



## The world at the end of 2025: more or less secure?

The close of 2025 presents itself to history as the likely epilogue to the era of undisputed hegemony and the preface to a fragmented global order, where competition between powers has transcended traditional diplomatic channels to manifest in a series of kinetic and asymmetric conflicts. During the final week of December 2025, the international system witnessed an unprecedented acceleration in the redefinition of spheres of influence. From the steppes of Eastern Europe to the coasts of Southeast Asia, passing through the heart of the Sahel and the Taiwan Strait, the military actions recorded on the 28th and 29th of that month did not represent isolated incidents, but rather the culmination of a year marked by the exhaustion of multilateralism and the return of *realpolitik*. The central dilemma facing the international community, the persistence of a transactional unilateralism versus the emergence of a competitive multipolarity, is manifested today in the ability of state actors to impose realities on the ground through the use of advanced technology, the control of energy resources and the reconfiguration of security alliances.

## The Eurasian Front: The War of Attrition and the Diplomacy of Fire.

The conflict in Ukraine, now entering its fourth year, experienced a significant qualitative and quantitative escalation in the final days of 2025. On December 28, Russia launched one of the most massive aerial operations recorded since the beginning of the invasion in 2022, deploying a combined arsenal of 519 drones and 40 precision missiles<sup>1,2</sup>. This attack, primarily targeting the capital, Kyiv, and its critical energy infrastructure, left vast areas of the region without electricity or heating in the middle of winter<sup>3,4</sup>. The sophistication of the strike was evidenced by the use of Kinzhal hypersonic missiles, Iskander projectiles and Kalibr cruise missiles, designed to saturate Ukrainian air defenses<sup>5</sup>.

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- <sup>1</sup> ANI News. "Russia strikes Kyiv with missiles, drones ahead of Trump-Zelenskyy meeting." (2025). <https://www.aninews.in/news/world/europe/a-lot-can-be-decided-before-the-new-year-says-zelenskyy-ahead-of-talks-with-trump20251228190546/>
  - <sup>2</sup> Indian Express. "Russia strikes Ukraine's capital and kills at least 1 person a day before Zelenskyy-Trump meeting." (2025). <https://indianexpress.com/article/world/russia-strikes-ukraines-capital-and-kills-at-least-1-person-a-day-before-zelenskyy-trump-meeting-10442577/>
  - <sup>3</sup> RBC-Ukraine. "Russian drone attack on Ukraine overnight leaves several strikes despite air defences." (2025). <https://newsukraine.rbc.ua/news/russian-drone-attack-on-ukraine-overnight-1766995787.html>
  - <sup>4</sup> The Guardian. "Kyiv's heritage: rebuilding in the shadow of war." (2025). <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2025/dec/28/kyivs-heritage-rebuilding-shadow-of-war>
  - <sup>5</sup> ANI News. "Russia strikes Kyiv with missiles, drones ahead of Trump-Zelenskyy meeting as peace talks continue." (2025). <https://www.aninews.in/news/world/europe/russia-strikes-kyiv-with-missiles-drones-ahead-of-trump-zelenskyy-meeting-as-peace-talks-continue20251227085753/>

From a strategic perspective, the bombardment on December 28 was not merely an act of war, but a tool of diplomatic pressure. The operation was executed just hours before Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy travelled to Florida for a high-level meeting with U.S. President Donald Trump<sup>6</sup>. This encounter, intended to discuss a framework for the cessation of hostilities, was overshadowed by the Kremlin's show of force, which seeks to secure definitive territorial concessions, specifically in the Donbas region and the occupied areas of Zaporizhzhia. Moscow's message is clear: any peace agreement must recognize the realities on the battlefield, under the threat that if Kyiv does not yield, Russia will achieve the objectives of its "special military operation" through purely military means<sup>7</sup>.

The Ukrainian response was not long in coming. December 29, 2025, highlighted the cross-border and economically disruptive nature of modern conflict. Kyiv executed a series of drone strikes that hit critical Russian infrastructure, most notably impacting the Yuzhnaya Ozereevka export terminal of the Caspian Pipeline Consortium (CPC). This action not only affected Russian energy logistics but also triggered a 6% drop in crude oil production in Kazakhstan, a neutral country that relies on this route for 80% of its exports. The paralysis at the Tengiz oil field, operated by Chevron, demonstrates how Ukrainian precision strikes can generate massive collateral damage in global energy markets and Western corporate interests<sup>8</sup>.

The dynamics of this confrontation reveal the exhaustion of traditional security frameworks. While Kyiv seeks security guarantees similar to NATO's Article 5, the Kremlin insists on a demilitarized zone and the recognition of its territorial annexations. The Ukrainian proposal, a free economic zone in the east and a national referendum contingent upon a 60-day ceasefire, reflects an attempt to democratically legitimize painful decisions; however, mutual distrust and the tactical superiority claimed by Russia in sectors such as Myrnohrad and Huliaipole, complicate any diplomatic exit. In this scenario, multipolarity manifests as the inability of any single power to dictate the end of

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<sup>6</sup> The Guardian. "Volodymyr Zelenskyy, Donald Trump, US security guarantees, Ukraine." (2025). <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2025/dec/29/volodymyr-zelenskyy-donald-trump-us-security-guarantees-ukraine>

<sup>7</sup> ANI News. "Zelenskyy, Trump to hold high-stakes peace talks in Florida amid intensifying Russian strikes on Kyiv." (2025). <https://www.aninews.in/news/world/us/zelenskyy-trump-to-hold-high-stakes-peace-talks-in-florida-amid-intensifying-russian-strikes-on-kyiv20251228181512/>

<sup>8</sup> Modern Diplomacy. "Ukraine Strike on Russian Terminal Cuts Kazakhstan Crude Production." (2025). <https://moderndiplomacy.eu/2025/12/29/ukraine-strike-on-russian-terminal-cuts-kazakhstan-crude-production/>

the conflict, leaving Ukraine in a precarious balance between military resistance and the need for a sustainable peace.

### **The Pacific on Edge: Operation “Mission Justice 2025”.**

Simultaneously, with the crisis in Europe, East Asia entered a phase of significant tension with the launch of Operation “Mission Justice 2025” by China’s People’s Liberation Army (PLA), starting on December 29<sup>9</sup>. These exercises, which included live-fire drills and geographically completely surrounded the island of Taiwan, represented Beijing’s sixth major military manoeuvre since 2022, serving as a direct response to the United States arms sale package to Taipei, valued at \$11.1 billion. The Chinese military operation involved not only the navy and air force but also the rocket force and the coast guard, simulating a total blockade of the vital ports of Keelung in the north and Kaohsiung in the south.

The aforementioned military exercise differed from previous manoeuvres due to the aggressiveness of its dissemination and its focus on a multidimensional siege. China’s Eastern Theatre Command published propaganda posters titled “Shields of Justice” and “Arrows of Justice”, warning that any “external interference” that touches these shields must bear the consequences. This language is not coincidental; it reflects a posture from Beijing that no longer merely seeks to deter internal independence forces in Taiwan<sup>10</sup>, but to establish an “external deterrence” against the United States and its regional allies<sup>11</sup>. Furthermore, the exercises affected international air traffic, forcing the rerouting of flights carrying more than 100,000 passengers in a single day, underlining the vulnerability of global supply chains and transportation to geopolitical ambitions.

Japan’s involvement in this crisis adds a layer of multipolar complexity. Statements by Japanese Prime Minister, Sanae Takaichi, suggesting that Japanese forces could become involved if China acts against Taiwan, provoked a violent reaction from Beijing, which summoned Tokyo’s ambassador and encouraged its citizens to avoid traveling to

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<sup>9</sup> ANI News. "China launches 'Justice Mission 2025' military drills around Taiwan." (2025). <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/defence/china-launches-justice-mission-2025-military-drills-around-taiwan-asserts-territorial-claim/articleshow/126223422.cms?from=mdr>

<sup>10</sup> SBS News. "China launches live-fire drills around Taiwan in warning to 'separatist forces'." (2025). <https://www.sbs.com.au/news/article/china-taiwan-drills-blockade/izp6qqtYW>

<sup>11</sup> Focus Taiwan. "China military exercises Taiwan December 2025 purpose." (2025). <https://focustaiwan.tw/politics/202512290018>

Japan<sup>12</sup>. This alignment of liberal democracies against Chinese expansionism is interpreted by Beijing as a provocation that undermines regional stability. Furthermore, analysts have noted that China is using these manoeuvres to rehearse “cognitive warfare”<sup>13</sup> operations and to demonstrate growing strategic coordination with Russia, especially in the realm of airborne forces. The Taiwan Strait thus solidifies as the epicenter of the dispute between a regional order led by the U.S. alliance system and the Chinese vision of undisputed continental hegemony<sup>14</sup>.

### **The “Golden Fleet” and the new U.S. Unilateralism.**

At the center of this global whirlwind lies a radical transformation in the United States Defense Strategy. Under the current administration, the Pentagon has shifted toward what President Donald Trump has dubbed the “Golden Fleet”<sup>15</sup>, an ambitious plan to build a new class of combat vessels, the “Trump class” battleships, intended to restore absolute naval supremacy through the power of capital ships and cutting-edge technology<sup>16</sup>. On December 22, 2025, the blueprints for the USS Defiant (BBG-1), the lead ship of the class, were unveiled. This vessel, weighing between 30,000 and 40,000 tons, will integrate nuclear weapons, cruise missiles, electromagnetic railguns, and the most sophisticated lasers on the planet<sup>17</sup>.

This new doctrine moves away from the discretion and stealth that characterized naval designs of recent decades in favour of an aesthetic of imposing power. The official argument maintains that previous vessels had become “old, tired, and obsolete”, and that the only way to guarantee peace is through a force that deters potential enemies of the United States. The plan envisions the construction of up to 25 of these “battleships”, controlled by artificial intelligence and manufactured entirely by American citizens, in an effort to revitalize the nation's shipbuilding industry while containing China.

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<sup>12</sup> Indian Express. "Chinese military to stage drills around Taiwan to warn external forces after Japan tensions." (2025). <https://indianexpress.com/article/world/chinese-military-to-stage-drills-around-taiwan-to-warn-external-forces-after-japan-tensions-10444055/>

<sup>13</sup> Cognitive Warfare, NATO Chief Scientist Research Report, 2023.

<sup>14</sup> Institute for the Study of War. "China-Taiwan Update, December 19, 2025." (2025). <https://understandingwar.org/research/china-taiwan/china-taiwan-update-december-19-2025/>

<sup>15</sup> War.gov. "Trump Announces New Class of Battleship." (2025). <https://www.war.gov/News/News-Stories/Article/Article/4366952/trump-announces-new-class-of-battleship/>

<sup>16</sup> Breaking Defense. "Trump announces new Trump-class 'battleship' as part of 'Golden Fleet'." (2025). <https://breakingdefense.com/2025/12/trump-announces-new-trump-class-battleship-as-part-of-golden-fleet/>

<sup>17</sup> Defense Scoop. "Trump Battleship Golden Fleet Navy." (2025). <https://defensescoop.com/2025/12/23/trump-battleship-golden-fleet-navy-phelan/>

The most immediate manifestation of this new defense strategy occurred on Christmas Day 2025, when a U.S. Navy vessel in the Gulf of Guinea launched Tomahawk cruise missiles against ISIS-Sahel camps (locally known as Lakurawa) in Sokoto State, Nigeria<sup>18</sup>. The operation, justified as a response to the “slaughter of Christians” in the region, represented a return to unilateralism and a “guns-a-blazing” approach. Although, the Nigerian government later confirmed that the action resulted from shared intelligence, the initial lack of coordination and the exclusion of local forces from direct execution sparked a wave of domestic criticism regarding the violation of national sovereignty<sup>19</sup>.

This attack in Nigeria underscores the dilemma of residual unipolarity: the United States continues to possess the unique technological capability to conduct global precision strikes without the need for ground bases, a crucial factor following the loss of access to bases in Niger and Chad in 2024. However, these actions often exacerbate local tensions and fuel the narrative of extremist groups that view Washington as the “great evil”. The effectiveness of these bombardments in permanently dismantling terrorist cells remains a subject of debate among analysts, who warn that, without solid local governance, military power alone is insufficient to resolve security crises affecting a population of 230 million people<sup>20</sup>.

### **Southeast Asia: The Collapse of the Regional Order**

While the major powers redraw the global map, smaller-scale but high-intensity regional conflicts provide further evidence of the fragility of a system lacking effective arbitration. The border clash between Thailand and Cambodia over the sovereignty of the ancient temples of Preah Vihear and Ta Muen Thom resurfaced with a violence not seen in decades<sup>21</sup>. Despite a ceasefire agreement signed on December 27, 2025, mediated by diplomatic pressure from both the U.S. and China, the truce collapsed just 24 hours later.

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<sup>18</sup> Washington Post. "U.S. forces struck Islamic State targets in northwestern Nigeria." (2025). <https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2025/12/25/trump-bombing-nigeria-isis/>

<sup>19</sup> Washington Post. "US naval operation Boko Haram Nigeria December 2025 attack from sea." (2025). <https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2025/12/26/trump-nigeria-airstrike-isis/>

<sup>20</sup> Military.com. "Nigerian Villagers Are Rattled by US Airstrikes." <https://www.military.com/daily-news/2025/12/26/nigerian-villagers-are-rattled-us-airstrikes-made-their-homes-shake-and-sky-glow-red.html>

<sup>21</sup> Britannica. "Thailand-Cambodia Conflict (2025)." (2025). <https://www.britannica.com/event/Thailand-Cambodia-Conflict>

On December 29, the Thai army formally accused Cambodia of violating the agreement after detecting more than 250 drones flying over border positions<sup>22</sup>.

This conflict is particularly representative of the multipolar dilemma. Both nations have utilized modern technology, such as BM-21 multiple rocket launchers and surveillance drones, to sustain a confrontation that displaced nearly one million civilians in 2025. External mediation, led by figures such as China's Wang Yi and the U.S. President, achieved a "hard-won success" in public statements; however, this crumbled in the face of tactical realities on the ground and deep-seated mistrust between the political elites of Bangkok and Phnom Penh. The fact that neither pressure from Beijing nor Washington could sustain the truce underscores that, in a multipolar world, regional actors possess greater leeway to defy superpower directives when their national interests or political ambitions are at stake. This, in turn, challenges the logic of social constructivism as the prevailing security theory at the close of the first quarter of this century.

ASEAN's inability to manage this crisis underscores the eclipse of regional multilateral institutions. The dispute, which is rooted in colonial-era treaties and a 1962 International Court of Justice ruling that, in turn, left ambiguities regarding the lands surrounding the temples, has become a battlefield for exacerbated nationalisms<sup>23</sup>. In this power vacuum, military force becomes the only resource perceived as effective, fuelling a spiral of militarization that affects not only the belligerents but the stability of all of mainland Southeast Asia.

### **The Structural Crisis of Multilateralism: The UN on the Abyss Edge?**

The analysis of the conflicts at the end of 2025 reveals an uncomfortable truth: the institutions designed to preserve global peace are in a state of near-total paralysis. The United Nations, as it enters its eighth decade of existence, faces what experts describe as a "systemic exhaustion crisis". The architecture of collective security has been undermined by the systematic use of the veto in the Security Council by the United States,

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<sup>22</sup> Indian Express. "Thailand accuses Cambodia breaching ceasefire agreement border fighting." (2025). <https://indianexpress.com/article/world/thailand-accuses-cambodia-breaching-ceasefire-agreement-border-fighting-10445122/>

<sup>23</sup> Wikipedia. "2025 Cambodia–Thailand conflict." (2025). [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2025\\_Cambodia%E2%80%93Thailand\\_conflict](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2025_Cambodia%E2%80%93Thailand_conflict)

Russia, and China, which has blocked critical resolutions on Ukraine, Gaza, Syria, and the Sahel<sup>24</sup>.

This phenomenon has led to a de-Westernization of the global order, where countries of the Global South perceive the UN as a tool of the North that operates under a normative double standard. While Western powers demand compliance with international law in Ukraine, those same norms are ignored or unilaterally reinterpreted in other theatres of operation, which has eroded the legitimacy of bodies such as the International Criminal Court. The result is a world where transactional diplomacy replaces multilateral logic, and where ad hoc alliances such as AUKUS or the QUAD gain greater relevance than the formal structures of the UN.

The withdrawal of U.S. leadership from multilateral institutions, marked by the cessation of support for human rights bodies and a focus on immediate national interests, has created a vacuum that China and Russia are attempting to fill with alternative visions of absolute sovereignty. However, these powers do not offer an inclusive model of global governance either, preferring a system of “agile platforms” that lack accountability mechanisms. In this context, multipolarity does not translate into a stable balance, but rather into a fragmentation of international law where the “law of the strongest” once again becomes the predominant norm<sup>25</sup>.

### **The Multipolar Dilemma: A Global Risk Perspective.**

In evaluating the complete landscape of 2025, it is evident that the world has transitioned from a post-Cold War unipolar system to a “multipolarization” phase characterized by competition between at least three major powers and the rise of influential middle powers. Thus, Russian geopolitician Aleksandr Dugin proposes the idea of a four-polar world, identifying four major poles that define specific areas: the Anglo-American zone, the Euro-African zone, the Euro-Asiatic zone, and the Far East Pacific zone<sup>26</sup>. For his part, political scientist John Mearsheimer, one of the leading proponents of offensive realism, has proposed three centers of power: the United States (the strongest), China (rapidly rising

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<sup>24</sup> Ministerio de Defensa (España). "The UN in the face of the eclipse of multilateralism 2025." (2025). [https://www.defensa.gob.es/documents/2073105/2990223/la\\_onu\\_ante\\_el\\_eclipse\\_del\\_multilateralismo\\_2025\\_dieeee71\\_eng.pdf/de043378-893d-8018-9211-969a9f6c511e?t=1762859414559](https://www.defensa.gob.es/documents/2073105/2990223/la_onu_ante_el_eclipse_del_multilateralismo_2025_dieeee71_eng.pdf/de043378-893d-8018-9211-969a9f6c511e?t=1762859414559)

<sup>25</sup> Global Challenges Foundation. "Who Makes the Rules? Defending Law Over Power in a Fracturing World." (2025). <https://globalchallenges.org/updates/law-over-power/>

<sup>26</sup> Dugin, A. (2021). *Geopolítica del Mundo Multipolar*. Santiago, Chile. ICP Ediciones.

as a peer competitor), and Russia (a great power in relative decline, yet militarily aggressive)<sup>27</sup>. This structure generates two permanent conflict dyads, U.S. vs. China and U.S. vs. Russia, which eliminate the possibility of lasting stability without a new grand global bargain<sup>28</sup>.

The multipolarity dilemma lies in the fact that, while it offers a system more representative of the actual diversity of power, it lacks the crisis management mechanisms that existed during the Cold War. The proliferation of high-tech weaponry, the use of drones for cross-border strikes, and the ability of powers to interfere with their adversary's critical infrastructure have reduced reaction times and increased the risk of miscalculation<sup>29</sup>. The United States "Golden Fleet" and China's military exercises under the name "Mission Justice" are symptoms of this mutual distrust, where each party seeks to ensure its survival by expanding its nuclear and conventional arsenals.

In this environment, resource conflicts, exacerbated by climate change and the scarcity of water and food, act as catalysts for violence in geographic areas with fragile democracies, such as the Sahel and the Horn of Africa. The civil war in Sudan, terrorist attacks in Nigeria, and instability in Myanmar serve as reminders that great power competition often utilizes fragile states on this global chessboard, leaving civilian populations in a state of extreme vulnerability. Humanitarian aid, increasingly politicized and conditional, is proving insufficient to address long-term crises in countries like Somalia, where millions face acute hunger while the world focuses on the tensions between major blocs.

### **Conclusions: The Future of Governance in a Divided World.**

The year 2025 concludes with a severe warning for humanity. The global events of late December underscore that the international system has entered a dangerous transition phase, where the old rules no longer apply and the new ones have yet to be agreed upon. The dilemma between unipolarity and multipolarity is not merely a question of how many power centers exist, but of what values and norms will govern their interactions.

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<sup>27</sup> Mearsheimer, J. (2014). *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*. W. W. Norton & Company.

<sup>28</sup> International Policy Brief. "Analysis of US unilateralism vs multilateralism." (2025). <https://internationalpolicybrief.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/10/ARTICLE-18-1.pdf>

<sup>29</sup> Nordic Defence Review. "Global conflict landscape in 2025: local wars and uprisings." (2025). <https://nordicdefencereview.com/global-conflict-landscape-in-2025-local-wars-and-uprisings/>

On one hand, the persistence of a transactional unilateralism by the still-dominant power seeks to preserve security through the demonstration of overwhelming technological and military force. The construction of Trump-class battleships and pre-emptive strikes in Africa are expressions of a will to act independently of global consensus when threats to national interests or specific values are perceived. It is a clear expression of the enduring relevance of the security theory of classical realism.

The emerging multipolarity, which China and Russia have sought to promote, advocates for a system of spheres of influence, where regional control and the sovereignty of strong states prevail over external interventions. This model, however, has proven to be equally prone to violence, as evidenced by the aggressions in Ukraine and the siege manoeuvres in Taiwan.

The survival of a functional global civilization will depend on the ability of world leaders to recognize that 21st-century challenges, ranging from the regulation of Artificial Intelligence to the mitigation of climate change and the prevention of a nuclear war by miscalculation, cannot be resolved through military force or nationalist retreat. While the world wavers between nostalgia for an order that no longer exists and the uncertainty of a fragmented future, the succession of frictions witnessed throughout 2025, culminating in those described in these paragraphs from the year's final month, stand as a testament to a planet that, for now, seems to have chosen conflict as the only possible language to redefine its destiny.

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