

## Trump: Anomaly or Herald of a New Geopolitical Order?

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**Abstract.** The aim of this discussion forum is to understand whether the Donald Trump administration in the United States is an anomaly in the geopolitical order that emerged after the Cold War or whether it heralds a new geopolitical order. Currently, global power is characterized by a profound transformation in its forms and actors. There is no longer a single geometry of power based exclusively on the hegemony of great powers or on the classic struggle for territorial spheres of influence. Instead, we are witnessing the coexistence of multiple geometries—territorial, digital, financial, and logistical—that are constantly intertwined and reconfigured. The United States, China, Russia, and the European Union remain central actors, but their capacity for control is limited by global interdependence, the emergence of middle powers, and the influence of non-state actors, such as corporations, international organizations, and social movements. The resurgence of nationalist and protectionist policies, exemplified by the «America First» doctrine and the imposition of tariffs, has weakened the rules-based liberal international order and fostered more open competition for strategic resources and areas of influence. However, globalization, digital networks, and transnational flows of capital, information, and people challenge the rigidity of borders. So, has conflict intensified over cooperation in the current geopolitical order? Or are we definitively witnessing an irreversible transformation of the geopolitical order, even though the geometry of global power remains open and uncertain?

**Keywords.** geopolitical transition; geopolitical order; geometry of global power; hegemony; Trump's administration.

**Outline.** The New «Geometries» of Global Power (John Agnew). Trump: Destroyer and Builder of Geopolitical World Order and the Meaning of Peace (Colin Flint). Towards a hypocritical geopolitics? (Virginie Mamadouh). Alter-geopolitics today: we have whistles (Sara Koopman). The Political «Geometries» of Climate Change (Simon Dalby). New Geopolitical Disorders: The Centre Should not Hold (Jo Sharp). Security Anxiety and the Restlessness of America's Wars (Xiaobo Su). Trump Doctrine and the Global South: The Decline of Liberal International Rule-Based Order or New Geometries of Geopolitical Order? (Ernest Tooichi Aniche). The New Geometries of Middle Powers as Seen from East Asia (Takashi Yamazaki). Trump 2.0: Transactional hegemonic domination, areas of influence, and variable geometries of power (Jaime A. Preciado Coronado). World Political Map as an Optical Illusion (Igor Okunev). What Comes Next? Four Possible World Orders (Reece Jones). References.

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## The New «Geometries» of Global Power<sup>1</sup>

John Agnew

The President of the United States in 2025 gave a priority to attacking his domestic political adversaries and began to withdraw the United States from the range of longstanding policies around the world (foreign aid, lowering tariffs on traded goods, supporting allies and international organizations, etc.) that have characterized US foreign policy for many years (e.g., Kimmage, 2025; Sandbu, 2025). This retreat from deploying «soft power» would seem to mark a profound shift in the relationship between the US and the rest of the world (e.g., Cooley and Nexon, 2025). At the same time and worldwide, many other governments are also increasingly hostile to the relatively open national economies and the retreat from interstate territorial aggression that came with the globalization sponsored by successive US governments since the 1970s and increasingly questioned by nationalist-populist politicians and their movements (Agnew and Shin, 2020). Is the world on the brink of a new geopolitical era marked by a dramatic and singular shift in the shape or «geometry

1. Received on 31 December 2025.

of global power» (drawing on the terminology of Massey (1999)) equivalent to those at the beginning of the geopolitical periods of inter-imperial rivalry (1875-1945) or the Cold War (1945-1991) (Agnew, 2026b)? In this brief article I suggest that it is too soon to tell and the likelihood of a straightforward recapitulation of a past era as a replacement for the present is very unlikely.

How best then to understand recent trends in the ways political-economic power is playing out across the world? «Classical geopolitics,» dating from the period of inter-imperial rivalry is undergoing something of a revival to use as a justification in relation to presumptive grand strategies pursued by the so-called Great Powers (e.g., Brands, 2023; Guzzini, 2012; Tjalve, 2020). The US, China, and Russia, in particular, are viewed increasingly as desiring to divide the world into spheres of influence in which each would exercise a regional hegemony, sometimes on the basis of the old sea power versus land power trope (e.g., Payne, 2025). Trump openly endorses his own «corollary» to the Monroe Doctrine of intervening across the Western Hemisphere, from potentially annexing Greenland to waging war in Venezuela and beyond (Grandin, 2025; Wallace-Wells, 2025). The notion of spheres of influence is newly infectious. Historically, the word «geopolitics» had come to stand for the explicit conduct of foreign policies that are unsentimental, based in the «realities» of the world's physical geography—particularly the opposition between land and sea powers—and the singular «interests» of the states into which the world is divided, particularly the militarily most powerful of them, and designed as part of grand strategies that can replace the mere pragmatism and political maneuvering that prevail without geopolitical insight (e.g., Bongiovanni, 2024).

## The Pluralist Present

Recently, however, even with the classical revival, the scope of the term geopolitics—now as a signifier for the geography of broader political-economic changes—has become much wider (e.g. Boria and Marconi, 2022). Newspaper headlines and social media feeds announce the «geopolitics of this» and «the geopolitics of that.» At best the term refers to placing foreign-policy issues in their geographical context. This means situating not just the actions of states, particularly the most powerful ones, but also those of a wide range of actors in businesses and organizations of various stripes, regulatory and administrative, in terms of the physical infrastructures and political structures of global relationships. Offshore financial havens such as the Cayman Islands, Qatar, and Panama still shelter the assets of wealthy individuals from taxation back home (see, e.g., Obermayer and Obermaier, 2016) and multinational businesses focus increasingly on the resilience and diversification of their supply chains to protect against the ad hoc imposition of tariffs (e.g. Vietnam and Mexico substitute for China) (O'Neil, 2025).

Trump, of course, is notoriously «commercial» in his approach to world politics from his understanding of negotiation garnered from a career in commercial real estate and television to his predilection for rewarding personal/political friends (including pardoning convicted big-shot drug dealers and fraudsters) and punishing putative enemies at home and abroad (Wedel, 2025; Ganesh, 2025; Wiggins, Miller and Palma, 2025). Other contemporary «strongman» rulers are also infamously transactional and concerned about retaining their domestic audiences by addressing their sense of victimhood rather than pursuing classical geopolitical objectives (Hronesova and Kreiss, 2024; Kotkin, 2026). Trump's nationalist credentials as a global tycoon are particularly thin for someone whose electoral appeal is based in large part on an «America First» approach to the world. Criminal organizations engaged in drug and human trafficking, and the massive money laundering this entails, are also intrinsic to this world order (Galeotti, 2025). Geopolitics thus now can refer to any deployment of power over space in various modalities and by a range of different agents, and can involve authority, seduction, manipulation, and assent as well as domination through coercion.

The geographical processes involved in deployments of power over space can be viewed as new «geometries» of power (Massey, 1999), to distinguish this broader usage from the classical uses of «geopolitics.» To Doreen Massey (1999: 23) humans «are constantly making and re-making the time-spaces through which we live our lives» ... so just as there was never ... «some massive and absolute shift from a 'space of places' to a 'space of flows'» with globalization, so is there no

commensurate shift today «back» to a world of rigidly defined territories. In other words, the world is not yet one in which the so-called Great Powers, or following the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, the United States and its sponsorship of globalization alone, and rising powers such as China, once again call all of the shots globally. There are new *geometries* rather than a singular one.

## The Return of Territorial Geopolitics?

The main challenge to this pluralist view comes from the emergence, and around the world, of nationalist-populist politicians who have tapped into an increasingly powerful current of opinion hostile to the open economies associated with recent globalization in which flows of capital, goods, and raw materials challenged the notion of rigidly separated national-territorial economies. This backlash results, at least in the US and Western Europe, from such changes as the declining share of manufacturing jobs in overall employment (even when much of this is down to technological changes such as robotics rather than just jobs moving somewhere else), increasing domestic income and wealth inequality, anxiety about status in a context of increased foreign immigration, and cultural changes ascribed to foreign influences. Long established political parties on both left and right as conventionally classified now face dramatic increases in support for so-called zero-sum movements that appeal to resentments about immigration, intergenerational and class inequalities in wealth, and worries about the future both individually and collectively (Burn-Murdoch, 2025).

But, and ironically given the emphasis on reinvesting in a renewed national-territorial destiny, it also reflects the failure of most governments in the United States and Europe to live up to the promises made by political parties and their leading candidates. Most Americans, public opinion polls reveal, do not see governments as deserving of their trust or capable of solving their problems (Pew Research, 2025). This is the longstanding crisis of «the providential state» (Rosanvallon, 1981). It leads to putting your faith in figures such as Trump with a lifelong history of confidence trickery and selling himself by appealing to ethno-national identities and resentments against foreigners and immigrants as a substitute for actual coherent and well laid-out policies other than tax cuts for the rich (Stewart, 2025; Agnew, 2026a).

The net effect has been to produce trends towards increasing tariffs on imports (particularly by the second Trump government in the US), constructing walls and fences around national land borders, and limiting foreign exchanges of all sorts. This re-territorialization is particularly evident in the United States, if only because it was for many years the champion of lowering barriers to trade and exchange in part because of its opposition to the autarkic state socialism represented by the former Soviet Union and its apostles (Agnew, 2005). Territorial geopolitics, then, seems to be undergoing something of a revival wherever you look.

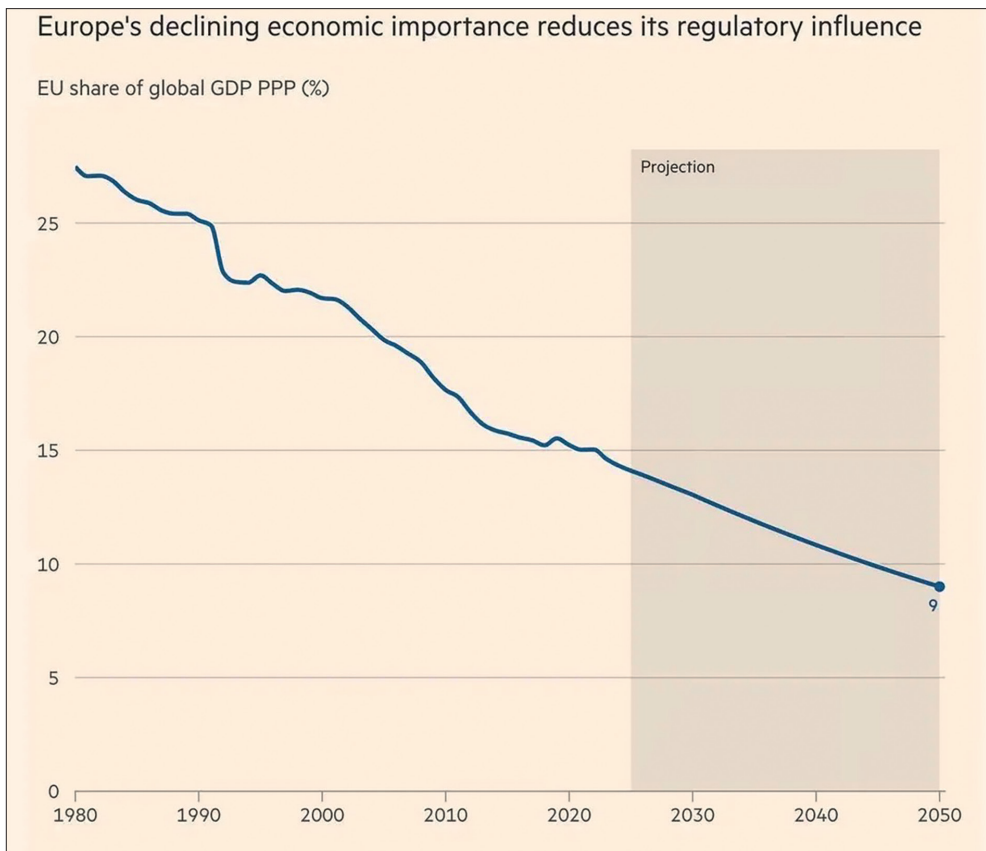
How has this mixed geopolitics of territories (or blocs of strategic space) and flows through networks played out over the past five years or so in this context of increased territorialization? Indeed, some commentators see a return since 2017-18 to the inter-imperial rivalry of the early twentieth century with rising economic protectionism worldwide and the likely abandonment of the commitment to an open world economy that were especially characteristic of US governments before 2017. The COVID-19 Pandemic of 2020-22 has encouraged this trend. Blame for the pandemic was widely put on China's government by that of the US, partly because the virus originated in China but more because of the lack of cooperation of the Chinese government with both the World Health Organization and foreign governments in addressing the causes of and spread of the virus.

At the same time, and more long term, in sectors seen as critical to future economic development such as electrical vehicles and artificial intelligence, to name just two, the US and China increasingly view one another as competitors and rivals rather than as potential mutual beneficiaries. Increasing tariffs to protect domestic industries and industrial policies to pump government funds into selected sectors have made a comeback in both the United States and Europe. The so-called Washington Consensus on lowering tariffs and shrinking government budgets is dissipating. At the same time, territorial disputes that had seemed to be out of sync with the times, such as that between Russia and some of its former sibling Soviet republics, such as Georgia and Ukraine, and

between China and Taiwan and China and India, also suggest a return to the pre-Cold War past (Agnew, 2023). This trend is more general in extending beyond so-called Great Powers to include disputes such as that between Venezuela and Guyana, Turkey and some of its neighbors, Armenia and Azerbaijan, and Ethiopia and Somalia over claims to territory to exploit oil and gas deposits, claim symbolic regions or establish a port for a land-locked state, respectively. The Israel-Palestine dispute has taken on a new violent turn since 2023 reinforcing broader narratives about ethno-nationalist claims to «rightful» occupation of contested territories (Agnew, 2017, 2024).

The increasingly troubled role of the United States in maintaining the post-Cold War trend of increased global openness is very significant. The dramatic internal political polarization in the United States beginning during the Obama presidency in the aftermath of the US based financial crash of 2008 and the failures of US military interventions during its abortive war on terrorism in the aftermath of the attacks on targets in the US by the pan-Islamist Al-Qaeda on 11 September 2001 (military interventions in Afghanistan and Iraq, in particular) have seriously damaged US political and military credibility at a crucial time. Disarray within the European Union and the British departure from that enterprise (Brexit) have also undermined the previous clear affiliation of much of Europe with its US alliance. The Trump government attacks the European Union as symbolic of a «decaying civilization» apparently because of its decline in its share of global GDP (Figure 1) but also because it is seen as representing the worst of the «woke culture» that Trump's right-wing supporters are at war with at home and abroad (Mackinnon, 2025). The European Union's regulatory impact on Trump's US tech company allies is perhaps also not irrelevant to this attack.

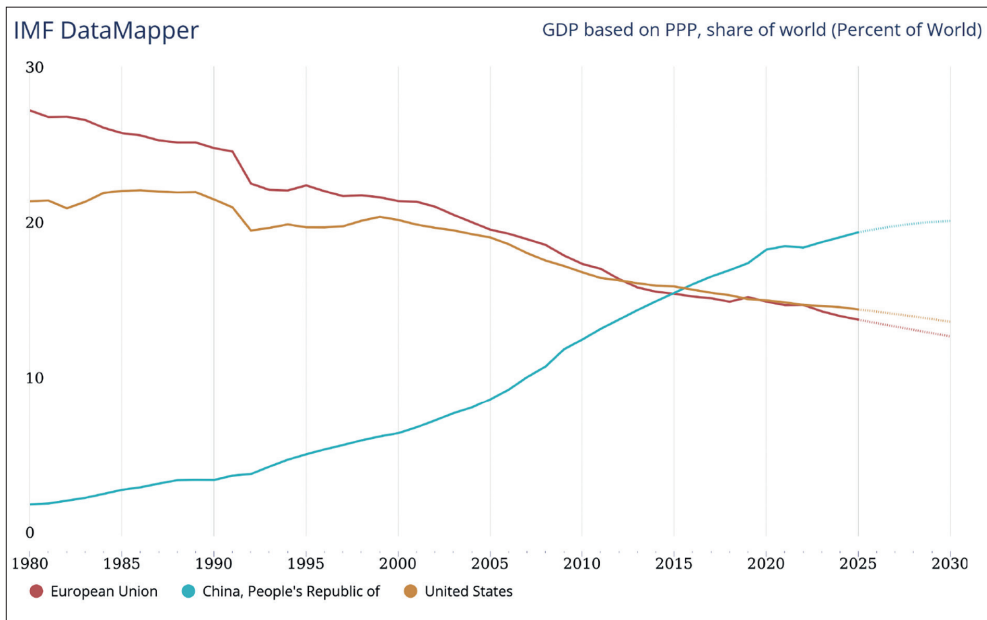
Figure 1. How to Exaggerate the Importance of Europe's Growth Decline:  
Do Not Compare it to the US and China.



Source: Financial Times calculations based on IMF PwC · Current EU27 member states only.

Traditional allies count for little in Trump's purely transactional world (Kelly and Poast, 2025). In fact, even as the European Union's share of world GDP at Purchasing Power Parity has declined so, not surprisingly given the spread of economic development worldwide under globalization, has that of the United States (Figure 2). In fact, the disaffection between the European Union and US governments is not entirely new but reflects the post-Cold War American sense of supporting Europe militarily via NATO as unsustainable in the face of «larger» challenges than Russia from China and elsewhere and the weakened US economy threatened by the global regulatory impact of the European Union following the 2008 financial crisis. This finally came to a head with different responses on the two sides of the Atlantic to the Russian invasion of Ukraine (Anghel and Jones, 2024).

Figure 2. Shares of Global GDP at Purchasing Power Parity, European Union, China, and the United States 1980-2025.



Source: World Economic Outlook (October 2025). ©IMF, 2025.

The net effect of these trends has been to weaken even previously powerful structural factors underpinning the global role of US governments such as the central role of the US dollar and the increasingly limited impact of US sanctions on foreign adversaries as alternative currencies and trading routes are opened up (e.g., Pforr, Pape and Petryc, 2025). Moreover, the US federal deficit, much of it due to tax cuts for the wealthy and heavy subsidies to favored industries, is now larger in percentage of national GDP than the national debts of most other major national economies and must be financed largely by foreigners and foreign governments because of the low US national savings rate and overall popular credit profligacy (e.g. Guttman, 2021; Rogoff, 2025; Ngarmboonanant, 2025; Martin, 2025). Europe is certainly not alone, then, in terms of its relative economic decline in terms of share of global GDP, but both it and the US are in fact incredibly interdependent in terms of their future growth prospects. The European Union and the United States are both the other's largest source of direct investment and trade in goods by far compared to China and other parts of the world including the two largest single trading partners of the US, Canada and Mexico (Wolf, 2025).

## New Geometries of Global Power

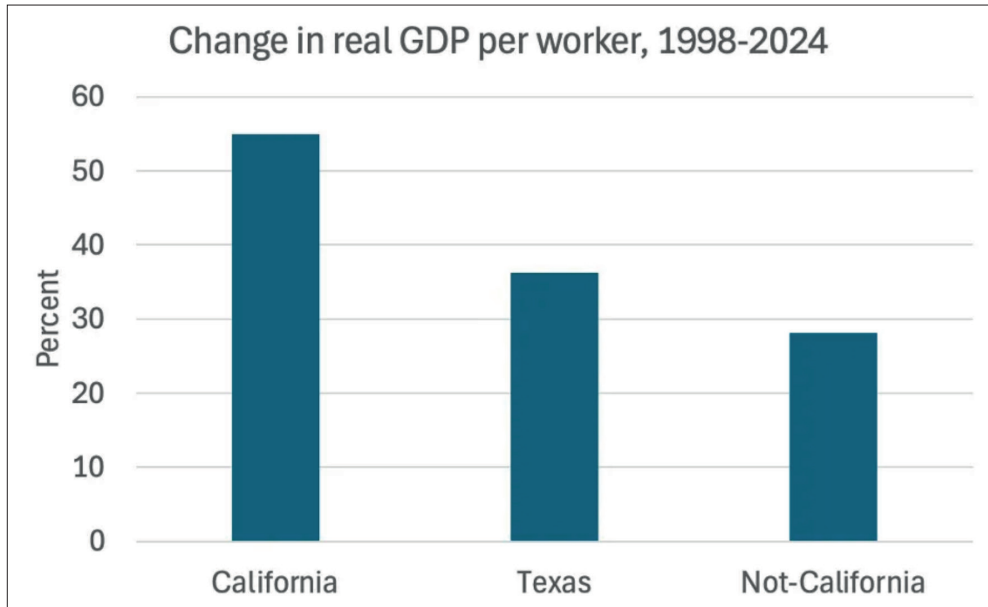
Considerable power, therefore, is still manifested, and increasingly so, across mobilizing networks by multiple actors including all sorts of states and organizations notwithstanding this recent outbreak of seemingly old-style territorial geopolitics (Allen, 2003; Agnew, 2023). Information, both accurate and false, flows widely as do capital, trade in parts and final goods, and electronically delivered services (instructions, complaint management, and credit checks, for example). None of this happens without a wide range of regulatory and managerial organizations that have sprung up to make the flows work. These include everything from private credit-rating agencies that evaluate the worth of different national government bonds and food and electronic standards agencies to the International Monetary Fund and the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (e.g. Büthe and Mattli, 2011). For example, global data flows are increasingly important to businesses worldwide. Governments make attempts at controlling such flows but with uneven success. But every effort seems to lead to innovations that attempt to bypass controls. US governments still have much power over the basic infrastructure of communication networks (fiber-optic cable systems, payment systems, etc.) even as their power seems to wane in other domains. The use of economic sanctions in international disputes by US governments, for example, in relation to Iran and Russia, reflects this continuing if weakening source of global leverage (Farrell and Newman, 2025).

On a scale not seen since the years immediately following the Second World War, human migrants now increasingly challenge the borders of the territorialized units into which the world is nominally divided as civil wars, climate change effects, and poverty drive people away from their places of origin towards wealthier and less violent havens. Much migration, particularly of refugees, is to neighboring countries (such as from Syria to Turkey). In the long-term, however, declining populations in Europe and in the United States plus pressures from wars and depleted water supplies and agriculture in Latin America, South Asia, and Africa are producing large migrant flows from poorer to richer countries. This is producing the specter of small boats crossing the Mediterranean and large numbers of people showing up at the Mexico-US border (Agnew, 2023).

This is now a political issue exploited worldwide by the nationalist-populist right, yet the demand for cheap labor in the face of ageing populations in the US and Western Europe needing care and tax revenues to pay for that makes the likelihood of reducing these flows very limited indeed. This represents a geometry of global power that is not just about domination by states in relation to one another, but also about the workings of power across space in a number of different modalities and with a wide range of actors. It is also about what happens *within* states with respect to the spatial distribution of the benefits and costs of this or that structuring of power (centralized-decentralized, patronage-ideological, etc.) The 2025 contest between the state governments of California and Texas in the US over electoral districting for federal elections and enforcement of federal immigration rules is one example.

An even more significant example is the fact that the wealth of different countries today is often very regionally and locally biased within the countries in question (e.g., Moretti, 2012). As a result of agglomeration economies or returns to specialization, for example, California accounts for a much larger share of US productivity growth than the rest of the country over the recent past because of the importance of the high tech industries predominantly located there (Figure 3). Most other states, except for Texas, have very low or negative productivity growth over the period 1998-2024. Much of the nationalist-populist appeal of Trump and his MAGA movement within the Republican Party is based on a mix of nostalgia and status anxiety in places and regions left behind for old industries and the socio-economic relations they are seen as once encouraging, such as households with one typically male wage-earner and ethnic hierarchies in who dominated local and national politics and a resentment of the places that have been more successful as a result of globalization and technological change, such as California (Agnew and Shin, 2020).

Figure 3. Not All the USA Is California: Measuring Relative Productivity in GDP Per Worker 1998-2024 in the United States.



Source: Bureau of Economic Analysis, US Department of Commerce, 2025.

Classical geopolitical understandings see power as invariably centered and geared towards some places and states dominating others and/or territorially restricting cooperation and popular inclusion. However, it is not that geopolitical hierarchy based on domination has been eclipsed. Far from it, as we see in 2025 with the unilateral imposition of tariffs by the US government in an arbitrary and openly politicized manner (as with the 50% tariff imposed on Brazilian imports as punishment for prosecuting a former president who had also tried to overturn an election). States such as the United States, Russia, and China obviously also still exert enormous military power and influence globally, even if the balance between them has recently changed to the apparent advantage of the third over the first two notwithstanding their currently superior military assets. China benefits from its global stranglehold over the rare earths needed for computing power and artificial intelligence applications, the lack of a clear US geopolitical logic behind its China policies as demonizing the European Union replaces any concern with the impact on the US of authoritarian regimes such as China or Russia, and a singular US focus on the Americas potentially leaving the rest of the world available for China's initiatives (Luce, 2025).

Persisting global strategic interdependence, however, in terms of global capital flows, trade, migrant flows, and financial connectivity, undermines the case for the emergence of a singular geometry of global power based entirely on inter-imperial rivalry and spheres of influence. How the plurality of geometries plays out in the years to come, and its consequences for all the other actors currently still enjoying relative freedom of action worldwide, however, is firmly in the lap of the gods.

# Trump: Destroyer and Builder of Geopolitical World Order and the Meaning of Peace<sup>2</sup>

*Colin Flint*

President Donald Trump's foreign policy heralds a new geopolitical world order. This is to be expected through the political economy approach of world-systems analysis and its utility in focusing upon structural imperatives and hegemonic cycles. We are in a period of the hegemonic decline of the US while the dominant core-periphery structure of the world-economy will remain. The institutions to govern economic and geopolitical relations that the US established at the end of World War II are being dismantled by President Trump. As leader of the declining hegemon, Trump is trying to design a new world order to retain the golden years of «greatness.» The greater likelihood is that this attempt to renew hegemony will fail. There are many ways that these claims could be addressed. I will focus on the changing meaning of peace.

As John Agnew says in his opening essay for this forum, commentary and analysis is replete with the «geopolitics of this» and the «geopolitics of that» to such an extent that we are becoming befuddled about the nature and meaning of current geopolitical change. New geometries are being created, as Agnew illustrates, but structural imperatives remain. I echo the value of a historical approach and that current geopolitical dynamics are the expression of change in several geometries. The driving force of these changes is one structural phenomenon, the decline of US hegemony and the process of geopolitical transition. The framework of world-systems analysis identifies a capitalist world-economy that is now global, the necessary existence of inequality in a core-periphery hierarchy, and a multi-state political geography (Wallerstein, 2003). Though the hierarchy is permanent the power dynamics within the multi-state system are driven by competition that, since the early 1800's has taken the form of the rise and fall of a hegemon. The geopolitics of the system and hegemonic competition are a form of geopolitics that intertwines economic and political processes, negating the explanatory confusion of the «geopolitics of this and that.»

The cyclical dynamics of hegemony have created periods of relative stability in global geopolitical patterns (Taylor, 1990). The Concert of Europe and the Cold War are examples of these geopolitical world orders. Periods of hegemonic decline and the rise of a new hegemon are periods of geopolitical transition. I believe we are living through such a period. This is a frightening claim as previous geopolitical transitions have involved, perhaps required, sustained periods of global war (Flint, 2024). World War I and World War II are situated within one period of geopolitical transition from British to US hegemony.

Are we approaching a period of global war or have we been in such a period for a while? It is hard to answer this question definitively. Perhaps the terrorist attacks of September 9, 2001 and the consequent War on Terror were the beginning of a period of war that involved an international coalition fighting a non-state actor. However, previous periods of global wars have been between coalitions of states and not states versus a non-state actor. I would lean towards arguing that there are signs that a global inter-state war is very possible though the pattern of adversaries is not clear. Would the US be able to muster a coalition of allies given President Trump's negativity towards NATO? Would Russia or China want or be able to translate challenge to the US into war? Would they ally? These are unknowns, of course, but the prominence of war within periods of geopolitical transition creates an imperative for the prospect of another period of global war, with the potential use of nuclear weapons, to be taken seriously (Flint, 2024). The prospect invites an avenue of discussion centered around the changing political geography of peace.

Peace is a contested idea. And no peace is peaceful. Rather peace is an ongoing process in which the balance between winners and losers changes as new forms of power relations are established and inevitably become the subject of new challenges from disgruntled parties (Flint, 2011). This is the case at all political scales and remains relevant in the establishment of world orders and transitions. The post-World War II world order proclaimed two important ideas or meanings of peace. Please note that ideas were contradicted by actions. Nonetheless, ideas are the

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2. Received on 2 April 2026.

basis for the reason and stability of the world order. The two ideas established by the US were national self-determination and development.

National self-determination meant the end of a world order based on empire (Peet, 2009). President Franklin D. Roosevelt was adamant that the Allied victory in World War II would not mean that Britain could retain its Empire, much to the annoyance of Prime Minister Winston Churchill (Toye, 2010). Instead, countries would break free of imperial constraints. I emphasize that this was the idea, and it is easy to find examples in which the US allowed delays in national self-determination for its own ends. For example, the Suez Crisis of 1956 made clear that the US would not tolerate military escapades aimed at maintaining European power in the Middle East. Instead, «freedom» would reign.

This idea was complicated by the inability of US hegemony to be a global project. The Soviet Union offered the counter ideology of Communism and in conjunction with the Peoples Republic of China and Soviet control of Eastern Europe meant that the vastness of Eurasia was excluded from US influence. Dismantling of old empires was a partial success for US hegemony. But the partiality allowed the US to frame its ideas contrary to an alternative ideology. National self-determination went hand-in-hand with the idea of democracy. Of course, in practice the idea of democracy was a representative veneer over support for authoritarian regimes who quashed political debate and civil society.

The end of empire was meant to dismantle the inequality of metropole-colony economic exploitation. The ideology was «development.» W.W. Rostow's (1960) *The Stages of Economic Growth* was the seminal text that spurred all sorts of development projects in which geography was highly involved. For example, transport geographies proposed models of development of national systems that foresaw development from «third world» to «modern» systems (see Abler, Adams, and Gould, 1971). It was believed that the idea of development would cast-off the shackles of core-periphery inequalities that are seen to be persistent and necessary from the world-systems understanding of the capitalist world-economy.

National self-determination and development were not just ideas but geopolitical practices. They required the establishment of institutions to translate ideas into obedient behavior by other states. The United Nations General Assembly was the crown jewel in the idea of equality of voice for newly independent states. UN agencies would take ideas of what development was and put them into practice. The International Monetary Fund and the World Bank would help fund the transformation of economies from dependence to decision-making (Chang, 2009). It was all a sham.

Instead, development through the enforcement of free-trade policies maintained economic inequality through dominant economic theories that promised economic growth but delivered new geometries of dependency. If governments saw through the sham and tried to establish alternative policies the CIA, another institution established at the outset of US hegemony, undertook dirty deeds to maintain compliant governments (Talbot, 2015).

These were the institutional arrangements and geopolitical representations that created the geometries of what was labeled peace in the world order of US hegemony. The geometries are being actively dismantled by President Trump. And in so doing will create a new world order with new geometries. China is building its own global institutions, such as the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank and, in tandem with a set of globe-spanning infrastructure projects within the Belt and Road Initiative, promoting a new vision of peace that takes the form of «south-south cooperation» that is purported to be «mutually beneficial.» Though these projects and related rhetoric are a feature of China's challenge to US hegemony they are unlikely to fundamentally alter the core-periphery structure of the world-economy. The new geometries that are being created and old ones being dismantled can be engaged by considering a new meaning of peace.

The UN has been roundly criticized by President Trump. He has established what he foresees as an alternative, the Board of Peace. There is a sense amongst commentators and many political leaders that if the Board is ignored it might just go away. It has been described as a «nothingburger» (Jones, 2026). But the Board is a manifestation of support for new geopolitical geometries that the US has catalyzed whether the Board is something or nothing. The Board's charter claims to support existing international law but plans to reconstruct Gaza with little input from Palestinians belies that claim. The preamble emphasizes that the Board will «depart from approaches

and institutions that have too often failed» – the institutions of the post-World War II order. But even if the Board is short-lived, it is a clear sign that the political geography axioms of the post-World War II order are waning. The ideas and practices of national self-determination and development rested on the assumption of territorial integrity and sovereignty. This was reinforced by interpretations of international law. This geometry has been weakened.

Post the seizure of Venezuelan President Maduro, and as US ambitions to seize Greenland one way or the other were still live, and as preparations were underway to launch a war on Iran, Fox News broadcasted a story with a background featuring the face of Donald Trump and the headline «Global Push for Peace.» This «peace» is a new imperialism in which the US believes it has the right to seize territory if it is deemed necessary for economic security and strategic value. These twin goals lie behind the desire to annex Greenland. The kidnapping of Maduro initially seemed like a return to mercantilism and gun-boat diplomacy, but with the bullying to promote a compliant government appears to be a new expression of imperialism. The reasons for the war on Iran were never made clear through befuddled messaging. But the war has echoes of Cold War actions that suppressed any resistance to the hegemon's order. The fundamental vision of the Truman doctrine, as written in NSC-68, was that «defeat anywhere...is a defeat everywhere» (USNSC, 1950). No ideological alternatives may be tolerated.

At the same time practices that echo the hegemon's new vision may be tolerated, it seems. The tenuous support for Ukraine and the willingness to make room for President Putin's territorial claims resonate with Trump's might is right and territory is up for grabs vision. Taiwan is rightfully worried. The old geometry of territorial integrity seems to be no more. The rules of a new world order are clear. But the longevity of the order is questionable.

One outcome of Trump's foreign policy is that US security needs may be put in jeopardy. His attitude towards Ukraine seem to favor the goals of Russia and weaken NATO, the defensive bastion of the US's Atlantic flank. The promotion of the violation of established borders gives encouragement to China's claim to Taiwan, though invasion does not appear to be imminent. And the war on Iran seems to be driven by Israel's security imperatives and may well result in the loss of support of Gulf state allies, or at least their wariness of US as a stable and reliable ally.

One last point, the new world order that Trump envisions denies what is arguably the greatest security threat humanity has ever faced, global climate change. The new world order that Trump is trying to establish is a pathway to territorial wars that have been largely absent since the conclusion of World War II and a brake on the international cooperation to address human security in the context of a heating planet. Alternative visions of world order will arise. Perhaps a form of Confucianism proffered by China will be a set of practices and rhetorics that positions the country as a new hegemon addressing a global crisis. The question is whether the competition between alternatives will be decided through diplomacy or global war.

## **Towards a hypocratic geopolitics?<sup>3</sup>**

*Virginie Mamadouh*

As 2026 unfolds, the second term of US President Donald Trump is well underway to crucial mid-term elections, while worldwide he figures prominently, both with words and (announced) actions, in news headlines and social media. Many, both among friends and foes, see him undermining, almost single-handedly, the international order co-produced with US hegemony since World War II.

There are many ways to analyze the unfolding events from a geopolitical perspective. One is to explore the geographical imaginations and geopolitical representations at work. It is therefore tempting to discuss the geopolitical narratives produced by President Trump and his administration. In the midst of ad hoc and bold statements, claims to continuity and legitimacy are performed through the historical reappropriation of past geopolitical doctrines and narratives. In his first term, President Trump's vision was often seen as a return to isolationism (on the pendular geopo-

3. Received on 24 May 2026.

litical visions of the US, see Dijkink, 1996) and retreat from the global stage. In his second term, he envisions the projection of US power on to the world and mobilize 19<sup>th</sup> century geographical imaginations to legitimate the return of American expansionism associated with the notion of Manifest Destiny (see Jones, 2025) and the preoccupation with hemispheric security associated with the Monroe doctrine (see Dodds, 2025). Such geopolitical gestures call for critical assessment, problematizing them both in their original contexts and in their current reactivation.

Moreover, the spectacle associated with Trumpism (Miller, 2021) can be approached from the perspective of IR scholarship inspired by French philosophers Debord and Baudrillard. Arguably it produces a tabloid geopolitics (Debrix, 2003, 2007, 2008) of sorts. Compared with the 1991 Gulf War that inspired Baudrillard and the (Global) War on Terror studied by Debrix, when mass media (satellite television) were dominating the news coverage of war and international politics, it could be called a tabloid geopolitics on steroids, enhanced by social media (see also Weber, 2017, and Richardson, 2019, for analyses of Trump's first presidency through Baudrillard).

In this brief commentary, my intention is to highlight how new information and communication technologies (social media enhancing infinite scrolling like TikTok, machine translation through Large Language Models and generative Artificial Intelligences) have created new media affordances (Adams 2007), affecting both the production, the circulation and the reception of geopolitical narratives. In short, President Trump currently epitomizes a new way of doing geopolitics in a hypocracy.

To see the change, it is insightful to travel back in time and revisit his first inaugural speech on 20 January 2017 when he announced that «From this day forward, it's gonna be only America first! America first!» What matters here is that the speech was a global media moment, shocking audiences around the world and prompting reactions. A few days later, the Dutch comedian Arjen Lubach broadcasted a video «America first, the Netherlands Second» in his weekly satirical show, meant to introduce The Netherlands to the new president. Mocking the hyperbolic style of President Trump (using a voice actor to imitate him), and possibly his lack of expertise in foreign policy and his alleged geographical illiteracy, it was also self-mocking. It ridiculed both the unquestioned Atlanticist orientation of the Dutch and their readiness to please the new American President, but also the appeal to a similar political agenda in national politics «making our country great again» (prioritizing Dutch interests over European values and international norms). Last but not least, it was also satirical in highlighting stereotypes about the country and its specificities, both assets and oddities often praised or criticized by migrants and visitors.

The video went viral. On television (as it was broadcasted by programs abroad) and on YouTube. It was viewed 73 million views by February 3<sup>rd</sup>. But even more importantly it generated another response, by *Neo Magazin Royale*, a similar satirical show on the German television ZDF, who contested, not US primacy, but the Dutch claim to the second position. In addition, the German comedian Jan Böhmermann also challenged others to produce similar videos to introduce their own countries, creating the contest *Every second counts*. The reactions were overwhelming, with dozens and dozens of similar videos, first from Europe then elsewhere, in which comedians and sometimes just creative individuals (remember it was before AIs could make videos, clone voices or even write text!) would manufacture similar messages with their own country as second to America.

For a paper presented at the annual conference of the American Association of Geographers in New Orleans in 2018 I collected about 100 videos. With the wisdom of crowds, Wikipedia (2026) now indexes 117 videos from 80 states, plus about sixties for territorial entities (like Madeira, Taiwan, Antarctica, the European Union), cities, communities (indigenous peoples, the Muslim World) and imaginary places (Westeros). Most replicated the same format as the Dutch original, claiming a privileged relationship with the US and second place for their own country or community; others acknowledge more complicated hierarchies («America First, China Second, Canada ...third?», «America First, Russia First, Serbia First after that» «America First, Poland Firster»), regional hierarchies («America First, Namibia First in Africa») or national identity issues («America first, Sweden last» or «America first, The UK anywhere above Europe»).

In 2025 no such conversation was observed. The statements of politicians and state persons have become so bold, that there seems to be less room for satire – the audience would not know for sure if it is meant as a parody or not. But, maybe even more importantly, the media landscapes are now so fragmented that there is not a sense of «news of the day» that reaches almost everyo-

ne at the same time (like the evening television news once did) and hence no general satirical commentary to be envisioned. Instead, memes travel faster but in a topological network of connected bubbles, reaching certain subgroups but remaining totally invisible or uncomprehensible to others.

To illustrate the change, the reactions to President Trump's much publicized desire to be awarded the Nobel Peace Prize are remarkable. By the end of the summer of 2025, tweets of the administration framed President Trump as the President of Peace, having ended «seven wars in seven months». He was nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize by the Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, Argentinian president Javier Milei and other state persons around the world. President Trump also created the Board of Peace, a new international body, as an alternative to UN institutions, to promote peace in the world, of which he was nominated chair-for-life.

In October 2025, when awardees were announced, it became clear that President Trump would not get the prize. Netanyahu nevertheless posted an AI image portraying Trump receiving in his presence a huge Nobel medal (Times of Israel, 2025). In November 2025, Gianni Infantino, the president of FIFA announced the creation of a FIFA peace prize Football Unites the World «an award to recognize exceptional actions for peace and unity, bestowed on behalf of all football-loving people from all around the world». It was awarded to President Trump on 5 December (just days before the Nobel Peace Prize ceremony in Oslo) at the World Cup draw in Washington DC.

Mid January 2026, the actual laureate, the Venezuelan opposition leader opposition María Corina Machado, visited the President after the US intervention in Caracas to capture of the Venezuelan president Maduro and his wife. She proposed to share the peace prize with President Trump, despite several statements of the Nobel Peace Prize Committee that such was impossible. Machado eventually presented her Nobel Peace Prize medal to President Trump who accepted and kept it.

The reason to mention this list of awkward events, is that they could just as well have been the spins of comedians, commenting on the news on the President's very public Nobel Peace prize frenzy. But since they were happening in reality, there was not much room left for satirical interventions. Instead, the buzz on social media has become an infinite stream of commentaries, video bloggers, commenting on original tweets and videos, by President Trump or the reactions of others. These clips can be weaponized for bias confirmation, confirming how great the President is or alternatively how deranged he is, but more importantly they are distributed by algorithms to their respective audiences, a feature of the hypnocracy our society has become.

The term hypnocracy I borrow from the essay *Ipnocrazia: Trump, Musk e la nuova architettura della realtà* (Xun 2024,2025). The essay discusses the impact of algorithms and artificial intelligence in society in general, and is the result of a dialogue of the Italian philosopher Andrea Colamedici in interaction with generative IAs (Claude Sonnet 3.5 and ChatGPT-4o more specifically). The essay posits the existence of a «new regime of power that operates not through coercion, but through the subtle manipulation of consciousness» foregrounding the hypnotic working of social media. In an attention economy what matters is the induction of a trance (not the representation of reality): «Figures like Donald Trump and Elon Musk are not exceptions, but archetypes of this system, hypnotizing the public through crisis, spectacle, and contradiction.»

The essay has academic pretense, but does not engage with academic literature. It should be read as a provocative essay. It is tricky to borrow a concept coined by an experiment, rather than to engage with the ever expanding academic literature on the impact of social media on society and politics (especially authoritarianism). It seems nevertheless more appropriate to talk of a hypnocratic geopolitics, than to use an expression like TikTok geopolitics to put center stage the infinite scrolling that magnify the trance (especially since the expression could be understood as a geopolitics of TikTok, or geopolitics of bans and other policies targeting that specific application).

If this diagnostic of our current predicament is accurate, the consequences are profound. In a hypnocracy, narratives need not to be coherent and consistent, and that is true of geopolitical narratives too. To study them, critical geopolitics has always posited some shared representations, a geopolitical vision, a geostrategic strategy, a storyline that creates order in the world, a map of friends and foes, a survey of threats and opportunities. These ideas were supposed to be rather stable, representing long term orientations in the national identity and the foreign policy of a state

(for example Dijkink, 1996; Van der Wusten & Dijkink, 2002) or of vocabularies shared in a specific epoch (for example Agnew, 2003, on civilizational, naturalized and ideological geopolitics).

In a hypnocratic geopolitics, narratives do not even pretend to create order. President Trump can both be the president for peace and tweet about the annihilation of Iran; he can both open and close the Strait of Hormuz at the same time. Moreover, on the receiving end, his domestic and international audiences can also smoothly swipe between contradictory narratives. Does it make the study of geographical imaginations and geopolitical representations redundant? Probably not, but we need new tools to analyze them, understand how they coalesce in contingent assemblage, and research how they impact actions.

More than ever, it is important to unveil changes on the ground: material transformation, wealth transfer, redistribution of power (see Agnew's opening contribution on «the new «geometries» of global power»). But more than ever, this knowledge is likely to have little impact on the public debate. If hypnocracy is hegemonic, it produces reality and is able to absorb and assimilate dissidence. Breaking the spell will be difficult. Learning how to navigate the perpetual disruption caused by social media and generative AIs (the ability «to live the trance knowing you are living it» as there is no outside to the trance, according to Xun and Colamedici) might be the single most important skill we could help our students to master... or that we could learn from them, the natives of hypnocracy.

## **Alter-geopolitics today: we have whistles<sup>4</sup>**

*Sara Koopman*

The current plurality of geometries that Agnew writes about also includes a recent surge in alter-geopolitics. In the face of the growing use of explicitly coercive power to control space and the people in it, those people are increasingly turning to cooperative power used spatially to keep each other safe and even to thrive, to live well.

Agnew writes powerfully about the different ways that the term geopolitics is used loosely today and argues that, «(g)eopolitics thus now can refer to any deployment of power over space in various modalities and by a range of different agents, and can involve authority, seduction, manipulation, and assent as well as domination through coercion.» What does not come through is why these agents are doing all of this. Traditionally geopolitics was presented as engaged in for security, to keep a nation safe, but Agnew implies that accumulation and greed is playing an increasing role. It certainly feels that way to me, living in the kleptocracy (and kakistocracy) that the US is becoming. The focus has been less on controlling the chess board and more on pocketing as many chess pieces as possible. And then when a loss of a key part of the board (say the strait of Hormuz) then puts those stashed pieces (say stock bets and schemes) at risk, there is flailing and panic.

## **Alter-geopolitics around the world**

I have argued (Koopman, 2011, 2023) that (alter-)geopolitics is also done by one agent that does not come into focus in Agnew's article: ordinary people, coming together to build various alternative securities through solidarity. Their deployment of power over space usually involves moving their own bodies, putting them together in various ways for greater safety. I wrote about how protective companions do this in Colombia, putting bodies less likely to be attacked next to those under threat for their work for peace and justice so as to stay safer together.

Since then, others have pointed to how this has happened in other ways and places.<sup>5</sup> In Tahrir square in Egypt Swanson (2015) writes that protesters stayed together to stay safe and create a

4. Received on 5 May 2026. This work was supported by the Ministry of Education of the Republic of Korea and the National Research Foundation of Korea (NRF-2025S1A6B5A02004223).

5. I draw in this section from my chapter on Peace (Koopman, 2026) in the recent *Handbook of Feminist Political Geography*, which is a great new resource.

liberated space with different social relations. In the massive protests in India by farmers in 2020-21 their open and free community kitchens were as key as the tractor marches. Essex (2014) points to how they were doing alter-geopolitics with a focus on food security for all as they demanded a minimum support price for their crops.

But to list these examples by countries like these falls into a Westphalian nation-state logic that many of these projects complicate and work against. Moradi's (2023) work on the ways Kurdish activists do alter-geopolitics points to this, as well as to how this work can happen in subtle ways under extreme repression, including the use of traditional clothes and dances. Hill (2019) writes about internationalist anti-nuclear organizing during the cold war that enacted alter-geopolitics by trying to literally cross national borders together, on walks to nuclear sites. There are many more examples of people coming together to build alternative securities for themselves and others. The police and prison abolition movement is gathering these at [millionexperiments.com](http://millionexperiments.com).

I was originally inspired to look for these alternatives by Gibson-Graham's (2008) gathering of alternative economy projects. Just as these are not fully outside of or replacing capitalism, alternative securities usually do not make us fully safe, but safer—at least for a while, as Rowley and Weldes (2012) added to my original formulation. But these projects are not just about living with safety but living well (*vivir bien*), living with dignity and justice, even living deliciously (*vivir sabroso*) as the Afro-Colombian movement puts it.

My initial (2011) emphasis in defining alter-geopolitics was on how human bodies come together to build alternative nonviolent securities. This has been usefully extended to the ways non-human bodies and objects are also part of this coming together and play an active role (Benwell, Núñez, & Amigo, 2021; González, Reveco, & Benwell, 2023). In Colombia companions often carry white flags but Benwell et al. (2021) argue that in Chile in the protests of 2019-2020 a black version of the national flag was part of imagining and creating another way of being together as a nation. This is part of a growing interest across critical geopolitics more broadly in the role of the material (Squire in Koopman et al., 2021; Sharp, 2022).

## Alter-geopolitics in Minnesota

Whistles have been playing a key role in building alternative securities through solidarity in the face of the Trump administration's beyond draconian attacks on immigrants. They were first widely used in Chicago, in the first surge of huge numbers of ICE and other federal agents to a blue (Democrat) city from September to December of 2025. Resistance was so strong that in December ICE shifted instead to a much smaller blue city (Minneapolis/St. Paul, in the state of Minnesota) and flooded it with a much higher number of new agents. It felt like a military occupation. People were regularly seeing their neighbors be violently abducted, and coming upon cars left running in the middle of the road that people had been dragged out of.

In the face of this onslaught, drawing on organizing muscles and networks built in the protests over the police murder of George Floyd in Minneapolis in 2020, neighbors organized rapid response networks. Tactics travel quickly and whistles were handed out widely and worn around necks, at the ready. One person seeing an abduction would start whistling, another would text the neighborhood signal chat, and soon a group would be whistling and recording. Sometimes this was enough for the ICE agents to back off. Sometimes it reduced the violence of the arrest. Some responders would interposition themselves to stop or slow the violence, but the more common tactic was to stand back and document, so as to notify family and quickly line up legal support, and so slightly decrease the violence. Showing the solidarity of neighbors, that you are not alone, even if we can't immediately stop this, also helped to reduce the terror.

Fear and terror were definitely the aim of these attacks. Many immigrants remained in their houses for months, even if they had the legal right to be in the U.S. Black and brown people were regularly targeted, and many citizens were also terrorized. In an ironic and painful twist, Native American people were also arrested. Of these, three members of the Oglala Sioux tribe were held at what was Fort Snelling, used as an internment camp for native people during the winter of 1862-63, and where many died. Arrests were generally made without warrants, as ICE declared they no longer needed them (in violation of the U.S. constitution). Months later the state of Minnesota is

finally investigating charges of kidnapping for one particularly egregious incident where ICE broke into a home and dragged an elderly US citizen out into the extreme cold in his underwear. There is shocking footage of this abduction taken by whistling neighbors that is being used in the case.

The protective presence offered by neighbors turned into regular walking patrols, taking turns sitting in ethnic restaurants and groceries that were more likely to be targeted, and what became called «commuting», or driving behind ICE vehicles. Neighbors also helped to run errands and deliver groceries for those who were staying home to reduce risk of attack. Even grad students of color were getting rides to school with people less likely to be stopped. This all received widespread media coverage in the U.S. and was far and away the most widely publicized campaign of accompaniment since the tactic was formalized in the 1980s.

Media coverage exploded when ICE murdered 37 year old Renee Good in her car on January 7, 2026, as her wife was standing outside of the car recording ICE agents along with other whistling bystanders. This repression backfired, and even larger numbers of people came out in the following days to stand by their neighbors. On January 24th, just a few blocks away, Border Patrol agents murdered 37 year old Alex Pretti. He had been filming them with his phone, directing traffic around them, and had just reached out to help another whistling bystander that had been knocked down by an agent, putting his body between them. Astoundingly, again, even after a second murder, more people joined the protective presence.

These tactics are being taken up preemptively around the U.S., and there is what is being called a 'whistle brigade training' in Cleveland this week. There have been a huge number of online 'ICE watch' trainings, encouraging people to set up rapid response networks in advance. Perhaps this is the biggest wave of people using these tactics, though there is increasing recognition that tactics of what is increasingly being called 'unarmed civilian protection' are done spontaneously by communities in conflict affected areas around the world. Whistles, for example, have been used for years in Cameroon as an early warning system for (pending) violence—though generally leading to people fleeing from the area rather than rushing to the scene and sometimes this whistling is done simply by mouth to mimic birds for greater safety (López, Bliesemann De Guevara, Julian, Macaspac, & Okello-Orlale, n.d.).

## **Alter-geopolitics everywhere and every day**

How can something as small scale as neighbors whistling at ICE officers be geopolitics? Too often still geopolitics is thought of only as, as Agnew notes here, the foreign policy of states based on the «realities» of physical geography, or as he sees this shifting, foreign policy issues more generally in geographical context. But what counts as foreign policy? Allowing such loose arms sales in the U.S. that guns flood South into Mexico and Central America, fueling violence there that pushes people to leave, ironically often to the source of those guns? Vilifying immigrants, particularly those with the wrong skin, from the wrong countries? What may seem like everyday domestic politics is enmeshed with 'foreign policy.'

The relationship is not one way. When they coined the term feminist geopolitics, Dowler & Sharp (2001) argued that mundane practices shape reconstructions of the nation and the international, just as global geopolitical discourse shapes daily lives and bodies. Geopolitical discourse can be understood not only as representation but also the ways geopolitics is embodied in everyday practices, like checking out a car to see if they might be ICE. They point to the ways the everyday speaks back and changes seemingly immutable forces. The intimate is not the opposite of the national or the global. They are co-produced, that is, they are each constantly (un)making each other. We are not just pawns being moved from above in the supposed Great Game of geopolitics.

We can do alter-geopolitics every day, in our neighborhoods, with whistles and more. These are not separate from but constantly shaped by and shaping geopolitics in both space and time. In the 2020s there has been a surge of civil resistance and nonviolent uprisings around the world. People protecting each other has become more and more core to that organizing. Tactics are traveling fast. Hong Kongers taught us to put traffic cones on tear gas canisters. The barricades widely used in Latin America popped up in Minneapolis to keep ICE out of neighborhoods. A flotilla of small private boats is taking supplies not just to Gaza but now also to Cuba.

What is the shape of the new geopolitical order we are moving into? Or orders? I don't think this is just in the lap of the Gods, as Agnew puts it in his conclusion. Yes, it does appear that we are in a shift to a new geopolitical era with more territorial aggression, more closed economies, and more repression (Cairo & Agnew, 2026). But in the face of a rising tide of hatred, one of the new geometries of power is clearly the growing force of people around the world moving themselves on the chess boards, coming together in new ways to be safer together and supporting each other in living well (*vivir bien*). Is it enough to change the overall shape of this order? Surely more in some places and times than others.

## The Political «Geometries» of Climate Change<sup>6</sup>

*Simon Dalby*

### Fossil Fuel Insecurities

Much of the current discussion of geopolitics and suggestions of new global «geometries», to borrow Agnew's use of Massey's (1999) term in his essay in this forum, retains old assumptions of the planet as a given context for power politics and economic competition. Earlier alarms about climate change and the urgency of tackling it while there is still time to do so have recently been swept aside by a focus on economic competition, the impact of the Trump administration's international trade tariffs, and once again war in Southwest Asia. Great power rivalry is once again the order of the day; what the new geometry of international affairs might be is, for most of the pundit class a matter of importance. But having a functional biosphere within which the great game of power politics might be played in future is simply a taken for granted assumption.

Earth Systems Science suggests very clearly that this assumption is false (Rockstrom *et al.*, 2024), but such science is widely ignored by political elites with more immediate priorities preoccupying them in terms of how the great game of states is being played. Little attention is being paid to the key questions of how political economy, and crucially the energy systems that power contemporary societies, are shaping the future context for both the great powers, and everyone else too (Boyd, 2026). The second Trump administration has doubled down on the importance of petroleum in the exercise of American power; the intervention in Venezuela and the high seas seizure of oil tankers suggests a nostalgic cultural politics that represents the possession of fire-power as the key virtue in the contemporary world (Dalby, 2024).

Policy discussions, in what now remains of the Whitehouse, are obviously not concerned with climate. The second Trump administration has explicitly argued that climate discussions and efforts to build a new renewable energy infrastructure are weakening European states. Trump's self-styled «Secretary of War» demanded the Pentagon stop dealing with «climate change crap» and focus on combat. Energy is once again equated to fossil fuels, the apparent source of power that matters. All else is a distraction at best, a threat to American interests at worst. Venezuela and Iran matter because they have oil; places hard hit by climate change extremes, be they fire ravaged suburban Los Angeles, or flooded Texas or Pakistan, or drought stricken African states, matter not at all. Where climate is taken seriously in security circles it is now mostly about military adaptation and gaining access to raw material sources for novel weapons technologies (Lamain, Marijnen, Edwards & Jeursen, 2026).

The closure of the Straits of Hormuz in early 2026 induced supply chaos in the global fuel system, and market fluctuations were the inevitable result. Petroleum is key because so much of the global economy is dependent on it. The odd marketing arrangements that transfer distant supply disruptions into nearly instantaneous price changes at the retail fuel pump for motorists have prompted local political ramifications that are taken seriously by most governments.

In some ways this is all an old geopolitical story. In the 1970s the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) rose to prominence in the aftermath of the October 1973 war between

6. Received on 1 May 2026.

Israel and Syria and Egypt, and the boycott by oil producers of those states that had aided Israel's military efforts in that conflict. Peter Odell (1970) produced frequent updates of his Penguin Books text on *Oil and World Power* in the 1970s highlighting the importance of petroleum for the global economy. Amory Lovins (1976) bemoaned the failure of American political elites to use the opportunity to rethink energy policy more drastically and in the process reduce the vulnerability of states to distant supply sources. The 1980 Carter doctrine, effectively declaring that petroleum from the region was an America national security priority, focused attention on the region. The Iran - Iraq war of the 1980s once again highlighted the importance of petroleum; the American navy escorted «reflagged» vessels through the Gulf. The response to the Iraqi occupation of Kuwait in 1990, leading to the first Gulf War showed that it was a doctrine to be taken seriously.

While the 1970s oil shock did hasten the diversification of sources of petroleum and trigger discussions about both conservation and more efficient energy use as well as technological innovation in terms of electrification, the overall dependency of the global economy on petroleum wasn't dramatically altered. Energy security was defined in terms of reliable supplies of fossil fuels at reasonable prices. Despite the disruptions of the last half century, it usually still is understood in these terms. In so far as that remains the case, then ensuring continuous supplies of fuel from producer regions, and their transport to where they are burnt for energy, will continue to drive substantial parts of geopolitics, leaving consumers vulnerable to distant disruptions and the vagaries of the global market arrangements that generate volatile prices.

These are policy lessons that have still not been adopted by numerous governments, not least because, given the profitability of fossil fuels for some key corporations and a revenue source for producer states, states frequently turn out to have higher priorities than long term energy security for vulnerable populations. Active political campaigns against climate policy actions have made matters worse (Timmons Roberts, Milani, Jacquet & Downie, 2025). Short term manipulations of price to assuage anger fuel prices is widespread, but longer-term planning to reduce the vulnerabilities gets short shrift. In the aftermath of the Russian attack on Ukraine in 2022 European states looked to alternative sources of natural gas, and in the process changed their dependency from Russian supplies to American ones, rather than emphasizing the need to wear their economies off gas altogether. No wonder the Trump administration excoriates European efforts to expand wind and solar power systems!

Failure on the part of most states to transition away from fossil fuels accelerates the third vulnerability that comes from the use of fossil fuels, the mounting climate disruptions that are manifesting themselves in extreme weather events, melting ice caps, and widespread agricultural and economic disruptions. What future political geometries will look like depends in part on how responses to the current crisis over the Strait of Hormuz play out. If, as the Trump administration apparently wishes, the world doubles down on fossil fuel use and profits can be squeezed out of the rising price of petroleum, the long-term consequences will be even worse for climate disruptions and political instabilities.

What is new this time round, in contrast to the 1970s, is the rising impact of climate change on the global economy and on peoples and places everywhere. In terms of whether Trump is an anomaly or the harbinger of a new geopolitical order, part of the answer will depend on how states and corporations respond to the energy crisis induced by his participation in Benjamin Netanyahu's schemes to violently induce regime change in Tehran. If they take the opportunity to move rapidly away from dependence on fossil fuels a new geopolitical order may well emerge, and the Trump administration's nostalgic embrace of a geopolitical order based on firepower may, yet, ironically accelerate a transition away from it towards one more focused on planetary security. Failure to do so presages accelerating climate chaos and further insecurities which may in turn lead to more conflict as state regimes struggle to assert control.

### Three Future Political Geometries

Given that the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and the Paris Agreement of 2015 have so far failed to substantially curtail greenhouse gas emissions, not least because until recently the annual conventions didn't even frame fossil fuels as the primary cause of the

climate change problem, other options are emerging. The Santa Marta conference in April 2026 focusing on transitions off fossil fuels is noteworthy because its «geometry» is shaped by Colombia and The Netherlands being co-sponsors of the conference (Friedman, 2026). Growing support for a fossil fuels non-proliferation treaty, aimed at choking off supplies by precluding new developments of fossil fuel extraction, has garnered support from both states that are vulnerable to climate change and those concerned not to be blindsided if a rapid decarbonization of economies reduces state revenues.

These emerging coalitions of interest, supported by civil society organizations, and increasingly by international law rulings focused on the need to tackle climate change, suggest that energy geopolitics will likely take novel forms in coming decades driven by the increased awareness of the severity of future impacts and the failure of states which have historically generated greenhouse gases to provide financial assistance to those suffering the consequences. While the traditional great powers may ignore such efforts, at least for the foreseeable future, the possibilities of novel arrangements are clearly in evidence. In so far as traditional rivalries between the great powers persist, and the remilitarization of international politics continues than such activities delay cooperation on climate (Toal, 2024). By diverting materials and resources away from innovative energy technologies into weapons systems this may also make energy innovation all the more difficult.

Nonetheless, novel energy systems not reliant on fossil fuels are rapidly expanding. This suggests a second, complementary future political «geometry» in terms of energy provision. At least so far, the rising significance of renewables, batteries and electric propulsion has added on to existing fossil fuel systems rather than comprehensively replaced them (Bradshaw, 2026). China's dominance in novel technologies and its enhanced trade arrangements in what used to be called the Global South suggest the possibilities of new forms of development not dependent on fossil fuels. In the aftermath of the 2026 fuel crisis many states and corporations may be willing to become much more innovative in planning ahead. Indeed, petroleum producers too may be looking ahead and assuming that peak petroleum is, finally, in sight. Perhaps the 2026 decision by the United Arab Emirates to withdraw from OPEC, with its production quota system, may herald a move to get as much petroleum out of the ground as possible while there are still lucrative markets for it?

China is key here as the leading producer of solar and wind energy technologies, but also as the innovator in electrifying numerous parts of its economy. While lessons from the history of political economy should be treated with caution in the novel circumstances of the present, it has in the recent past been the case that hegemonic powers have based their primacy on energy systems, the British in the nineteenth century on coal and the Americans on petroleum. The subsequent rise of natural gas as an additional fuel hasn't followed such an obvious pattern, but clearly political and economic power will flow from dominance in the new energy systems that are emerging in response to the difficulties of relying on fossil fuels, and as policy responses to the looming dangers of accelerating climate change. It is not hard to make the case that Trump's obsession with petroleum is effectively accelerating China's rise.

Third, in so far as climate change, and the larger questions of ecological transformation of the earth system do get taken seriously in future years, then a very different mapping of places of importance must shape future planetary «geometries». Earth System Science now suggests some crucial parts of the earth system need to be maintained as functional components if the system as a whole is to remain relatively stable in conditions loosely analogous to those through the period of the Holocene, the last twelve thousand years of planetary history (Rockstrom *et al.*, 2024). Failure to do so will lead to the system crossing various thresholds and tipping into what are likely to be much more dynamic conditions, ones that make large scale human societies much more difficult to sustain. Viewed in these terms the geometries that matter include maintaining the functionality of the Amazon rainforest system, maintaining polar icecaps, limiting permafrost melting and the crucial Atlantic Meridional Overturning Current (AMOC) which drives much oceanic circulation.

In these terms places have a very different significance in terms of geopolitics. NATO navies have long been concerned to monitor and control naval and shipping activity in what is known as the Greenland, Iceland, United Kingdom gap. While this has primarily concerned Russian naval

access to the Atlantic, in future if climate change is taken seriously, its significance will lie in terms of whether the flow of the Gulf Stream, a key part of the AMOC continues. If this current should slow dramatically, or stop completely, as recent studies suggest is increasingly likely later this century (Portmann, Swingedouw, Khattab & Chavent, 2026), much of the rest of the earth's climate system will be changed. This will have all sorts of knock-on political effects that are hard to predict precisely given that they will, at least partly, be dependent on how flexibly political and economic systems can by then cope with increasingly volatile contexts. Then it will indeed be possible to suggest in retrospect that Trump was at least indirectly responsible for a new geopolitical order given his repeated efforts to stymie much needed climate policies.

## Which Future Geometry?

The politics of the moment, dominated by the interminable media focus on Trump's shenanigans, and the Hormuz issue in particular, is inevitably shaping how the future ecological configuration of the planet will develop. If the lessons of fuel vulnerability, in terms of supply disruptions, price volatility, and climate disruptions are incorporated into policy and corporate actions in coming years then the possibilities of speeding up transitions away from fossil fuels emerge. Taking the soft energy path, to use Lovins' (1977) old terminology, offers the possibilities of more benign futures where climate change is slowed and adaptation to the changes already in the system is made easier.

Failure to do so, following the hard path of ever greater extraction of resources and combustion of fossil fuels, bids fair to perpetuate the conflictual relations between states and increased vulnerabilities for societies. Such a path, and at least the second Trump administration seems determined to move this way and stymie the development of wind and solar energy systems, will likely make it ever harder to tackle the disruptions as climate change accelerates. Indeed, delaying too long may derail the possibilities of building sustainable societies altogether (Laybourn, Evans & Dyke, 2023).

Facing existential threats from increasing climate instability will in turn enhance the rapidly growing calls for artificial climate interventions in the form of solar geoengineering (Beech, 2025). In turn this may add further twists to emergent political geometries; future aspirant hegemons might be tempted to try to use climate engineering as a tool of political management promising the prospect of a secure future under an artificially managed sky (Hickman, 2025). Geopolitics isn't any longer about how to dominate spaces and control populations and resources; it is now also crucially about the future consequences of which modes of control are used by the rich and powerful in their struggles for political dominance. The failure of the Trump administrations to understand this renders that future more fraught than it needed to be.

## New Geopolitical Disorders: The Centre Should not Hold<sup>7</sup>

*Jo Sharp*

Taken at face value, the Trump 2.0 regime seems entirely without geopolitical order. A seemingly random list of tariffs set the initial tone for his second administration, with erstwhile allies receiving the same or higher levels than foes, and some levels apparently set by nothing more than petulant response to personal slights (e.g. Brazil, which had not only voted out Trumpian Bolsonaro, but had jailed him for corruption). The geopolitical certainties of allies and «special relationships» were apparently abandoned to history.

Vice President Vance's blistering attack on Europe and NATO allies at Davos in 2025 seemed to point to a «clash of civilizations» in the vein of Samuel Huntington (1993), his critique of Europe the harshest of all, seemingly driven by a new form of «post-liberalism» that explains the populist turn towards a strong leader in the US, and away from democracy, pluralism and toleration.

<sup>7</sup> Received on 22 May 2026.

No sooner had geopolitical theorists started to respond to this apparently isolationist turn, than Trump set his sights on owning Greenland, threatening to take the territory of a NATO ally, and then as quickly witnessed the emergence of the «Donroe Doctrine» as the US military stormed Venezuela, arresting president Maduro and taking him away for trial.

Perhaps the new world order was to return to the hemispheric spheres of influence of more than 100 years earlier? Russia had invaded Ukraine and Trump's response seemed to display more admiration than reproach. Commentators wondered whether this had given China the tacit go-ahead to take Taiwan.

But again, before the dust had settled, the US and Israel attacked Iran. No clear objectives were articulated by the Americans, and it appeared that there had been no anticipation of Iran's capability to respond. As of the time of writing (May 2026), Iran's control of the narrow navigable entrance to the Strait of Hormuz has the global economy in a chokehold. While Trump insists that this has only minimal impact on the US, it has gravely hit both the economies and safe reputations of Gulf countries, had already had devastating effects on South-East Asian countries, and threatens a global recession.

At this dizzying rate, Trump's «new geometries» of global power (Agnew 2026) appear to be beyond the grasp of geopolitical theorists. Was the (quite astonishing) failure of the Trump administration to recognise the geographical vulnerability of Hormuz due to the wholesale sacking of those with diplomatic and geopolitical expertise, or was it part of a strategic plan, the complexity of which was yet to be revealed? Drawing on the familiar geopolitical metaphor, commentators have been divided as to whether Trump is playing some fiendishly-clever multi-dimensional game of chess, or whether he has simply eaten the pieces (to paraphrase the podcast *The Rest is Politics US*).

On the one hand, there is no doubt that much is shifting. Conventional geopolitical arguments about the deterministic effects of geography are being overturned if not conceptually then by the shifting nature of the environment itself. Trump's obsession with Greenland was not simply a passing fancy but instead recognition of the emerging shift in geopolitical significance of this region as ice melts and year-long ice-free routes open up for shipping, and the retreat of the ice reveals access to the kinds of rare earth minerals that otherwise have to be extracted from central Africa or traded for with China. The irony that it is the very processes that right wing populists like Trump insist are «fake news»—human induced climate change—that are driving this new geopolitical opportunity are not lost on most commentators. But while there are opportunities for enrichment around the Arctic, the same processes are creating existential threats for states in the Pacific, with the likes of Tuvalu and Vanuatu being forced to consider what legal identity can mean in conditions where the state itself is underwater (Dalby, 2023). No insistence of the primacy of borders can stop the fluid power of rising seas.

Similarly, the nature of diplomacy seems to have been scrambled. Trump's apparent refusal to use diplomatic channels, and diplomatic language, has raised the stakes of engagement (and rendered fairly meaningless O'Tuathail's (1996) distinction between formal, practical and popular geopolitics). The checks and balances that might have shaped and tempered US response to the actions of foes (or even friends these days), appear to have been jettisoned in favour of a singular unregulated point of response.

While many state leaders have gasped and doubled-down on official channels, the Iranian regime has sought to use the same social media dissemination as Trump and have effectively recast the narrative using a range of fast-response AI memes themselves.

But despite these rather superficial, perhaps even performative, changes, much remains fundamentally unaffected. Firstly, the «post-liberal» Trump administration has abandoned the previous US emphasis on persuasion, diplomacy and negotiation to a language of friends and foes, but this differs only in scale from George W Bush's insistence that post-2001, states were «either with us or with the terrorists.» From a feminist geopolitical perspective, the masculinist embodiment of geopolitical agency is redoubled rather than being fundamentally different. This warrior masculinity (Dalby, 2008; Sharp, 2007) is most spectacular in the Department of War's short video, *Justice, the American Way*, where testosterone-drenched clips from blockbuster movies from *Top Gun* through *Gladiator* (via *Braveheart*) are spliced with drone footage from the bombing campaign against Iran. But it is echoed on the Department's website where the lethality of US

warfare is juxtaposed with images of Secretary Hegseth's fitness and «grooming» regime and of the (white, heteronormative) family at the heart of the military. These are particularly crass and unapologetic celebrations of masculinity, but they are not a significant departure from previous iterations. Just as was the case under George W Bush's «war on terror,» the domestic corollary of warrior masculinity—in both cases, partially justified by the figure of the repressed Muslim woman—is a «return» to «traditional» gender roles (it is no co-incidence that «trad-wife» has emerged as a cultural phenomenon in MAGA America).

Secondly, while Trump's «America First» language may be classical geopolitics, his geopolitical economy is decidedly not. Despite his insistence that America's fuel security means the US will be insulated from the worst of the oil price increases of the closure of Hormuz, this is naïve to the global nature of the oil (and especially diesel (Lindner, 2026)) markets. Or perhaps it is entirely knowing of it. Economic uncertainty and higher oil prices are terrible for the manufacturing sector, but provide excellent opportunities for market traders. It is only by grasping the «K-shaped» nature of the US economy that the geopolitics of the Iran war makes sense—while the manufacturing sector is facing a slow down, and the majority of the population will be impacted by higher fuel and commodity costs, well-connected investors have seen significant financial gain betting (perhaps with some insider knowledge) on oil price fluctuations has apparently led to some vast accumulations of wealth. But again, while the scale and apparently unapologetic nature of this insider trading is new, and garnering significant attention, the use of insider knowledge by US administration figures is not, as attested to by the existence of Congress Stock Tracker websites, which allows others to follow the successful patterns of Congress people's investments (most notably, Nancy Pelosi's which have returned three-times more than the average trader since 2014).<sup>8</sup>

If these trends are indeed evidence of the approaching end of US empire, what do they predict? Amidst this apparent chaos, China has sat back, apparently happy to take on the role of the stable hegemon, as a cover of the *Economist* magazine stated, quoting Sun Tzu's *Art of War*: «never interrupt your enemy while he is making a mistake» (4/4/26). Perhaps the most significant outcome would be if the US dollar loses its place as world reserve currency. Post Bretton Woods, this has provided stability, propping up the values of the dollar required for US foreign investment, ultimately underlining its hegemonic status. The quid pro quo of the use of the dollar for oil sales, of course, was that that the US would provide security for the Gulf States, which has facilitated their reinvention as safe havens for investment and tourism. The US failure to protect the Gulf States from Iranian drone attacks, the temporary closure of regional airports, and the subsequent exodus of influencers and investors, has gravely impacted the Gulf brand.

Added to this, Iran is requiring tolls to be paid in Chinese Yuan or cryptocurrencies. Some oil sales were being done in non-dollar currencies before the recent war, but it would seem that whatever the eventual outcome of the conflict, the link between the dollar, oil and stability has been fundamentally severed. Without the need to hold dollar reserves to buy oil, the value of the currency may tumble, US Treasury Bonds would lose their appeal and the possibility of China and the Gulf States seeking repayment could create dramatically destabilising economic geometries.

It seems we are at the centre of an interregnum undergoing a particularly challenging transition where the geopolitical imaginations of the US-led post-war order are still dominant, but the material conditions have moved on. Many years ago, John Agnew & Stuart Corbridge (1995, p. xi) similarly noted that the 1980s were «a time of crisis in geopolitics precisely because as an old order [was] dying a new one [had] not yet been born». Thus «discourses of geopolitics take shape—sometimes uneasily and always unevenly—against the backdrop of an international political economy experiencing periodic crisis and restructuring» (Agnew & Corbridge 1995, p. 7). The attacks on the US on September 11 2001 and the subsequent American military and cultural response forged this flux into a new geopolitics of a «war on terror».

The globalisation that benefitted the US since the end of the Second World War no longer works to support the country's economy. Trump's attempt at imposing tariffs is reminiscent of Canute trying to hold back the tide. The economic, moral and geopolitical crisis of the US war in Iran might hasten the emergence of the new order.

8. See <https://www.quiverquant.com/congresstrading/politician/Nancy%20Pelosi-P000197>

There are several possible future geometries currently competing to emerge. It could be that China materialises as the new hegemon, or that we do indeed move towards a more hemispheric bi- or tri- polar world split between China, the US and Russia. Or perhaps Mark Carney's vision for an alliance of medium states or regional organisations will come to pass. Realistically, Carney's would be the only option that would truly offer a *new* geometry: a geopolitics based on a recognition of shared vulnerability, a recognition that co-operation and collaboration is necessary to survive and prosper, rather than a power struggle to impose geopolitical will over a world rendered fluid by economic globalisation and Anthropocene change.

But whether states will embrace Carney's vision is another question. Even Canada itself has wavered. Viewing this from the UK, it seems our domestic politics currently mirror this global situation. On the one hand, a declining Conservative Party and the rampant Reform, infused with imperial nostalgia, continue to insist upon the conceit that Britain is still a top tier state, rather than a medium one, clinging on desperately to the idea that it is still possible to «take back control,» as the Brexiteers insisted. If the Reform surge continues into the next Westminster parliamentary elections, then Britain will continue its shift from Europe and towards a more Trumpian world view. But as the recent English local and devolved parliamentary elections showed, against this is growing support for an alternative. For the first time, each of the devolved nations governing bodies is headed by a party seeking independence. The Scottish National Party won its fifth consecutive victory and, with the Greens gaining more seats, independence-supporting parties make up a clear majority. The break-up of Britain would produce new small states that would have to look towards Europe and other progressive alliances to seek strength in numbers.

It is a tantalising vision, all the more so because of the devastation likely associated with the other options.

## Security Anxiety and the Restlessness of America's Wars<sup>9</sup>

*Xiaobo Su*

The weapon of criticism cannot, of course, replace criticism of the weapon, material force must be overthrown by material force; but theory also becomes a material force as soon as it has gripped the masses. Theory is capable of gripping the masses as soon as it demonstrates *ad hominem*, and it demonstrates *ad hominem* as soon as it becomes radical. To be radical is to grasp the root of the matter.

Karl Marx, *A Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right*

Security anxiety, in theory, should not play a significant role in U.S. foreign relations. The nation has never faced an existential security threat capable of seriously jeopardizing its survival, apart from a few nontraditional security challenges like the 9/11 terror attacks and drug trafficking. Even Mearsheimer acknowledges the unparalleled nature of the U.S. geostrategic position:

No adversary is going to invade America and threaten its survival, because that opponent would almost certainly end up getting vaporized. In essence, two giant oceans and thousands of nuclear weapons today shield the United States. Moreover, it faces no serious threats in its own neighborhood, as it remains a regional hegemon in the Western Hemisphere (2014, p. 11).

Yet, despite these advantages and the near-zero risk to its physical survival, the U.S. continues to be haunted by security anxiety, driven by concerns that rising powers—from Germany to the former Soviet Union, Japan, and now China—might challenge its dominant global position.

9. Received on 13 April 2026.

In response to perceived strategic threats, the United States has deployed a combination of discursive and material instruments to shape the contours of global politics. Wars, whether discursive or military, have been waged to demonize and suppress potential adversaries; alliances have been forged to reinforce a hierarchical world order; and trade sanctions have been imposed to stifle the economic development of challengers. At times, this underlying sense of insecurity has escalated into expansive—and occasionally disproportionate—policy responses, including efforts at regime change directed against states constructed as systemic challengers (Alshaibi, 2024; Henriksen, 2022). Such strategies reveal a recurring dynamic in which attempts to mitigate security anxieties generate a self-reinforcing cycle of coercion, resulting in a pattern of interventions and sanctions that carry significant and far-reaching consequences for global geopolitics. From a Marxian perspective, the core analytical issue lies in the interplay between dominance and resistance within the international system. At its root, this dynamic reflects the persistent use of unilateral and coercive measures by the United States to preserve its position of supremacy. In recent years, particularly since the first Trump administration, such measures have become more overt, expansive, and confrontational, contributing to a marked reconfiguration of global power geometries and intensifying the structural contradictions of the contemporary international order. Discursive criticism upon these measures, as Marx emphasizes, cannot be replaced by criticism of the weapon to counter American military and economic adventurism, as shown by recent wars against China and Iran.

### The Warm War against China

To Trump, the strategy of preventing China's rise continued not through alliances with other Asian nations, but through its direct economic confrontation. Donald Trump posted a statement in April 2018:

We are not in a trade war with China, that war was lost many years ago by the foolish, or incompetent, people who represented the U.S. Now we have a Trade Deficit of \$500 Billion a year, with Intellectual Property Theft of another \$300 Billion. We cannot let this continue!<sup>10</sup>

To handle the loss, the Trump administration launched a trade war against China by imposing tariffs on US\$200 billion worth of Chinese goods, on top of the US\$50 billion worth already taxed earlier in 2018. The trade war soon escalated to a high-tech war by restrictions and sanctions against Chinese firms. Trump's «America First» does not merely spell out the prioritization of American interests in world politics, but also rejects the possibility that America would become second after another nation. Despite America's relative decline in power in relation to China, Trump firmly refused a loss to China and sought to subordinate China through the trade war first and then a massive high-tech war (Layne, 2018).

To further suppress China, the U.S. has increasingly disregarded established international rules and norms. For instance, in a dialogue on *Made in America* organized by Semafor in December 2023, former U.S. Trade Representative Katherine Tai defended tariffs against China, stating that «tariffs are a part of the U.S.-China bilateral relationship.» Instead of addressing the complexities of U.S.-China economic entanglement or engaging in fair trade competition, the U.S. has chosen to weaponize national security concerns. This strategy involves labeling numerous Chinese-made products as threats to U.S. security and placing nearly 800 Chinese firms on the entity list. Such actions reflect a shift away from rules-based competition toward more aggressive and unilateral measures to contain China's rise. Writing about techno-geopolitical uncertainty deduced by the U.S. CHIPS and Science Act, Luo & Van Assche (2023, p. 1) argue that the Act showcases «a paradigm shift from market-oriented liberalism to intervention-oriented techno-nationalism, heralding a new era of zero-sum thinking and geopolitical prioritization.»

What stands out about the trade war initiated by Donald Trump and sustained by Joe Biden is the explicit process of economic decoupling and even the potential for de-globalization. Reflec-

10. Retrieved from <https://twitter.com/realDonaldTrump/status/981492087328792577>

ting on great power politics, Chen & Evers (2023) argue that the dominant power's structural incentives to cut off a rising power's access to global supply chains can inadvertently trigger a reaction that eventually accelerates its own decline over time. Here, the criticism of the weapon deployed by China to counter the U.S. draws on economic productivity, industrial upgrading, and technological advancement. After seven years of trade wars and high-tech restrictions, China's global trade remains robust, and its high-tech industrial clusters continue to thrive, as evidenced by the success of Chinese firms in 5G technology, electric vehicles, high-speed rail, and other strategic sectors. Due to limited material gains from economic confrontation with China, the United States has increasingly sought alternative arenas in which to reassert its strategic leverage. In this context, prior cases such as U.S. pressure on Venezuela have demonstrated the continued efficacy of coercive instruments in weaker states, reinforcing confidence within U.S. policymaking circles regarding the utility of military adventurism. This time, Iran has become the target.

## The Bloody War against Iran

Peace and stability have remained elusive in the Middle East in the decades following both the 1991 Gulf War and the 2003–2011 Iraq War. Rather than stabilizing the region, these wars inaugurated a prolonged period of geopolitical fragmentation and recurrent crisis. Since 2023, regional tensions have escalated markedly, accompanied by a steady deterioration in relations between the United States and Iran. During the so-called «Twelve-Day War» in June 2025, the United States carried out strikes on Iranian nuclear facilities. Iran's response to these strikes was comparatively restrained and strategically calibrated, suggesting an apparent reluctance to escalate into direct, large-scale confrontation with the United States and Israel. However, such restraint did not translate into de-escalation at the regional level. On the contrary, tensions continued to intensify, underscoring the limited capacity of unilateral restraint to stabilize an increasingly volatile security environment.

Against this backdrop, the subsequent launch of a third Gulf War by the United States and Israel—absent a clearly articulated and broadly recognized legal or normative justification—marks a further escalation. On February 28, 2026, the United States and Israel conducted a joint preemptive military operation, under the codename «Epic Fury,» aimed at dismantling Iran's Islamic Republic. The campaign targeted key political and military figures, senior commanders, aircraft, naval assets, and strategic infrastructure, and included a decapitation strike in which Iran's Supreme Leader at the time, Ali Khamenei, was killed in an airstrike. Without hesitation, the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) responded, under the designation «True Promise,» with large-scale retaliatory attacks, deploying ballistic missiles and loitering munitions against multiple U.S. military installations across the Gulf region as well as targets within Israel. Simultaneously, Iran effectively imposed a partial blockade of the Strait of Hormuz, severely disrupting global oil supplies. At the time of writing, the Third Gulf War remains ongoing, and there is no clear indication that Iran's «criticism of the weapon» is sufficient to deter the Trump administration's continued reliance on coercion. Nevertheless, the conflict has already reshaped global geopolitics and produced what Agnew describes as «new geometries of global power.»

Iran appears to be deliberately pursuing a strategy of protraction, aiming to transform the conflict into a sustained war of attrition analogous to a twenty-first-century «Vietnam War.» Rather than seeking rapid escalation or decisive confrontation, this approach prioritizes endurance, dispersion, and the gradual imposition of costs. By leveraging its strategic depth, asymmetric capabilities, and regional networks, Iran can extend the temporal horizon of conflict and complicate the operational environment faced by its adversaries. The underlying objective is to entangle the United States in a prolonged engagement characterized by cumulative material expenditure, operational fatigue, and political strain. Over time, such a strategy seeks to erode America's military effectiveness and domestic support. In this framework, success is not defined by battlefield victory in conventional terms, but by the ability to impose disproportionate costs, generate strategic overextension, and ultimately compel a recalibration—or withdrawal—by the U.S., the sole superpower in the world.

Marx's distinction between «criticism of the weapon» and «weapon of criticism» underscores that material confrontation cannot be avoided in conditions of geopolitical conflict. Iran's investment in missiles, drones, and asymmetric warfare reflects the necessity of engaging in «criticism of the weapon»—that is, responding to material force with material force. However, Marx's deeper insight lies in the second half of the statement: theory becomes a material force once it grips the masses. This is particularly relevant for understanding Iran's internal resilience. The ideological framework of the Islamic Republic—rooted in Shi'i political theology, anti-imperialism, and narratives of resistance—has been institutionalized and disseminated through state, religious, and social networks. The discourse of resistance is not abstract; it is grounded in lived political memory and framed as a defense of sovereignty and justice. In this sense, ideology «grips the masses» because it connects structural conditions (external pressure, inequality in the international system) with moral and political interpretation. This alignment transforms belief into mobilization capacity, turning Iran into a real regional power with global influence.

### Theoretical Implications

America's security anxiety toward perceived adversaries is often less a reflection of immediate, material threats than a constructed narrative that produces and sustains antagonistic relationships. The projection of this anxiety onto countries such as China, Iran, and Russia has intensified a classic security dilemma: measures taken by the United States in the name of security prompt countermeasures by these states, which in turn reinforce U.S. perceptions of insecurity. As this cycle deepens, bilateral relations become increasingly confrontational, while overall global stability deteriorates. The U.S.–China trade war and the third Gulf War exemplify how such dynamics are reshaping the geometry of global power. At the surface level, these confrontations are expressed through industrial competition or military force, emphasizing precision, scale, and intensity of projection. At a deeper structural level, both economic and military competition ultimately rest on the material foundations of power—industrial output, technological capability, and the resilience of supply chains. In this context, decades of financialization and deindustrialization have significantly weakened the United States' industrial base, raising questions about the long-term sustainability of its capacity to project power and sustain coercive strategies abroad.

Scholars have long agreed upon that the structural foundations of American supremacy—material preponderance, institutional authority, and ideological legitimacy—are undergoing simultaneous strain, thereby accelerating a transition already underway (Arrighi, 2009; Arrighi & Silver, 1999). If the decline of American supremacy is understood as a gradual, long-term process, the third Gulf War against Iran can be interpreted as a critical threshold at which this trajectory becomes effectively irreversible. Consequently, the central analytical question shifts from whether American supremacy will decline to how—and at what tempo—this decline will unfold. At the same time, the erosion of hegemonic capacity introduces greater systemic uncertainty, particularly as institutional legitimacy is increasingly contested and alternative centers of power expand their influence, as John Agnew has argued in his analysis of the new «geometries» of global power. Within this framework, the core issue becomes how to develop an effective «criticism of the weapon» capable of countering America's ongoing military interventionism, while simultaneously fostering an alternative vision of international order grounded in peaceful coexistence and socioeconomic development.

# Trump Doctrine and the Global South: The Decline of Liberal International Rule-Based Order or New Geometries of Geopolitical Order?<sup>11</sup>

*Ernest Tooche Aniche*

## Background

The Trump Foreign Policy Doctrine, anchored on the «America First» mantra and «Make America Great Again» (MAGA) slogan, is essentially aimed at prioritizing American interests sometimes at the expense of the traditional alliance system, multilateralism, and liberal international rules-based order. The thrust of the Doctrine is to maintain and sustain America's geo-economic leverage and political hegemony in competition with primarily China through a strange mixture of economic nationalism, unilateralism, bilateralism, isolationism, and interventionism, some of which are in fact antithetical to the Rule-Based International Order (RBIO) or Liberal International Order (LIO). By orchestrating the resurgence of a singular geometry of state-centric global geopolitical order of the territorialized great power rivalry and the contemporary global trade war moment, the Trump Doctrine has a significant implication, as noted by John Agnew in this forum, for the new «geometries» of global power.

## Trump Doctrine and Deepening Global Trade War: Whither Africa?

The emergence of Donald Trump as the President of the United States of America escalated economic great power competition between America and China in the form of a trade war in early 2018. The tariff war began specifically in January 2018 when America suddenly increased tariffs on nearly 50% of its imports from China, including washing machines and solar panels imported from China. This pattern continued in March 2018 when it imposed a tariff of 10% on aluminum and 25% on steel (Bown, 2019; Lai, 2019; Qiu, Zhan & Wei, 2019; Liu, 2020; Jin, Dorius & Xie, 2022).

China quickly responded with tariff retaliation covering more than 70% of imports from America, which appears to be the largest and longest in recent economic history. This comprises imposition of tariffs on 128 goods imported from America, including agricultural goods worth 2.4 billion dollars in April 2018. Expectedly, the American government responded by imposing 25% tariffs on a list of 1300 Chinese goods (mostly from the technology and pharmaceutical industries) worth 50 billion dollars. The Chinese government consequently released another list of imposed tariffs on 106 goods, including cars, airplanes, and other products. The tariff war affected almost all Chinese exports, reaching a point where the tariffs imposed on Chinese goods reached 505 billion dollars. The trade war persisted, affecting the global economy despite signing the Phase-One trade agreement with China in January 2020 and the Biden administration taking office in January 2021 (Maclsaac & Duclos, 2020; Hua & Zeng, 2022).

The global trade war expanded and deepened during Donald Trump's second tenure, transcending the US versus China tariff war when it was extended to what used to be America's traditional allies and trade partners, such as Canada and the European Union (EU). This is why John Agnew argued in this forum that «traditional allies count for little in Trump's purely transactional world». It was even extended to some BRICS+ member countries like Brazil and South Africa. The deepening and expanding trade war of imposing tariffs on one another's goods particularly between the America and China can be attributed mainly to America's trade imbalances and deficit due to China's currency undervaluation and rivalry between the two countries over global economic and technological dominance (Zhang, 2018; Archana, 2020; Chen, Chen & Dondeti, 2020; Chong & Li, 2019; Kim, 2024).

The trade war between America and China has negatively impacted the global economy and mostly economies of the Global South, particularly African economies, despite the fact that Africa is not a big player in the global trade (Li, He & Lin, 2018; Liu & Woo, 2018; Fajgelbaum *et al.*, 2024).

11. Received on 4 May 2026.

Thus, the Trump Doctrine has severe implications for the economies of the Global South. While Asia, particularly the Middle East, remains the main theatre of intensive geopolitical struggles and geo-strategic contestations, Africa has uniquely become one of the major arenas of the geopolitical rivalry and geo-economic competition, resulting in a renewed scramble for Africa's rare mineral resources. This has resulted in a shift from old dependency to new dependency of the international division of labor, where African economies are not only structurally dependent on the economies of the Global North (America and Europe) but also currently vertically integrated to China (Aniche & Iwuoha, 2025).

## **The Decline of Rule-Based Liberal International Order**

The RBIO/LIO has historically been challenged, especially by China and more recently by Russia (Deudney & Ikenberry, 1999; Ikenberry, 2011; Trachtenberg, 2025). The rise of China and perhaps the resurgence of Russia combined to quicken the decline of the RBIO/LIO. The rapid growth in the economy and technology of China was very instrumental in challenging RBIO/LIO (Ikenberry, 2018; Mearsheimer, 2019). China was able to use its «non-liberal» infrastructural investment/financing model, especially the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), to expand its sphere of economic influence in the Global South, particularly in Africa and Asia (Charles *et al.*, 2025). This model enabled China to provide an alternative (non-liberal) order that allowed China to provide foreign aid and loans without interfering in the internal politics of recipient states. The Chinese infrastructural financing model became very attractive to the economies of the Global South because, unlike RBIO/LIO, it is not based on conditions like human rights, rule of law, democracy, good governance demand, and other forms of internal political interference (De Robertis & Tkachenko, 2020).

Furthermore, rivalry within the Global North or among Western allies, like Brexit and trade wars, complicated the fall of RBIO/LIO. This heralded the transition from cooperation to rivalry within the Western allies and champions of RBIO/LIO. To be sure, the signs that RBIO/LIO is declining predated Trump's administration, and in fact, the two main mantras («America First» and MAGA) of the Trump Doctrine were aimed at projecting and protecting America's interest in the face of this decline, but instead of seeing RBIO/LIO as a strength or leverage, he saw it as a problem, obstacle or weakness. Thus, Trump's response to China's threat to America's economic hegemony was to promote economic nationalism, protectionism, tariff war, unilateralism, bilateralism, and isolationism. As a result, the Trump Doctrine became antithetical or paradoxical to the very principles of RBIO/LIO, such as free trade and multilateralism, which is what Agnew referred in this forum to as «dissipating of the so-called Washington Consensus' lowering tariffs.» The expansion of the tariff war to America's traditional western allies and co-promoters of RBIO/LIO, like the EU and Canada, became the final straw that quickened the fall of RBIO/LIO (Kundnani, 2024; Lake, 2026).

## **The New «Geometries» of Global Power or still the Old Singular Geometry of Geopolitical Order?**

The decline of RBIO/LIO has inevitably raised an alternative order. There is no longer a single dominant global order. The core of John Agnew's argument in this forum is not that the current non-state-centric plurality of geometries of multiplicity of actors has completely transcended the singularity of the geometry of state actors. This is what Agnew meant when he stated that the Trump Doctrine appears to represent the resurgence of territorialized or geopolitical order, where the singular geometry of great power politics thrives. What then is this alternative order? My argument is that despite the current multiple-actors or plural geometries of global power, states still dominate the contemporary geo-economic political order. This is usually the case when non-state actors still rely largely on instruments of state power.

Therefore, the model represented by China and its allies in BRICS+ has largely become an alternative order competing with RBIO/LIO within this prevalent singular geometry of great power geopolitical competition (McGregor, 2024). To contain China and its allies, the EU and G7 have set up Global Gateway (GG) and the US-led Build Back Better World (B3W) initiatives to challenge China's BRI. This intense competition has necessitated the rise of a new geo-economic political

order akin to the Cold War bipolarity (Stephan, 2023). This intense geo-economic, geostrategic, and geopolitical rivalry is playing out in the Global South, especially in the Middle East and Africa (Hout & Onderco, 2022). The current Middle East crisis and resurgence of military coups (democracy backsliding) in Africa are exemplars (Iwuoha & Aniche, 2026).

Thus, Africa is once more at the epicentre of global geopolitical and geo-economic rivalries, raising concerns for a new scramble for African rare minerals and the deepening neo-colonial dependency, further fragmenting African economies, with the consequences of reinforcing structural dependence, neo-colonial links, vertical integration, and unequal trade relations (Aniche, 2025). Yet this competition has some positives for the Global South, particularly Africa, in terms of providing an alternative model for infrastructural financing and bargaining leverage

## The New Geometries of Middle Powers as Seen from East Asia<sup>12</sup>

*Takashi Yamazaki*

Various forms of classical geopolitics, or state territorial geostrategies, have been observed worldwide since the end of the 20th century. The «War on Terror,» the «Belt and Road Initiative (BRI),» and the «New Cold War» exemplify this trend and reflect renewed interstate initiatives and tensions at the global scale. In recent years, geopolitical tropes such as «Make America Great Again» (MAGA) and the «Don-roe Doctrine» (the Monroe Doctrine rearticulated by President Donald Trump) have attracted global attention.

As Agnew points out in his essay, whether the geopolitical visions and actions initiated by Trump will represent any of the new geometries of global power is also a question this essay addresses. In the following, I will provide an overview of the geopolitical nature of MAGA and the Don-roe Doctrine, examine their relationship to and possible influence on Japan's foreign policy, situate Trump's foreign and military policies within the geopolitical context of East Asia, and propose a new framework for international cooperation that can be called «the new geometries of middle powers.»

### Trump's geopolitics

MAGA is a political slogan Trump has used since his 2016 campaign, representing the conservative wing of his supporters. Rooted in the «America First» principle, MAGA prioritizes U.S. economic and security interests over international cooperation. Its isolationist stance is marked by distrust of NATO and the UN, though it sometimes appears interventionist when confronting totalitarian regimes such as Venezuela and Iran. Domestically, stricter border control, including building border fences and harsh law-enforcement measures against illegal immigrants, along with a retreat from liberal democratic values and inclusive policies, exemplify a strengthening of state territoriality aimed at «re-nationalizing» industrial sectors and social fabrics.

The Don-roe Doctrine has sought to extend such territoriality to the Western Hemisphere. This updated, radicalized, and personalized imperial vision has already materialized in U.S. intervention in Venezuela and might also be projected onto areas such as Greenland and Cuba. By staying away from the postwar international multilateral order initiated by the U.S. itself and by promoting U.S. national interests, the Doctrine signals the intent to establish an exclusive sphere of influence over the Americas through political-economic means. A self-righteous form of political realism—summarized by the logic «might makes right»—is now proliferating in Ukraine, Gaza, and Iran.

### East Asian geopolitical landscape and the U.S.

If we turn to the Eastern Hemisphere, particularly East Asia, the geopolitical landscape looks different. Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan have long relied on U.S. military presence and support to

12. Received on 1 May 2026.

secure themselves against threats from China, North Korea, and/or Russia. The projection of U.S. military forces into the region has been considered so crucial to the regional power balance that alliances there have tended to favor U.S. strategic priorities. In Japan's case, the postwar military alliance with the U.S. has been central to its security policy and has led to a heavy U.S. military presence on Japanese territories.

In February 2026, Sanae Takaichi, the Prime Minister of Japan, and her party, the Liberal Democratic Party, won a landslide victory in the House of Representatives election. Trump took to social media to congratulate Takaichi and express his hope that she would achieve great success in realizing their shared policy goal of «peace through strength.» When she visited the White House in March 2026, she greeted Trump by saying, «Only Donald can bring peace and prosperity to the world» (Japan News, 2026). Given the U.S. attack on Iran (Operation Epic Fury) that began the previous month, Takaichi publicly approved of Trump's «peace through strength» policy and of Japan's subordinate alignment with it. Some U.S. bases in Japan dispatched forces to Iran, unlike those in Italy and Spain, whose host countries denied their use.

The concept of «peace through strength» dates back to the 1930s and has been a core diplomatic and security principle of the U.S. Republican Party since the 1980s. It rests on the belief that peace can be sustained by sufficient military power. However, as Bacevich (2010) criticizes, «peace through strength» risks devolving into «peace through war.» While Takaichi's praise of Trump's «peacemaking» can be interpreted as suggesting her acceptance of «peace and prosperity through war,» it remains unclear how Japan could support U.S. military campaigns against Iran. She added that she had clearly explained to Trump what the Japan Self-Defense Forces can and cannot do regarding their deployment in the Strait of Hormuz, within the scope of Japanese legal arrangements (Asahi Shimbun, 2026). As the Operation seems unlikely to change the Iranian regime or prevent the closure of the Strait, Trump has become frustrated with what he perceives as non-cooperative allies, including NATO members, Japan, and South Korea.

Trump's isolationism, self-righteousness, and unsuccessful military campaigns may raise further concerns for Japan. The Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP) plan, initiated by Japan's former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe in 2016, aims to promote the stability and prosperity of Indo-Pacific countries that share values such as the rule of law, freedom of navigation, free trade, and a market economy (Japan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2026). With the QUAD (Australia, India, Japan, and the U.S.) as core members, the FOIP serves as an international cooperation framework to counter China. The plan was officially adopted by Trump in 2017, strengthening the Japan-U.S. alliance. However, given Trump's distrust of multilateralism, neglect of international law, and inclination toward a unilateral doctrine, it is now unclear how actively the U.S. will be involved in this initiative. Operation Epic Fury and the subsequent developments also seem to run counter to the plan's stated values. Direct negotiation with China would make Trump less interested in such regional cooperation (Kotani, 2026).

East Asian democracies such as Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan are products of postwar democratization and decolonization led by the U.S. The subsequent Cold War rendered the U.S. military presence and intervention in East Asia structurally permanent, leading these democracies to depend on U.S. security arrangements for nuclear deterrence. Perceiving threats from Russia, North Korea, and/or China, they have subordinated their security policies to U.S. global strategies. Because of the asymmetrical (hub-and-spokes) relations between the U.S. and the regional powers, it has been difficult to envision an alternative model for regional security arrangements (Izumikawa, 2020). If the Trump administration becomes reluctant to maintain the current level of U.S. security commitments in East Asia, there may be an opportunity to reconsider the framework for regional cooperation.

## **The new geometries of middle powers**

Prioritizing bilateral deals and «peace through strength» over multilateral cooperation and international law, Trump continues to destabilize the existing world order in unpredictable, inconsistent, and norm-breaking ways while retreating from global leadership. If the U.S. is no longer the primary provider of international public goods, alternative frameworks must be explored. In this

context, Mark Carney, the Prime Minister of Canada, called for an alliance of «middle powers» at the World Economic Forum's Annual Meeting 2026 in Davos (Carney, 2026). Carney stated that the rules-based international order had come to an end and that Canada was responding by pursuing greater strategic independence while continuing to uphold principles such as human rights and national sovereignty. For him, middle powers would collaborate to push back against the growing dominance of hard power and intensifying rivalry among great powers, in order to create a more cooperative and resilient global environment.

Which states can be considered middle powers? Carney mentioned Canada and its strategic and trade partners, including China, Qatar, India, Thailand, the Philippines, ASEAN, and Mercosur. He also added Ukraine, Denmark (with Greenland), and NATO. However, he does not necessarily rule out the U.S. as Canada's most important economic partner (his interview on NHK One, 2026). Broadly defined, middle powers are states that maintain a relative distance from great-power rivalry, pursue multi-directional diplomacy, and engage flexibly with the U.S., China, and Middle Eastern countries. Japan and South Korea are candidates for middle powers. Such a call for a new world order is not necessarily new, but some existing international norms and orders have outlived their usefulness and cannot be replaced by classic imperialist geopolitical schemes.

As individual states, middle powers may face a significant financial burden if they strengthen their economic and military security without being swayed by the intentions of great powers. Therefore, middle powers must act collectively to address the great powers. If they are not at the table, they are on the menu and risk being exploited by the great powers (Carney, 2026). They should form not a monolithic alliance, but flexible, multiple coalitions grounded in practical interests to counter the destructive and exploitative tendencies of the great powers. Such coalition building would constitute «the new geometries of middle powers.»

## **Trump 2.0: Transactional hegemonic domination, areas of influence, and variable geometries of power<sup>13</sup>**

*Jaime A. Preciado Coronado*

Donald Trump's second term in office has intensified the disruption of the rules-based liberal international order, while simultaneously blocking the consolidation of a multipolar order open to the Global South. This disruption should not be understood as a mere strategic detour, but rather as a structural transformation that brings together economic nationalism, cultural supremacism, and geopolitical unilateralism. As Álvaro García Linera (2026a) argues, this is a form of domination that prioritizes coercion over hegemony, though without being able to completely dispense with the latter. In this sense, Trumpism constitutes a fragmented or degraded hegemony, sustained by partial consensuses and the ideological mobilization of the «America First» discourse and the «Make America Great Again» (MAGA) movement.

This form of transactional hegemonic domination relies on a diplomacy that does not adhere to the parameters of classical realism, but rather to an instrumental logic where the means are subordinated to immediate, non-strategic ends. Foreign policy ceases to be guided by stable principles and becomes a field of permanent negotiation, where tariffs, sanctions, and alliances are used as instruments of pressure. This transactional hegemony links the domestic with the international, transforming domestic economic policy into a weapon of geopolitical projection.

The effects of this orientation are so profound that they can be interpreted as a global interregnum: the old order does not disappear completely, and the new order fails to consolidate. The dark age of the Leviathans emerges (García Linera, 2026b). In this context, the classical notion of spheres of influence proves insufficient to understand the complexity of the contemporary international system. John Agnew proposes in this forum the concept of «variable geometries of power» to describe a world where multiple spatialities coexist: territorial, digital, financial, logistical, and cultural. These geometries are not static, but relational and dynamic, configured by net-

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works that cross borders and reconfigure national or supranational sovereignty, such as the European Union.

The Americas have become a privileged space for observing this transformation, because they are not merely a traditional sphere of influence, but a hub where territoriality, strategic infrastructure, supply chains, digital platforms, and military apparatuses connect. In this sense, US dominance combines a localized territorial matrix with trans-territorial projections that operate through global networks.

Within this context, three foundational moments of hemispheric power can be identified in the current phase of Trumpism. The first is «Liberation Day,» in April 2025, which inaugurates a strategy based on the global imposition of tariffs, but which transcends trade by articulating (connecting) three pillars of US global power: dominance of the dollar, military supremacy, and the capacity for economic coercion. The second is the National Security Strategy (The White House, 2025), which redefines security as an assemblage of economic, technological, and military power. The third is the so-called «Trump Corollary,» formulated in 2026, a reinterpretation of the Monroe Doctrine that incorporates elements of Manifest Destiny, the Big Stick, and the Roosevelt Corollary, all under a narrative of American exceptionalism that presents itself as a chosen nation and people.

### **Between perverted realism and the complex geometries of power**

Although official discourse presents this policy as a combination of flexible realism and principled realism, this characterization is problematic. As Rebecca Lissner and Mira Rapp-Hooper (2020) argue, «flexible realism» functions as a discursive alibi that legitimizes the expansive use of coercion without a coherent strategy. US intervention in conflicts such as the one with Iran, in alliance with Israel, demonstrates the absence of a clear articulation between means and ends, which contradicts the basic principles of realism.

«Principled realism,» on the other hand, would imply strategic discipline, prioritization of great power competition, and caution in the face of peripheral conflicts. However, Trumpism subverts this through an erratic practice that combines selective interventions, economic sanctions, and regime-change policies. Examples such as the management of the Peace Council in Gaza or, more generally, the tensions in the Middle East show the reappearance of practices that Trump himself had criticized, such as nation-building, albeit in a partial and contradictory manner. The most paradoxical case is the imposition of a puppet government in Venezuela by the Donald Trump administration.

This tension reveals a central paradox: while Trumpism invokes realism, its practice departs from it, substituting strategy with a coercive hegemony characterized by low levels of consensus. This form of power weakens the United States' capacity to structure stable spheres of influence in a world characterized by complex geometries.

In this sense, it is more appropriate to speak of a transactional hegemony. Following García Linera (2026a), all lasting domination requires some degree of hegemony, that is, an articulation of interests between dominant and subordinate groups. In the US case, this consensus is fragmented, limited, and pragmatic, sustained by material mechanisms such as the dollar—which remains central to the international financial system (International Monetary Fund, 2025)—global financial markets, and military capacity.

This transformation directly impacts the rivalry for spheres of influence. The United States seeks to expand and secure strategic spaces—energy resources, critical minerals, trade routes—but these spaces are increasingly contested and less controllable. As Amitav Acharya (2017) points out, the contemporary international system is «multiplex,» characterized by the coexistence of multiple orders and actors that interact in a non-hierarchical manner.

Within this framework, the variable geometries of power allow us to understand how US hegemony no longer organizes global space coherently but rather operates in fragmented configurations that combine direct coercion, economic dependence, and limited forms of seduction. These geometries do not completely replace spheres of influence, but rather coexist with them in a conflictive manner, producing overlaps and permanent tensions (Agnew, in this forum).

## The American Hemisphere: Three Moments of Transactional Domination

The «Liberation Day» speech encapsulates this logic by redefining trade as an instrument of geopolitical coercion. Tariffs cease to be economic tools and become mechanisms of strategic pressure. As Adam Tooze (2025) argues, the global economy is in a state of polycrisis, where economic instruments are increasingly subordinated to geopolitical competition.

The National Security Strategy (The White House, 2025) deepens this orientation by integrating economic, technological, and military security. Competition with China shifts toward control of supply chains, technological innovation, and strategic sectors such as semiconductors and artificial intelligence (Ikenberry, 2025). At the same time, the logic of the Monroe Doctrine is revived, redefining the Western Hemisphere as a priority sphere of influence. This approach combines selective protectionism, nearshoring in Latin America, and migration control, configuring a transactional hegemony based on flexible vertical alliances and economic coercion. The reduction of global engagement—especially in Europe and the Middle East—reflects an attempt to reorganize US hegemony in a context of relative decline (Zakaria, 2012).

The «Trump Corollary» represents a reterritorialization of this strategy. Unlike the original Monroe Doctrine, it incorporates technological, logistical, and financial dimensions aimed at controlling critical infrastructure, such as ports, telecommunications, and energy networks. Initiatives like the «Shield of the Americas» demonstrate this hemispheric reorganization based on security criteria, albeit with a significant power asymmetry.

The so-called «Donroe Doctrine» underscores the personalistic, unilateral, and coercive nature of this strategy, which prioritizes selective alliances and pressure mechanisms to align Latin American and Caribbean governments. This approach redefines spheres of influence as dynamic, conflictive, and under constant negotiation.

The spatial dynamics of the «Greater America» imaginary—stretching from Alaska to Ecuador, including Greenland, Canada, the Caribbean, and northern South America—do not imply formal annexation, but rather the construction of an expanded security perimeter. This perimeter is inscribed within the variable geometries of power, where territory is integrated with digital networks, financial circuits, and military apparatuses.

## Variable Geometries of Power and Areas of Influence

The variable geometries of power, as presented by Agnew in his essay, transcend territory and are configured through logistical infrastructures, digital platforms, financial circuits, and military apparatuses that reconfigure the scales of sovereignty. Agnew (2005) provides the first precedent regarding the variable geometries of power. After questioning the «territorial trap»—the tendency to conceive of power exclusively in terms of state sovereignty—he points out that contemporary hegemony is articulated through transnational economic and regulatory networks. Agnew (in this forum) reinforces this critique by showing that structural interdependence also limits the consolidation of self-sufficient territorial blocs with their respective areas of influence.

Agnew's variable geometries allow for a better understanding of Trumpism, since this materiality translates into a transactional hegemony that links these geometries of domination: domestically and internationally through tariff blackmail; in «peace by force,» with regime change, sanctions, and military power; in counterterrorism and organized crime policies; in anti-immigrant policies in the face of the «great replacement»; and in the deregulation of the state, crudely expressed in the «chainsaw» approach employed by Elon Musk when he headed the Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE) during the first months of Trump's second term, which reinforces authoritarian tendencies.

Added to this is a supremacist culture war that connects religious values, nationalism, and an anti-woke agenda, projecting itself internationally through conservative networks such as the Conservative Political Action Conference, of which several Latin American and Caribbean governments are members: Argentina, Bolivia, Chile, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Honduras, Panama, Paraguay, the Dominican Republic, and Trinidad and Tobago. This ideological dimension is not secondary, but rather constitutive of hegemony in its most coercive aspect; it is what provides frameworks for legitimization and political mobilization. Many of these governments participated in

the formation of the Shield of the Americas in Miami in March 2026. Its architecture, as John Agnew (in this forum) suggests, can be interpreted as a variable geometry of power, where the United States does not control contiguous territories but rather strategic nodes (ports, routes, borders).

Following Robert W. Cox's (1981) framework, this configuration can be understood as a structure that articulates material power, ideas, and institutions, although in this case with less systemic coherence and greater fragmentation. It represents a hegemony in crisis that combines predominant coercion with partial consensuses.

Simultaneously, industrial policy—supported by a multilateral policy, the so-called «Pax Silica» (USDS, 2025)—connects the digital complex of platform capitalism (artificial intelligence, supercomputing, microprocessors), the military-industrial complex, the energy complex (oil, gas, advanced petrochemicals), and the automotive and aerospace sectors. This assemblage establishes a new material base for US power, geared toward controlling critical technologies and strategic resources. Multilateral negotiations represent an obstacle to be overcome, if necessary, by a transactional, bilateral, and unilaterally controlled multi-state approach.

The result is a policy of dispossession that combines territorial appropriation, control of strategic minerals, and dominance of key maritime spaces. The dispute over the Panama Canal and the strategic interest in Greenland illustrate the centrality of these spaces in the geopolitical re-configuration. Likewise, the military presence in the Caribbean and the pressure on countries like Venezuela and Cuba reflect the intensification of this logic.

In short, Trumpism heralds a disruptive, 2.0 global geopolitical order that does not represent the end of US hegemony, but rather its transformation into a transactional, fragmented, and unstable regime of domination, operating within an international system characterized by shifting geometries of power, including spheres of influence. This configuration produces an order where coercion gains centrality, but it still depends on material anchors and partial consensuses to sustain itself. These are increasingly located in the different national far rights, under the impetus of the Reactionary International led by Donald Trump, aka *Donroe*.

## World Political Map as an Optical Illusion<sup>14</sup>

Igor Okunev

John Agnew's paper «The New 'Geometries' of Global Power» represents a rare example of academic work in which the complexity of the contemporary world is not reduced to yet another round of great power confrontation or simplified schemas of changing geopolitical epochs. For the Russian reader, weary of both Western narratives about the «return of geopolitics» and domestic discussions about the inevitable triumph of multipolarity, the author's engagement with the legacy of Doreen Massey and her concept of «power-geometries» sounds like an invitation to a serious and unbiased conversation (Massey, 1999; Christophers, Lave, Peck and Werner, 2023). This response attempts to examine Agnew's theses through the prism of the Russian tradition of political geography thought, which, oddly enough, largely moves in a similar direction while offering its own original tools for describing the tectonic shifts taking place.

A key point of convergence can be considered a shared skepticism toward «classical geopolitics,» which is once again becoming fashionable in expert circles on both sides of the Atlantic (and Pacific). Agnew rightly points out that the rhetoric of spheres of influence and great power rivalry, actively used by politicians like Donald Trump, often conceals a primitive understanding of international relations, reducing them to a struggle of predators for territorial prey. However, from the perspective of the author of this response, the source of this simplification lies even deeper, at the very foundation of our perception of the world. We are talking about what could be called the «mystification of the world political map.» The familiar map of the world with its multi-colored fill, each color representing the territory of a sovereign state, creates a dangerous illusion that the international system consists of equal, stable, and clearly demarcated units operating according

14. Received on 5 March 2026.

to universal rules. This map is nothing more than a narrative, a projection of someone's vision, fixed in school textbooks, but saying nothing about real hierarchies, about power exercised in maritime, air, and virtual spaces, about transnational corporations and criminal networks, about which Agnew himself writes (Agnew, 2005). Russian political geography, as Vladimir Kolosov and his co-authors note, has increasingly turned to the study of these hidden structures, exploring «uncontrolled territories» and «partially recognized states» that do not fit into the classical picture of the world (Kolosov, Zotova and Turov, 2022).

A possible metaphor for overcoming this mystification is the proposal to use, for depicting the true political picture of the world, not the «fill» tool, but the «spray» function in a graphics editor. In this case, the world appears not as a mosaic of rigid color blocks, but as a living canvas by Kandinsky: states do not disappear, but turn into clearer clots of one color, magnets attracting the blurred periphery of their hues. This image captures the very essence of Agnew's multiple «geometries»: the territorial structure is preserved, but it ceases to be the only and all-explaining one. Moreover, the rigid territorial structure, as both the author himself and Russian researchers rightly note, is not an eternal norm, but a «fairy-tale anomaly,» an artificial simplification born of the desire to reproduce the world order according to the model of a picture from a textbook (Okunev, 2024; Okunev and Liubimova, 2025).

A convincing example of an alternative, non-territorial organization is the model of Christian denominations, where the line of division runs through people, not through land: Orthodox and Protestant churches coexist in a space divided into canonical territories, but a believer does not fall out of the flock when crossing a border. This model suggests an impending transition from nation-territories to nation-communities, where citizenship and political loyalty will be increasingly less tied to a specific piece of land. The problem of unrecognized states on the post-Soviet space, which Kolosov and his colleagues study in detail, precisely illustrates this transition: the population of these territories forms a special identity and political loyalty that does not coincide with formal state borders, creating complex «power-geometries» at the local level (Kolosov, 2022).

Accepting the general logic of Agnew's reasoning about the «pluralist present,» I would like to offer one important addition concerning how exactly this plurality manifests itself in the perception of the world by various actors. Agnew avoids a direct answer to the question of the ultimate configuration of global power, limiting himself to stating its complexity. In official Russian rhetoric, the answer to this question has long been found: the world is moving toward polycentricity. However, a deeper analysis, presented in a number of contemporary Russian works, shows that even this answer is too simplistic. An idea emerges that can be called «situational polarity.» Its essence lies in the fact that the world is simultaneously unipolar, bipolar, and multipolar, depending on which side you look from and which specific issue is being discussed (Okunev, 2020). Polarity is not an objective property of the world system, but rather a property of the gaze, the «eyepieces» that this or that player puts on to interpret a specific situation.

Thus, Russia, supporting sanctions against North Korea, behaves as if the world were unipolar, that is, it recognizes the existence of universal rules. On the issue of Ukraine's geopolitical choice, many Russian politicians think strictly in categories of a bipolar world: Kyiv must choose between the West and the Eurasian Union; there is no third option. Finally, participating in the Syrian settlement, Russia acts in the logic of a multipolar or even «non-polar» world, maneuvering among the many overlapping interests of global and regional players and not seeking to rigidly divide them into friends and foes. International relations thus appear not as a game on a chessboard with a fixed arrangement of pieces, but as a competition of different models of maintaining balance. The unipolar, bipolar, and multipolar models exist simultaneously, and different countries in different situations appeal to the one that benefits them. This is the true «multiple geometry,» where the configuration constantly changes depending on the task at hand.

From this observation follows another important consequence: the very concept of a «pole of power» is qualitatively different for different cultures and historical traditions. Agnew, following the Western tradition, tends to measure the power of a state by military and economic indicators, which is quite natural for analyzing the policies of the USA, China, or Russia. However, for Russian self-consciousness, symbolic and historical capital rooted in a specific date—1945—plays a key role. The modern system of international relations, from this point of view, took shape as a result of World War II at the conferences in Tehran, Yalta, and Potsdam. It was the victory in the war that

ensured the USSR (and now Russia as its successor) the status of a great power, a permanent seat on the UN Security Council, and, as a consequence, the legitimate right to possess nuclear weapons. This status is thought of as inalienable, regardless of temporary economic or technological difficulties. For a significant part of the Western world, the reference point is different—1991, the year of victory in the Cold War. From this point of view, Russia's «Soviet» ambitions look archaic and unfounded. This chronological gap generates a fundamental misunderstanding: Moscow considers itself a great power by right of history, while the West sees in this only nostalgia for an empire, unsupported by real power.

Reflecting on the future of the world's territorial structure, Agnew notes an important paradox: the construction of walls and trade barriers with the simultaneous growth of cross-border flows. He sees this as a manifestation of the «return of territorial geopolitics.» However, this can be viewed from another angle. The construction of walls and the introduction of duties are, perhaps, not so much a return to the 19th century as the agony of a departing territorial model. States desperately cling to classical sovereignty, but the network structure of the world—financial flows, migration, data—already lives by its own laws. In this regard, the idea of the inevitable emergence of «mixed forms of sovereignty» and a «corporate model» of territorial governance acquires particular value. If the same territory cannot belong to two states, as the Westphalian dogma teaches us, then any territorial conflict is fundamentally unsolvable and can only be frozen by force. If, however, we imagine the territory as a kind of joint-stock enterprise, where states have different shares (say, one country owns 51% of the shares, another 30%, a third 19%, while one of the shareholders has a «golden share» with veto power), then space for compromise opens up. This idea, however fantastic it may seem today, logically follows from observations of the erosion of territorial sovereignty that Agnew writes about. We already see the beginnings of this in discussions about the fate of states threatened by flooding due to rising sea levels: it is proposed to preserve their statehood even if their citizens live in other countries. Nation-communities are gradually replacing nation-territories.

Summing up this virtual dialogue, I would like to once again emphasize the value of the approach proposed by John Agnew. By refusing to search for a single «geometry» of power, he opens up the possibility for a much more subtle and realistic description of the modern world. Russian political-geographical thought, largely following a similar path, proposes to supplement this approach with an analysis of the «geometries of perception»—how the participants in international relations themselves construct the image of the world depending on their historical traumas, ambitions, and situational interests. The world, in which one and the same conflict can be described in categories of unipolar pressure, bipolar confrontation, and multipolar maneuvering simultaneously, does not lend itself to simple schemas. The contemporary world order resembles not a chessboard and not a Western court, but rather an Eastern bazaar, where there are no universal prices, and the price is set each time through a unique context of negotiations, or a Russian fair, where it is important not so much to sell as to show respect to one another. And in this sense, Agnew's main conclusion that the future is «firmly in the lap of the gods» is not a manifestation of academic timidity, but the only possible honest position in the face of a complexity that we are only just beginning to comprehend. Perhaps we live not in an era of changing geometries, but in an era of realizing that no single geometry of the world ever existed. There were only convenient political maps that we, in our simplicity, took for reality.

## What Comes Next? Four Possible World Orders<sup>15</sup>

*Reece Jones*

As John Agnew illustrates in his opening piece on «The New 'Geometries' of Global Power,» the rules-based order of the post-World War II era is in tatters but the system that will replace it is not yet clear. The United States, Russia, and China have all signaled the end of the concept of territo-

15. Received on 5 May 2026.

rial integrity through the rhetoric of expansionism and acquisitions through force (Jones, 2025). The United States is threatening to acquire Greenland, Canada, and the Panama Canal. Russia invaded Georgia and Ukraine, twice. China seized territory in Bhutan and the South China Sea, while continuing to eye Taiwan. The disregard for global norms and institutions led Canadian Prime Minister Mark Carney (2026) to call the changes a «rupture» and German Chancellor Friedrich Merz (2026) concluded that the rules-based order «no longer exists.» If we accept Carney's and Merz's diagnosis of the demise of the rules-based order, then what will replace it? In this short piece, I outline four future possible world orders based on nationalist, liberal, global, and corporate states.

A world order of unconstrained nationalist states appears to be the preferred outcome of Russia, the United States, and to a lesser extent, China. Nationalist states give primacy to state sovereignty above all else, allowing the national interest to trump international norms and agreements. In this view, institutions like the United Nations are unnecessary limits on powerful states, who can use military superiority to create stability in the world through force. A world of nationalist states also dispenses with the fiction of mutual recognition of sovereignty between equal states in a global system. Gone are failed states and unrecognized states. Instead, in a world of warring nationalist states, if a powerful country can occupy their weaker neighbor, they are free to do so.

This version of the world resembles the late nineteenth century global order, which was characterized by expansionary wars, colonization by powerful states, and an unbridled form of capitalism (Acharya, 2025). When Donald Trump says he wants to Make America Great again, he means the Gilded Age of unchecked power for the dominant countries on the world stage, arguing that America was «at our richest from 1870 to 1913» (Weissert, 2025). This world order would seem to favor authoritarians, who could dominate their country without regard to international standards of democracy and human rights (Jones, 2026; Koch, 2022).

The world of authoritarian nationalist states is what Mark Carney and Friedrich Merz are concerned about. In response, they propose a second version of a future world order that continues to be based on liberal states in a system of global agreements. In this world order, the current institutions and norms would be maintained, but refined by shifting the center of power away from the bad actors like the United States, Russia, and China. As an alternative, Carney (2026) proposed alliances of middle powers that work with each other to institute norms and values that would maintain stability and order. Carney's world order based on liberal states is the closest to the rules-based order of the second half of the twentieth century. The vision is for a balanced world of state sovereignty and international agreements and norms, but one that would not be as dominated by a few powerful states.

Both the nationalist state and the liberal state world orders would maintain the current configuration of authority in the form of Westphalian sovereign states, with the main difference being that in the nationalist version all authority is with the state while in the liberal version, the state cedes a modicum of authority to a global system of rules and norms. However, many of the intractable problems of the rules-based order could be boiled down to a mismatch between the scale of the problem and the scale of the solution. While the climate, the economy, and humanity exist globally, the ability to regulate pollution, corporations, and mobility are divided up between 193 sovereign states. Inevitably, issues that affect the local population of the state are going to take precedence over shared, but distributed, global threats. Moreover, the inability to enact global regulations on technologies like nuclear weapons, dangerous pathogens, or Artificial Intelligence increases the risk that a single actor that controls a sovereign state could pose an existential threat to the continued existence of humanity (Ord, 2020).

The solution to these problems is the third possible world order: a single global state that controls dangerous technologies and sets global rules for environmental protections, working conditions, wages, and the right to movement around the world. The idea that the world would eventually need a single government has existed for millennia. Florentine author Dante Alighieri discussed a world government in *Monarchia*, written in 1312 -13. Dutch legal theorist Hugo Grotius' *On the Laws of War and Peace* in 1625 outlined the need for international laws. Immanuel Kant's *Perpetual Peace* in 1795 also argued a global confederation was essential for world peace. At the end of World War II, Albert Einstein, H.G. Wells and Bertrand Russell advocated for a world government. Even Ronald Reagan briefly joined the World Federalist Movement in the 1940s.

Despite the long intellectual tradition in favor of a single administrative state for the earth and for all of humanity, a world government faces significant headwinds due to the primacy of separate sovereign states today. Given the strong sense of place-based nationalism that has been fostered in countries around the world, it is difficult to envision how a significant portion of the world's population, much less the leaders of sovereign states, could be convinced to cede that authority to a single, shared governance system. Indeed, just as a world government has been presented as a utopia, it also fuels dystopian fears that a global elite could enrich themselves while subjugating the majority of the people in the world. A truly global rupture would probably be required to dislodge the entrenched sovereign states of today.

The fourth possible world order of corporate states is based on a techno-optimist view that private enterprise could solve the world's problems if only the inefficient administrative state would get out of the way. In 2025, Elon Musk's Department of Government Efficiency in the United States was described as a cost-cutting measure at the start of the second Trump Administration, but it did not actually save much money. What it did do was disrupt the work of government and make it seem ineffective, which opened more space for corporations. The idea that the private sector can do the work of government better has long been a vision on the right of the political spectrum. SpaceX and Blue Horizon can replace NASA. Blackwater, Halliburton, and Kellogg Brown Root can replace the military. Palantir and ClearviewAI can replace the police. FedEx and UPS can replace the Postal Service. OpenAI and Anthropic know better than a government regulator how to set the boundaries for Artificial Intelligence. And on and on.

In a techno-utopian vision of the future, the world would not need traditional states at all. Instead, corporations can do all of the work of government more effectively, while making a profit for their shareholders. Musk envisions X as the everything app. Google has its hands in everything, as does Amazon. In China, WeChat is already integrated into many aspects of people's lives. Then there's Palantir, whose CEO Michael Karp published *The Technological Republic* (Karp & Zamiska, 2025) arguing for a militarized tech oligarchy. However, there is a good reason that many dystopian films such as *Soylent Green*, *Blade Runner*, and *WALL-E*, and dystopian novels such as *The Running Man* and *Snow Crash* all rely on an evil corporation controlling all aspects of a future world. There are many functions of government that should not be based solely on whether they are profitable. Indeed, it is not just writers who are worried about the threat of corporate states. In his farewell speech as president of the United States, Joe Biden warned of the dangers of a tech oligarchy (Davies, 2025).

The world is in a dangerous moment of transition as these different visions of the nationalist, liberal, global, or corporate state compete for primacy. The vacuum could also be filled by other contrageopolitics like indigenous states (Moreton-Robinson, 2020) or anarchist mutual aid collectives (Reese & Johnson, 2022). In the end, what is clear is that the rules-based order of the second half of the twentieth century is over and something new has begun. Now is the time to envision what that new thing should be and then enact it in the world.

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