

The New World Order Will Be More Dangerous and More Cooperative

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What Ernest Hemingway wrote about going bankrupt can also be said of the end of the rules-based international order. It happened in two ways: gradually, then suddenly. Gradually, as two-plus decades of hypocrisy and failure — the invasion of Iraq, the financial crisis, the pandemic — demonstrated its ineffectiveness and unfairness. And then suddenly, as US President Donald Trump threatened allies, abandoned international agreements, slapped tariffs on everything from Canadian steel to Korean cars, and launched unprovoked military operations against Venezuela and Iran.

Trump has de facto disavowed territorial integrity, self-determination, free trade and human rights — bedrock principles America has championed for 80 years. These were always “[pleasant fictions](#),” ignored when inconvenient to national self-interest. Yet a world order based

on American security, financial architecture and problem-solving institutions was more predictable and [stable](#) than just about any historical alternative.

So what comes now? Many think something far worse: “[The Great Unraveling](#),” a “[New World Disorder](#),” or mere [anarchy and greed](#). It has become fashionable to [quote](#) Thucydides or to invoke the early 19th century, when great powers divided the world as if playing a game of Risk. International life is seen regressing to a Hobbesian state of nature — solitary, competitive, brutish. Trump’s approach, argues political scientist Ian Bremmer, is guided not by a grand strategy but simply by [the law of the jungle](#). The Iran war, hastily undertaken with cascading effects for regional stability and global energy prices, seems to confirm that view.

The reality is more nuanced. The physicist Stephen Hawking quipped in 2000 that this would be the century of complexity. He was speaking about science’s quest to divine the hidden laws of complex adaptive systems, but the same is true of geopolitics. Like a jungle overtaking a single-crop plantation, a wild, decentralized ecosystem is replacing a world order concentrated in US power and institutions. New players and types of relations are emerging. What the law of the jungle ignores is that the wilderness is full of cooperative behavior, [as European Commission Vice President Kaja Kallas noted](#) at this year’s Munich Security Conference. Diverse organisms form mutually beneficial relationships to grow and thrive, surmount obstacles and mitigate risks.

The new world order will be defined by connectivity without hegemony. Numerous state and non-state actors will coalesce more fluidly around specific issues and needs, forming a tangle of networks that will complement and supplant the big international institutions. For problems that lend themselves to distributed action, like trade, public health and climate change, this might even prove to be an improvement.

But not all issues will fit this messier new mold — most of all, security. And so the law’s conventional interpretation also holds: The jungle is dark and full of danger.

The Post-American World Order

Understanding this new order depends on understanding three underlying trends. The first is an ongoing redistribution of global power between nations. After five centuries concentrated in the West and North, power is dispersing to the East and South. From 1990 to 2025, the share of the world’s gross domestic product held in the Group of Seven (France, Germany, Italy, Canada, Japan, the UK and the US) [shrunk](#) from half to a quarter, while the share held by China, India and Southeast Asia rose from 15% to 55%.

Though the American military remains unparalleled, China has been [catching up](#). And in a world where strength is less a function of territorial holdings than technological mastery, China is starting to match or outpace the US in many strategic technologies, from hypersonic missiles to biotech to artificial intelligence.

This shift in power goes well beyond China’s ascent as a superpower. A whole range of middle powers have gained confidence and clout. In a telling sign, when Russia invaded Ukraine in 2022, India, Brazil, South Africa and several other nations defied intense US pressure to isolate

Moscow. Efforts to bring them to heel fell flat or backfired. When the Trump administration announced tariffs on India for purchasing Russian oil, New Delhi expressed outrage, cozied up to Beijing and waited for the US to back down (which it did).

More nations, especially developing ones, are exercising regional and even global leadership. Poland will [soon have](#) Europe's strongest military. Turkey has the world's [third-largest](#) diplomatic footprint. Qatar has become an essential [conflict mediator](#). From business to sport to diplomacy, "the global south is becoming more visible — and influential — in every arena," [wrote](#) *Foreign Policy* editor-in-chief Ravi Agrawal in 2023.



A Polish-made mine-scattering vehicle is pictured during a test of unmanned weapon systems outside Warsaw on Feb. 19. Photographer: Wojtek Radwanski/AFP/Getty Images

The second trend is an ongoing shift in power from states toward companies, NGOs and other so-called non-state actors. Their wealth, reach and capabilities often surpass those of nation-states. Walmart's revenue exceeds the GDP of Sweden. Every day more than 3.5 billion people socialize, receive news or conduct commerce on a Meta app. The number of active international NGOs has [ballooned](#) since 1955, from around 1,000 to more than 45,000. Geostrategic technologies like generative AI, semiconductors and spacecraft are developed by the private sector with limited government involvement.

The claim that the power of these actors is rising relative to that of governments is counterintuitive in a time of strongmen and state attacks on civil society. Trump and other leaders such as India's Narendra Modi, Hungary's Viktor Orbán and Turkey's Recep Tayyip Erdoğan share an affinity for treating companies as extensions of the state and attempt to coerce universities, media outlets, law firms, museums and other independent institutions into complying with their preferences.

Yet, governments are not always successful in these efforts and continue to depend on non-state institutions to achieve national security and economic and foreign policy objectives. This has increasingly become the case, amid the [privatization](#) of everything from education to security, mounting pressure on state budgets, and growing technological and financial complexity.

The influence of these actors over global affairs is evident. Nvidia Chief Executive Officer Jensen Huang [persuaded](#) the Trump administration to allow the export of his company's powerful H200 chips to China, upending seven years of bipartisan policy consensus. The Chinese Communist Party has [loosened the reins](#) on Chinese tech companies to catch up in the AI race. The bond market compelled Trump to temper his "Liberation Day" tariffs, well before the Supreme Court killed them. And perhaps no example better illustrates the power of non-state actors than Starlink: If a small or midsize military wants reliable battlefield communications, it has to deal with Elon Musk.

The third underlying trend shaping the world is ever-increasing global connectivity. This too runs counter to the vibe. Though often [proclaimed dead](#), globalization appears to have weathered populism and a pandemic. Even with the effective US tariff rate [surging](#) from 2.2% to somewhere around 10%, world trade [is forecast](#) to grow at the same pace it did over the past decade. Foreign direct investment [rose](#) 14% in 2025. Politicians trumpet national self-sufficiency, supply chain reshoring, and reviving homegrown industry, yet the [data shows](#) no appreciable shift from international to domestic activity underway.

People remain on the move, with international [migration](#) continuing to increase. Far from isolating and retrenching, governments are engaging with one another more than ever before. In the aggregate, [diplomatic ties](#) are expanding and deepening. Though the number of formal, treaty-based international organizations [peaked](#) in the late 1990s, there has been an explosion of informal clubs, specialized conferences and smaller issue-specific summits.

This increased connection brings many benefits, but it is also the source of many of the world's ills. States "[weaponize](#)" interdependence, using financial architecture, trade and digital networks as instruments of coercion and attack. The threat of old-fashioned interstate war remains, but national security now also includes managing the darker outgrowths of interconnection: climate change, infectious disease, cyberattacks, terrorism.

The greatest sources of direct harm to Americans since 2020 are all born of global connectivity, less inter-*national* than inter-*societal*. Just look at the Covid-19 pandemic (1.2 million dead), the fentanyl crisis (around 350,000 dead), and [online scams](#) (as much as \$119 billion lost last year).

'Polyamorous' Geopolitics

For the better part of the past 100 years, countries formed relatively stable blocs based on ideology, political systems or culture. Communism versus Capitalism, the West versus the Rest, the Clash of Civilizations. Many contradictions lurked beneath those labels, of course. But grand bifurcations essentially structured the bulk of foreign affairs.

In an age of hyperconnectivity and distributed power, these divisions have broken down. Countries, now with more agency and more options, are fluid, opportunistic and contradictory in their relations. “Polyamory” is the new norm in geopolitics.

Communist Vietnam is deepening its security ties with the US. Proudly democratic Brazil stands beside Russia and China in BRICS. Prior to the war, Saudi Arabia was [drawing closer](#) to both Israel and Iran. No security alliance feels ironclad nowadays. Trump’s threat to annex Greenland shook NATO to its core, dashing any remaining hope the US would absolutely honor Article 5’s guarantee of collective defense. The Moscow-Beijing-Pyongyang tie-up is less a durable axis than a temporary marriage of convenience. As much as commentators [proclaim](#) a new Cold War, the rivalry between the world’s two great powers is complicated: The US is China’s largest trading partner, China the US’s third-largest foreign creditor.



China’s President Xi Jinping (center), North Korea’s leader Kim Jong Un (right) and Russia’s President Vladimir Putin (left) arrive for a reception in Beijing following a military parade marking the 80th anniversary of the end of World War II on Sept. 3, 2025. Photographer: Jade Gao/AFP/Getty Images

Middle powers are major players in this new landscape. They can act as [swing states](#), tilting the balance of geopolitical power, or pursue what Canada Prime Minister Mark Carney [called](#) “variable geometry...different coalitions for different issues based on common values and interests.” Though the withdrawal of the US constitutes a massive shock to the supply of international cooperation, the proliferation of cross-border problems means [demand](#) for shared problem-solving is higher than ever, and middle powers have the means to step up. Intensifying great-power coercion creates added incentive for these countries to join forces — to hang together to avoid hanging separately.

This means that the new world order might be more cooperative and fairer than its predecessor — in certain areas, at least. Issues that are culturally or ideologically symbolic, like migration or human rights, will remain intractable. But progress is more likely on issues that are mostly technical in nature, and that are better addressed in a global system that is decentralized and networked rather than concentrated in the “big architecture” of a single power and institution.

Take trade. The rigid, universal rules of the World Trade Organization [were biased](#) toward the goals of developed countries, [undermined](#) democratic decision-making and [contributed to](#) powerful backlashes within societies. While the WTO has ceased to function, a spaghetti bowl of regional, bilateral and “[minilateral](#)” trade deals is emerging. As former US Trade Representative Michael Froman [wrote](#), a messier, more flexible system of overlapping memberships, like-minded coalitions and “open plurilateral relationships” would be, if less efficient economically, more durable politically, as well as more equitable.

Similarly, countries are creating a [new web](#) of regional and bilateral deals to manage financial crises. The International Monetary Fund continues to be the largest source of emergency financial assistance, but these other arrangements add to the safety net, protecting individual countries and making systemic contagion less likely. Importantly, regional and bilateral arrangements can be more flexible in their terms. Many have [argued](#) that since the US is the IMF’s largest backer and shareholder, austere loan conditions prioritize short-term repayment at the expense of long-term growth, often forcing cuts to health, education and other sectors that keep recipient nations trapped in cycles of poverty.

In public health, a more decentralized network for pandemic surveillance and vaccine development is taking shape. The 193 member-states of the World Health Organization adopted the world’s first-ever pandemic treaty without the US. After the rich world hoarded Covid-19 vaccines, a group of middle powers led by South Africa, with many private partners, [established](#) an mRNA technology transfer program to develop vaccines and respond to emerging disease threats.

Transnational crime, AI standards and space — including issues such as managing orbital debris — are all technical issues apt to experience more cooperation in a polyamorous world. These are problems an increasing number of countries and non-state actors have a stake in solving, and progress no longer depends on a single power or institution.

Even action on climate change, despite the Trump administration’s hostility, will move ahead. A single deal on national emissions reductions under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change was always ill-suited to the distributed nature of the problem. Spurred by market incentives, strategic interest and values, a wide range of actors — from big emitters like China to cities, philanthropists, carbon market makers and private investors — are pursuing a global energy transition. Corporations have gone from “greenwashing” to “[greenhushing](#).”

So there is cause for hope. But a big question looms over this new world: Who keeps us safe? Security is one issue that benefits from centralized authority. Though imperfect and selective, American hegemony did place a check on territorial aggression. Like a high school without a

principal, bullies are now bolder, fights likelier. Today more countries are [in conflict](#) than at any other point since World War II.

Worse is on the horizon. Russia is testing NATO's resolve. China [is intent](#) on bringing Taiwan under its direct control. Trump's US is aggressive and unpredictable. A massive global [military buildup](#) is underway. And for the first time in decades, nuclear proliferation is on the table. It is not just rogue states such as Iran, but democracies like South Korea, Poland and Japan that are considering the bomb as the US nuclear umbrella frays.

The risk of another world war is rising. Yet the more troubling feature of the new order is heightened uncertainty. Unlike risk, which can be priced, [uncertainty is incalculable](#) — the unknown unknowns that enter the realm of the possible as a system become more complex. Superintelligent AI might turbocharge scientific and technological progress — or go rogue. A terrorist group could engineer a pathogen with the lethality of Ebola and the transmissibility of measles. Climate change might unleash an extreme weather catastrophe. The list of other such sci-fi horrors worth considering is worryingly long.

More possibility and more peril. This is the paradox that defines the new world order. States and ideologies have risen and fallen, but the world has never seen these levels of connectivity and complexity. History cannot foretell whether cooperation or chaos will prevail.

Gordon LaForge is a senior policy analyst at New America, a think tank.

Markets at a Glance

[Dow Jones Industrial Average](#)

47,916.57

▼
0.56%



[S&P 500 INDEX](#)

6,816.89

▼
0.11%



[NASDAQ Composite Index](#)

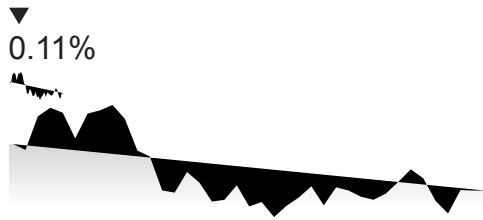
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0.35%



[Bloomberg 500 Index](#)

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[S&P/TSX Composite Index](#)

33,695.76

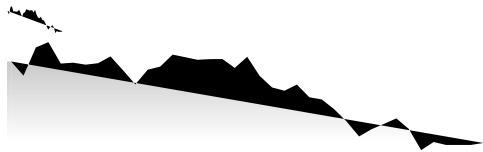
▲ 0.65%



[S&P/BMV IPC](#)

70,023.39

▼ 0.41%



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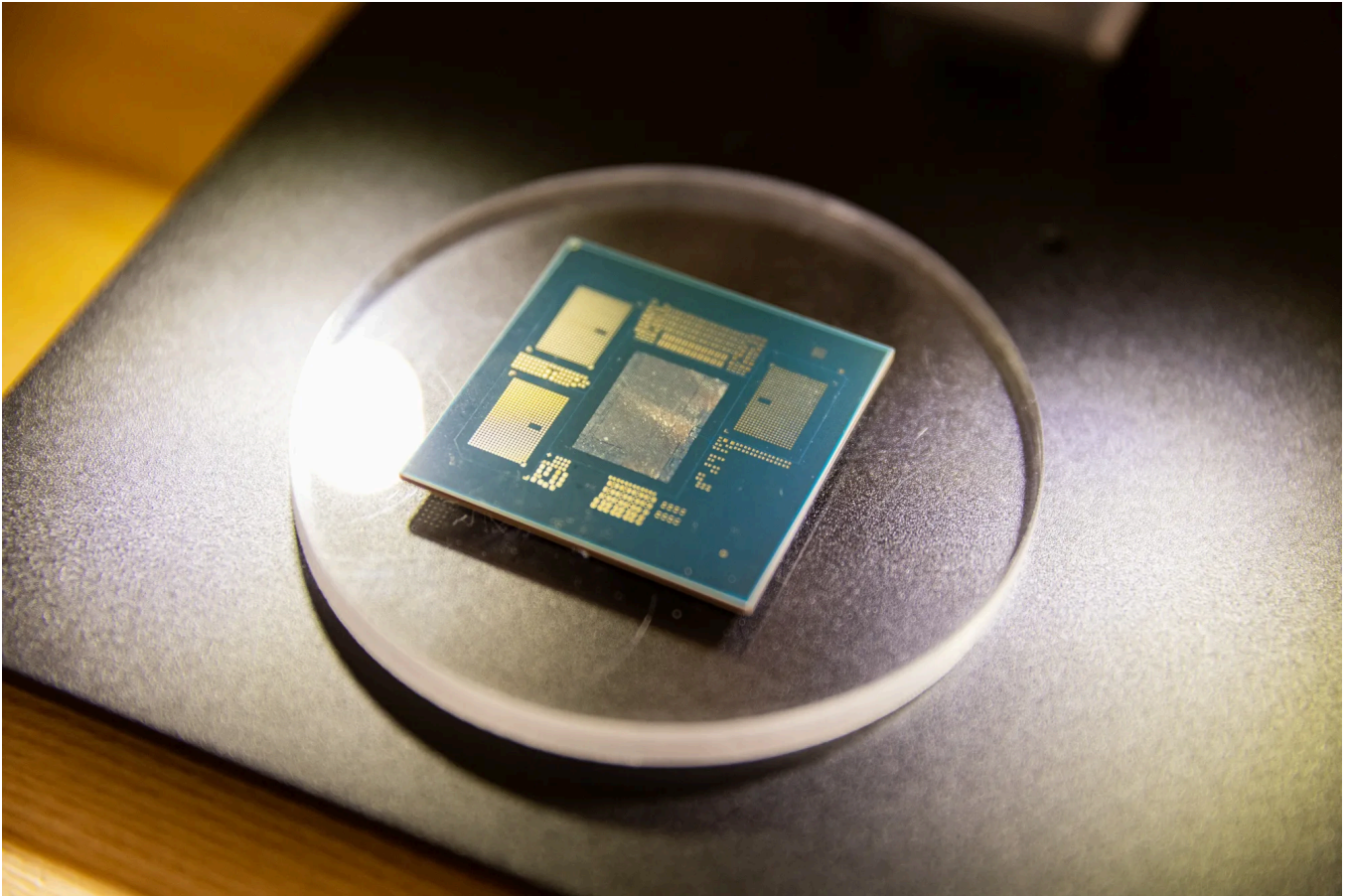
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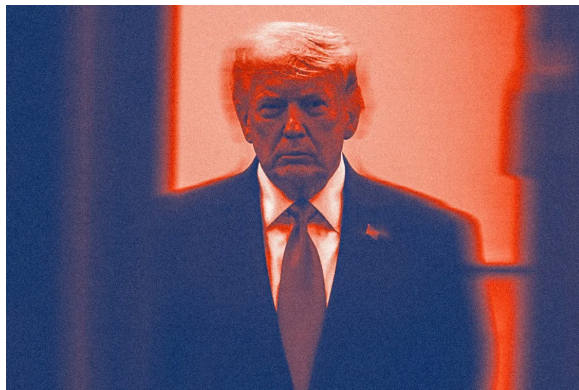
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Defendants file this Notice of Clarification to refine the Government's position

We write respectfully and regrettably to correct a material mistaken statement of fact

The United States apologizes to the Court

apologizes to the Court for not having sought a timely extension.

We deeply regret that this error has come to light at this late stage,

To correct and clarify the record,

wish to correct a factual discrepancy

I regret any confusion that resulted from my statements.

NOTICE OF CLARIFICATION

clarify two statements

DEFENDANTS' NOTICE OF CLARIFICATION TO JOINT STATUS REPORT

due to out-of-state counsel's unfamiliarity

CLARIFICATION OF RECORD

that omission was inadvertent.

did not mean to mislead the Court

To correct and clarify the record,

defendants regret any unintended ambiguity

in writing to correct and clarify two statements

NOTICE OF CORRECTED CERTIFIED ADMINISTRATIVE RECORD

NOTICE OF CORRECTIONS TO THE RECORD

I make this declaration to modify certain prior statements

[The DOJ Keeps Making Corrections In Court, and Judges Want Answers](#)

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