



Valdai  
New  
Generation

# Beyond the Pattern: The World of Real Multipolarity



**Valdai** | Discussion  
Club

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Edited by Timofei Bordachev

The views and opinions expressed in this report are those of the authors and do not represent the views of the Valdai Discussion Club, unless explicitly stated otherwise.

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**Under the general editorship of Timofei Bordachev**

# Table of contents

- 4 Foreword by the Academic Editor
- 8 Chapter 1. Multipolarity:  
The Politico-Military Dimension of the World Order
- Heramb Podar, Yize Huang, Dong Suk Yoo,  
Lilia Romodan, Mehrubon Ashurov.*
- Introduction: From Hegemony to Real Multipolarity?
  - Poles of Power and the Limits of Institutionalisation
  - BRICS as a Projection, Not an Alternative
  - Multipolarity as Stage, Not as a Limit
  - Conclusion
- 13 Chapter 2. The Role of Ideology,  
Values and Identity in Contemporary  
International Relations
- Beatris Bineva, Nikita Lipunov, Muhammad Shamsuddinov,  
Hasibe Tuğçe Taşık, Anastasia Pogorelskaya.*
- Not the “End of History”
  - “De-ideologisation of Ideology”: The Case of Renewed Bloc Politics
  - The Role of Identity and Values in International Relations:  
The Cases of Different Regions
  - Towards the Multipolarity of Meaning?
- 22 Chapter 3. Weaponised Trade: The Political Economy of Turbulence
- Li Kunlin, Hao Nan, Priyanshu Agarwal,  
Maria Bazlutskaya, Yuri Kolotaev*
- The Roadmap to a New Reality
  - Conceptual Framework:  
The Weaponisation of Economy
  - The Three Tiers of a Weaponised World
  - Major Powers and System-Shapers
  - Middle Powers: Swing Enforcers  
and Pivotal Nodes
  - Small States: Exposure Managers  
Under Chokepoint Politics
  - Cross-Layer Dynamics
  - Conclusion

**30** Chapter 4. The Global South and Development Challenges

*Lorenzo Maria Pacini, Mateo Rojas Samper, Marina Krynzhina,  
Alyona Lisenkova, Irina Iutiaeva.*

Post-colonialism, Development, and the Perception  
of the Global South

Epistemological Decolonisation  
and the Reclamation of Cultural Sovereignty  
in Post-colonial Structures of the Global South

Conflicts

Drug Trafficking

Technological and Digital Divide

Climate Change

Conclusion

**36** Chapter 5. The “Big Regions” of the Contemporary World

*Christian Baldi, Lucas Leiroz, Rajoli Siddharth Jayaprakash,  
Pavel Devyatkin, Medha Bhardwaj.*

Fragmentation and Re-alignment

Europe

Central Asia

The Arctic

Conclusion

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# Foreword by the Academic Editor

This report is the second collective work produced by participants in the Valdai–New Generation<sup>1</sup> project, bringing together, in a shared intellectual endeavour, a large cohort of young—yet already accomplished—researchers from Russia, China, India, Brazil, Tajikistan, Italy, Colombia, Turkey, and the Republic of Korea. Over the course of a year, all of them prepared and published original commentaries on the Valdai Club’s website, addressing the most pressing issues in today’s world. They subsequently collaborated, as part of five working groups, in drafting the report’s collective chapters.

Invaluable assistance in organising the work of these creative teams was provided by the Club’s Research Director, Fyodor Lukyanov, and Programme Directors Oleg Barabanov, Anton Bespalov, and Ivan Timofeev. Their attentive and exacting approach to participants’ proposals, combined with their tactful oversight, enabled the “new generation” to meet the challenges set before them at the highest academic level. Equally significant support in shaping the intellectual development of this new cohort came from their senior colleagues—graduates of the 2025 Valdai–New Generation programme—who generously assumed the role of tutors in guiding the individual research of their junior peers. Ladislav Zemanek, Non-Resident Research Fellow with the China-CEE Institute; Nubara Kulieva, Junior Researcher at CCEIS, HSE; Rupal Mishra, Senior Research Fellow at the Centre for Russian and Central Asian Studies at Jawaharlal Nehru University; Anna Sytnik, Associate Professor in the Department of American Studies at the School of International Relations of SPbU; and Alexei Chikhachev, Associate Professor of the Department of European Studies at the same faculty, worked day and night preparing valuable comments on the authors’ work. The report’s authors and its academic supervisor also extend their gratitude to the leadership and staff of the Valdai Club. And, of course, we are deeply thankful to the project coordinator, Irina Yakovenko, whose extraordinary efforts made it possible for our work to take on the character of a comparatively coherent collective undertaking.

The purpose of this report is to offer readers a rich and multifaceted picture of the principal processes and phenomena shaping contemporary international affairs, and to identify the key systemic trends that may determine the evolution of the world around us in the future. The subject matter of each chapter was defined by the preferences of the five authorial teams and their own assessment of what is most important to study in today’s world. The authors make no claim to have covered every topic deserving scholarly

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<sup>1</sup> See the 2025 report of the Valdai–New Generation project: The New Horizons of Multipolarity // Valdai Discussion Club. 24.04.2025. URL: <https://valdaiclub.com/a/reports/the-new-horizons-of-multipolarity/>

attention—many important questions and problems inevitably remain beyond the scope of this work. Nevertheless, it appears that precisely because of the youth and diversity of its participants, the project has succeeded in highlighting the most significant directions for research. Moreover, the collaborative nature of the work enabled participants to avoid one of the central intellectual pitfalls of our time—the lack of scrutiny of one’s own knowledge and hypotheses by fellow researchers. All chapters and sections were actively discussed over several months during working group seminars.

The hypotheses, conclusions, and observations formulated by the authors are presented across five chapters: “Multipolarity: The Politico-Military Dimension of the World Order”; “The Role of Ideology, Values and Identity in Contemporary International Relations”; “Weaponised Trade: The Political Economy of Turbulence”; “The Global South and Development Challenges” and “The ‘Big Regions’ of the Contemporary World” . This wide thematic spectrum has enabled the authors to produce a panoramic overview of how the modern world is developing and which trends may shape its evolution in the near future. At the same time, each chapter constitutes an independent study—a paper—fully in keeping with the academic supervisor’s intention to avoid any attempt to force the participants’ findings into a single theoretical framework.

The authors continue the tradition of the Valdai—New Generation project, presenting themselves as historians of the present, whose task is not to persuade the reader of the correctness of their particular interpretations of key events and phenomena, but rather to offer an opportunity for reflection based on the fresh perspectives of scholars representing diverse cultural traditions, yet united in their search for truth. The reader is thus given the chance to determine independently which processes are most significant for global politics, economics, and social development, and how to navigate the complex landscape of international life at the outset of the second quarter of the twenty-first century. Such intellectual freedom becomes especially important in a world where, as the authors of one chapter observe, “the pursuit of security relentlessly reshapes the foundations of prosperity”.

As always, the methodology we have chosen carries its own particular features and limitations—it does not aim to construct a coherent and unified concept of how the new generation of Valdai experts perceives the present or envisions the future. Nor do the authors and the academic supervisor seek to convince the reader that any specific model of international order or interstate relations is optimal from the standpoint of global stability and development. This means that the report does not offer ready-made prescriptions or clear directives as to the kind of world we should aspire to build. What it does provide, however, are vivid reflections on the opportunities that contemporary global politics presents to states.

The authors are likewise far from assuming that they can determine the strategic course of states in a changing environment. Yet this very approach, in our view, reflects the core principle of the Valdai Club's work—the fullest possible support for broad, open expert discussion, free from the hallmarks of state or corporate propaganda, and not aimed at imposing any particular analytical perspective on its audience. Our priority is to foster the most open-ended and unrestricted debate on the most pressing issues of our time, grounded in a comparatively objective assessment of their substance and nature.

At the heart of contemporary international processes lies the gradual formation of multipolarity, which, as the authors of the first chapter argue, should be understood not as an end state, but as a process whose trajectories range from informal coalitions united by specific issues to more structured mechanisms of coordination. The future of multipolarity therefore depends on whether states can move beyond rhetorical declarations and commit resources to building practical frameworks for cooperation. It is precisely coordination—even if imperfect and gradual—that can transform multipolarity from a condition into a functioning system.

The second chapter addresses issues that, while not always at the forefront of daily news coverage, nonetheless shape how political decisions are made both now and in the future. In the authors' view, ideology, values, and identity are playing an increasingly significant role in international relations. The trend towards global ideological and normative uniformity is being counterbalanced by a growing demand for more differentiated approaches to democracy, development, and global governance. The emerging “multipolarity of meaning” reflects an evolving polycentrism that is not merely an abstract idea, but a tangible reality.

This is all the more significant at a time when politics is increasingly subsuming other spheres of human activity. According to the authors of the third chapter, the world has entered an era in which economic interdependence is consistently used as a weapon: major powers compete for systemic influence and the proliferation of their rules, each employing a distinct set of instruments shaped by its structural position and institutional capacities; middle powers oscillate between compliance with the demands of larger states, the use of coercive measures, and self-protection from their spill-over effects, thereby determining the pace and contours of the spread of these instruments; while smaller states prioritise risk management and the creation of fall-back mechanisms in order to reduce the likelihood of coercive success against them.

In such conditions, the challenges faced by countries of the Global South acquire particular urgency. According to the authors of the fourth chapter, these challenges range from rethinking post-colonial development models to epistemological decolonisation, from armed conflicts to drug trafficking, from the digital divide to the climate crisis. Yet they also reveal a common thread—the search for sovereignty within an international system still characterised by profound asymmetry.

The discussion is further enriched by the fifth chapter, devoted to the “big regions” of the contemporary world—those areas where existing global contradictions manifest themselves most vividly. Europe and Central Asia serve as prime examples, whose combined development is of fundamental importance for security and politics across Eurasia.

Each chapter of the report, without exception, is the result of substantial research effort, each reflecting the authors’ creative achievements during their participation in the Valdai–New Generation project, and each truly worthy of independent publication. At the same time, this does not render the report a mere collection of articles or a loosely connected collective monograph: all five authorial teams have succeeded in creating a richly diverse, at times internally contradictory—as life itself—yet coherent panorama of international reality in 2026. There is no doubt that many of the conclusions and hypotheses will, in time, be revisited, perhaps by the authors themselves. Yet this, in turn, reflects the very nature of the intellectual process as an unending dialogue between the past, the present, and the future.

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<sup>2</sup> A post-doctoral degree called Doctor of Sciences is given to reflect second advanced research qualifications or higher doctorates in ISCED 2011.

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# Chapter 1. Multipolarity: The Politico-Military Dimension of the World Order

**Heramb Podar, Yize Huang, Dong Suk Yoo,  
Lilia Romodan, Mehrubon Ashurov.**

## Introduction: From Hegemony to Real Multipolarity?

Multipolarity has emerged as a reaction to American hegemony, driven by shifts in power and fuelled by the emergence of centres of power such as Russia, China, and India at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. This concept is not codified, legally formalised, or even represented by a specific system with universal mechanisms. Unlike bipolarity or liberal unipolarity, multipolarity does not inevitably suggest the development of parallel structures.

The currently unfolding crises, such as the escalation around Iran, confirm that a multipolar world cannot be an abstract concept. This raises the question of whether the emerging poles are capable of acting in a coordinated manner.

A key issue in modern multipolarity is that even if all emerging actors wish to avoid a confrontation, the United States can impose a conflict, forcing an escalation in the system. Multipolarity is not only a reaction to the shift in power but also a complex phenomenon shaped by the still-dominant actor.

## Poles of Power and the Limits of Institutionalisation

Nevertheless, it is beyond doubt that the United States, despite the rise of new centres, is still the strongest pole in terms of financial, technological, and military and political power. At the same time, there is

economic might in China, military power in Russia, market power in the EU, and demographic and technological potential in India. Closer coordination among the major poles is objectively weakening the United States' negotiating position. Therefore, there is scepticism among the American elite towards institutions that constrain their freedom to manoeuvre. It ranges from criticism of the European Union to pressure on BRICS. For the United States, closer coordination among the poles, even if not aimed at weakening the US, is seen as a threat.

Against this background, the expectation of clear bloc-based alignment appears increasingly unrealistic. The emerging system does not reproduce Cold War-style divisions into opposing camps. Instead, it reflects overlapping partnerships and situational alignments. For example, India simultaneously deepens cooperation with the United States while maintaining strategic ties with Russia and pragmatic engagement with countries such as Iran.

This fluidity makes any "black-and-white" distribution of actors across rigid blocs not only improbable but also analytically misleading. Multipolarity is not a system of fixed alliances but a dynamic balancing process, in which states pursue parallel and sometimes contradictory foreign policy vectors.

## BRICS as a Projection, Not an Alternative

BRICS can be seen as a projection of a multipolar world and should not be viewed as an anti-American bloc. None of the countries in the group would be interested in severing relations with the United States. Moreover, most members are not prepared for a military or economic confrontation. Even if the United States allows the use of force to advance pragmatic, mercantilist interests, BRICS shows no coordinated willingness to respond symmetrically. This poses a dilemma: are the BRICS countries capable of recognizing that individually they cannot counterbalance the United States and move towards coordination directed not "against," but "around" its dominance? The development of common financial mechanisms, coordinated positions in international organisations, supply chain security, and unification of investment and technology standards can enhance their overall autonomy.

The military escalation around Iran involving the United States and Israel has already become another stress test for the emerging international system. This development goes beyond the regional crisis and touches on a broader issue: the global community's ability to act amid the erosion of previous norms and the absence of new, sustainable regulatory mechanisms. Their interpretation of law and security demonstrates that, even in the context of emerging multipolarity, power asymmetry persists, allowing individual states to act outside the framework of universal rules without incurring immediate systemic costs.

However, despite Iran being a member of BRICS and the closeness of Russia and China's positions on a number of issues related to international governance, the two countries did not veto the UN Security Council resolution condemning Iran's actions. This reflected not a change in underlying principles, but rather the continued primacy of national interests and the need to preserve a balance in relations with both Iran and the Gulf countries.

This demonstrates a key characteristic of modern multipolarity: it does not imply strict bloc discipline and allows for a plurality of foreign policy trajectories, also highlighting a fundamental limitation of BRICS as a format. The group functions as a platform for coordination rather than a mechanism for collective crisis response. The lack of a unified position in a critical situation raises questions about its effectiveness during escalation, particularly in regions where member interests diverge. Thus, events surrounding Iran demonstrate the dual nature of the emerging order. On the one hand, the role of alternative centres of power is growing, and the space for independent state policy is expanding. On the other hand, there is still a deficit of coordination mechanisms capable of transforming this multiplicity into a stable architecture of interaction.

Factors facilitating coordination within BRICS+ include the following: a shared interest in global governance reform; reduced dependence on the US dollar; growing mutual trade; supply chain security; a desire for sovereign autonomy; and pragmatic flexibility.

Factors hindering coordination within BRICS+ include: differences in national priorities, dependence on Western markets and technology, competition for investment and resources, and the lack of a common strategic identity.

At the same time, the absence of immediate coordination should not be interpreted as structural failure. Rather, it reflects the early stage of multipolar consolidation, where mechanisms of interaction are still emerging and have not yet been stress-tested into coherence.

## Multipolarity as Stage, Not as a Limit

Historically, international systems have been characterised by multiple centres of power, competing empires, and overlapping spheres of influence. What is happening today is not a radical innovation, but a return to structural pluralism after a relatively short period of Western dominance.

This generates a structural contradiction: states strive for greater sovereignty while remaining deeply embedded in global economic and technological ties. How this contradiction is managed will determine whether multipolarity consolidates into a new configuration of order or remains a prolonged phase of strategic uncertainty.

Moreover, the persistence of crises within and around the multipolar constellation, including tensions involving BRICS members themselves, does not negate the relevance of multipolarity. On the contrary, it highlights the urgency of developing coordination mechanisms capable of managing contradictions rather than eliminating them.

In the longer term, multipolarity can be viewed not as a final model for global order, but as a transitional stage toward the emergence of a more complex format—a dialogue of civilisations. Even today, the emerging poles of the international system largely coincide with major civilisational spaces such as Russia, China, and India, each with its own values, historical foundations, and institutional structures. In this context, a possible direction for evolution could be a new “concert of powers”—a flexible system for coordinating interests between key civilisational centres based not on bloc confrontation, but on the recognition of a diversity of development models and the need for ongoing strategic dialogue.

## Conclusion

The relative weakness of BRICS in relation to the United States can be compensated not by bloc confrontation, but by coordination on specific issues from currency mechanisms to technological alliances and diplomatic interaction, which increase autonomy without causing a systemic rupture. The ability to structure and maintain multipolarity is based not so much on a common identity as on functional interaction. In this sense, multipolarity is not a goal, but a tool, the effectiveness of which depends on the willingness of states to move from symbolic rhetoric to pragmatic cooperation and gradually expand their autonomy.

Scepticism about multipolarity stems from its current inconsistency, but alternative strategies are less viable: passive engagement with the United States limits autonomy, while direct confrontation risks escalation without sufficient coordination capacity. Even if some states initially resist deeper coordination, structural pressures are likely to push them toward deeper engagement in the medium term. Multipolarity in this sense may not be a choice, but an impending necessity.

However, rather than accommodating multipolarity, Washington is likely to attempt to restore elements of its hegemonic position. Such efforts represent not a reversal of structural trends but a reactive phase that may temporarily intensify instability without altering the underlying redistribution of power.

If the developing powers fail to coordinate their actions, the system risks sliding into a new, albeit more fragmented, form of hegemony. On the contrary, even limited coordination can gradually shift the system toward a more balanced order.

Multipolarity should be understood not as an endpoint but as a process, with trajectories ranging from loose issue-based coalitions to more structured coordination frameworks. Its future depends on whether states move beyond rhetorical commitment and invest in practical mechanisms of cooperation. It is coordination, even if imperfect and gradual, that can transform multipolarity from a condition into a functioning system.

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## Chapter 2. The Role of Ideology, Values and Identity in Contemporary International Relations

**Beatris Bineva, Nikita Lipunov,  
Muhammad Shamsuddinov, Hasibe Tuğçe Taşık,  
Anastasia Pogorelskaya.**

### Not the “End of History”

In 1989 Francis Fukuyama famously claimed the “end of history” with the triumph of the liberal ideology and values. In his view, the end of the Cold War signified the victory of liberal democracy as the best form of government and of market capitalism as the most viable economic model which all entailed the end of global ideological battles. Fukuyama’s concept of the “last man”, satisfied and prosperous but lacking grand ideals, implied the formation of a universal “post-historical” identity. However, the subsequent evolution of international relations has revealed this vision to be myopic.

Informed by this ideology to some extent and ignorant of the local political and cultural contexts, the US “democratisation” policy in the Middle East resulted in a series of interventions and revolutions, which destabilised the region. While the liberal values are often used by some states as a political tool or a pretext, there is a growing demand for traditional and national values all around the world—even in the West itself. The need for alternative and fairer political worldviews and respect for authentic ways of development has been embodied in such formats as BRICS and SCO. The Ukrainian crisis has eventually proved to be

a value-based struggle between Russia and the West rather than just a post-Soviet ethno-political conflict.

The Western-driven economic globalisation only fostered the emergence of new centres of power in Asia, Africa and Latin America. This, in turn, facilitated regionalisation processes, which in many cases promoted collective regional identities. Russia, China, India and Turkey are increasingly leaning towards the civilisational discourse in their foreign and domestic policies and some of them even explicitly identify themselves as “civilisation-states”.

These are just a few examples illustrating the false promise of an “ultimate homogeneous state” of international relations envisioned by Fukuyama almost 40 years ago. They prove that regional, national and local contexts still matter—perhaps even more than ever in world history. The recent international trends have sparked a demand for alternative political perspectives and distinct self-identifications as opposed to political and cultural homogeneity. The preponderance of liberal universalism is increasingly counter-balanced by “authentic pluralism”.

Besides multipolarity in international relations another one is emerging. The “multipolarity of meaning” does not imply a postmodern world of subjective interpretations, rather an objective reality of the increasingly complex international processes. It assumes the pluralism of political ideologies and values reflecting both the universal and national perspectives and the freedom to identify oneself according to one’s historical and cultural heritage. In other words, ideology, values and identity increasingly matter in contemporary international relations, which underscores the need for a broader application of constructivist approaches to study them.

The following case studies reveal how ideology, values and identity impact foreign policies of particular states or are instrumentalised by them.

## “De-ideologisation of Ideology”: The Case of Renewed Bloc Politics

In contemporary international relations, ideology is often treated as a secondary variable compared to material capabilities, security concerns, or economic interdependence. However, such an approach risks overlooking the role of shared meanings, normative assumptions, and socially constructed understandings of legitimacy in shaping global politics. As the liberal international order encounters increasing contestation, ideology has reappeared in analytical debates—not as a rigid doctrine, but as a framework through which states interpret world order, articulate political identity, and justify foreign policy choices. From a constructivist perspective, ideology connects values, identity, and state behaviour in meaningful ways.

The renewed prominence of bloc politics provides an illustrative case for examining these developments. Emerging alignments are frequently explained through shifts in power distribution or strategic calculation. Yet these explanations alone do not fully account for contemporary patterns of cooperation and alignment. Bloc formation today reflects not only changes in capabilities, but also differing interpretations of sovereignty, democracy, development, and global governance. These divergences are particularly visible in interactions between established liberal powers and states often grouped under the term “Global South,” where historical experiences and postcolonial trajectories inform alternative perspectives on political order. In this context, ideology becomes a relevant analytical category for understanding how international relations are constructed and debated.

From a constructivist standpoint, the resurgence of bloc politics cannot be explained solely by material power shifts or strategic interest. It also reflects changes in the ideational structures that shape how states interpret the international environment, define legitimate conduct, and construct their identities. Ideology can therefore be understood as a shared framework of meaning that influences expectations, facilitates

collective positioning, and frames the range of foreign policy options considered legitimate.

Rather than disappearing after the Cold War, ideology has evolved in form. Contemporary blocs are not organised around rigid doctrinal oppositions but around shared narratives that question or reinterpret aspects of the liberal international order. These narratives articulate alternative understandings of sovereignty, legitimacy, and political development. In this sense, ideology functions less as a comprehensive blueprint and more as a constitutive element of international political discourse.

The concept of the “Global South” plays an important role in this process. It does not function merely as a geographic descriptor but as a socially constructed identity that carries political and normative significance. References to colonial history, structural inequality, and marginalisation in global governance institutions contribute to a shared vocabulary through which states articulate claims to autonomy. Within this discursive framework, policy choices such as non-alignment, strategic diversification, or selective participation in sanctions regimes are presented as consistent with broader principles of sovereignty and strategic independence.

Ideology therefore operates at multiple levels. At the narrative level, it shapes how states explain their actions and respond to external expectations. At the institutional level, it informs support for new or reformed multilateral arrangements. At the behavioural level, it is reflected in patterns such as flexible multilateralism or issue-specific coalitions. These practices are influenced not only by material incentives but also by shared understandings of appropriateness and legitimacy.

In this context, contemporary bloc formations can be interpreted as efforts to renegotiate aspects of the normative structure of global governance. They do not necessarily seek systemic replacement, but rather greater recognition of alternative institutional preferences, political models, and development pathways. From a constructivist perspective, ideology remains analytically significant—not as a prescriptive doctrine, but as a factor shaping how states understand their role within an evolving international system.

## The Role of Identity and Values in International Relations: The Cases of Different Regions

Identity as a theoretical concept encompasses multiple definitions and suits the constructivist theory, positing that international politics is constituted not only by material power but also by socially constructed meanings. It elucidates why states with similar material conditions may behave differently and why cultural, historical, and normative factors are at least as significant as military or economic power. Moreover, identity plays a decisive role in shaping interests, foreign policy, and global interactions. The importance of common identity for macro-regions is based on its role as a source for the development of regional cooperation. However, regional identity may clash with the globalist views based mainly on Western values.

### *The West*

One of the ways Western values are promoted worldwide is educational cooperation. Educating foreign youth is a long-term investment that serves long-term geopolitical interests. Thus, the US and the UK are the leaders in educating foreign political elites. To get access to resources and to balance Russian influence, foreign educators have become very active in Central Asia since 2022. In their turn, Central Asian states treat these policies as the opportunity to diversify their international partnerships, resources and support not to rely overwhelmingly on one or another foreign power.

The other variant of spreading Western values worldwide was development policy. Previous versions of international development policies proved to be ineffective partially because they did not take the differences among cultures and nations into account and relied on an ideology that was declared to be universal. The current situation shows that there may be no universal values in the world except for peace and human life, but there is a huge demand for respect for diversity among peoples and for the right of states to choose the trajectory of their development independently.

In addition, the neoliberal logic of international relations and the principles of interdependence turned out to be the instruments of promoting Western view of the world claimed to be universal. The recent spread of cancel culture from social networks to international relations became a sign of struggle against particular national values. The efforts for cancelling Russian culture proved that it may be used against the whole country. The Russian case also displayed some typical characteristics of cancel culture in politics. Thus, it is used when economic restrictions do not work properly. To a certain extent, it serves a form of political control and a tool of information war against the targeted entity or state. Cancel culture strived to serve the logic of uniting countries against common “challenge” however far-fetched it might be.

Although cancel culture appeared as an element of anti-colonial discourse (i.e. #BLM), it became the tool of neo-colonialism in international relations because it serves as the moral basis for justifying the right of Western countries to decide who behaves wrong in world politics. Using cancel culture against certain countries also serves the aim of ensuring solidarity among the rest. Therefore, it is supposed to strengthen their own identity and views in contrast to the identity and values that are being cancelled. Nevertheless, applying cancel culture in international relations rather promotes antagonism than establishes trust, indicates common grounds for negotiations or makes some values more attractive than others. Excessive pressure in imposing values, even those claimed to be universal, gives rise to rejection.

### *The Middle East*

Identity in the Middle East often emerges across three mutually competing strata: the sub-state, the state, and the supra-state, articulated through broader ideological projects such as Pan-Islamism or Pan-Arabism.

*Sectarianism and Regional Contestation:* Sectarian cleavages, most notably the Sunni–Shia dichotomy, have emerged as pivotal drivers of political and societal fragmentation within Middle Eastern polities. The 1979 Iranian Revolution constituted a watershed in the politicisation of sectarian identities, thereby legitimizing regional rivalries, particularly with Saudi Arabia, through identity-based discourses.

*Pan-Arabism's Ascendancy and Demise:* Pan-Arabism endeavoured to reorient popular allegiances toward a supra-state horizon; yet its resonance diminished under the weight of entrenched state interests and the structural imperatives of an anarchic international system.

*Turkey as a Case Study:* Within Turkish political dynamics, the Middle East has functioned as a domain wherein Kemalist (Westernist/secular) and Conservative (Ottomanist) identities externalise their ideological orientations through foreign policy. Both camps have instrumentalised Middle Eastern policy as a vehicle for consolidating their respective identities in the domestic sphere.

### *Africa*

In Africa, identity is directly linked to the legacy of colonialism and the processes of state formation following independence.

*Colonial Legacy and Artificial Borders:* The borders of African states were drawn without consideration for the ethnic, religious, and sociological structures of local populations, rendering the region prone to conflict from the outset. The coexistence of diverse identity groups within these artificial boundaries has constituted a primary cause of separatist movements and civil wars.

*Pan-Africanism:* Emerging as a form of resistance to the reductive approach of colonialism toward African societies, Pan-Africanism sought to revive shared African values and identity, aiming at political and economic unity across the continent.

*Indirect Colonialism and Dependency:* Although many African states achieved independence, cultural and educational ties established with former colonial powers (such as France and the United Kingdom) continue to shape the identities of ruling elites. This dynamic has perpetuated economic and political dependency in the form of "indirect colonialism."

### *Central Asia*

For Central Asian states the core issues shaping their national interests include socio-economic and socio-political development,

the modernisation of production capacities and infrastructure, as well as the development of their own natural resources. The states of the region are not capable of addressing this entire set of challenges independently and therefore require external assistance, seeking to build relations with all key actors in the international system.

Central Asian states make use of values in their interactions with different countries. In their engagement with the European Union and its member states they may employ liberal rhetoric and issue corresponding statements on democracy and human rights.

Interaction with the Muslim world also represents an important dimension of Central Asia's foreign policy. In this regard, the potential of Islam is utilised to establish closer relations with Muslim states and attract investment from the leading actors of the Muslim world interested in expanding their influence in Muslim countries. Therefore, values in foreign policy of Central Asian states are employed for achieving national interests.

Another aspect related to issues of values and identity in Central Asia concerns attempts at external projection and the involvement of the region in projects promoted by non-regional actors (Organisation of Turkic States led by Turkey, Eurasian economic integration projects led by Russia, China's Belt and Road Initiative, and even initiatives such as "C6" (Central Asia–Azerbaijan)). The countries of Central Asia manoeuvre quite effectively among these projects, seeking to use them in their own interests. At the same time, the countries of the region are actively promoting the idea of the formation of a Central Asian subsystem of international relations, presenting Central Asia as a subject of international relations. Although it is still too early to speak of the formation of a fully-fledged regional identity, the process in this direction should not be ignored.

### *BRICS*

Although BRICS includes countries that are very different in their cultures and values, it managed to constitute a group that is supposed to be

a symbolic alternative to the Western-centred worldview. The attraction to it is based not on a unified identity but rather on a platform that respects national values as well as openness and inclusiveness.

However, they all are based on the intention to be different from the West, to pursue the idea of a multipolar world and *the value of unique development paths*. At the same time, they are based on a rather pragmatic basis making cooperation not fight with some external threat the main uniting idea. Potential benefits of integration are supposed to provide grounds for a common future.

## Towards the Multipolarity of Meaning?

The case studies show that ideology, values and identity increasingly matter in contemporary international relations, both analytically and in practice. Nowadays we can observe that the trend towards global ideological and value homogeneity is opposed by a growing demand for a more nuanced approach to democracy, development and global governance. This is the case of re-emerging bloc politics which is to a large extent driven by the “ideology” of “authentic pluralism” and respect for national political perspectives rather than pragmatic material calculus. Values and identities—their creation, promotion and defence—still constitute the foundation of established and emerging international political regions and groupings of “like-minded” states. However, they may also serve as tools to achieve foreign policy goals.

The emerging “multipolarity of meaning” reflects the evolving polycentrism in international relations which is not an abstract idea but a reality. Embracing it requires both a more constructivist analytical approach on part of IR scholars and a more open and flexible worldview on part of politicians. After all, it seems the only way to achieve a more harmonious state of international relations in an increasingly turbulent and diverse world.

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# Chapter 3. Weaponised Trade: The Political Economy of Turbulence

**Li Kunlin, Hao Nan, Priyanshu Agarwal,  
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## The Roadmap to a New Reality

The global economy has undergone a fundamental transformation in which trade and commerce are no longer primarily channels for efficiency and growth but arenas of security logic and statecraft. The key change is not simply the imposition of more tariffs, but the combined and systematic use of financial, technological, supply-chain, and rule-based instruments—and the manner in which these tools diffuse and generate spill-overs across different tiers of states.

This chapter provides a roadmap to the new normal: the systematic weaponisation of the global economy. It maps the toolbox containing tariffs, sanctions, export controls, investment screening, critical minerals management, and compliance standards.

Today's world is not a flat playing field in this new game. States fall into three distinct tiers based on their structural power, capacity, and global reach. Major powers—like the US, China, Russia—and the EU shape the system, middle powers (such as Japan, India, and Germany) navigate between coercion and self-protection, and small states manage their profound exposure. The interactions between these tiers show the escalating dynamics, spill-over effects, and trends to watch for in the years ahead.

## Conceptual Framework: The Weaponisation of Economy

Weaponisation of the economy means the systematic repurposing of cross-border interdependence—trade, finance, technology, data, and supply chains—into instruments of pressure, punishment, exclusion, and coercion. As Farrell and Newman have demonstrated in their foundational work on weaponised interdependence, global networks tend toward centralisation, creating hubs that yield significant strategic advantages. Actors controlling these key nodes can generate two distinct forms of power: a panopticon effect, providing monitoring and intelligence advantages through access to information flows, and a chokepoint effect, enabling the disruption or denial of access to critical economic networks.<sup>3</sup>

This dynamic is not new, but its intensity and pervasiveness have grown dramatically. The trend began years ago, with the EU, for instance, increasingly using its regulatory market size as a lever. However, the second Trump administration has served as a visible accelerator of these dynamics. The United States integrates its economic advantages more directly into national security logic and pushes both adversaries and allies to build counter-capabilities. The result is an era of proliferating economic weapons in which market exchange becomes hopelessly entangled with national security. This evolution has moved sanctions, which were mostly used as tools aimed at pariah states, to the very frontline of great-power competition.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Farrell H., Newman A. Weaponized Interdependence: How Global Economic Networks Shape State Coercion // *International Security*. Volume 44. Number 1. 2019. Pp. 42-79. URL: [https://doi.org/10.1162/ISEC\\_a\\_00351](https://doi.org/10.1162/ISEC_a_00351); Timofeev I.N. Policy of Sanctions in a Changing World: Theoretical Reflection // *Polis. Political Studies*. Number 2. 2023. Pp. 103-119. URL: <https://doi.org/10.17976/jpps/2023.02.08>

<sup>4</sup> Farrell H., Newman A. The Weaponized World Economy: Surviving the New Age of Economic Coercion // *Foreign Affairs*. Volume 104. Number 5. 2025. URL: <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/united-states/weaponized-world-economy-farrell-newman>; Protecting against coercion // European Commission. URL: [https://policy.trade.ec.europa.eu/enforcement-and-protection/protecting-against-coercion\\_en](https://policy.trade.ec.europa.eu/enforcement-and-protection/protecting-against-coercion_en)

## The Three Tiers of a Weaponised World

To make sense of this complex landscape, states should not be categorised by their GDP alone, but by their role in this new geo-economic game. This geo-economic framework organises economic coercion instruments into six families:

- Market access measures including tariffs and procurement restrictions;
- Financial sanctions targeting institutions and transactions;
- Technology-stack controls such as export controls and entity lists;
- Investment and data restrictions;
- Critical minerals and supply chain interventions;
- Standards and compliance requirements.

Purposes of the restriction application encompass punishment, deterrence, technology denial, forcing alignment, and shaping supply-chain reconfiguration. Intensity of these measures ranges from symbolic gestures through sectoral restrictions to systemic exclusion. Spill-over effects are assessed according to whether they remain domestic in scope or achieve extraterritorial reach that pressures third-country firms and banks into compliance.<sup>5</sup>

## Major Powers and System-Shapers

These are the states and actors with the structural reach to build and enforce global rules and chokepoints. The United States exemplifies

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<sup>5</sup> Farrell H., Newman A. Weaponized Interdependence: How Global Economic Networks Shape State Coercion // *International Security*. Volume 44. Number 1. 2019. Pp. 42-79. URL: [https://doi.org/10.1162/ISEC\\_a\\_00351](https://doi.org/10.1162/ISEC_a_00351); Timofeev I.N. Policy of Sanctions in a Changing World: Theoretical Reflection // *Polis. Political Studies*. Number 2. 2023. Pp. 103-119. URL: <https://doi.org/10.17976/jpps/2023.02.08>

the strategic logic of embedding trade instruments into national security objectives to sustain controllable advantage in key technologies and supply chains. Its signature tool combination centres on technology-stack and export controls, particularly advanced computing and semiconductor measures that represent chokepoint governance with extraterritorial effects. Tariffs and market access measures provide both bargaining leverage and domestic political mobilisation. However, as the toolkit becomes more systemic, it increasingly induces substitutes, workarounds, and counter-capability building by others, creating blowback dynamics that reshape the strategic environment.

China, under sustained external pressure, has focused on building counter-chokepoint capacity and institutionalizing industrial advantages into repeatable policy leverage. Its tool emphasis centres on critical inputs, particularly critical minerals and processing ecosystems, combined with export control and list-based governance and selective countermeasures. The constraint of over-politicisation, which can undermine investment expectations and innovation, remains a significant limitation on Chinese coercion capacity.<sup>6</sup>

The European Union as a whole qualifies as a major power because its common commercial policy enables unified trade action while the single market generates strong regulatory spill-overs. The signature tool is the Anti-Coercion Instrument, which formalises retaliation and deterrence through a legal and procedural mechanism, symbolizing a shift from a rules-only actor toward a geo-economic actor. The EU's economic security strategy makes risk identification, dependencies, and critical-technology protection explicit. The weakness remains that operational coherence and speed are constrained by internal divisions and security competences.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Farrell H., Newman A. The Weaponized World Economy: Surviving the New Age of Economic Coercion // *Foreign Affairs*. Volume 104. Number 5. 2025. URL: <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/united-states/weaponized-world-economy-farrell-newman>; Protecting against coercion // European Commission. URL: [https://policy.trade.ec.europa.eu/enforcement-and-protection/protecting-against-coercion\\_en](https://policy.trade.ec.europa.eu/enforcement-and-protection/protecting-against-coercion_en)

<sup>7</sup> Q&A regarding the Anti-Coercion Instrument // European Commission. URL: [https://policy.trade.ec.europa.eu/enforcement-and-protection/protecting-against-coercion/qa-regarding-anti-coercion-instrument\\_en](https://policy.trade.ec.europa.eu/enforcement-and-protection/protecting-against-coercion/qa-regarding-anti-coercion-instrument_en); Joint Communication on a European Economic Security Strategy // European Commission. 20.06.2023. URL: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52023JC0020>

Russia belongs in the major-power category as it is a central actor in the sanctions-counter-sanctions-adaptation chain. However, its economic weaponisation profile is more anchored in sanctions warfare and selective commodity and energy leverage than in systemic control of global technology stacks.<sup>8</sup>

## Middle Powers: Swing Enforcers and Pivotal Nodes

These states lack the global dominance of the first tier but possess significant regional influence and specialised capabilities, making them the crucial “swing votes” in geo-economic conflict. Japan and South Korea hold pivotal positions in advanced manufacturing, critical materials, technical standards, and supply chains while remaining deeply embedded in US-led security architectures. They function as both coordinated enforcers and risk managers, employing alignment tools such as coordinated export controls, investment and technology screening, and supply-chain de-risking alongside self-protection tools including redundancy building, industrial subsidies, and supplier diversification. The structural contradiction between economic ties and security alignment pushes economic security into a durable, institutionalised condition.<sup>9</sup>

Major EU member states, including Germany, France, Italy, and the Netherlands, function as EU-embedded middle powers. Trade instruments are largely managed at the EU level, but member states shape whether these tools are usable and how far they extend through their national security priorities, industrial policy preferences, enforcement resources, and risk preferences. They act as both the engine and brake for the EU major-power toolkit, driving economic-security agendas while facing

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<sup>8</sup> Timofeev I.N. Policy of Sanctions in a Changing World: Theoretical Reflection // *Polis. Political Studies*. Number 2. 2023. Pp. 103-119. URL: <https://doi.org/10.17976/jpps/2023.02.08>

<sup>9</sup> Act on the Promotion of Ensuring National Security through Integrated Implementation of Economic Measures // Japanese Law Translation. URL: <https://www.japaneselawtranslation.go.jp/en/laws/view/4716>; South Korea prepares \$34 bln fund for national strategic industries // Reuters. 05.03.2025. URL: <https://www.reuters.com/markets/asia/south-korea-prepares-34-bln-fund-national-strategic-industries-2025-03-05/>

constraints from corporate exposure and market dependence, producing cautious, incremental, and procedural geo-economic behaviour.

Beyond the framework of Western-aligned swing enforcers, middle powers like India and Brazil exercise agency through a strategy of “multi-vector” or “all-alignment”. Unlike states deeply embedded in US-led security architectures, these powers actively arbitrage between major-power blocs to maximise their own economic sovereignty and strategic autonomy. India, for instance, leverages its massive market size and pivotal role in global service supply chains to resist extraterritorial pressures while simultaneously participating in alternative financial frameworks like BRICS Plus. Similarly, Brazil utilises its leverage in global food and energy security to maintain a position of “active non-alignment,” framing economic coercion as a violation of international norms to mobilise broader Global South support. By refusing to be permanent “enforcers” for any single systemic coercer, these multi-vector middle powers act as critical “insulators” in the global economy, complicating the diffusion of chokepoint politics and preventing the emergence of a truly bipolar geo-economic system.

## Small States: Exposure Managers Under Chokepoint Politics

Small states function as load-bearing structures within network politics, facing conditions of high dependence on external financial and technology stacks, substantial substitution costs, and elevated risk of becoming collateral damage from extraterritorial and supply-chain spillovers. Their agency is exercised primarily through vulnerability management and resilience engineering rather than through symmetrical weaponisation capacity.

Four typical strategic responses emerge from small-state practice. Some adopt alignment, following one major power in exchange for security guarantees. Others pursue hedging, maintaining selective engagement with competing powers in order to diversify risk and preserve flexibility. A third

strategy is multi-vector balancing, through which small states distribute their external relations across several centres of power to avoid overdependence on any single one. A fourth response is neutrality, which aims to preserve strategic distance and limit direct entanglement in major-power rivalry. These strategies are implemented through different combinations of compliance capacity building, diversification, redundancy, and normative or legal contestation. Small states thus retain agency, but it is exercised primarily through the management of exposure, the reduction of dependence, and the preservation of policy autonomy rather than through the manufacture of chokepoints of their own.

## Cross-Layer Dynamics

The diffusion logic of economic weaponisation follows a clear pattern in which major-power competition over systemic leverage leads middle powers to institutionalise both alignment and self-protection measures, while small states normalise risk management as a permanent condition. This progression shifts the global economy from an efficiency logic toward an offense-defence logic in which capabilities and countermeasures proliferate. The spill-over mechanism operates through extraterritorial compliance requirements and supply-chain cascade effects that transform point-to-point measures into network-wide shocks.<sup>10</sup>

Three key indicators will tell where this escalation is heading. The first is whether technology-stack controls continue expanding in scope and how third countries are conditionally incorporated into or excluded from these regimes. The second is whether the EU's Anti-Coercion Instrument evolves from symbolic deterrence into operational

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<sup>10</sup> Farrell H., Newman A. Weaponized Interdependence: How Global Economic Networks Shape State Coercion // *International Security*. Volume 44. Number 1. 2019. Pp. 42-79. URL: [https://doi.org/10.1162/ISEC\\_a\\_00351](https://doi.org/10.1162/ISEC_a_00351); Farrell H., Newman A. The Weaponized World Economy: Surviving the New Age of Economic Coercion // *Foreign Affairs*. Volume 104. Number 5. 2025. URL: <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/united-states/weaponized-world-economy-farrell-newman>; Protecting against coercion // European Commission. URL: [https://policy.trade.ec.europa.eu/enforcement-and-protection/protecting-against-coercion\\_en](https://policy.trade.ec.europa.eu/enforcement-and-protection/protecting-against-coercion_en)

use, testing the credibility of European geo-economic capacity. The third is whether small states and firms internalise geopolitical compliance costs as a permanent business condition, shaping investment flows and the tempo of supply-chain reconfiguration.

## Conclusion

The world has entered an era where economic interdependence is permanently weaponised. It exhibits a three-tier pattern. Major powers compete over systemic leverage and rule spill-overs, with each deploying distinctive tool combinations shaped by their structural positions and institutional capacities. Middle powers oscillate between alignment with major-power demands, execution of coercive measures, and self-protection against spill-overs, thereby shaping the pace and contours of tool diffusion. Small states prioritise exposure management and redundancy engineering to reduce the likelihood of coercion success against them. Understanding which tier a state occupies, and how its tools and strategies fit into that role, is essential for navigating a world where the pursuit of security relentlessly reshapes the foundations of prosperity, with technology and AI now at the very heart of the contest.

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# Chapter 4. The Global South and Development Challenges

**Lorenzo Maria Pacini, Mateo Rojas Samper, Marina Krynzhina, Alyona Lisenkova, Irina Iutiaeva.**

## Post-colonialism, Development, and the Perception of the Global South

The evolution of postcolonial development in the Global South represents a pragmatic response to the structural legacy of Western colonialism and the uneven dynamics of globalisation. Instead of passivity, these states have developed alternative pathways based on sovereignty, regional integration, shared values, and South-South cooperation. Post-colonialism, as an analytical framework, demonstrates how former colonies reduce dependence on external markets through hybrid institutional models. Examples include the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), aimed at restructuring intra-continental trade; Latin American initiatives like CELAC and ALBA-TCP; and Asia's "middle way" policies (e.g., India and Indonesia), which combine selective liberalisation with strong industrial policies to control key sectors. Political efforts toward regional cooperation, such as the Sahel Alliance, also illustrate the pursuit of independence and the formation of new partnerships.

Western perceptions of these strategies range from cautious optimism to structural scepticism, often interpreting them as "deviations" from neoliberal models rather than legitimate development experiments. This asymmetry arises from differing views on modernisation: the West sees it as convergence toward its own standards, while the Global South views it as diversification of pathways based on local resources and historical experience. The pursuit of technological autonomy, financed by non-Western capital, is often perceived as geopolitical competition, though it actually reflects a transformation from dependence to interdependence. Thus, the Global

South's strategies illustrate a shift from passive adaptation to systemic transformation, recalibrating globalisation to serve its own priorities—a strategic reformism aimed at achieving autonomy within an asymmetrical global system.

## Epistemological Decolonisation and the Reclamation of Cultural Sovereignty in Post-colonial Structures of the Global South

The pursuit of cultural sovereignty in postcolonial states is a rigorous process of epistemological decolonisation, aimed at dismantling the “coloniality of power” that persists long after formal independence. Numerous studies show that global power structures remain western-centric, treating Western history and development as the universal standard, while the Global South is relegated to a state of perpetual “catch-up.” For these nations, sovereignty is not merely a legal status but a structural necessity for validating indigenous knowledge systems, languages, and social organisations historically suppressed as “primitive” or “pre-modern” by colonial administrations. Western perceptions of the Global South often operate through the lenses of Orientalism or “developmentalism,” reducing complex civilisations to monolithic categories like “emerging markets” or objects of humanitarian intervention, thereby stripping them of intellectual agency. This “gaze” reinforces a hierarchy where the South must continually import Western cultural and educational models to gain legitimacy in the eyes of the international community.

Empirical examples of this struggle are evident in the defence of intellectual property and constitutional reforms. In India, legal battles against “biopiracy”—the unauthorised patenting of traditional knowledge by Western corporations—represent a critical defence of cultural and biological sovereignty. Similarly, Bolivia's constitutional integration of the *Vivir Bien* (*Sumak kawsay*) philosophy directly challenges the neoliberal, linear model of progress. These countries engage in structural delinking from Western-centric paradigms by institutionalizing indigenous cosmologies as official policy, asserting that their traditional values are advanced tools

for contemporary social and environmental governance. To fully transition from “object” to “subject”, postcolonial states must institutionalise their unique cultural identities within the globalised market. This involves resisting the homogenisation of global media and academic standards, which often marginalise local languages and non-Western methodologies. Sovereignty is realised when a nation no longer seeks external validation for its cultural products but instead fosters a robust internal discourse reflecting its own socio-political reality. This process ensures that the Global South is recognised not as a deficient shadow of the West but as a diverse region producing its own legitimate, unique, and highly evolved forms of modernity.

## Conflicts

A persistent security deficit remains one of the key structural obstacles to the socio-economic development of the Global South, where internal armed conflicts, terrorism, and proxy wars—resulting from weak state institutions and high border permeability—occur far more frequently than in the Global North.

Rather than forming a unified front, countries of the Global South often compete with one another, openly or covertly, including over claims to regional leadership. In this context, they sometimes continue to rely on Western military and political support, yet increasingly refrain from viewing Western states as the sole guarantors of security. This is partly because external support rarely contributes to sustainable peace, while a number of Western military interventions have in fact triggered waves of instability across regions of the Global South.

In some conflicts, countries of the Global South adopt common positions based on the principle of non-interference—often in opposition to Western interventionism—helping preserve state sovereignty but not guaranteeing durable conflict resolution due to persistent institutional weakness. In response to externally imposed solutions, countries of the Global South promote regional security mechanisms, whose effectiveness is limited by institutional underdevelopment or perceptions of bias, as they often reflect existing regional power configurations.

From the state’s perspective, the security deficit undermines long-term economic strategies, forces the reallocation of resources toward coercive sectors at the expense of social policies, and contributes to brain drain.

From a business perspective, it increases transaction costs and undermines the investment climate. Taken together, these factors significantly complicate progress toward the achievement of Sustainable Development Goals and constrain regional economic integration, creating a vicious cycle of instability and distrust.

## Drug Trafficking

Drug trafficking also poses a systemic threat to the development of the Global South, where—unlike in the Global North—it undermines not only public health but also socio-economic and institutional development. The Global South's role in the global narcotics economy is primarily concentrated in production and transit due to the availability of raw materials, limited legal employment opportunities and weak state institutions. High border permeability and chronic security deficits turn drug trafficking into a factor that undermines the very foundations of statehood, fuelling organised crime, violence, economic criminalisation, and the emergence of parallel power centres.

Combating drug trafficking requires comprehensive approaches, including the development of alternative livelihoods and the integration of populations involved in the drug economy into legal economic activities. While countries of the Global South actively use regional cooperation frameworks to counter drug trafficking, mutual distrust and divergent priorities continue to hinder the formation of a unified front. North–South cooperation remains more institutionally developed, yet in recent years troubling trends have emerged, notably the shift by the United States toward unilateral coercive actions under the banner of combating drug trafficking. Such approaches raise concerns from the standpoint of international law and erode trust between the North and the South, thereby complicating the consolidation of global efforts to curb the illicit drug trade.

## Technological and Digital Divide

Digital inequality threatens the sustainable development of the Global South, where digital technologies and big data have become strategic resources of influence, yet their adoption is constrained by the imposition of Western standards such as GDPR and through US and EU investments in infrastructure. Approaches to addressing this issue vary:

while Asia and Latin America rely on adopting ready-made solutions, such as electronics manufacturing in Mexico or Vietnam, Africa generates unique innovations (e.g., Kenya's M-PESA mobile payment system and Rwanda's Irembo digital services) amid extreme resource scarcity. The development of AI in the region is also hindered by infrastructural limitations, such as insufficient internet access, unstable electricity supply in rural areas, and dependence on low-paid labour-intensive services (e.g., data labelling, content moderation) which deepen the digital divide and create risks of exploitation.

The lack of a developed regulatory framework for data protection and the ethical use of AI exacerbates the situation, highlighting the urgent need to adopt an AI governance model, as previously noted by the authors of the Valdai Club report *The New Horizons of Multipolarity*<sup>11</sup>. Overcoming these challenges requires not only technological investments but also collective efforts to create fair conditions for innovation, protect vulnerable groups, and build a responsible AI ecosystem. Countries of the Global South must strengthen cooperation, invest in education, stimulate local innovation, and reduce dependence on Western technologies. Russia supports these efforts through joint IT projects and expertise sharing, contributing to the technological sovereignty of the regions and fair development in a multipolar world.

## Climate Change

Climate change is among acute problems facing the Global South, where extreme heat, droughts, water shortages, flooding, and socio-economic vulnerability—exacerbated by poverty—are prevalent. Despite their minimal contribution to global greenhouse gas emissions, these countries bear disproportionate consequences, a phenomenon known as historical injustice and the climate “debt” of developed nations. Developed countries have historically utilised necessary resources and transitioned through all stages of energy evolution (from wood to coal, oil, gas, and renewables), which fuelled their industrial and post-industrial growth. However, under current global pollution conditions, the Global South is denied its inherent right to development, becoming a victim of environmental standards imposed by economically advanced players. This is often compared to neo-colonial practices, termed energy and climate neo-colonialism, as the Global North

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<sup>11</sup> See *The New Horizons of Multipolarity* // Valdai Discussion Club. 24.04.2025. URL: <https://valdaiclub.com/a/reports/the-new-horizons-of-multipolarity/>

continues to control energy resources (oil, gas, etc.) and critical raw materials (lithium, cobalt, etc.) essential for green energy, leaving exporters hostage to the “resource curse.”

Meanwhile, low public concern about climate issues in the region creates a paradox: those most affected by the consequences are the least interested in addressing them. However, as countries in the Global South intensify their development (with BRICS nations now accounting for over 50% of global emissions), historical responsibility fades into the background, giving way to immediate environmental challenges. Their economic growth remains tied to cheap fossil fuels, and there are no historical examples of successfully “skipping” energy transition stages, complicating the shift to sustainable development models.

## Conclusion

The challenges facing the Global South—from redefining postcolonial development models to epistemological decolonisation, from armed conflicts to drug trafficking, from the digital divide to the climate crisis—reveal a common thread: the search for sovereignty within an international system still marked by profound asymmetries. Experiences of regional cooperation, such as AfCFTA, Latin American initiatives, and attempts to build autonomous security mechanisms, demonstrate that the Global South is no longer a passive object of global dynamics but a subject experimenting with multiple pathways to modernity. Without internal institutional strengthening, deeper regional integration, and leverage to motivate more equitable global governance, these efforts risk remaining fragmented and vulnerable to external pressures.

Solutions must be articulated on multiple levels: significant investments in education, innovation, and infrastructure to reduce technological dependence on colonizing countries; the promotion of credible regional mechanisms for conflict management and combating organised crime in all its forms; and the consolidation of development models that integrate economic growth, social inclusion, environmental sustainability, and respect for local traditions. Only through more structured South-South cooperation, with North-South dialogue based on equality and the strengthening of state capacities, can structural vulnerabilities be transformed into levers for development, ensuring that the Global South plays a fully recognised and proactive role in the emerging multipolar system.

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# Chapter 5. The “Big Regions” of the Contemporary World

**Christian Baldi, Lucas Leiroz, Rajoli Siddharth Jayaprakash,  
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## Fragmentation and Re-alignment

The “big regions” are where today’s global tensions show up most clearly. Europe, Central Asia, and the Arctic are perfect cases. Taken together, these areas are fundamental for Greater Eurasian security and politics. This is because they are the primary stages upon which the collapse of the post-Cold War order is playing out, marked by American retrenchment, the rise of counter-hegemonic movements, and the erosion of multilateral norms. In Europe, the old transatlantic consensus is fracturing under the weight of US disengagement and internal EU strain; in Central Asia, a new, fluid architecture is emerging from the post-globalisation vacuum, driven by connectivity and a search for inclusive security; and in the Arctic, the model of “exceptionalism” is giving way to outright great power competition and imperial ambition. Understanding how these three regions navigate the twin pressures of fragmentation and re-alignment is the key to deciphering the likely contours of a future Eurasian—and indeed global—security order.

## Europe

In Europe, NATO was originally seen as a system of US control over its allies. Today, the US prefers smaller alliances like AUKUS. The US intention to annex Greenland is among the greatest threats to NATO, while consensus and unity within the EU regarding relations with Russia is under strain. The US transferred control of the three European NATO Joint Force Commands to the UK (northern), Italy (southern), Germany and Poland (eastern), in line with the new trend of a gradual American disengagement from Europe. Given recent events, the EU and NATO influence is decreasing and the future awaiting European countries could be connected with the rest of Eurasia, with each power managing its own microzone, leading to conflicts for the control over them, or creating a stable security architecture for the continent.

Against the backdrop of turbulent shifts in the international system, further amplified by the return of President Trump to the White House, countries are recalibrating their approaches. For Eurasia, this signalled a potential American retrenchment away from European affairs marked by attempts to rebuild the Russia-US relationship, to develop stronger linkages with countries in the Caucasus and Central Asian region, while the Indo-Pacific region, understood in the Russian lexicon as the Asia-Pacific, continues to remain focused on curtailing the rise of China.

## Central Asia

Meanwhile, a new fluid security architecture has ostensibly been taking shape in the Eurasian space. Pre-existing multilateral and plurilateral blocs such as the SCO, ASEAN, CSTO, EAEU, and the BRICS give a semblance of an architecture within the Greater Eurasian framework. Interestingly, the flux in the international system and a new wave of de-globalisation have led to a greater emphasis on formally designing a Eurasian security architecture with the underlying pillars of inclusivity and indivisibility. This has resulted in states increasingly becoming receptive towards engagement in Eurasia. With major connectivity projects such as the International North-South Transport Corridor, the Belt and Road Initiative, Eastern Maritime Corridor, and the Northern Sea Route, along with other regional initiatives such as Kazakhstan's *Nurly Zhol*, and the Steppe Road Plan put forth by Kazakhstan and Mongolia, the economic transformation taking place in Eurasia is becoming increasingly evident. Even amid the flux in global geopolitics, the impetus among Eurasian states is, in a sense, reflective of a new counter-hegemonic movement taking shape in its nascent stages—one marked by a growing drive to create a new order in the Eurasian space based on shared and inclusive rules.

Russia's engagement with the broader Turkic world has drawn attention as it navigates historical, cultural, and economic ties with Turkic-speaking populations within and beyond its borders. Regions such as Tatarstan and Bashkortostan offer natural connections, enabling cooperation without directly challenging external Turkic actors. Strategically, closer ties could enhance Eurasian security by strengthening regional stability, securing energy and transport corridors, and improving coordination on conflicts and transnational threats across Central Asia, the Caucasus, the Caspian and Black Seas. However, Turkey and Azerbaijan shape the Turkic agenda, requiring Moscow to manage political sensitivities. Institutions like the Organisation of Turkic States provide frameworks for cooperation in economic, technological, and security fields. A gradual, project-based

Russian approach focused on energy, transport, digital, and security initiatives could build trust and foster a more stable Eurasian environment before any formal membership.

## The Arctic

In the Arctic, President Donald Trump's threats to seize Greenland illustrate how a major power, confronted by intensified great power competition, can discard multilateral norms in favour of openly imperial ambition. Greenland is ground zero for the climate catastrophe, and Trump wants to militarise it instead of leading climate cooperation. Far from enhancing security, annexation rhetoric accelerates the erosion of international law and institutions.

Tech libertarians like Peter Thiel and Elon Musk are eyeing Greenland for access to critical minerals and as a potential site for so-called libertarian "freedom cities," where they could benefit from resource extraction to fuel their technological ambitions. Pushing back against imperialism and exploitation cannot be left to governments alone. Inuit organisations, climate scientists, NGOs, and everyday citizens must place Greenland's 56,000 people—most of them Indigenous—at the centre of the story. Non-state actors can help demonstrate that genuine resilience in a fragmenting world is built on respect for the political agency of those who call this region home.

Arctic exceptionalism, a post-Cold War model of depoliticised, consensus-based cooperation is under strain. Denmark's 2025–2027 Arctic Council chairmanship excludes Russia from most working groups. This follows the 2022 suspension by the other seven other Arctic states in the wake of Russia's military operation in Ukraine. The seven Western Arctic states now operate separately from Russia. This split threatens the Council's circumpolar legitimacy. It risks paralysis on climate monitoring, biodiversity, and Indigenous issues, and the solidification of a permanent Arctic-7 versus Russia divide. Without Russia's vast territory and data, regional governance weakens. The Arctic's unique cooperative model now faces fracture. These developments threaten the narrative of Arctic exceptionalism. A fragmented Arctic risks the creation of rival forums, reduced climate cooperation, and heightened competition. These paths signal rising geopolitical rivalry in the Arctic.

Denmark, as the sovereign power responsible for Greenlandic security, has more or less adopted the confrontational United States

analysis of the situation in the Arctic, treating both China and Russia as geopolitical rivals. This adversarial posture, combined with a documented Danish tendency to plan and navigate from worst-case scenarios regarding Greenland, has meant that the chairmanship has been shaped less by a desire to restore cooperative norms and more by the logic of great power competition.

The institutional damage inherited at the outset of Denmark's tenure is considerable. Around one-third of the Arctic Council's 130 projects were reportedly put on hold following Russia's exclusion, with new projects blocked and existing ones unable to be renewed. Moscow compounded this by announcing a suspension of its annual payments to the Arctic Council until the organisation resumes its work in full, effectively withdrawing financial legitimacy from the Council's ongoing activities. Since 2022, Russia has restricted access to scientific data critical to monitoring climate change—particularly assessments of the potential impact of carbon dioxide and methane releases from Russia's melting permafrost. The seven-member rump Council over which Denmark has presided is therefore operating with a structurally diminished mandate, unable to claim the full institutional legitimacy the Council once possessed.

The governance vacuum left by Russia's exclusion has also emboldened China to challenge the Council's legitimacy more openly. Chinese officials have rejected the legitimacy of Arctic Council activities that continue to exclude Russia, and Beijing is actively seeking to strengthen the argument that Arctic governance needs to be expanded. China may seek to work with Russia and some non-Arctic states to call for a new mechanism to replace the Arctic Council, or to return dialogue for Arctic governance to the United Nations or another international body. Denmark's confrontational posture has, in this respect, inadvertently provided rhetorical ammunition to those advocating for the Council's replacement rather than its reform.

Greenland itself has increasingly become the focal point of this great power competition under Denmark's watch. The US interest in purchasing or otherwise controlling Greenland has intensified, while China's presence in Greenland signals global aspirations that extend well beyond the Arctic. Denmark finds itself navigating an uncomfortable position: nominally chairing a multilateral forum premised on cooperation, while simultaneously managing sovereign responsibility over a territory that has become a theatre for systemic rivalry between Washington and Beijing. This creates "unfortunate dynamics", a governance architecture that, rather than moderating competition, risks institutionalising it.

The NATO expansion—with Finland acceding in 2023 and Sweden in 2024—has further entrenched this divide. Any future Arctic Council is, by default, divided into NATO states and Russia. Some experts have argued that Western efforts at cooperation with Russia in the Arctic must be maintained, but others believe that the fundamental rift between Russia and the West will persist, hampering the functioning of Arctic institutions.

In sum, the post-Danish chairmanship era of the Arctic Council is likely to be defined not by institutional recovery but by managed fragmentation. The consensus-based forum that once served as the primary governance architecture for the circumpolar region now operates under a structural legitimacy deficit, a scientific data gap, a financing dispute, and a geopolitical environment in which both Russia and China are actively contesting the Council's authority. Denmark's confrontational orientation, while understandable in the context of Greenland's strategic exposure, has accelerated rather than arrested this trajectory.

## Conclusion

The current political and economic situation in the world is dominated by uncertainty, a condition that serves as the primary driver of systemic change. This uncertainty, amplified by the return of great power competition and deglobalisation, consequently affects regional balances, creating instability at the global level. This instability manifests distinctly: in Europe as a managed decline of US hegemony and a dangerous leadership vacuum; in Central Asia as a promising but untested laboratory for a counter-hegemonic, multipolar order built on connectivity and shared economic incentives; and in the Arctic as a stark regression from consensual governance to a fragmented, militarized frontier, epitomized by the Greenland annexation threat and the crippling of the Arctic Council. An analysis of these situations allows us to advance a crucial hypothesis for the construction of a new global and regional security architecture: the future is unlikely to be a single, stable order but rather a managed fragmentation, where resilient sub-regional blocs coexist with zones of open rivalry. The ultimate challenge, therefore, is to build resilience and stable coexistence within this new, inherently fragmented reality.

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