For example, Denmark is set to reach a 100% renewable electricity target well before 2050, and Costa Rica has been consistently generating almost all of its electricity from renewable sources. The aforementioned examples demonstrate that, when there is political will, strategic investment, and support from society, it is possible to bring about significant change on a large scale and in a short time.

## **Conclusion: The Path Forward in the Green Transition**

There is no doubt that climate change represents the key challenge of our age, transforming ecosystems, economies, and societies with deep and frequently calamitous effects. The worldwide green transition is more than an ecological necessity; it embodies humanity's answer to a crisis that jeopardizes our collective future. The stakes are monumental, and the choices we make today will determine whether this transformative era leads to progress or exacerbates inequality.

This transition will produce winners and losers as it takes place. Nations abundant in green resources and industries ready to innovate are strategically positioned for success, whereas economies reliant on fossil fuels and underperforming industries confront considerable upheaval. Especially in developing countries, at-risk communities are threatened with lagging progress as they suffer the worst effects of climate change without sufficient means for adaptation.

However, these inequalities are not unavoidable. Taking action that is inclusive and proactive can help lessen the most severe of these disparities. With an emphasis on worldwide collaboration, fair financing methods, and thorough policies that cater to the needs of every stakeholder, the green transition can promote global equity. It is essential to redirect investments into renewable technologies, aid developing countries in adapting to climate change, and establish just transition programs for workers in shrinking industries to achieve this aim.

The urgency cannot be overstated. Delaying more reduces the time available for effective action, thereby bringing us closer to the dire consequences of surpassing the carbon budget and reaching critical points in climate systems. The advancements we have seen—innovative technologies, heightened public awareness, and global pledges—provide a basis for optimism.

While the transition to a sustainable and equitable future is achievable, it necessitates a united commitment from all segments of society: governments, industries, and individuals alike. Policymakers must take strong action to put climate agreements into practice and ensure compliance with them. At the same time, businesses must quickly shift their focus to environmentally friendly innovations. Simultaneously, people can promote change using advocacy, voting, and incorporating sustainable practices into their everyday routines.

We are at a crucial juncture. The decisions we make today will resonate across generations, shaping the world we bequeath. It is still possible to create a future in which humanity flourishes alongside the planet, but we must act immediately. We can only turn the green transition into a just and sustainable reality for everyone by adopting measures that are bold, inclusive, and urgent.

# THE BREAKDOWN OF INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTIONS AND THE FALL OF THE WESTPHALIAN SYSTEM<sup>1</sup>

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There has been significant discussion regarding the inability of international institutions to deal with the big problems that the world is currently experiencing. Most observers agree that the world is facing multifaceted challenges that humanity should address as a global community, but the institutions through which the global community would express itself are incapable of both developing solutions and organizing the community to address them. As a result, they argue that international institutions, which were created under the Westphalian system and have played an important role in organizing the international community for action since 1648, are in fact failing.

International organizations are indeed failing to assist us in addressing numerous global concerns. However, before we assign guilt to one or more elements of the international system, we must first pose a series of questions. First and foremost, what was the Westphalian system? Next, were existing international organizations built to meet the requirements of this system? More importantly, is the system now working and being challenged, or has this always been the case? There are further questions, and the reader may think of more, but let us start with these.

The reader may recall that Europe saw a prolonged period of conflict between 1618 and 1648, during which the forces of the Holy Roman Empire, backed by the Catholic Church, claimed unlimited sovereignty over a variety of kingdoms, many with protestant majorities. The latter argued that each state would exercise sovereignty over the territory it ruled, rejecting the Holy Roman Empire's claim supported by the Roman Catholic Church, that it was the supreme sovereign. After decades of fighting that destroyed Central Europe and claimed many lives, the empire came to an end, and the church was forced to declare that each state, regardless of size or population, would be the ultimate sovereign within its borders or territory. This legal principle claimed that states were equal since other governments could not interfere in their internal affairs.

The Thirty Years War and the Westphalian system of states it established have been analysed on a variety of levels. Some historians have described it as an accord created by the political conditions of the period, making it unique to that time and place, whereas others have attempted to ascribe it a universal quality that has affected world politics ever since. We do not intend to participate in such debates, but rather to point out that the system produced two legal principles that have played an important role in shaping international politics ever since: state sovereignty in its own territory and legal equality of states within the international system. These two principles have been observed in the formation of international institutions since then, but whether

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<sup>1</sup> I would like to thank Mr. Selim Yenel who read an earlier version of this paper and suggested improvements.

they have been observed in practice, that is, in how states engage with one another, is debatable. More specifically, at the political level, Westphalian principles have always been challenged to the point where, while they have been considered and observed in appearance, they have not been able to escape the reality of power differences among states and the resulting differences in state behavior toward one another.

## **The Incongruities Between Westphalian Principles and State Behaviour**

Each independent state seeks to persuade other states to do what it wants and not to do what it does not want. They use whatever means are available to them, ranging from simple persuasion to using brutal force. Westphalian principles that states are equal with one another and that each state is sovereign in its own territory so that others may not interfere with what it does (non-interference in the domestic affairs of others) are regularly tested due to differences in size, resource, power, and, equally importantly, policy and goal. It may be beneficial to investigate the sources of these strains more thoroughly.

Let us start with some broad observations:

1. Larger and/or stronger states have influenced smaller and/or weaker states' conduct by granting material or non-material rewards for conformity, as well as deprivation for opposition.
2. Larger powers have used force, including armed intervention, to influence smaller or weaker states' actions. In these cases, we are not referring to intervening in a country's internal affairs, but rather acts that a larger and/or stronger state may employ to elicit the desired response from the smaller or weaker.

The examples of the phenomena raised in points 1 and 2 abound, rendering it unnecessary to provide specific examples; instead, let the reader to recall those that he or she is familiar with. We do know, however, that states may opt for a more active involvement in other people's home matters in a number of ways in order to induce desired conduct. Here are several examples:

3. A state may form an alliance with a group in another state to support separatist claims, which might lead to the formation of a client state. For an example, consider how colonial powers approached the Ottoman Empire to increase their sphere of influence at the expense of the Sublime Porte. A quick study at Greek independence may be enlightening. As may be recalled, the concept of Greek independence was first articulated in Russia. At the time (the beginning of the nineteenth century), Czarist Russia sought to grow at the expense of the Ottoman Empire, not only to increase its territorial domain but also to reach the warm waters. When it became apparent that the move was gaining ground and local Greek organizations within the Ottoman Empire, backed by Russia, were generating support that the Sultan's government might not be able to resist, the British, who had been backing the territorial integrity of the Ottomans to ensure that the passageway to the Indian colony would be in friendly



hands, changed policy and became a supporter of Greek independence, judging that if a Greece were to be born, it should owe its birth to Great Britain rather than Russia. Cooperating with the Greek separatists was plainly an intervention in the Ottoman Empire's domestic affairs, but Russian and British interests were too prevalent to follow Westphalian ideals of non-interference in domestic matters. The outcome, as already said, was the establishment of the Greek state as a British client.

4. A state may form alliances with groups in another society to influence its policies. We may refer, by way of example, to the French connection with Lebanon's Maronite community. The French established close ties with the Maronites, who became affiliated with the Catholic Church, and leveraged this connection to become Lebanon's guardian. The French were able to influence domestic politics in the Empire, particularly those concerning the Syrian territory, knowing that they could manipulate the Maronite community if the Sublime Porte chose to dispute French preferences in the area

5. States have attempted to influence voting outcomes in elections and referenda in different nations to achieve the desired results. Currently, there is substantial debate regarding how some countries, most notably Russia, are attempting to influence voting behaviour in Western European countries and the United States. Such behaviour is considered unacceptable not only by the target countries, but also by the larger liberal democratic community to which they belong. However, covert and occasionally overt meddling in another country's politics to influence electoral outcomes is not a new phenomenon. We know that the Soviets used it extensively after WWII in Eastern European elections. Equally significant, however, during the Cold War, it was believed that the Communists might win national elections in Italy and, if in power, reveal NATO secrets to the Soviets. To avert such an outcome, certain NATO members, most notably the United States, but also other nations, provided material support, propaganda material and counsel to non-Communist parties, particularly the Christian Democrats, in order to prevent the Communists from winning elections. A similar worry surrounded Iceland for a brief period in the late 1950s.

Although points 1 and 2 may cover both territorial sovereignty (including territorial integrity) and state equality, we have thus far focused on state sovereignty inside borders as a legal ideal and how it has been ignored in practice in interstate interactions. It is common for a state to violate another state's territorial sovereignty in politics, either subtly or openly, while often paying lip service to the notion and denouncing others for doing so. The other ideal, state equality, has proven more difficult to overcome in practice, especially among governments with favourable relations and common policies, but it is also occasionally breached.

6. Stronger states may disregard international rules including Westphalian principles when it suits them, but will not tolerate similar behaviour from smaller or less powerful states, especially if not supported by a larger or more powerful state. We have seen numerous occasions in which the United States has attacked another country suspected of doing things that the Americans do not approve of. The US-led invasion of Saddam Hussein's Iraq (violation of territorial integrity) on the basis of unsubstantiated allegations that the country was building nuclear weapons is a prime

example. The same United States, on the other hand, started a war with Iraq when the latter invaded Kuwait claiming that Kuwait was traditionally part of Iraq but was taken away by colonialists. In this second instance, Iraq was presumably violating international law but America had not violated it in the first instance.

7. Larger governments seek favoured status in international institutions to overcome limits imposed by the principle of state equality. The United Nations Security Council is an exemplary illustration of this phenomena, with five countries out of nearly two hundred members given the power to prevent the body from adopting a resolution or settling on a course of action. For example, the United States has consistently vetoed all Security Council votes that would launch sanctions against Israel in its efforts to rid the Gaza Strip of Palestinians.

8. However, in many other cases, the notion of state equality has empowered smaller nations to undermine larger governments' aspirations to control international institutions. Greece, for example, threatened to halt the European Union's expansion into Eastern Europe if Cyprus was not included on the list of new members, despite the fact that its demand clearly violated the European Union principle that potential members should resolve territorial disputes with neighbours before being considered for membership.

9. The principle of state equality has led larger governments to form official or semi-official groups that exclude smaller ones, thus preventing their equal representation. The G-7 and G-20 are examples of groups with more particular goals, with only larger states invited to join as members.

Rather than continuing the subject, let me summarize: I attempted to establish that the two legal principles considered critical in the Westphalian order were routinely ignored by larger and more powerful countries in international affairs. Why is it that there appears to be a growing concern now that we are living in an era in which international institutions, like the Westphalian system, are failing?

## **The Expansion of the Global Community**

### **The Rise of Globalization**

Some analysts have ascribed the issues that the current system's international institutions face, including their dissolution, to the onset of globalization. We can begin our discussion by asking, "What is globalization?" The following definition, which is easily available on the internet, provides an effective overview of the phenomenon: "Globalization describes the growing interdependence of the world's economies, cultures, and populations, brought about by cross-border trade in goods and services, technology, and flows of investment, people, and information."

Why would globalization result in the dissolution of international institutions, followed by the collapse of the Westphalian system? It might be claimed that globalization has

reduced the relevance of states as autonomous decision makers in the international system by limiting the domain in which they make decisions as interdependence grows.

It should also be noted that many international entities beyond the power of particular nations, such as significant international corporations or international non-governmental organizations have been born that have no place in the Westphalian system which views the state as the principal actor in international politics.

Finally, and more importantly, the world is facing several global challenges that individual governments are unable to address, owing to their primary focus on pursuing their narrowly defined self-interests. As a result, they refuse to cooperate and appear incapable of dealing with global issues. Until and unless the Westphalian presupposition of the state as the major actor in international politics is abandoned, the world will be unable to address its common problems.

While the concept that globalization is rendering the Westphalian system inoperable is appealing, it is unclear whether it is the primary problem. After all, globalization is currently receding rather than progressing. Major countries have learned that globalization may be harming them by flooding their markets with low-cost products from elsewhere. Supposedly, it is also compromising their security, it is driving investments to developing markets, it is encouraging emigration to more prosperous countries, etc. In other words, the present trend appears to be anti-globalization. While not all features of globalization may be eliminated as a result of the anti-globalization policies that major countries have begun to apply in recent years, it appears that the speed of globalization is slowing significantly. It is also clear that other trends, such as the freer movement of capital and goods around the world, will be subject to more stringent controls. As a result, it may be prudent to investigate other developments that can help us comprehend the emergence of the current era, which is marked by an oncoming breakdown in international relations, including the collapse of the Westphalian system.

## **The Rise of New Powers**

The current international order and its institutional framework was developed by the United States after the Second World War. The world was divided into two camps, and the Cold War had begun. The United States had assumed leadership of the so-called Free World, which was primarily made up of Western European countries that had suffered greatly as a result of the war and were waiting for the United States to help repair the war's damage and rebuild them as economically prosperous societies. This order, which includes the United Nations, international economic institutions such as the IMF and the IBRD (World Bank), the WTO (which took decades to become a real organization), and security arrangements such as NATO and SEATO, were primarily developed by Washington and serves its interests.

Not surprisingly, the conditions that led to the establishment of the United States led order evolved over time. During this process, when an agency stopped serving

Washington's interests, it soon became less relevant for the United States. The United Nations, for example, was regarded as a significant institution at first when it demonstrated the ability to conduct even the Korean War under its auspices. However, the organization expanded to such an extent that the United States could no longer command it and secure support for all of its policies and initiatives. This prompted it to downplay the influence of the United Nations in its foreign policy. Furthermore, Washington was forced to utilize its veto power in the Security Council on a regular basis to prevent the organization from doing anything it opposed, rendering the organization ineffective in the process.

Even in NATO, where other members relied heavily on Washington's nuclear deterrent for safety, some countries pursued policies that differed from those of the United States as the danger of a nuclear challenge from Russia receded. The system that the United States established after World War II appears to have failed not only to suit the interests of rising states and allies of the United States, but also to serve even American interests effectively. Such trends have nowadays led to the rise of different leaders as in the person of Donald Trump, who states that he will withdraw the United States from several institutions of the post-World War II system because he deems them to be damaging to American interests.

Meanwhile, new actors such as China, India, and Brazil, among others, are making their presence felt in the international system, but they are not represented in international institutions in ways they believe they deserve. The formation of BRICS, for example, allows countries such as India and Brazil to express their displeasure with being excluded from the centers of global economic decision-making and relying on the dollar as the primary international payment medium, a reality from which the United States benefits greatly. From an Indian perspective, it is difficult to understand why France and Britain have permanent seats and veto rights in the United Nations, whereas India is not even guaranteed a seat. Similarly, China, which accounts for about 20% of global production and is a big player in international commerce, believes that the dollar should not be the basic unit used in international payments. On the other hand, the newly emerging countries appear to be unanimous in their belief that the global governance structure should be modified to reflect the power realities of our day better.

## **The Problem of Equality**

In addition to challenges caused by change, which we have discussed in various ways previously, we may specifically identify a persistent problem that the Westphalian ideal of state equality produces, notably in international institutions, often leading to their paralysis. Many international organizations require unanimous decision-making on crucial issues such as what the organization will do and whether to accept new members. This regulation gives enormous influence to any individual member who disagrees with what the organization intends to do because they have the ability to block choices. This easily renders such organizations paralyzed and therefore ineffective. As previously said, a very powerful member may be able to exert enough pressure on other members to submit to the former's preferences, but on many occasions, the

result is nothing more than organizational stagnation. This is more likely to occur when the membership is diverse and includes many large and small members. The rule of equality appears to be at the root of the European Union's status as a minor player in international politics, despite the fact that its members collectively wield tremendous economic and political power. There is currently no persuasive evidence that this Westphalian concept of equality of states will be modified when the globe eventually adjusts to the changing global power dynamics.

## Conclusion

The international system's institutions, many of which were formed in accordance with Westphalian ideals, look to be breaking down. While this may be due in part to the world's recent globalization process, a more important factor appears to be a shift in the composition of the global community of nations, with new states emerging as power centers and feeling underrepresented in the post-World War II order established by the United States. The newcomers question the existing system and its assumptions, harshly criticize some of its institutions, and sometimes even set up new ones. They will most likely continue to do so until they conclude that the global governance system provides them with a better possibility of representation and engagement in the activities of the global. After this is completed, we may have a set of more stable international institutions, but such an order is likely to be ephemeral because global change never ends.

The issue at the moment appears to be that all international institutions are under pressure to become more inclusive rather than Western-dominated. Demands for change are raging. These factors do not encourage stability. Whatever order arises, it will not be bereft of the two primary Westphalian principles however, because all states, in principle, believe in full territorial sovereignty and non-intervention in their affairs. Smaller states, on the other hand, will also continue to demand legal equality. No solution has yet been developed to adequately address size and power variations between states.

To summarize, the international system is under pressure to change, but whatever new system emerges will most likely adhere to the two legal principles that the Westphalian system established as inseparable components of international politics, even though these principles have frequently been and will continue to be ignored in practice.

# THE RETURN OF TRUMP

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The 2024 U.S. Presidential Election can be described as the most extraordinary election in the country's history. For the first time since the 19th century, a former president has returned to the White House—this time with a dramatic political swing: Republican Donald J. Trump, who lost the 2020 election to Democrat Joe Biden by a margin of 7.5 million votes, won this time by a margin of 2.5 million votes.

Moreover, no previous American leader has been as controversial—both politically and personally—nor has the country experienced such extreme polarization. For the first time, Trump faced an opponent from two minority groups—Kamala Harris, the Vice President and former Senator from California. This election represented a clash between two completely opposing worldviews: on one side, radical/authoritarian nationalism, and on the other, liberal democracy. Unprecedented terms such as 'dictatorship,' 'mass deportation,' and 'domestic enemies' dominated the discourse of the American election campaign. There were two assassination attempts on Trump, heightening concerns over political violence and reinforcing the electorate's awareness of the election's high stakes. Until the final moments, polls indicated a neck-and-neck race between the two candidates. However, instead of the anticipated days-long vote counting process, the results emerged as a decisive victory for one candidate—and consequently, a clear defeat for the other.

Out of the 538 Electoral College votes, Trump secured 312, while Harris received 226, so the Republicans gained an absolute majority in both the Senate and the House of Representatives. With 6 of the 9 Supreme Court justices being conservatives—three appointed by Trump in his first term—Trump will assume office as the 47th President with significant power and strong backing from both the legislative and judicial branches, despite the checks and balances in the U.S. political system.

How did this become possible? What lies ahead for America and the world? Since every political phenomenon result from multiple factors, let us first briefly examine the reasons behind Trump's re-election before making predictions about the future.

## Reasons for Trump's Election

These reasons can be categorized into three groups: **historical/cultural**, **structural**, and **current/contextual** factors.

## Historical/Cultural Reasons

When we look at the basic elements that make up American political culture, we see that Puritan Protestants, who fled the oppressive authority of the Anglican Church and arrived in the New World in search of religious freedom, played a leading role in the founding of the country. As a result, the concept of “moral righteousness” was established as a guiding principle not only in American political and social life but also as a moral compass for the rest of the world. The belief that the U.S. is a nation blessed by God eventually evolved into the idea of “American exceptionalism.” The seeds of religiously driven conservative nationalism were thus sown early in American history. The U.S., under its First President, George Washington, translated its geographical isolation from Europe into a policy of political isolationism. In his farewell address in 1796, Washington advised the nation to avoid the dark political intrigues and power struggles of the Old World (i.e., Europe) and to maintain relationships with those nations purely for commercial purposes. Indeed, even today, since World War I, the United States has always experienced periods of introversion after long-term foreign interventions such as World War II, Vietnam, Iraq, and Afghanistan. While this tendency has led to a decline in geopolitical influence, it remains a persistent feature of American foreign policy, transcending different administrations.

According to the renowned historian Walter Russell Mead, there are four primary schools of thought that have shaped American foreign policy, each inspired by a historical figure and emphasizing a different priority. Firstly, Wilsonianism, inspired by President Woodrow Wilson, advocates for securing democracy and human rights globally. Hamiltonianism, influenced by Alexander Hamilton, the first Secretary of the Treasury and founder of the Federal Reserve, emphasizes the primacy of economic interests in foreign policy. Jeffersonianism, reflecting the views of President Thomas Jefferson, warns against foreign interventionism as it strengthens the security state domestically and argues that protecting American democracy requires a non-interventionist approach. Jacksonianism, inspired by Andrew Jackson, the seventh U.S. president and the first populist leader, promotes a militaristic and nationalist foreign policy centered on national interests. Throughout American history, these schools have alternately dominated or coexisted.

It is clear that elements such as religiously driven conservative nationalism, isolationism, Jacksonianism, and Hamiltonian economic priorities are among the deep-rooted historical and ideological factors that contributed to Trump’s election. It is important to note that Trump’s isolationism is primarily military in nature. While he avoids deploying troops abroad, he aggressively employs political pressure tactics wherever necessary. Trump’s America is to abandon value-based policies, focusing solely on pragmatic national interests. Moreover, this isolationism is extremely selective. The most important proof of this is the prioritization of Asia over the traditional strategic ally Europe.



## Structural Reasons

Beyond historical and cultural factors, the structure of the American electoral system also contributed to Trump's victory. The Electoral College, a mechanism dating back to the 18th century and often criticized as an outdated anomaly, consists of "Great Electors" allocated proportionally based on each state's population. The total number of Electoral College votes (538) corresponds to the combined membership of Congress—438 Representatives and 100 Senators.

In presidential elections, the "winner-take-all" system applies in most states: the candidate who receives the majority of votes in a state wins all of that state's electoral votes. To become president, a candidate must secure at least 270 electoral votes, representing an absolute majority. Thus, what matters is not the total number of popular votes nationwide, but the total number of Electoral votes won across the states. So, whether the difference is one vote or millions of votes, each State provides a fixed number of Electors for the winner.<sup>1</sup> Therefore, the number of states to be won is very important. Furthermore, apart from the traditionally Republican Midwest and southern states and the traditionally Democratic coastal and northern states, the "swing states," whose stance changes in each election, play a key role in determining the results, because the larger number of Republican states is roughly offset by the higher population of Democratic states.

In this election, Trump won all seven swing states—Pennsylvania, Georgia, North Carolina, Wisconsin, Michigan, Arizona, and Nevada—securing a total of 93 electoral votes. He also won the popular vote with a margin of 2,475,676 votes.

## Current/Contextual Reasons

When it comes to the current and contextual factors, first comes the global rise of conservative nationalism, Islamophobia, and racism across the Western world; followed by, secondly, the inflation and economic impact of mass migration, particularly from the Global South, fueling isolationist tendencies, economic nationalism, and protectionism; and thirdly, growing opposition to political elites and *woke* (racial and class egalitarianism) culture, which emphasizes racial and class equality. Lastly, the success of right-wing populist leaders who have convinced the public that traditional liberal policies cannot solve these issues, reflecting the 'spirit of the times'. Trump's extreme rhetoric, which defied societal norms and openly expressed what many secretly thought, made him a polarizing figure with a negative charisma. His discourse appealed to the subconscious frustrations of the white, religious, rural, and less-educated middle-lower class, creating resentment that blamed "the other" for their hardships. This "othering" included globalists, liberals, minorities, political elites, immigrants, and the LGBTQ+ community, fueling unprecedented polarization in American society. Notably, Latino voters, who traditionally supported Democrats, and rural African-American men shifted significantly toward the Republican camp in this

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<sup>1</sup> For example, in 2016, Hillary Clinton received 232 electoral votes despite receiving 3 million more votes than Trump, while Trump won with 306 electoral votes.



election. While the economy was the main factor, these groups also felt threatened by mass immigration, perceiving it as a challenge to their integration into the majority.

In addition to grassroots support, big business and conservative intellectuals formed the elite base of Trump's electorate. Tech giants played a role in supporting Trump directly or indirectly, with Elon Musk actively engaging in campaign efforts and investing millions in propaganda through his companies. Jeff Bezos, owner of The Washington Post, has altered its longstanding tradition once known as 'the newspaper that brought down Nixon,' with this legendarily democratic newspaper remaining neutral in the elections under his ownership. Social media influencers and podcasters have also helped turn a segment of young people towards Trump this time.<sup>2</sup> The allegations of Russian interference and support that led to an investigation into Trump following his first election were again on the agenda, although this time less prominently so.<sup>3</sup> In this context, the statement made by Nikolay Patrushev, Vladimir Putin's advisor and former head of Russia's intelligence service (FSB), to the newspaper Kommersant is quite telling: "In order to win the election, Donald Trump received the support of certain powers, and has consequent obligations. As a responsible individual, he must fulfill them."<sup>4</sup>

As for the opposing camp, President Biden withdrew from the race 107 days before the election, and due to time constraints, the new candidate Kamala Harris had to hastily take over the campaign without going through an internal party contest—thus running as a relatively unknown vice president against a very well-known former president. Despite her extensive professional and political experience, several factors are cited as contributing to her defeat: she was a woman belonging to two minorities in a society that was becoming increasingly conservative; she struggled to articulate concrete plans for addressing the economy—particularly the rising food and housing costs that affect everyone; she initially avoided the press; she did not fully distance herself from Biden's support for Israel in the Gaza war and failed to propose a clear solution for the Palestinians; she adopted an overly moderate stance in an attempt to attract mainstream Republican voters but still placed significant emphasis on identity politics (such as gay and trans rights) that ran counter to their views; and she was unable to provide a clear answer regarding how hers would differ from the Biden administration.

As a result, it was not Trump who has won significantly more votes—indeed, this time the popular vote tally did not differ substantially from 2020—but rather Democrats who have received fewer.

In short, on one side, the main themes were the economy and immigration; on the other, the focus was on the right to abortion and the protection of democratic values.

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<sup>2</sup> Trump said he came into contact with the latter through his younger son, Barron.

<sup>3</sup> John Kirby, the US State Department National Security Spokesman, humorously expressed this by saying, "Three things are certain in life: death, taxes, and Russian intervention." Intelligence units and Microsoft announced that many Russian hacker groups were active in this election as well.

<sup>4</sup> News from the Russian TASS agency, [tass.com](https://tass.com), November 11, 2024.

Recognizing that the abortion ban might cost them the election, the Trump campaign softened its rhetoric on the issue toward the end.<sup>5</sup> Nevertheless, public belief that Trump would improve the economy and support for his immigration policy remained consistently strong.

What is often overlooked is that today's challenges largely stem from the pandemic economy inherited by the Biden administration. By contrast, the first Trump administration benefited from the positive indicators carried over from the Obama era. Another point is the inevitable economic contraction that would result from the deportation of 11 to 13 million undocumented immigrants. Moreover, the concept of forced relocation and its humanitarian consequences would itself damage the democratic image of the United States—a separate issue in its own right.

## What Comes Next?

Trump's political and economic agenda is based on the 900-page report titled "Project 2025: A Mandate for Leadership," prepared by the conservative think tank Heritage Foundation. Although Trump has not openly endorsed this document—which generally presents views more radical than the official Republican Party platform—about 150 of his advisors contributed to its preparation, and their names are listed in the report's introduction. In fact, the Foundation's president, Kevin Roberts, has described Project 2025 as the "institutionalization of Trumpism." The report is considered a roadmap for Trump's second term, reflecting the ideology of the illiberal right.

Project 2025 outlines four key political goals:

1. Placing the family at the center of American society.
2. Dismantling the administrative structure of the "deep state" to restore sovereignty to the American people.
3. Protecting the nation's sovereignty, borders, and wealth against foreign threats.
4. Securing personal freedoms, seen as divine gifts, and ensuring life according to the "blessings of liberty" outlined in the Constitution.

Within this framework, several measures are foreseen:

- Placement of - in accordance with the 'unitary executive theory,'- all federal agencies, particularly the Department of Justice, under direct political control. This could lead to the dismissal of thousands of civil servants through the reimplementation of Annex F, a directive from Trump's first term that Biden had revoked;
- Regulation of health and family life according to "Biblical principles";
- Mass deportation of undocumented immigrants;

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<sup>5</sup> In 2022, the Supreme Court—whose majority was composed of conservative justices appointed by Trump during his previous term—overturned *Roe v. Wade*, the ruling that had legalized abortion in the 1970s, and left the matter to the individual states.

- Tax cuts for individuals and particularly institutions, accompanied by an increase in tariffs;
- The elimination of “harmful political orientations” from educational programs;
- Cuts within healthcare, social security, and welfare programs;
- Loosening of environmental regulations to promote industrial growth.

In addition to these policies, Trump has stated that he would penalize his political and legal opponents—if this is not merely campaign rhetoric—a claim that has already caused concern in some circles. Unlike his first term, Trump’s new team is composed of much more radical conservative figures, and his young Vice President, J.D. Vance is already seen as the future heir of the MAGA (Make America Great Again) movement.

## Foreign Policy

Project 2025<sup>6</sup> promotes a foreign policy aligned with the “America First” doctrine, emphasizing U.S. supremacy in the international system. The approach seeks to sideline multilateralism and international institutions, favoring unilateral action whenever possible. While not fully isolationist, it is aligned with the Jacksonian tradition, advocating for international intervention only when direct national interests are at stake.

The report uses demonizing language when discussing China, referring to it as a “malicious giant” and stating that the U.S. will protect its political and economic interests through an aggressive-defensive strategy. As part of this approach, unprecedented tariffs of up to 60% are planned on Chinese imports. This economic protectionism will also cover European countries, with projected tariffs of around 20% expected to cause economic disruptions. For example, the President of the German Central Bank, Joachim Nagel, has estimated that this could cost Germany at least 1% of its economic output.

Trump, who has promised to “end all wars,” believes that Kyiv is losing the war, that the territories occupied by Russia will not be regained, and that the conflict imposes an enormous financial burden on the U.S. (an estimated \$80 billion over three years). Thus, instead of continuing support, he favors imposing a rapid resolution on the parties involved.

After the election, Trump appointed Lieutenant General Keith Kellogg—who previously served as National Security Advisor to Vice President Mike Pence—as Special Envoy for Ukraine. Kellogg advocates for continued support of Ukraine’s self-defense until negotiations begin. He also suggests easing sanctions on Russia, indefinitely postponing Ukraine’s NATO membership, and using taxes on Russian energy exports to fund Ukraine’s reconstruction. Meanwhile, Vice President J.D. Vance has stated that

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<sup>6</sup> *Project 2025 Presidential Transition Project*. <https://www.project2025.org/>.

occupied Eastern Ukraine should be demilitarized, that Ukraine should remain neutral, and that the region should be fortified against potential future threats. Although the global media speculates that the U.S. may abandon Ukraine, shifting the burden of support to Europe, it is questionable whether Europe's military capabilities are sufficient to fill the gap.

Since his first term, Trump has maintained a critical and distant stance toward NATO. Some believe he may even sever ties with the Alliance during his second term. John Bolton, Trump's former National Security Advisor (2018–2019), is among those who are certain that the U.S. will withdraw from NATO if Trump remains in office. The prevailing view, however, is that Trump will not formally leave NATO but will effectively place it in "deep freeze" while undermining the binding nature of Article 5, the collective defense clause. Trump has repeatedly stated that allies who fail to meet their financial obligations to the Alliance will not be defended in the event of an attack. This possibility has sparked new debates in Europe, with suggestions that Germany should become a nuclear power to compensate for the limited capabilities of France's and the U.K.'s nuclear forces.<sup>7</sup>

According to Elbridge Colby, a key figure shaping Trump's security and defense policies, "no alliance is sacred; everyone must do their part." He argues that this approach could actually prompt Europe to become a more independent security actor.<sup>8</sup> However, today, the divisions within Europe and the growing number of right-wing governments—many of which sympathize with Trump and, in some cases, Russia—may, according to European Union expert Nathalie Tocci, hinder the EU from reaching a consensus on this matter. This, in the context of the ongoing Ukraine war, poses a significant risk for Europe.<sup>9</sup>

Trump's position on the ongoing Gaza War, triggered by the October 7, 2023 Hamas attack on Israel, remains unclear. While he has consistently provided unconditional support to Israel, how he plans to end the conflict is uncertain. When Netanyahu's government was given a completely free hand and the defeat of Iran and its proxies was regarded as certain, the collapse of the Assad regime in Syria also contributed to this outcome. The military infrastructure left behind by the Hezbollah- and Iran-backed Damascus regime was destroyed by Israeli airstrikes. In the Middle East, the Iran-backed axis of resistance—comprising Hamas, Hezbollah, and the Houthi movement, all supported by Russia—has largely collapsed. Meanwhile, Turkey, which has backed anti-Assad forces in Syria, is generally considered to have emerged victorious against this bloc.<sup>10</sup> Also, Trump's statement, declaring: "Syria is not our fight; whoever takes

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<sup>7</sup> Steven Pifer, "Could NATO survive a second Trump administration?", *Brookings Commentary*, Center on the US and Europe, *Project Election '24*, Brookings Institution, Washington DC, June 25, 2024.

<sup>8</sup> Ravi Agrawal, "Decoding Trump's Foreign Policy," *Foreign Policy*, July 31, 2024.

<sup>9</sup> Nathalie Tocci, "Europe Is Not Ready for Trump," *Foreign Policy*, July 1, 2024.

<sup>10</sup> Vali Nasr, "In Post-Assad Middle East, Iran's Loss Is Turkey's Gain," *Foreign Policy*, 10 Aralık 2024. Gönül Tol, "How Turkey Won the Syrian Civil War," *Foreign Affairs*, December 11, 2024.

over is not a friend of America,” can be a signal for a potential withdrawal of the limited U.S. forces still present in the region. The consequences of this power vacuum in the region remain uncertain, but Trump’s remarks suggesting that Syria is within Turkey’s natural sphere of influence have drawn attention. Regarding the plight of Palestinian civilians, the primary victims of the Gaza conflict, there is no clear sign of hope for their future.

In the context of Turkey-U.S. relations, the general expectation is that President Trump’s good personal rapport with President Erdoğan will lead to a renewed period in which direct communication with the White House can be maintained. Indeed, immediately after his election, President Erdoğan was among the first leaders whose congratulatory call has been welcomed by Trump. Shortly thereafter, he indeed has referred to President Erdoğan as a smart and strong leader he respected. However, it is important to remember that during Trump’s first term, the U.S. imposed sanctions on Turkey over the purchase of Russian S-400 missiles. Additionally, tensions escalated over the detention of Pastor Andrew Brunson, linked to the Gülen movement, as well as the U.S.’s military cooperation with the YPG/PYD against DAESH in Syria, with Trump using threatening rhetoric toward Ankara. Moreover, the President’s latest appointments indicate that Secretary of State, former Florida Senator Marco Rubio, has in the past been a figure critical of Turkey on issues such as human rights and democracy, the presence of the Turkish Armed Forces (TSK) in Syria, Armenian genocide claims, the opening of Maraş and the two-state solution in Cyprus. Moreover, the National Security Advisor, Florida Representative Michael Waltz, is a member of the Kurdish Caucus in Congress and has expressed positive views toward both Iraqi Kurds and the PYD/YPG. Given Trump’s impulsive and unpredictable nature, it remains unclear how much weight he will place on these factors in his dealings with Turkey. However, in the era where personal leadership dynamics often overshadow formal policy, it is always possible for leaders with “compatible chemistry” to find common ground. The only concrete data we have at the moment is that, in Elbridge Colby’s words, “transactionality in line with purely US interests” will continue to determine Trump’s foreign policy. Tom Barrack, a Lebanese-American, who was announced as a candidate for the US Ambassadorship to Ankara, is not a career diplomat but the founder of an investment company called Colony Capital.

The election of Donald J. Trump as the 47th President of the United States signals significant changes for American democracy, global geopolitical balances, and the rules-based liberal international order that the U.S. has led since World War II. Indeed, the first executive orders signed by Trump immediately after his inauguration serve as the most concrete evidence of this shift.

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