

Brief reference to the evolution of the world order

History can be structured according to the rise and fall of different orders, understood as the dominant power relations in a given era, including the corresponding institutions and norms. In the Modern Age, the first order was established on the basis of the European and Atlantic expansion of the great dynastic powers. Some of its principles and agreements (sovereignty, freedom of navigation) were consolidated in the Peace of Westphalia in 1648. From 1815 to 1880, the United Kingdom became the dominant great power within the so-called European concert. The configuration of a vast transoceanic empire and British leadership in the birth and development of the industrial revolution were the essential factors in achieving this position. The period from 1880 to 1945 was defined, among other issues, by imperialist rivalries, when other European powers (France, Russia and Germany) and non-European powers (the United States and Japan) rivaled or sought to emulate British power and replace its leadership¹.

The two world wars and their catastrophic consequences represent two decisive historical moments in the formation of a set of rules that would allow for the reconstruction of international relations in the 1920s, 1940s and 1950s. These rules were based, among other things, on a geopolitical reconfiguration of territories motivated by the defeat of some imperial powers and the emergence of new poles of influence, as well as by the nationalist and independence aspirations of peoples and minorities in different regions, mainly in Central and Eastern Europe, the Middle East and Southeast Asia. International cooperation organisations (UN) were created to finance the development of new states and to oversee the growing complexity of an international society beyond the capabilities of the great powers.

The First World War gave rise to the first attempt to create a collective security order and a multilateral international organisation, which failed and did not prevent the emergence of new ideologically oriented imperial projects. The Second World War developed a similar but more advanced model, although it was conditioned and limited by bipolarity. The bipolar order, established by the Soviet Union and the United States during the period

¹ In HOBBSAWM, E.'s work, *The Age of Revolution, The Age of Capital and The Age of Empire*, Planeta 2014, various aspects of this issue can be explored in greater depth. Also in KENEDY, P.'s work, *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers*. Debolsillo, 2004.

from 1945 to 1991, inherited some trends, such as the breakdown of the previous order (decolonisation), and established others, such as the ideological structuring of geo-economic relations (blocs, cultural and propaganda influence in third countries, the formation of defensive alliances, and scientific and technological competition (nuclearisation, space).

The fall of the Soviet Union marked the beginning of a brief period, from 1991 to 2008, of a unipolar world, centred on the global dominance of the United States, its military power and its economic leadership. With the withdrawal of communism from the international stage, the United States increased its influence through a rules-based international order that the superpower had established after 1945, through institutions such as the World Trade Organisation, the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund.

That process, which originated with the reconstruction of Europe, driven by the United States and supported by a rules-based trade architecture, was based on predictable alliances, nuclear deterrence and the expansion of global markets. However, the collapse of the Soviet Union and the reunification of Germany between 1989 and 1991 eliminated the bipolar order known as the Cold War and established a unipolar distribution of power. In its early days, during the 1990s, unipolarity acted as a generator of synergies that favoured global integration through market liberalisation, the expansion of trade rules and the opening up of new economies, especially in Eastern Europe and Asia, which established deep economic interdependence, boosted growth and restructured supply chains.

The success of economic liberalism in the spheres of influence of the United States, the European Union and Japan, and the failure of the communist system promoted a process of democratic transition in the former socialist Europe, in various Latin American countries and in the Far East. The widespread renunciation of the ideological struggle against the triumphant economic dynamic disabled the tendency to propagate social movements and systems with Marxist roots. Social democracy ended up consolidating itself as a third way to integrate social demands into liberal democracies, while authoritarian systems faced the transformation of their autarkic-dependent or collectivist systems into new state capitalist systems, integrated into financial and commercial dynamics and regulations.

Multilateral institutions such as the United Nations, the International Monetary Fund, and the World Bank helped mediate the transition from state-based to market-based systems, reinforcing the belief that economic convergence would produce political convergence. At the same time, contradictions also arose, such as the promise of a single, liberal economic order that clashed with financial crises, inequalities in development, and internal political reactions². This was accompanied by an increase in historical-geopolitical trends attributed to the hegemonic situation of the system designed and led by the United States.

At the same time, the commitment to innovation in communication technologies to facilitate economic and financial interdependence between different actors and markets led to the multiplication of the effects of globalisation. Until the advent of digital connectivity, beginning in 2004, opened up a new socio-economic and cultural space that became a new strategic and security domain.

However, the so-called Liberal Order, as we have pointed out, was weakened after the long war on terrorism, which began after the attacks on the Twin Towers and culminated in the fiasco of the invasion of Iraq and the long occupation of Afghanistan. Finally, the global financial crisis of 2008 undermined the strength of the United States and weakened domestic support for Washington's role as guarantor of order, exercised through active surveillance and coercion of destabilising actors—*rogue states* and terrorist groups.

A geopolitical review of the order

The global geopolitical situation shows evidence that the old rules-based world order, born after the Second World War and organised around a set of institutions and alliances backed by norms of behaviour that stabilised a bipolar and then a unipolar world, has been fading away. Meanwhile, a new multipolar order has been taking shape, where power has replaced norms as the dominant variable in the equation that explains its

² The so-called anti-globalisation movements prior to 2008 and various populist and ultra-progressive parties that emerged in Europe after the economic crisis are examples of these phenomena and constitute groups that are critical of the liberal order within liberal democracies themselves.

dynamics³. This transformation has broadened the parameters of risks and threats, now projected from a greater diversity of actors and deployed in more unstable domains.

As Jennifer Lind points out: "Polarity also matters... Freed from the restrictive effects of a rival great power, Washington deployed its forces around the world and carried out military actions in several countries, including Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya and Serbia. However, the dangers of bipolarity are different. Superpowers in a bipolar structure compete obsessively, creating spheres and buffer states... Multipolarity, on the other hand, in which three or more major powers are present, is said to be the most prone to war because alliances are precarious and the fluidity of alignments makes it difficult to estimate the balance of power"⁴.

The 21st century brought with it three tectonic shifts that have defined multipolarity as an emerging trend. First, China's meteoric rise as a global economic and commercial powerhouse altered the distribution of material power and challenged existing norms of governance and influence. China's rise and its overseas investment transformed regional balances and created alternative trade and finance networks.

Second, the perception of a decline or recalibration of Western dominance, driven by excesses in distant conflicts, the global financial crisis and the rise of populism, weakened the apparent automaticity of Western leadership and created conditions for regional actors to assert themselves. The so-called BRICS incorporated emerging countries from different regions (Latin America, Eurasia, Southeast Asia) into the multipolar framework. And in regions as destabilised as the Middle East, the interest of different countries in achieving power status in order to act in the reconfiguration of the regional suborder (Saudi Arabia, Iran, Turkey and Israel) was strengthened.

The third change has to do with the resurgence of an imperial Russia⁵, with the desire to dispute spheres of influence and demonstrate that state revisionism can be exercised in ways other than those marked by the rules. In a way, the aim was to redirect the course

³ The book *Orden mundial: concepto, tendencias y estrategias* (World Order: Concept, Trends and Strategies), Peredo, J. M. La catarata, 2024, provides a summary of the debate between different authors on the unipolar or multipolar nature of the order of competition between powers, as predefined in the United States Security Strategies of 2017 and 2022.

⁴ LIND, J. "The Multipolar Mirage," in *Foreign Affairs*. 12 December 2025.

⁵ Eurasianism, for example, became part of the new Russian doctrinal narrative in the second decade of the century.

of history, supposedly stuck in a liberal conclusion, and return to the previous historical evolution in terms of geopolitical competition between great powers.

However, the evolution of the current order faces the challenge of managing a complex system, characterised by transnational institutions and global markets, which coexist with interest groups and regional alignments⁶ ; as well as bilateral relations and the use of asymmetric instruments of influence, in the form of cyber operations for economic coercion and disinformation. The liberalised economy is not managed exclusively on the basis of corporate criteria or multilateral cooperation, but on a geostrategic basis that includes energy projects and digital technologies⁷ .

As the post-World War II order fades, the powers are entering into a competition that is leading to processes of geopolitical realignment and security review, such as the Shanghai Conference, QUAD and AUKUS, where they confront their interests through regional economic agreements, such as Asia-Pacific, to demonstrate their capacity for influence and integration in a non-hegemonic and under-regulated multipolar order. The dynamics of competition ly highlight the inadequacy of traditional international frameworks and alliances to cope with the new order in transformation, in which economic interdependence and trade are promoted, but in which political interference, military intimidation and coercion through coordinated sanctions are also incorporated.

With regard to the trends that have remained and strengthened during this process of geopolitical transformation, it should first be noted that population growth has peaked in many of the former powers. Birth rates are declining and societies are ageing. Meanwhile, regions with more favourable demographics and strategic geography, with access to arable land, proximity to sea routes and endowment of resources, will become more important. In other words, geography and demographics now carry more weight than ideology or globalist economic dogma.

This trend has been compounded by a growing self-interest among large states to secure resources and seek greater regional coherence to that end. Post-World War II and post-

⁶ The growing involvement of Russian corporate groups, such as Gazprom, in energy supply contracts with European countries and the Chinese Belt and Road project in the Eurasian context serve as examples to illustrate this geopolitical revision of the liberal economic order.

⁷ The rise of Huawei as a digital technology provider and the geopolitical constraints on such expansion exemplify the meaning of this statement.

Cold War growth was based on cheap energy, fossil fuels, and integrated and expanding global supply chains. Scarcity, climate pressures, energy transition and supply chain disruption are driving states to prioritise energy and resource security over international cooperation.

In short, the 'post-Cold War dream' of a stable global order led by a single superpower, or a coherent alliance of powers, is coming to an end. The replacement is a mosaic of regional projects, shifting alliances and divergent national interests. A world in which strategic geography, resource distribution and demographic changes matter more than lofty ideals of global governance or liberal order, see Greenland. Some experts emphasise that states in this situation have adopted a transactional and neutral approach to foreign policy as a principle of action. China is generally considered to be the forerunner of this approach in international relations.

"For more than a decade, Beijing has secured exchange agreements with countries around the world to create new markets and expand its economic reach, forging diplomatic ties with both autocratic and democratic states. China has established itself as a major power through a model of state capitalist economic development that ignores universal precepts on human rights and the legitimacy of its trading partners' political systems. Its concession practices may be predatory, but the beneficiaries of Chinese loans and infrastructure projects have voluntarily agreed to them."⁸ .

This practice is now being adopted by the Trump administration in the United States as a criterion for foreign policy action: "In recent months, the United States has implemented its own version of transactional foreign policy. During his term in office, President Donald Trump has rejected the framework of competition between major powers, partially subjugated to the commitments derived from the previous order. Washington has attacked allies and partners as well as adversaries, with exorbitant tariffs to gain diplomatic power, trade concessions and resources. In addition, it has sought agreements with countries as diverse as Argentina, China, Japan, South Korea and Saudi Arabia, regardless of the type of regime in those countries, and has relentlessly attacked the institutions that underpinned the rules-based order. More recently, after capturing and

⁸ BRENES, M. "The Transactional Trap" in *Foreign Affairs*. 7 Jan., 2026.

extraditing Venezuelan leader Nicolás Maduro, President Trump seems eager to reach agreements with Maduro's successor to benefit US oil companies."⁹ .

All this apparent foreign turmoil has provoked numerous comments and critical analyses within the United States. Some attempt to explain Trump's doctrine as a return to historical moments such as the end of the 19th century, when the country made the leap to the status of a great imperialist power.

"One sentence from Trump's 2025 inaugural address stands out: 'The United States will once again consider itself a growing nation, one that increases our wealth, expands our territory, builds our cities, raises our expectations and carries our flag to new and beautiful horizons'. No sentence more perfectly captures the deep connection with the conception of power and security at the end of the 19th century."¹⁰ .

The current moment is, in any case, one of redefinition. To this end, it is essential that post-Cold War agreements mature within a transnational multipolar order, shaped by economic interdependence, technological disruption and renewed geopolitical dispute, a world in which power is dispersed, strategies are hybrid and old certainties have been replaced by continuous adjustment. In this context, the Trump Administration has presented its foreign policy as a transactional dynamic, guided by national interest and with a geo-economic perspective.

Scenarios

The evidence that geo-economic competition between powers is the dominant option rather than a transitory dynamic in international relations does not mean that the liberal order has completely disappeared, nor that the dominant trends that gave rise to the process of transformation have been overcome. Nor does it mean that new or renewed norms and institutions will not be created in the new order to stabilise and develop it. On the contrary, we are facing a period of acceptance and adaptation to the new geostrategic framework by the main actors and powers, which should give way to the necessary reforms to reduce security risks and implement political agreements for its development.

⁹ *Op. cit.* in citation 4.

¹⁰ MUKHARJY, A. "The New Imperial Era" in *Foreign Affairs*. 9 January 2026.

In this period, it is estimated that the fundamental issue is not the assessment of capabilities to deduce the redistribution of power, which is multipolar, nor to establish the domains, which are six—given that the cognitive domain is integrated—nor to delimit the number of powers and actors, which are those capable of acting in this order, but rather to establish the possible scenarios for the transformation process. In this regard, four are proposed:

Stabilisation

Stabilising the world order does not necessarily mean establishing a single, urgent global agreement on the distribution of power, the commitments and guarantees to accept and implement it, or on the general and sectoral rules designed to shape and develop it. If we look at history, the emergence of an international order in the past has been the result of a peace process, either after a confrontation between great powers that renegotiate their geopolitical dimensions and spheres of action (Westphalia or the Congress of Vienna), or after a war of attrition or devastation that incapacitates the defeated powers to rehabilitate their capabilities and forces them to accept the new order (Versailles or Yalta/Potsdam). It has also occurred as a result of the dismemberment of one of the dominant powers or of the system itself (the end of the Cold War or, historically, of an imperial order).

However, the current change in order has not come about as a result of a process of armed confrontation, but rather as a process of transformation in the distribution of power caused by economic and political dynamics and the behaviour of the main actors and powers, empowered to make autonomous decisions within the established framework (trade and financial openness) or outside the established order (violation of sovereignties, hybrid wars). The liberal order has mutated through a phase called competition between powers, which the Trump administration now calls a transactional order, but which we could call a transnational geo-economic competition order¹¹.

¹¹ Transnationalism in international relations studies interactions and links that cross national borders, involving non-state actors such as companies, NGOs, social groups and migrants, and challenging the traditional approach focused solely on states. It facilitates the flow of people, goods, capital and ideas, creating societies and policies that transcend the strictly national, driven by globalisation and technology, and manifests itself in phenomena such as cross-border

The fundamental idea behind a stabilisation scenario is that the change in order is accepted as a fact and a process of adaptation begins. Therefore, if this were the dominant scenario, a process of reform and adaptation of national strategies, regional alignments and international and security agreements would begin. At the same time, existing h al structures and instruments considered valid (NATO, for example) would be strengthened, while new ones would be created to address persistent challenges and imbalances. Economic dynamism and technological innovation would not be affected. The acceptance of a hierarchy of actors with greater geostrategic power as the foundation of order would go hand in hand with the demand for and assumption of commitments, for which rules would have to be maintained and developed to limit actions. Destabilising regimes and criminal actors would be identified and marginalised.

Stabilisation, from a realistic and pragmatic point of view¹², is based on a *status quo*, but requires periodic review of the balances and the creation of spaces and projects for bilateral, regional and multilateral cooperation. The order, which in this case is heteropolar, can have a bipolar, tripolar or multipolar meaning depending on the conflict or challenge it faces. However, unlike other historical transitions, the stabilisation of the current situation is not achieved solely or necessarily through a grand agreement, but through a phase of action and negotiation between actors and powers and a process of adapting existing norms and organisations.

Revision

Revision would mean that the order has not reached the minimum *status quo* to begin stabilising and, therefore, the great powers continue to act as revisionist powers, to improve their position and prevent the rise of others, and to achieve their claims (Russia in Ukraine, China in Taiwan, the United States in the Western Hemisphere, territorial adjustments in the Middle East, the revision of sovereignty in island territories, control of the straits, etc.).

cooperation. Although the concept stems from liberal globalist thinking, it can now be associated with this order that is not subject to the limitations of internationality, but open to a dynamic of transaction between state and non-state actors.

¹² For a more in-depth look at the idea of stabilising the international order from a realistic and up-to-date perspective, which is of enormous importance, see KISSINGER, H. *World Order*. Debate 2016.

The current situation and, therefore, regional tensions remain in order to increase influence in an environment of permanent transition. And as in this revisionist scenario, the limitation of actions remains, the transformation process does not deteriorate, but rather is prolonged. At the same time, the prolongation of the revisionist period means that there is not enough confidence in the intermediate actors to initiate a process of adaptation. The liberal order, although weakened, is seen as a framework for resistance to change rather than a framework for strengthening change. Meanwhile, the nature of the destabilising actors is not clearly determined.

The evolution of this scenario is unpredictable because geopolitical demands are multiple and interrelated (Pacific). However, for the time being, the revisionist period we have experienced over the last decade has strengthened the major global powers, and even some regional actors (Saudi Arabia, Morocco, North Korea). And although revisionism recognises and promotes a multipolar order (Shanghai Conference), the reality is that it is leading to a bipolar order (United States/China).

"The world, in short, is bipolar. Many middle powers are influential actors within their regions, but only the United States and China exceed the threshold of great powers. This development explains the growing tension in US-China relations and suggests that other countries will find it increasingly difficult to stay out of the crossfire of rivalry. Bipolarity, for example, helps explain the United States' recent concern about Latin America, where China has gained significant economic and political influence. As the dynamic between China and the United States becomes increasingly competitive, Washington will find such assertions intolerable, just as China may equally refuse to accept US political and military involvement in its own backyard."¹³ .

Whether the evolution is bipolar in nature, or quadripolar if Russia and India are included, the reality is that revisionism is excluding from this multipolar space countries that maintain revisionist criteria (defensive or offensive) as the objective of their foreign strategy, for example, to maintain their status, in the case of Europeans, or to increase their influence, in the case of Brazil, or to promote destabilisation or the collapse of the order (Iran, Venezuela, non-state actors such as Hamas). Meanwhile, it continues to

¹³ *Op. cit.* In citation 4.

weaken and put at risk numerous actors and intermediate powers (Germany, Mexico, Canada, Australia, Israel), as well as some traditional organisations and alliances (NATO, European Union).

Collision

If the order is considered established but without stabilisation agreements, countries located in strategic areas and major powers may be confronted by changes in energy trends or the evolution of technologies in phases of innovation, or by unregulated competition in open regions and domains (Arctic, Africa, oceans, space, cyberspace). The order would then enter a process of collision. Furthermore, the trend towards bipolarisation in the new order and the threat of the emergence of zones of influence carries risks associated with a hypothetical revival of neo-imperialist visions.

As Michael Bernes explains: "The future to which China and the United States aspire to lead the world would resemble the history of the past, specifically the 19th century, when, in the absence of effective multilateral institutions and international law, a group of empires competed for economic spheres, resources and territorial control, without mechanisms to limit authoritarian and greedy behaviour"¹⁴. Therefore, the author adds, given the historical background, world leaders should weigh the pros and cons before repeating the transactional practices of yesteryear, the effects of which promoted the implementation of inappropriate world orders.

And further on, he warns: "The prospect of constant conflict between major powers alone was a constant threat during the 19th century, a fact that must be avoided in the 21st century. The current polarity is more numerous than it was then, with small states exerting greater influence on the global stage"¹⁵. A transactional approach to foreign affairs will not generate stable spheres of influence, but rather instability produced by competition over who can extract the maximum benefit from the international system in terms of trade and resources, ignoring the search for solutions to global problems.

¹⁴ *Op. cit.* In citation 8.

¹⁵ *Op. cit.* In citation 8.

The collision may be limited, in the style of wars between colonial empires (Russia/British Empire). The defeat of the rival is not pursued, but rather its partial and long-term weakening. Or it can be permanent, when the *status quo* is repeatedly and periodically challenged, both globally (China/United States/Taiwan Strait) and regionally (Turkey/Syria/Kurdistan). Destabilising actors remain active in this dynamic of collision, or new actors emerge.

Therefore, concluding the process of transforming the order without a strategic vision of what and to what extent to negotiate in order to balance it would be a very risky decision on the part of the major powers. Or on the part of actors who feel particularly threatened by an unresolved conflict (Israel/Palestine/jihadism).

Regression

The major powers reach agreements to stabilise the order, but within them or in some strategic regions, different processes of involution take place. This is a scenario that has been present in other processes of change in the international order, such as the end of the Cold War and the collapse of the communist system in the Soviet Union, and immediately afterwards in the satellite countries of Central, Baltic and Eastern Europe. Currently, processes of involution could take place in authoritarian systems, due to a change of leader or leading group, but also in liberal democracies, hyper-volatilised by polarisation and hybrid wars.

If we look at the climate of opinion in the United States, which is very concerned about the possibility of greater military involvement in Venezuela or other territories, as reported by *The Economist* magazine, which reflects the results of a *Reuters/Ipsos* poll; and conditioned by the proximity of the 2026 midterm legislative and local elections, the first interpretation is that American society is not completely convinced of the need for an aggressive change in foreign policy. Furthermore, if we look at the degree of polarisation that still persists in domestic politics, the interpretation is that the risk of institutional regression, while , remains in US democracy. Foreign policy is therefore subject to this uncertain and unstable climate.

This same risk of internal regression persists in European democracies, which have very limited decision-making capacity due to recurring polarisation in different countries and multi-party government coalitions that condition and slow down decisions in others, and in the European Union itself. But outside the democratic environment, authoritarian systems are equally or more at risk in the face of growing external volatility.

Regression is also a regional risk. If, for example, any of the open conflicts in the Middle East, the Indian subcontinent or the disputed borders between regional actors were to occur, there would be an increase in clashes or open conflict. Regression is therefore a high-risk scenario, considering that the major powers possess nuclear weapons, which requires commitments to action that cannot be weakened in a process of this nature.

Europe

The US National Security Strategy (NSS) of 2025 marks a break with the post-1945 order. It explicitly distances itself from the idea that the United States will continue to command the global system, as powerful allies should assume strategic responsibility for their own areas of responsibility. This goes beyond a budgetary argument; it is a structural change in the way Washington understands its mission.

The NSS-2025 asserts that economic decline is overshadowed by a bleaker prospect: the possible demise of European civilisation, driven by overregulation, uncontrolled migration, plummeting birth rates, restrictions on free speech and the loss of national identity. From this perspective, Europe is not the embodiment of Western values, but a warning of what the United States should avoid.

Based on this interpretation, the strategy outlines three actions aimed at Europe: the first is a drastic increase in defence spending, envisaged through the so-called Hague Commitment, with a benchmark of 5% of GDP; the second is ideological intervention through explicit support for what the document calls 'European patriotic parties'¹⁶ ,

¹⁶ The reference is taken verbatim from the US National Security Strategy document, published in December 2025, and clearly denotes the ideological orientation that partially guides the text. Therefore, it should be understood as an aspect that cannot be extrapolated to another period with a different administration in the United States.

combined with harsh criticism of many current European governments, which are described as weak, minority and hostile to true democracy; and the third is geo-economic pressure through energy policy, industrial policy, tariffs, financial leverage and a direct attack on the European regulatory model.

The NSS-2025 doctrine published in December, the events in Venezuela in January, and the emergence of Greenland as an aspirational territory for the Trump administration's interests have had a significant impact on the perceptions and assessments of European leaders and have generated intense concern in foreign ministries.

Various political leaders from France, Germany and most European countries condemned US foreign policy under Donald Trump, stating in one way or another that Washington was "violating international norms". In unusually blunt and seemingly uncoordinated statements, Emmanuel Macron and Frank-Walter Steinmeier warned that the post-war rules-based international order could soon disintegrate. "The United States is a consolidated power, but it is gradually distancing itself from some of its allies and breaking with the international rules it promoted until recently," Macron told the French diplomatic corps at the Élysée Palace, a few days after the intervention in Venezuela.

For her part, on 15 January, EU foreign policy chief Kaja Kallas said European institutions were weighing their response if US plans to acquire Greenland materialised. "The messages we are receiving are extremely worrying," she said. "If this poses a real threat, what would our response be?" NATO ambassadors in Brussels also held a discussion on Arctic territory, where they reportedly agreed that the alliance should strengthen Arctic security. "No drama," a senior NATO diplomat told *Reuters*. "There is broad consensus that NATO needs to accelerate the development of a greater deterrent presence in the region."

In addition to statements by leaders and policymakers, debate and social concern have been evident in the media and in centres specialising in international analysis. In *The Spectator*, Peter Mandelson, former ambassador to Washington, has stated that the problem "we face is Europe's growing political impotence in the world." And the way to regain a seat at the table is not through "theatrics," but through the collective deployment of "hard power and cold cash," he writes.

In the opinion of Professor Bew, an adviser to four prime ministers, from Boris Johnson to Keir Starmer, Caracas represents three things: first, a greater willingness on the part of the United States to use executive power for rapid military action; second, a new reaffirmation of American mercantilism that insists on American control of oil, gas and minerals; and third, a shift towards a hemispheric approach, which could mean that China and Russia would have more room for manoeuvre in other regions¹⁷.

Chatman House Director Bronwen Maddox delivered a speech on 13 January at the prestigious British centre's Annual Conference, in which she made statements of extraordinary political and strategic importance:

"We have had what amounts to a revolution from President Trump. He has given the United States a radically new role in the world and on the 250th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence. A role that rejects the principles on which the United States was founded: that the government must be accountable to the people... Most profoundly, we have seen the rejection of the principles of international law that the United States helped to forge, even though it has often refused to apply them to itself. Venezuela showed that rejection to the world, followed by the president's intention to acquire Greenland... That is a flagrant violation of the United Nations Charter, and if he were to do so, acquiring Greenland by force would be the end of NATO. Members of the world's most successful military alliance are already forced to contemplate how they might have to defend themselves against its most powerful member.

Although the events of January have made comments and interpretations volatile, the reality is that US foreign policy in the first year of Donald Trump's second term has brought most of the analyses contained in this paper to the fore. The transitional order known as competition between powers has reached a level of disruption that allows us to speak of a different order, of a transnational nature, guided by the geo-economic interests of the main actors and powers and based on a transactional dynamic, whose regulation is neither defined nor subjugated by agreements established in the previous order.

¹⁷ At <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2026/jan/08/the-guardian-view-on-the-new-global-disorder-britain-and-europe-must-find-their-own-path> (accessed on 14 January 2025).

Among other uncertainties, three structural risk factors arise from the current situation in Europe until 2035. The first is the decoupling of security in conditions of continued dependence, as the United States gradually withdraws its contingent in Europe. The NSS-2025 is not a technocratic planning document; it is an explicitly political project. It defines US national interests: the protection of the homeland, the economy, the industrial base and a particular understanding of the American way of life. Anything that does not directly contribute to these priorities is relegated to the background. International institutions and transnational regimes are seen less as stabilising structures and more as potential threats to sovereignty.

The second is political renationalisation, implemented both from within the European environment and by Washington's strategic drive, which could erode the supranational logic of the European Union. The third is geo-economic erosion resulting from deindustrialisation, the sustained rise in energy costs, brain drain and the loss of technological sovereignty.

The NSS-2025 is used as a precept and stress test. It states that the United States will only provide security and economic partnership within a strict transactional framework that requires adaptation. Europe has a choice: accept a subordinate role in this framework or use the crisis as a catalyst to define and build genuine strategic autonomy. The document also states that the United States will no longer assume control of the situation by default. Allies benefiting from US protection are expected to contribute, align themselves and take visible risks. Security guarantees are no longer expressions of a shared identity, but the result of a cost-benefit calculation.

The turmoil caused by Donald Trump's first year in office has sent a warning to public opinion and policymakers that the European strategic project itself is under threat. This paper does not seek to conclude with such a warning, quite the contrary. It would be wrong to disrupt a process of integration as ambitious and successful as the European Union, and even more wrong to question NATO's Euro-Atlantic security framework, which has promoted the security, growth and stability of democracies for decades. But it would be even more wrong not to be aware, and indeed certain, that the international order has changed.

This summary of events and trends highlights a reality that must be addressed through political and institutional responsibility. A firm commitment to shared Euro-Atlantic security today requires allocating more resources and developing new strategies to project the framework of democratic coexistence into a more complex environment. It requires strengthening the European market with greater technological innovation and more dynamic and up-to-date regulation in order to address current and future geo-economic dynamics.

Political polarisation and populist and ultra-progressive doctrines are responsible for the weakening of democracies. The first challenge today is to depolarise societies that have remained irrationally divided in order to embrace the changes that were taking place in the international order, and which were unconsciously paralysed in the face of these changes. Global disorder has led to local disorder. Now is the time for national and European order to contribute to bringing order to an increasingly complex world.

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