

GLOBAL RELATIONS FORUM GLOBAL OUTLOOK REPORT 2025

The Future of International Organizations



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“The Future of International Organizations”

Project Coordinator
Fulya Kocukođlu / GRF Program Director

GLOBAL RELATIONS FORUM
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“The Future of International Organizations”

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www.gif.org.tr

FIRST PRINT: March, 2026

ISBN 978-625-97292-4-4

Cinius Sosyal Matbaası
Ömer Avni Mahallesi, Dümen Sokak, No: 11, B1 kat,
Gümüşsuyu/Taksim
Tel: (212) 528 33 14
Sertifika No: 52793

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(1) The views and opinions expressed in this study belong to the authors and may not reflect the official position of our institution.

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Selim Yenel

Selim Yenel was born in 1956 in Istanbul. He entered the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) in 1979. His first posting was the Turkish Delegation to the OECD in Paris between 1981 and 1984. From there he went to the Turkish Embassy in Kabul, Afghanistan (1984 - 1986). After coming back to the MFA he was posted to the Turkish Delegation to the UN in New York (1988 - 1992). From 1994 till 1999 he was at the Turkish Delegation to the European Union in Brussels. He returned to Ankara and dealt with EU matters up until the opening of accession negotiations (1999 - 2005). Subsequently in December

2005 he was posted as Ambassador to Vienna until October 2009 when he returned to Ankara as Deputy Under-Secretary for Bilateral Political Affairs and Public Diplomacy. From December 2011 till January 2017 he was posted as Ambassador and Permanent Delegate of Turkey to the European Union. Upon his return to Ankara he became Undersecretary at the Ministry of EU Affairs until July 2018 when the EU Ministry and Foreign Ministry merged. In 2019 he was appointed as First Deputy Secretary General at the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC) Organisation. In January 2020 he became President of Global Relations Forum. In 2021, his book titled “*Avrupa Birliđi’nin Türkiye Sınavı - Bir Karşılıklı Anlaşılama Hikayesi*” (The European Union’s Turkey Challenge - A Story of Mutual Misunderstanding) was published. He is married and has a son and a daughter.

FOREWORD¹

Selim Yenel

Ambassador (R); President, Global Relations Forum (GRF)

In this year's report, we aimed to present a comprehensive framework centered around a specific theme. The problems we face today are not only intractable, they are also diversifying, deepening, and becoming increasingly intertwined. This situation makes it more difficult than ever for countries to address these issues on their own. However, international organizations established to strengthen global solidarity and produce common solutions are expected to be functional, provide guidance, and produce solutions, especially in such times.

In the past, international organizations made significant contributions to preventing wars, stopping conflicts, or freezing them to make them manageable. However, the COVID-19 pandemic, mass migration movements, the energy crisis, and rapidly evolving technological challenges have starkly revealed the extent to which these structures have become ineffective. Moreover, far from stopping conflicts, solutions to frozen ones were unfortunately found through non-diplomatic means. Most of these organizations were designed approximately eighty years ago, after World War II. Some emerged through the transformation of older institutions or were rebuilt according to needs.

Although the world was divided into two blocs during the Cold War, most newly independent countries preferred to join structures established primarily under United States' leadership. Over time, with the exception of a few financial institutions, the decisive influence of these organizations began to shift to actors outside the United States and the West in general. Ironically, this transformation led to Washington withdrawing from some of

(1) The articles included in this booklet were finalized by their authors in December 2025.

the very structures it had founded. Indeed, in early 2026, the United States announced its withdrawal from sixty-six organizations, including several United Nations agencies. The inability of existing organizations to fulfill their objectives led to the emergence of new platforms such as the G7, G20, and BRICS.

However, with few exceptions, these new structures have also fallen short of creating the expected impact in terms of global governance. Organizations, whether national or international, can only be as strong as their members' commitment to them. This requires a willingness to comply with its decisions and fulfill shared obligations. Today, we are in a period where this willingness has seriously weakened. The world stands on the threshold of a fundamental transformation: How will countries address these complex problems that they cannot solve on their own? Will existing structures be reformed, or will an entirely new global system emerge?

In this report, we take a broad look at the historical development of international organizations, their current state, the challenges they face, and their options for the future. In addition, major organizations such as the United Nations, the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), the World Trade Organization (WTO), the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), and NATO are evaluated in detail by our expert authors.

We will follow together which organizations will survive and which will undergo transformation in the coming years.

GLOBAL POLITICAL CHANGE AND THE FUTURE OF INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS

İlter Turan

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In studying the effectiveness of international organizations in maintaining the global order and in preserving peace, the 1919-1989 interim represents first a sub-period of almost utter failure and then a period of reasonable achievement. More specifically, the period between 1919-1939 that was characterized by the prevalence of the League of Nations is generally looked upon as a period of failure, whereas the period after the Second World War under American and Soviet leadership may be looked upon as a period during which international organizations did contribute, if selectively, to the achievement of global peace. That period, however, came to an end with the demise of the Soviet Union. How international organizations fared after 1989 is a concern of another paper in this volume and therefore 1989 marks the borderline of our discussion.

International Cooperation in Historical Perspective

Choosing a beginning point for international cooperation is not easy but some observations may be made. First, some international cooperation from which all parties appeared to benefit evolved over time and developed during the nineteenth century into international organizations. Examples include the International Postal Union and the International Committee of the Red Cross. The Postal Union was established in 1874 initially under the name of General Postal Union to standardize international mail delivery and achieve equal treatment between domestic and foreign mail. It became a specialized agency of the United Nations after the latter was established and assumed the

job of coordinating postal policies among member nations and facilitating the operation of a universal postal system.¹ It responded to a genuine need since until that time mail among countries was handled through a cumbersome system of bilateral treaties. International Committee of the Red Cross, on the other hand, was in the nature of a private voluntary association established in 1863 that initially developed to care for the

wounded in war.² In its history, not only has it acted as a neutral intermediary between warring sides, but it has also managed more than once to persuade governments to adopt conventions on how the wounded soldiers should be treated. In its later years, has also assumed peacetime activities like helping those experiencing hunger and deprivation.

Second, over time, with the assistance of scholars and judges, a body of law called international law has evolved. Although subscribing to it has been voluntary, international law has constituted a set of rules to which countries have often subscribed in their relations with each other. The existence of such rules has rendered the international environment more predictable and has helped standardize, for example, diplomatic procedures among countries as well as many other interactions. It has also given domestic actors a justification for having to do things toward which the public is not favorably disposed. Although there is no agency that enforces international law, countries have often chosen to abide by it rather than operate in a totally lawless environment. Also, a Permanent International Court of Justice was established in 1920 within the framework of the League of Nations.³ Countries that previously agreed to go by its rulings, submitted their conflicts to it and then abode by its decisions.

The earlier cases of international cooperation were in areas where all parties derived some benefit from observing agreements. There were no agencies responsible either for implementing the agreement or for

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- (1) Universal Postal Union, *About UPU*, Universal Postal Union Official Website, <https://www.upu.int/en/home>
 - (2) International Committee of the Red Cross, *History of the ICRC*, ICRC Official Website, <https://www.icrc.org/en/document/history-icrc>
 - (3) Permanent Court of International Justice, *Permanent Court of International Justice*, International Court of Justice Archives, <https://www.icj-cij.org/pcij>

penalizing the violators. It appears that for international organizations that bore responsibility for maintaining a global order and penalizing those who failed to deviate, one had to wait for the 20th century when advanced communications between states and leaders became easier and faster and when it became possible for states to engage in reasonably rapid action to implement decisions.

The League of Nations and International Cooperation

The First World War (1914-1918) was more destructive than the previous wars and it imposed significant costs on the winners as well as the losers. Influenced by the immense destruction the war imposed and the overwhelming desire to avoid its repetition, countries participating in the Paris Peace Conference quickly agreed in 1919 to establish an international organization, the League of Nations, to conduct activities that would aim to avoid the recurrence of war.⁴ The League of Nations incorporated many international organizations that had been set up to achieve cooperation in a variety of non-political fields and added new ones, but the main innovation it contained may be best described by the expression “collective security.”⁵ The idea that did not have a precedent in earlier international efforts at cooperation was that the new international organization would intervene to stop “aggressive war” which was perceived as a crime committed against the global community. It was assumed that the coming together of all countries against an actor that would engage in an aggressive war would serve as a deterrent to those who wanted to commit the aggression. Presumably, instead of resorting to aggression, states would turn to adjudication, arbitration, cooperation, disarmament and open diplomacy.⁶

(4) League of Nations, Encyclopaedia Britannica, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/League-of-Nations>

(5) The concept is discussed and elaborated here in detail: Erika De Wet and Michael Wood, ‘Collective Security,’ in *Max Planck Encyclopedia of Public International Law* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, last updated July 2023). <https://opil.ouplaw.com/display/10.1093/law:epil/9780199231690/law-9780199231690-e270>

(6) *League of Nations, Encyclopaedia Britannica*, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/League-of-Nations> offers an excellent summary of the establishment of the League of Nations from which this summary has benefited.

The League was successful in its initial stages in getting the Germans and Poles to settle their border disputes in Upper Silesia and in saving Austria from financial disaster. It also forced Mussolini to withdraw from Corfu which he had occupied to force Greece to pay war reparations.⁷ Furthermore, the League allowed Germany to join the organization and assume a seat in the Council comprised of important members (somewhat like the Security Council of the UN today) in return for guaranteeing the integrity of the Franco-German border. This constituted a way of acknowledging that Germany was an important actor in European politics despite the way it had been treated in Versailles, aiming to reduce it to insignificance after the war. The gesture generated dismay, however, in countries like Spain, Brazil and Poland that also wanted a seat on the Council. Their aspirations were partially accommodated by creating elected Council seats. Despite these developments, there existed a general concern that Germany might rearm and a prevalent suspicion that it was already doing so without letting other countries know.

Some organizations attached to the League like the Permanent Court of International Justice operated with reasonable success, as demonstrated by its decision on the Mosul conflict between Turkey and Great Britain and the Bozkurt-Lotus Accident (two issues well known to the Turks). Later, however, the League failed in its aspiration to achieve collective security by jointly fighting aggressive behavior. A major development in this regard was the rise of the German Nazi party particularly after the beginning of the Great Depression. Even before the rise of the Nazis, Germany had been insisting that it achieve equal status with other powers before it would negotiate about disarmament. The Nazis, after the rise of Hitler to its unquestioned leadership and learning that restrictions on Germany's rearmament would be continued for another four years, withdrew from the League and openly turned to rearming.

Germany's rearming, however, was not the first challenge to the League's efforts to achieve collective security. Already in September 1931, Japan had invaded Manchuria that was a part of China. China brought the matter to the League, leading the Japanese to say that they would withdraw their forces.

(7) *Ibid.*

But rather than withdraw, in early 1932 the Japanese created the puppet state of Manchukuo and then argued that the grounds for the intervention of the League no longer existed. The League, nevertheless, sent a commission to the area that reported that it should be returned to China. Upon unanimous acceptance of the report in the League's Assembly (February 1933) Japan objected and within a month withdrew from membership. The League had failed to protect China against Japanese aggression.⁸

Then, in October 1935 Mussolini invaded Ethiopia (then Abyssinia) and within a year completed its invasion of the entire country. His intentions were known in advance but he could not be dissuaded despite suggestions that economic sanctions as depicted in the Covenant of the League would be applied against Italy. While such sanctions were in fact implemented, his determination was too strong. In the end, Britain and France, as leading members of the Council, accepted Italy's annexation of Ethiopia.⁹

It appears that the ineffectiveness of the League's response to the Ethiopian invasion resulted in its not being a deterrent in state aggression. So, Hitler's invasion of Sudetenland or his annexation of Austria came as no surprise. Another World War began in the Fall of 1939. The League had failed in its major goal of avoiding a major global conflict, one of the major reasons it was established in the first place.

It is only fair to analyze why the first major international organization aiming to avoid global conflict through a system of collective security and channel countries to settle their differences employing peaceful means failed so miserably. One might begin by noting that the United States which had been the leading force in the founding of the international organization decided not to approve of the League's Covenant and thereby become a member in the March of 1920. President Wilson had been an active proponent of the organization but the international treaty had to be approved by the Senate in which the isolationists prevailed. It did not help that Wilson was not popular with elected representatives. In fact, Harding who succeeded him declared from the beginning that he was opposed to the League. America's

(8) *Ibid.*

(9) Italo-Ethiopian War (1935–1936). Encyclopedia Britannica, <https://www.britannica.com/event/Italo-Ethiopian-War-1935-1936>

withdrawal not only undermined the claim of the League to be a universal organization, giving it the appearance of a European agency, but it also meant that countries, especially Great Britain, devoted as much attention to consulting the United States with whom it had a special relationship as it did to the League. Equally importantly, however, was the absence of the leadership of the United States that had determined the outcome of the First World War, from guiding the League. Lacking a powerful guide, the organization experienced difficulties in reaching consensus and deciding on a course of action.

Second comes the Versailles Treaty that tried to eliminate Germany as a major power in European politics. Considerable time was spent in trying to figure out how to incorporate Germany into European politics. It is understandable that Germany emerged as a revisionist power after the Versailles Treaty that imagined that Germany could be rendered into an agricultural power. As Germany rose to become an equal partner, it was always suspect with original members who thought Germany wanted to rearm and acquire territory. By the same token. Germany did not have a stake in ensuring that the League with which it was not involved as a founder would be successful. In fact, Hitler's success, in addition to the difficult economic circumstances Germany encountered, probably relied on the German national psychology which did not accept their country as a second-rate power.

Third, the great depression guided all countries, members of the League or not, to devote great attention to economic considerations, particularly the economic consequences of the policies that they pursued. The failure of the application of economic sanctions to Italy upon its invasion of Ethiopia offers an appropriate example here.

Fourth, the founders and leading forces of the League were all European powers with colonies. This presented two related problems: Eurocentrism and insensitivity to aspirations of non-European countries. Clearly, the organization was Euro-centric. Although it did include members from different parts of the world, the League spent most its energy and time on matters pertaining to Europe. The mandate system that was devised after the First World War was a continuation of colonialism under a different name. Therefore, the League was insensitive to issues of colonialism and issues of

participation and representation associated with it. The fact that colonialism, for all practical purposes, ended after the Second World War, suggests the existence of an issue which the League clearly ignored during the interwar period. This undermined the claims of the organization both in terms of universality and inclusiveness.

By the time the Second World War came, the League of Nations had become an ineffective organization that almost no one took into consideration in conducting their external affairs. The last time a state had turned to the organization was Finland when Russia attacked it in September 1939. The only meaningful action the League could take was to expel Russia from membership. So, when the question of an international organization to protect peace and perform other services for which there is a global need came up as the war was coming to a close, rather than focusing on the League's continuation, major powers pursued the development of an entirely new organization that would also assume some of the functions that the League aspired to perform.

The Coming of the United Nations

As already indicated, rather than continue with the League, the winning states of the Second World War decided to establish an entirely new organization. A major change on this occasion was that the United States would not only back the organization but also it would be a member of it. In fact, the United States assumed a leading role in the United Nations as the major power without whose intervention in the war, the tide might not have easily turned against Germany. The Americans perceived the United Nations as the political arm of a world order that they were interested in creating. They also proceeded to establish a number of organizations in the economic domain such as the International Monetary Fund, the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (World Bank) and the World Trade Organization which, in fact, did not get established until after the Cold War had ended much later. Since economic questions do not constitute the focus of this paper, we will simply mention them in passing and turn to the United Nations.

The United States had hoped that it would succeed in leading the other winners in the war into organizing global governance in a way, not much

different in act than the League in achieving collective security. It had become evident, however, rather early on that Russia rather than accede to American leadership, would pursue a competitive relationship with it. In terms of actual fighting, this became evident in Korea where the USSR and the USA had agreed to create two states with the 38th parallel constituting the border. Persuading Stalin that it had the military capability if supported by the USSR to invade the South and also getting the support of China, North Korean forces crossed the 38th parallel and initiated an invasion of the South. The Americans not only fought back along with the modest South Korean forces but managed to get the United Nations to support the defense of South Korea.

The involvement of the United Nations in South Korea's defense under the banner of collective security is in fact coincidental since the North was supported by the Soviets. The latter was boycotting the Security Council for another reason which gave the Americans the opportunity to get the organization to support South Korea against an invasion attempt from the North. Although a number of countries such as Great Britain and Turkey joined the war effort, extending protection to South Korea was an American organized and backed effort, in which the United Nations was used to render the effort legitimate. The war continued for three years as an inconclusive conflict, with each side gaining the upper hand at different times; ultimately, the 38th parallel remained the border, and it continues to serve as such today.

The Korean war constituted confirmation that collective security in its initial form would not be applicable in the post-World War II order, either. The United States proceeded to lead an effort to organize a "defensive" (?) alliance to deter Soviet encroachments to Western Europe and push them back Eastwards if possible. The Soviets, on the other hand, after consolidating their hold on Eastern Europe, responded with the establishment of the Warsaw Pact in 1955. The pacts were careful not to engage in confrontation against the other, assuring peaceful relations would prevail between the two pacts. Furthermore, they appear to observe a tacit agreement that they would not interfere with developments within each pact but compete with each other in other parts of the world. Such cooperation did not preclude mutual agreements in the United Nations Security Council to intervene in ongoing conflicts around the world, including the employment of peacekeeping forces, to bring or maintain peace.

The 1948-1989 interim represented a period that is commonly referred as the Cold War between the Western and the Soviet Blocs. Although the intensity of the struggle between the two blocs varied depending on the nature of the issue, it also tended to decline over time but never fully disappeared until the Cold War came to an end with the dissolution of the Warsaw Pact and later the disbanding of the Soviet Union. During the Cold War both Blocs were concerned that the competition between them could easily escalate into hot conflict if ran unchecked, therefore they displayed sensitivity and restraint in relations with each other. Earlier experience had shown them that the United Nations where other actors were involved might not be the most appropriate instrument to search for solutions to their conflicts. While they were happy to use the United Nations for propaganda purposes or for searching for solutions to conflicts that neither side had a major interest in, they did not turn to it for addressing issues with the rival bloc. Expressed differently, the United Nations was generally called upon to be active mainly on issues “of secondary significance to the USSR and the US.”¹⁰

The United Nations employed two instruments in its efforts to help bring peace to what appeared to be conditions of conflict. The first instrument relied to a great extent on the initiative of the Secretary General of the organization and can be briefly referred to as employing his good offices. This function is not defined in the Charter of the United Nations but successive secretaries general have used their own judgment to offer their services and their diplomatic skills to encourage communications between fighting parties and facilitate agreements by sometimes putting forth their own ideas. Day, for example, points to the role the late Dag Hammarskjöld played in the Suez crisis by engaging in direct talks with the fighting parties, gaining their confidence and assuring all that armistice arrangements would be effective.¹¹

(10) Matja Peter, “Peacekeeping: The Resilience of an Idea,” *UN Peace Operations in Changing Global Order*, ed. Cedric de Coning ve Matja Peter (Cham, İsviçre: Springer / Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), 27.

(11) See Adam Day, “Politics in the Driving Seat: Good Offices, UN Peace Operations, and Modern Conflict,” *UN Peace Operations in Changing Global Order* içinde, ed. Cedric de Coning ve Matja Peter (Cham, Switzerland: Springer / Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), eds., op. cit. p. 71

The Turks are not unfamiliar with the Secretary-General's good offices, as successive Secretaries-General, either personally or through appointed envoys, have sought to find a solution to the Cyprus issue. Although both Kurt Waldheim and Boutros Ghali were involved in bringing the parties together to agree on a formula whereby the Island might be united, it is Kofi Annan who even developed a plan that was eventually submitted to the approval of both sides (much after 1989) in the hope that unification might take place. While these efforts have proven unsuccessful so far, particularly after the accession of the Greek state to the European Union, the efforts of the Secretaries General of the United Nations are likely to continue with the recent election of Tufan Erhürman to the presidency of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC).

The second instrument that has been used by the United Nations is the instrument of peacekeeping that can take the form of either sending observers or actual lightly armed military units to an area to position themselves between the fighting units usually to bring an end to their potential fighting. For example, observers were sent to Palestine in 1948 to report on whether the parties were implementing the terms of the peace Arab-Israeli agreement. A similar undertaking also took place in 1949 to observe the peace agreement between India and Pakistan. More typical is the later development whereby lightly armored units supported by the United Nations have entered fighting zones either to bring an end to fighting or to prevent fights from breaking out.

The United Nations has employed too many peacekeeping missions to be cited here. We have already identified above one of their characteristics. Keeping in mind that we are dealing with the period that ends in 1989, these missions were often employed in areas in which were of limited interest either to the Western or the Soviet bloc. Second, while the funding for these undertakings mostly came from prosperous western countries, the soldiers came from a variety of countries depending on where the conflict was located, who was involved and the size of the peacekeeping force. Most of the time, a majority the forces belonged to Asian and African countries that were not particularly wealthy.

It may be important to remember that there is a United Nations peacekeeping force in Cyprus (UNFICYP). It was established in 1964 to prevent fighting

between Turkish and Greek Cypriots. After the Peace Intervention in 1974, its mission has been expanded (redefined) as preventing outbreaks between the Turkish and the Greek side and extending support to the Good Offices missions of the Secretaries general. The force is located in a neutral zone between the Turkish and Greek Cypriot states. It is a small contingent staffed mainly by troops coming from various countries of Europe.

The peacekeeping forces tend to be more effective if fighting parties want a neutral force to interject itself between them such that accidental conflagrations are avoided, they are less effective in environments if those fighting are a variety of groups that are loosely attached to each other and do not submit themselves to the administration or the command of a central organization. Nevertheless, under all circumstances, it may be argued that the presence of peace keeping forces have contributed to reduce and sometimes fully stop fighting. Not surprisingly, peacekeeping forces are more effective if the fighting actors themselves are supportive of the existence and assistance of United Nations units whose mission is to prevent fighting.

Many Activities of the United Nations

We have so far looked mainly at the security dimension of the activities of the United Nations. Since we are examining the role of international organizations in serving global needs, we should make a reference, if only briefly, to other activities of the United Nations. It may be pointed out that there are more than two dozen specialized agencies that are affiliated with the United Nations that provide services to various constituencies worldwide. Some of these were already existing organizations when the United Nations was established, but chose to affiliate with it to benefit from its support, including financial. Others had been affiliated with the League of Nations and maintained their attachment to the new international organization that came to replace it. The institutions that the United States set up to organize the World economy were also given a place within the framework of the United Nations.

There is no question some of these agencies have been instrumental in formalizing much needed international cooperation in a variety of domains. International Civil Aviation Organization and International Maritime

Organization are prime examples. Others have been useful in providing technology and information to developing countries in specific areas such as the Food and Agricultural Organization. International Law Commission has prepared texts of international conventions that have later been signed by a sufficient number of countries to acquire that status of international law. Some agencies such as UNESCO, on the other hand, have sometimes conducted activities that have drawn the wrath of its major funders, who have argued that they are propagating values that run counter to freedom and democracy and therefore do not deserve financial support. Even the World Health Organization has come under attack for publishing unreliable data. If one were to render a judgment about the existence of these agencies, one would have to recognize that they have contributed to the well being global populations and as such their achievements need to be recognized. Some may be criticized for not doing enough, others for having done the wrong thing, but on the whole, their contribution particularly to the less developed parts of the World cannot be denied.

Those organizations that the United States created after the War to help the smooth operation of the world economy, although under the umbrella of the United Nations, have generally served the Western countries that had operating market economies. While they have begun to serve a broader community of nations after the end of the Cold War (not studied here) new organizations challenging their prevalence are in the process of emerging at the current time.

Regional Organizations

So far, we have looked at the United Nations as the major international organization of the 1945-1989 period. We noted that the United Nations as a political organization was often called upon to deal with problems in which neither bloc had a deep interest in. We might add that on rare occasions, the United Nations has also tended matters that were of interest only to one bloc, as in the case of Cyprus, where no active member of the bloc wanted to take sides since they were interested in maintaining the bloc's unity.

During the years of the Cold War, there were naturally also regional organizations. They differed, however, from those that evolved after 1989,

in that these organizations usually operated within the bloc rather than constituting an alternative to the existing bipolar structure of the globe. An example of these is the Organization of American States which the United States had proceeded to establish after the war to bring the Latin American states and America together to build a zone of solidarity and prosperity in the Western hemisphere. While the organization symbolically represented a string of organizations interested in developing the well being of the region that went back to the Nineteenth Century, the fact that the headquarters of the post-war organization was located in Washington, D.C. may give sufficient indication that it was the United States that offered it leadership while also making sure that it operated within the limits defined by it. Cuba was theoretically a member, but representing an affiliation with Moscow, it did not participate in the activities of the organization after 1962.

One may view the European Union as another example of an organization that operated within one bloc rather than aspiring to become a universal organization. Initially it aspired to strengthen the solidarity of Western Europe only rather than compete with the Americans for a major role in world affairs. It expanded to include countries of Eastern Europe and became a more inclusive organization only after the breakdown of the Warsaw Pact when some countries that had been dominated by Russia were freed from Russian hegemony and demonstrated a willingness to subscribe to what were allegedly European values. They eventually joined the Union to make sure that they would not fall under Russian domination again. This happened much later than 1989 which constitutes the boundary of our study. The Soviet response to the European Union was Comecon that aimed to foster economic integration under Moscow's leadership among the countries that were already members of the Warsaw Pact.

One should not forget another European organization, the Council of Europe, that was established by the leading countries of Western Europe for the protection of human rights. Again, its members were countries that were bound together by belonging to the Western Bloc in the bipolar word system including all members of NATO. Within its organizational scheme, there was the European Court of Human Rights whose decisions were to be recognized by member states. Again, this organization expanded to cover

both the countries of Eastern Europe and even Russia only after the Cold war came to an end in 1989-1990. Russia, it should be added, terminated its membership in 2022 sometime after it decided that it would not work to become a part of Europe but pursue an independent course.

The Cold War lost its intensity and showed signs of thawing as the relations between the Soviet Union and the United States stabilized and intra-European relations became more relaxed. The two blocs regulated their relations usually not with organizations but with talks that often produced treaties. Through time, a string of agreements were signed between the United States and the Soviet Union to which other countries could also accede. These included the Nuclear Test Ban Treaty and Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons Treaty. Later agreements were also reached between the Americans and the Soviets on the limitation of strategic weapons and anti-ballistic Missiles. As the relations between adversaries became stable and slowly began to give way to cooperation to address common problems, the need to have a more permanent organization that would bring the parties together began to be felt. After long discussions, negotiations and eventual agreement on the form cooperation between the two blocs would take was specified in the Helsinki Accords (1973), the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) was born in 1975. It worked to improve relations between the blocs such that it even proved possible more than a decade later to agree on limiting the conventional forces in Europe. The OSCE was, of course, in the nature also of a regional organization but more comprehensive than others since it brought together 57 countries representing a large portion of the world.

The United Nations continued to perform important functions in several ways as regional organizations proliferated. First, it served as a depository of treaties to which countries acceded through time. Secondly, some of the treaties and agreements contained monitoring clauses. Not in all instances but in some, the United Nations, as an impartial organization (not a part of the bi-polar scheme) provided both functionaries and observers to ensure that the treaties were being implemented and their rules being observed. Third, as a universal organization, it provided an opportunity for countries that were not a part of the East-West Bloc scheme, to take part in activities that were also of interest to them.

Concluding Remarks

This chapter examined the activity of international organizations during the 1919-1989 interim. I trust it became clear from the beginning to the reader that the period is comprised of two sub-periods separated by the Second World War. Although there was an attempt to create a more orderly world after the First World War, the withdrawal of the United States from an active role in the world scene coupled with, on the one hand, the continuation of colonialism by the victors and, on the other, with the dissatisfaction of the losers in the war that led to their revisionism, rendered it difficult to maintain a credible international organization whose legitimacy was widely acknowledged. Not surprisingly, the League of Nations proved to be ineffective in resisting manifestations of territorial expansionism and therefore stopped being as an organization whose actions would be taken into consideration when states were formulating their foreign policy. The League failed in arresting developments that led to the outbreak of the Second World War.

The organizational scheme that aspired to give direction to the global community that emerged after the Second World War was shaped by the United States which, this time, decided to assume world leadership. Although, the world was soon divided into two blocs, one led by the Soviets and the other by the United States, the global community became much larger with the end of colonialism. After initially serving as a forum for the rivalry between the United States and the Soviet Union, the United Nations gradually developed into an agency that catered in many ways to the needs of the countries that were not a part of the bi-polar system. Regional organizations that are nowadays seen as challenging the international order, especially during the 1945-1989 interim, operated within broader polar system, and did not offer themselves as alternatives to the global system. On the whole, we may argue that the particular period was a period of stability in which international organizations also operated with relative ease. It is after the bipolar world came to a clear end that the search for a new world order commenced and not only the environment in which they operated but international organizations themselves entered a period of deterioration.

THE FUTURE OF NATO IN AN ERA OF DISORDER

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I- INTRODUCTION

Since the beginning of the 21st century, world politics has entered an ever-deepening spiral of upheaval, conflict, and instability. The inauguration of George W. Bush in the United States, with the support of neoconservative forces and circles, coincided with Vladimir Putin's ascent to power in Russia. These leadership shifts paved the way for revisionist currents, barely felt in the initial stages but becoming more distinct over time, to gradually dominate the political landscape in both countries. Consequently, global politics began to distance itself from the "rules-based system," moving steadily, albeit initially at a relatively slow pace.

Signs emerged that the United States was moving toward a unipolar global system by taking steps that strained the rules and norms of the international order it had spearheaded, particularly in the post-Cold War era. This situation prompted the Russian ruling class, led by Putin, to adopt a revisionist line at first, which eventually transitioned into an overtly aggressive stance in later stages.

Among the policy actions that pushed US-Russia relations into heightened tension were the US withdrawal from the Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) Treaty in 2002 which severely disrupted the strategic balance established in the 1970s based ultimately on nuclear deterrence, followed by the invasion of Iraq in 2003 through a move lacking international legitimacy, and the simultaneous rollout of a missile defense project in Europe exclusively under

its own control. It was inevitable that these developments would provoke a response from Russia targeting Euro-Atlantic security.

Indeed, because of these developments, Putin's rhetoric against the US and NATO became increasingly harsh,¹ a shift that was also reflected in Russia's foreign policy, security, and military strategy documents. From 2015 onwards, the US and NATO were no longer defined as partners in those documents but as rival nations and organizations to be countered.

The process that began in March 2014 with Russia's invasion and annexation of Crimea witnessed a significant transformation in global politics, a profound shaking of Euro-Atlantic security, and the onset of the collapse of the rules-based order.

In June 2014, the reign of terror unleashed by DAESH in Syria and Iraq and its proclamation of a so-called "Caliphate" compelled the international community to refocus its attention on terrorism. The instabilities and conflicts of the Middle East returned to the forefront of the global public agenda with full force.

The election of Donald Trump in 2016 witnessed developments that cast a shadow over the tradition of solidarity and cohesion within the transatlantic community. For Trump, NATO was an "obsolete organization," and the European Union (EU) was an "enemy" of the United States in economic and commercial terms.² Although this approach strained transatlantic cohesion, the first Trump term ended with the relationship managed in a way that avoided catastrophic damage.

Parallel to the emergence of these fractures in the Euro-Atlantic region and the threatening environment facing European security, the global climate deteriorated further as Xi Jinping came to power in China. This era saw China implementing ambitious policies both in the Asia-Pacific and globally, straining an already declining international system in its own favor.

(1) Steven Pifer, "One. More. Time. It's not about NATO", *Brookings*, 26 July 2022, <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/one-more-time-its-not-about-nato/>

(2) Sidra Khan, "Paradigm Shift in the US Foreign Policy towards NATO during Trump Administration." *Strategic Studies* 41, no. 3 (2021), <https://www.jstor.org/stable/48732276>

With Russia launching a second, larger-scale offensive against Ukraine in February 2022, and the Gaza crisis erupting in October 2023, dragging the Middle East toward a widening war amid Israel's relentless attacks, the already-weakened global system began moving rapidly toward uncertainty, insecurity, volatility, and a more confrontational horizon. In a context where rules and norms were being torn down, the rules-based order slipped further into collapse.

Trump's return to office in the United States for a second term with a much stronger support base has accelerated a transformation that establishes the foundations of an era based on different parameters. This shift necessitates that global politics in general and the transatlantic community, specifically NATO's European wing, confront new burdens.

It was naturally impossible for NATO to remain unaffected by such radical transformations during the first quarter of the 21st century. Within this context, the Alliance has begun to be tested by the obligation to first confront its internal divisions and subsequently adapt itself to these emerging challenges.

II. A BRIEF LOOK BEHIND THE SCENES

Following the NATO Leaders' Summit held in London in December 2019, the Secretary General at the time, Jens Stoltenberg, decided to establish an Independent Group of Experts consisting of ten members, including Ambassador Tacan İldem. This decision was made in view of the relative sense of relief felt by the European allies of the Alliance regarding the upcoming Biden administration in the United States, with the aim of creating a foundation for the strategy that NATO would follow until 2030.³

The Group began its work in April 2020 and submitted its report, titled "NATO 2030: United for a New Era," to the Secretary General in November 2020.⁴ This report was also made public. Rather than being a mere

(3) North Atlantic Treaty Organization, "London Declaration", December 4, 2019, <https://www.nato.int/en/about-us/official-texts-and-resources/official-texts/2019/12/04/london-declaration>

(4) North Atlantic Treaty Organization, "NATO 2030: United for a New Era. Analysis

assessment document, the report served as a reference text that framed the Alliance's strategic mindset shift. Based on this report and after a twelve-year interval, the Alliance announced its core strategic document, the Strategic Concept, at the 2022 NATO Madrid Summit, which would guide the Alliance's activities over the subsequent decade under normal circumstances.⁵

Despite the radical changes on the world stage, the primary reason for the delayed adoption of the new Strategic Concept was the apprehension and cautious stance caused among European allies by the extraordinary nature of Trump's approach toward NATO during his first presidential term.

Biden's inauguration in the United States in January 2021 reassured America's allies and partners, providing NATO's European wing with a relatively breathing room. This was due to the fact that the United States had returned to "multilateral policies and frameworks."⁶

On the other hand, certain unilateral actions, which re-emerged almost at the beginning of the Biden era during the decision-making processes directly concerning NATO, caused discomfort among European allies. For instance, the Biden administration's announcement in April 2021 regarding the withdrawal of US forces from Afghanistan, without conducting the necessary consultations with European allies, led to disappointment among other NATO members. Following this unilateral decision by the US, the trauma caused by the highly disorganized withdrawal of NATO forces stationed in Afghanistan in August 2021 remains vivid in memories and official records.

As if the disappointment caused by the "Afghanistan fiasco" were not enough, the announcement of the AUKUS (US, UK, and Australia) Pact by

and Recommendations of the Reflection Group Appointed by the NATO Secretary General", November 25, 2020 <https://fpa.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/03/201201-Reflection-Group-Final-Report-Uni.pdf>

(5) North Atlantic Treaty Organization, "NATO 2022 Strategic Concept", June 29, 2022, <https://www.nato.int/en/about-us/official-texts-and-resources/strategic-concepts/nato-2022-strategic-concept>

(6) Matthew P. Goodman, "Variable Geometry Takes Shape in Biden's Foreign Policy", CSIS, March 19, 2021, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/variable-geometry-takes-shape-bidens-foreign-policy>

the United States starting in September 2021, immediately followed by the revitalization of the quadrilateral QUAD (US, Australia, India, and Japan) platform, demonstrated that the competition with China had gained speed and momentum. Consequently, it showed that the US was shifting its focus toward the Asia-Pacific. These developments raised concern in Europe and resulted in a new wave of apprehension in transatlantic relations, even if it was not comparable to the Trump era.

Russia's second, larger-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 consolidated the Western world in general and the transatlantic community in particular. Russia began to be perceived as a primary threat of a conventional nature for the West. This perception was articulated at the NATO Madrid Summit held that same year, where Russia was defined as the most significant and direct threat to the Alliance.⁷

The main axis of the defense plans agreed upon at the 2023 NATO Vilnius Summit⁸ was to ensure the security of the Euro-Atlantic region by supporting Ukraine against Russian aggression. Accordingly, these plans were based on increasing the resilience of Alliance member states by strengthening their defense capacities and capabilities, as well as on the fight against terrorism, which was directly reflected in the new Strategic Concept as an asymmetric threat.

The chain of events that erupted following the attack carried out by Hamas against Israel in October 2023 played a significant role in bringing the conflicts and instabilities of the Middle East, which have affected Euro-Atlantic security since the era of DAESH terrorism, firmly back onto NATO's agenda.

The conflict environment in the Middle East, defined since 2014 as the "Challenge from the South" with terrorism as its primary source, has

(7) North Atlantic Treaty Organization, "Madrid Summit Declaration", June 29, 2022, <https://www.nato.int/en/about-us/official-texts-and-resources/official-texts/2022/06/29/madrid-summit-declaration>

(8) North Atlantic Treaty Organization, "Vilnius Summit Communiqué", July 11, 2023, <https://www.nato.int/en/about-us/official-texts-and-resources/official-texts/2023/07/11/vilnius-summit-communique>

further deteriorated because of Israel's disproportionate actions that ignored international law and extended beyond Gaza to a regional scale.

The consequences for Euro-Atlantic security arising from developments in the Middle East, North Africa, and the Sahel region were added to the Russian aggression already viewed as the fundamental threat within NATO. In response to this situation, much like the process leading up to the Madrid Summit, the Alliance released a report titled "Comprehensive and Deep-Dive Reflection on NATO's Southern Neighborhood,"⁹ which was prepared by an independent group of experts that included Ambassador Refik Ali Onaner from Turkey. This report formed the basis for the decisions regarding the Alliance's southern flank taken at the Leaders' Summit held in Washington on the occasion of NATO's 75th anniversary.¹⁰

The report examines NATO's Southern neighbors through "internal" and "external" layers, emphasizing the direct impacts of vulnerabilities along the Middle East–North Africa and Sahel line on Euro-Atlantic security; it presents three scenarios for the region's future: stable states, fragile states, and a chaotic environment where state capacity has collapsed. The report also suggests that NATO's approach toward its Southern neighbors should be strengthened with a more consistent, holistic, and 360-degree understanding. It proposes that the Alliance take on a more active role in the fields of intelligence, maritime security, missile defense, countering hybrid threats, and capacity building, while also deepening cooperation with the EU and regional organizations.¹¹

These assessments were reflected in the Washington Summit Declaration, which stated that terrorism, state fragility, regional competition, and climate-

(9) North Atlantic Treaty Organization, *Independent Expert Group Supporting NATO's Comprehensive and Deep Reflection Process on the Southern Neighbourhood: Final Report*. May 2024, https://www.nato.int/content/dam/nato/legacy-wcm/media_pdf/2024/5/pdf/240507-NATO-South-Report.pdf

(10) Luis Simón, eds., *NATO and the South: A Tale of Three Futures* (Real Instituto Elcano, May 2021) <https://media.realinstitutoelcano.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/nato-and-the-south-a-tale-of-three-futures-1.pdf>

(11) Tacan İldem, "NATO's Reflection Process on the Southern Neighbourhood(s)", EDAM, May 9, 2024, <https://edam.org.tr/en/foreign-policy-and-security/natos-reflection-process-on-the-southern-neighbourhood-s>

related risks in the Southern neighborhood directly affect Euro-Atlantic security. Accordingly, it was decided to appoint a special “Representative for the Southern Neighborhood,” increase NATO-EU cooperation, and strengthen targeted capacity-building efforts with countries in the region.¹²

Shortly after the Washington Summit, the results of the presidential elections in the United States left the European members of the Alliance facing a new nightmare. Following a five-year hiatus, Trump reassumed the presidency, once again and with even greater strength.

During the election campaign, Trump’s remarks regarding NATO triggered a wave of serious concern among European allies. His direct statements at rallies addressing NATO countries, saying, “If they’re not going to pay, we’re not going to protect them. Do you understand?”¹³ and his outburst toward allies, “You’ve got to pay! You’ve got to pay your bills,”¹⁴ were evaluated as signs of a radical shift in the US perspective on collective defense. This framing of the Alliance as if it were “a transactional cost-sharing arrangement” rather than a security community, deepened questions in European capitals regarding the future of transatlantic solidarity.

The statements made by Trump after returning to office did not alleviate these concerns; on the contrary, by reiterating that European allies must contribute more to defense,¹⁵ he signaled a desire to redefine the role of the US within NATO. This stance has opened the door to a new and uncertain era in US-European relations, weakening the sense of mutual trust that forms the foundation of the shared security and defense architecture.

(12) North Atlantic Treaty Organization, “Washington Summit Declaration”, July 10, 2024, <https://www.nato.int/en/about-us/official-texts-and-resources/official-texts/2024/07/10/washington-summit-declaration>

(13) Zeynep Katre Oran, “Trump, NATO ile ilgili ifadelerinin arkasında durduğunu söyledi”, *Anadolu Agency*, February 15, 2024, <https://www.aa.com.tr/tr/dunya/trump-nato-ile-ilgili-ifadelerinin-arkasinda-durdugunu-soyledi/3138048>

(14) Güven Özalp, “NATO’da Trump için gergin bekleyiş: Savunma harcamalarını artırmak mümkün mü, Türkiye ne diyor?”, *BBC News Turkey*, January 17, 2025, <https://www.bbc.com/turkce/articles/ceq99g49x02o>

(15) Defense Turkey. “NATO 2025 Lahey Zirvesinin Kazananları Başkan TRUMP ve Türkiye Oldu!”, June 26, 2025, <https://www.defenseturkey.com/tr/icerik/nato-2025-lahey-zirvesinin-kazananlari-baskan-trump-ve-turkiye-oldu-6314>

III. NATO IN THE TURBULENT US-EUROPEAN RELATIONS

Attributing the entire cost of the era that led to the divergence between the US and Europe solely to the Trump administration would represent an analytically incomplete assessment and would be misleading. The divergence, which began with George W. Bush, was balanced to some extent by Obama, became more concrete during Trump's first presidency, saw attempts at recovery during the Biden era, and finally peaked with the second Trump administration, constituting the links of a long-term process that has acquired a structural character for the transatlantic community.

Under the presidency of G.W. Bush, the unilateral withdrawal of the US from the Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) Treaty caused unease not only in Russia but also among NATO's European allies.¹⁶ This policy action by the US, which undermined the strategic balance and deterrence between itself and Russia, marked the beginning of a process that resulted in the total collapse of the arms control and disarmament architecture upon which Euro-Atlantic security also relied in the following years.

At the current stage, Trump's announcement that the United States could resume nuclear testing on "equal terms,"¹⁷ based on the claim that some countries continue their nuclear tests, has created a new uncertainty within the nuclear arms control regime. Although the US Department of Energy stated that these remarks refer to system tests rather than underground explosions, the allegations that Russia and China are engaged in similar activities, combined with Moscow raising the possibility of returning to nuclear testing, increase concerns that a new cycle of nuclear competition among major powers could be triggered.

The Second Gulf Operation conducted by the US in 2003, which lacked international legitimacy, caused a rift within the Alliance between "Old Europe" and the US administration. Germany, France, and the Benelux

(16) P. Gordon. "Bush, missile defense and the Atlantic alliance", *Survival*, 43, no.1 (2001). doi: 10.1093/survival/43.1.17.

(17) Thomas Latschan, "ABD yeniden nükleer bombalar mı patlatacak?", *DW Turkish*, November 9, 2025 <https://www.dw.com/tr/abd-yeniden-n%C3%BCkleeer-bombalar-m%C4%B1-patlatacak/a-74647020>

countries demonstrated their opposition to the actions leading to the invasion of Iraq by holding a separate meeting in Brussels, described outside the Alliance as the “Chocolate Summit.”

The issue of European allies allocating a greater share to defense under the principle of “burden sharing” has been a challenge between the US and its European allies since nearly the founding of NATO, one that has never been resolved within the framework desired by the US. After Obama took office, the US brought this issue to the Alliance’s agenda with a relatively soft tone. The consensus formula resulting from lengthy negotiations within the Alliance manifested at the 2014 NATO Wales Summit, where it was decided that European allies should aim to allocate 2% of their Gross Domestic Product (GDP) to defense within ten years. This target was not viewed by European allies as a legally binding obligation but was instead evaluated as a political commitment. Especially the Western European allies who had largely benefited from the post-Cold War “peace dividend” remained reluctant, with a few exceptions, to increase their defense spending, despite Russia’s actions violating Georgia’s territorial integrity in 2008, the invasion and annexation of Crimea in 2014, and the goals set at the Wales Summit; they continued to drag their feet to avoid leaving their comfort zones.

NATO data from 2016 clearly illustrate this trend. In that year, France allocated 1.79% of its GDP to defense, while Germany allocated 1.20%, Italy 1.18%, and Spain only 0.81%.¹⁸ This data set demonstrates that despite breaking points such as Russia’s 2008 intervention in Georgia and the 2014 annexation of Crimea, many Western European countries remained reluctant for a long time to approach the 2% target set at the Wales Summit.

The inauguration of Trump in 2016 and his generally distant and prejudiced stance toward Europe and specifically NATO led to turbulence within the Alliance. Realizing the gravity of the situation this time, European allies turned toward establishing a conceptual framework within the EU to increase Europe’s so-called strategic autonomy in the field of security and defense, rather than substantially increasing their defense expenditures.

(18) Fatih Mehmet, “NATO Ülkelerinin Savunma Harcamaları (2014-2021) ve Değerlendirmeler”, Defense Turk, April 15, 2022, <https://www.defenseturk.net/nato-ulkelerinin-savunma-harcamalari-2014-2021-ve-degerlendirmeler>

Faced with the distant stance of the United States toward NATO, the EU demonstrated a tendency to expand the conceptual framework of steps aimed at strengthening its own capacity in the field of defense.¹⁹ During this process, Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO) came into force in 2017, providing member states with the opportunity to develop joint defense projects. Additionally, the Coordinated Annual Review on Defense (CARD) was launched as a regular review process intended to identify capacity gaps in European defense and to harmonize defense investments. Furthermore, by strengthening the role of the European Defense Agency (EDA), the EU aimed to establish a more systematic framework in the areas of joint procurement, research and development, and capacity building.

The new Global Strategy document²⁰ announced by the EU in 2016 signaled to strengthen its perspective on security and defense compared to the past; it also showed that Europe was moving toward making a more meaningful contribution to burden sharing within the transatlantic framework in the face of the explicit stance of the US administration at the time. The occurrence of Brexit in the same year, however, subjected the future of the EU's efforts in the field of security and defense to additional uncertainty despite Russia's aggressive posture. Even in this turbulent period, the EU maintained a cold and distant approach toward allowing non-EU NATO members, such as Turkey, to participate on a fair scale in the defense decisions and mechanisms it had decided to establish.

During Trump's first term, discussions resurfaced among EU member states regarding the goal of achieving a distinct "strategic autonomy" for the EU in the fields of security and defense, reminiscent of the period when the cornerstones of the European Security and Defense Policy were being laid at the beginning of the new century. Even today, the question of where the limits of the EU's strategic autonomy, including security and defense, begin

(19) Selin Nası, "Avrupa Birliği'nin Savunma Gücüne Alternatif Yaklaşımlar: İngiltere Türkiye'ye Örnek Olabilir mi?" EDAM, September 2024, <https://edam.org.tr/dispolitika-ve-guvenlik/avrupa-birliginin-savunma-gucune-alternatif-yaklasimlar-ingiltere-turkiye-ye-ornek-olabilir-mi>

(20) European Union. *Shared Vision, Common Action: A Stronger Europe*. (European Union Global Strategy, June 2016), https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/shared-vision-common-action-stronger-europe_en

and end remains an enigma that has not achieved full clarity and lacks a consensus on a European scale.

The proposal by the President of the European Commission at the time, Jean-Claude Juncker, to establish a “European Army”²¹ could not be realized due to the lack of agreement among member states regarding political will and military integration. Similarly, initiatives aimed at shifting decision-making processes in the field of defense from the principle of unanimity to a majority basis failed to gain traction due to the national sovereignty concerns of some member states. Despite France’s calls for a more ambitious and autonomous European defense capacity, the stance of Germany and Eastern European countries, maintaining that US security guarantees are indispensable, remains one of the dominant factors preventing the emergence of a common understanding of the boundaries of strategic autonomy.

With Trump handing over the presidency to Biden in 2020, nearly all European allies breathed a sigh of relief, as the United States announced that it had “returned” to multilateral policies. NATO was also positively affected by the Biden administration’s prioritization of multilateralism, and the “Trump friction” within the transatlantic community was smoothed over. However, the Biden administration’s approach toward Afghanistan and its mindset prioritizing the Asia-Pacific region laid the groundwork for cracks to emerge within the Alliance, even if they were not as pronounced as they are today.

During the Biden era, NATO faced two main challenges. One was the aggression of the challenge from the East (Russia) that manifested in Ukraine in early 2022. The other was the persistent Middle East challenge starting with the Hamas attack in 2023, originating again from the South. Although both crises actually took place outside the Euro-Atlantic region, they witnessed conflicts that directly affected transatlantic security in terms of their consequences.

From the standpoint of rules and norms, we can argue that the Western world including NATO passed a relatively successful test during the Biden era. However, it is a factual reality that the same consistency and credibility on

(21) Dave Keating, “Juncker calls for an EU army”, *Politico EU*, March 9, 2015, <https://www.politico.eu/article/juncker-calls-for-an-eu-army/>

the scale of values were not displayed in the face of Israel's disproportionate and ruthless actions in the Middle East. The Western world, including NATO, failed the Middle East test and suffered a loss of power and prestige in the context of moral and shared objective values. Even if the characteristics of today's rule-free environment are set aside, the policies pursued by almost all of the administrations in the Euro-Atlantic region, primarily the United States with few exceptions, in the face of the series of tragedies in the Middle East have yielded significant consequences. The consequences of this situation are likely to remain a dark stain on the Western world, including the Alliance, for many years to come.

The Trump administration which took office in January 2025 has paved the way for developments where the American revisionism that began with the 21st century and has advanced steadily reached its peak.

Immediately after taking office, Trump's demands targeting Greenland²² and Canada, territories of allied countries, drew public attention. His stance toward keeping his European allies on the sidelines during the peace process in Ukraine has also cast a serious shadow on the unity and cohesion of the Alliance. Furthermore, his rhetoric suggesting that he would leave allies who do not allocate sufficient resources to defense on the scale he envisions to the mercy of Putin remains etched in memories.

We are faced with a US administration that has shattered the rules, norms, and moral values developed largely within the Western world following World War II. It is now evident that this administration plays an effective but negative role in determining the future of NATO by reducing these values to mere materialism and by showing contempt for multilateral organizations, primarily NATO. Consequently, it is largely losing its prestige and credibility both in the Euro-Atlantic region and in the eyes of the Western world in a broad sense.

Under current circumstances, European allies have little choice but to take greater responsibility for Europe's future in security and defense.

(22) James Landale and Rachel Hagan, "Trump says US 'has to have' Greenland after naming special envoy", BBC News, December 23, 2025, <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/ckgmd132ge4o>

Indeed, the EU has adopted a comprehensive plan that strengthens joint defense procurement, increases defense industrial cooperation, and supports integration with Ukraine in order to address capacity deficiencies in the field of defense. Approximately 800 billion euros in defense investment is envisioned over the coming years, which is intended to be financed through a new financial instrument called SAFE and relaxed borrowing rules.²³ These resources are directed toward developing Europe’s military capabilities particularly in priority areas such as air and missile defense, unmanned systems, artillery capacity, artificial intelligence, and electronic warfare. The plan also includes accelerating ammunition production and increasing stockpiles.²⁴ Additionally, the roadmap states that Turkey could be “constructively re-engaged” within the framework of the Common Security and Defense Policy (CSDP) on the basis of equal commitment. In this way, it is explicitly expressed that the door to Turkey has not been fully closed within the European security architecture.

IV. DYNAMICS OF THE CONFLICTUAL NEW CENTURY

It does not seem possible to predict today with all its dimensions how the current transition period, where strategic competition based on power politics shapes global relations, will gain scope and content in the future depending on a possible *modus vivendi* among major powers. Still, it is possible to comment on some fundamental trends that are candidates to influence global politics and consequently the Alliance in the foreseeable future.

The first quarter of the new century has ended in an extraordinarily jarring and painful manner. What the other three quarters might bring, where the current transition period based on conflict and competition might evolve, and which norms and rules will define the new era correspond to a controversial analytical environment. In light of this observation, it remains uncertain for now whether global politics will shift toward multipolarity

(23) Değer Akal, “AB’nin yeni savunma planı: Türkiye’ye bir iyi bir kötü haber”, DW Turkey, March 20, 2025 <https://www.dw.com/tr/abnin-yeni-savunma-plan%C4%B1-t%C3%BCrkiyeye-bir-iyi-bir-k%C3%B6t%C3%BC-haber/a-71988817>

(24) *Ibid*

or multicentrism, or whether it will transition into a phase marked by new conceptual definitions and values. This slippery environment is also valid for the future of NATO.

We summarize the trends likely to come to the fore at least in the next quarter century and their possible consequences under current conditions, as follows:

- The newly announced US National Security Strategy²⁵ by the Trump administration is a version of the Monroe Doctrine, which formed the basis of the isolationist policy implemented by the US under 19th century conditions, adapted to the 21st century on the scale of the Western Hemisphere. This assessment is explicitly put forward in the strategy in question. This time, the doctrine is identified with the label “Trump Corollary.” In the strategy, NATO and European allies are virtually brushed aside, and the Alliance is reduced merely to the dimension of resources to be allocated for defense.
- For example, references to Europe and NATO clearly illustrate the contours of this approach. NATO is relegated to a secondary position within US global priorities, while Europe is urged to assume far greater responsibility for its own security.²⁶ The strategy calls on European allies not only to increase defense spending, but also to develop credible and sustainable military capabilities in areas such as air and missile defense, long-range strike, logistical depth, and defense-industrial capacity. Beyond this, the document portrays Europe’s integration model as predominantly “civilizational” in character and explicitly encourages a renewed emphasis on national identity, nationalism, and sovereignty across the continent, thereby signaling sympathy toward Europe’s far right. It also includes language suggesting that the United States is prepared to intervene in the domestic politics of its democratic allies, outlining a framework

(25) The White House. *National Security Strategy of the United States of America*. The White House, November 2025 <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2025/12/2025-National-Security-Strategy.pdf>

(26) David Cattler, “What the New US National Security Strategy Really Signals for Europe”, ICDS, December 8, 2025, <https://icds.ee/en/what-the-new-us-national-security-strategy-really-signals-for-europe/>

aimed at challenging, and potentially reversing, Europe's current democratic orientation.²⁷ In this respect, the strategy envisions a more asymmetric transatlantic relationship in which European allies assume greater obligations without gaining increased influence in decision-making processes.²⁸

- It remains uncertain under what conditions the war in Ukraine will come to an end. A peace framework, which is understood to be shaped ultimately by the consensus reached by the US-Russia duo, will undoubtedly directly affect the future of the European security architecture. Europe is unlikely to be able to alter the current arrangements, which point to a process against Ukraine's interests, in favor of either Ukraine or itself. The process, essentially structured on the principles of "land for peace" in exchange for security guarantees whose content remains uncertain for now, will give rise to a scenario that requires Europe to assume its own security and defense to a large extent. This situation will lead to European allies shouldering more responsibility, with the exception of the nuclear deterrence provided by the United States, and consequently, it will allow the US-Europe balance within the Alliance to be designed according to a new equation, even if it is not fully equalized. In any case, it can be predicted that the easing of tension and mistrust between Europe and Russia will take a long time, likely extending over the next quarter century. Within this framework, it can be stated that European defense and deterrence will be reorganized according to the new balance that is inevitable within NATO. The concept of "variable geometry," which entered circulation in the early years of the post-Cold War era, may be brought back to the agenda to be recalibrated within the framework of both the balances within the Alliance and NATO-EU relations as NATO is reconfigured in the new century. Furthermore, both the balance to be calibrated in NATO and the "separable but not separate" force structures and arrangements adopted for NATO-EU relations

(27) Nathalie Tocci, "Does Europe Finally Realize It's Alone?", *Foreign Policy*, 5 December 5, 2025, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2025/12/05/national-security-strategy-2025-trump-europe-russia-ukraine-war/>

(28) Max Bergmann, "The NSS That Could Destroy the NATO Alliance", CSIS, December 5, 2025, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/nss-could-destroy-nato-alliance>

after the Cold War could transform into one of the main principles to be put into circulation for Euro-Atlantic security and defense in this new era characterized by different conditions.

- The conditions under which peace will be established in Ukraine and what will be given in exchange are likely to yield consequences not only for Euro-Atlantic security but also for the security of the Asia-Pacific region and the future of the China-Russia relationship. Furthermore, differences in the approaches of the US and the EU toward China are becoming more pronounced. Washington views Beijing as the primary systemic rival and pursues a harsher, containment-oriented strategy through technology limitations, supply chain restrictions, and deterrence policies. In contrast, Europe prefers a more cautious line based on “de-risking”²⁹ due to its deep economic interdependence with China and its structural vulnerabilities regarding critical minerals and green transformation technologies. These two distinct stances place at the center of the transatlantic agenda the question of whether the peace order to be established in Ukraine will weaken the China-Russia rapprochement or create a new close strategic alignment, as well as what its reflections on the Asia-Pacific will be.
- The global competition between the US and China has now fully surfaced. This rivalry, which began to heat up during Trump’s first term, continues with even greater intensity during his second term. For the United States, China is the primary actor and source of threat that must be contained and balanced. The recently published US National Security Strategy also includes assessments that confirm this observation.³⁰
- The assessments of the strategy document regarding China reveal that competition is no longer shaped solely in the military dimension but at the very center of the global economy. While Washington identifies

(29) Ursula von der Leyen, Speech by President von der Leyen at the EP plenary joint debate on EU-China relations (speech, Strasbourg, July 8, 2025), European Commission, https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/speech_25_1764

(30) The White House, *National Security Strategy*

Beijing as the primary strategic rival directly affecting the geopolitical and technological position of the United States, it emphasizes that the struggle is concentrated especially in middle- and low-income countries. China's rapid expansion of influence in these countries through increasing credit volumes, infrastructure investments, and production networks is viewed by the United States as a new front of geoeconomic competition.³¹ For this reason, the Strategy assigns American diplomatic missions the task of not only conducting political relations but also managing economic competition in a wide range of areas from major tenders to technology investments; it positions the capacity of multilateral financial institutions as a lever aimed at balancing the growing influence of China.³² This approach demonstrates that the United States views its relationship with China not as a value-based struggle but increasingly and more clearly as an interest-oriented strategic competition that is conducted simultaneously in the economic, technological, and geopolitical fields.³³

- Israel's cross-border and expansionist power policies in the Middle East are laying the groundwork for a new shaping of the region, including the Palestinian Israeli conflict and the unsettled elements in Syria. In any case, actions aimed at further curtailing Iran's influence in the region will not be surprising. Similarly, we can predict that Hamas and similar structures, which the administrations of Saudi Arabia and the Gulf Countries view as threats to their own regimes, will be liquidated from politics in the Middle East and even beyond in the coming period. It can be foreseen that this liquidation process will yield certain consequences for state and non-state actors who support such structures from within and outside the region. Indeed,

(31) Evren Balta, Trump'ın 2025 Güvenlik Doktrini ve "İki Batı"nın Resmîleşmesi, Ankara Politikalar Merkezi, December 10, 2025, <https://apm.org.tr/2025/12/10/trumpin-2025-guvenlik-doktrini-ve-iki-batinin-resmilesmesi/>

(32) The White House, *National Security Strategy*

(33) Emily Harding, "The National Security Strategy: The Good, the Not So Great, and the Alarm Bells", Center for Strategic & International Studies, December 5, 2025, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/national-security-strategy-good-not-so-great-and-alarm-bells>

the 20-point plan³⁴ announced by the Trump administration during the Sharm el-Sheikh process clearly reflects this trend with its provisions envisioning the reconstruction of Gaza accompanied by an international stabilization force and the establishment of a comprehensive political and administrative order in the region under US leadership.

- It is reasonable to assume that the peace to be reached in Ukraine, along with the process taking shape in the Middle East, will have significant reflections on Euro-Atlantic security. Although both remain out of area, it is necessary to consider it certain that the “Eastern and Southern Problems” will contain processes that directly influence the security agenda of NATO in the upcoming second quarter century.
- The erosion occurring in the position and role of Russia in other geographies where it seeks to exert influence, as it appears Russia will struggle to escape the “Ukraine Trap” in the foreseeable future, creates new opportunities particularly in the geopolitics of connectivity for the countries of the South Caucasus and Central Asia belt that emerged from the Soviet Union era with their own unique traumas. Moreover, the Western world has taken action to fill the vacuum that Russia has inevitably left in this belt. This geopolitical mobilization has pushed the United States to turn toward the region earlier and more ambitiously through the Trump Route for International Peace and Prosperity (TRIPP) project and the C5+1 platform, while the EU and European actors do the same within the framework of the Global Gateway initiative and the 2025 Samarkand Summit. Against this backdrop, the exclusive development rights granted to the United States particularly by TRIPP bring about a new dynamic aimed at placing Washington at the center of regional connectivity by eroding the mediation role and the dominance over transit routes that Russia has maintained for decades.³⁵

(34) BBC News, “Trump’s 20-point Gaza peace plan in full”, *BBC News*, October 9, 2025, <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c70155nked7o>

(35) Yusuf Kanlı, “TRIPP Anlaşması Türkiye’nin Bölgedeki Stratejik Etkisini Güçlendiriyor”, *Yetkin Report*, August 11, 2025, <https://yetkinreport>.

- In this revitalized process, although its future remains uncertain for now, it will be necessary to closely monitor whether a role will fall to the Alliance in terms of the security dimension, especially in meeting and balancing China from an advanced position. In this context, the geoeconomic and geostrategic transformation of the region is not limited merely to corridors and connectivity projects; it is also redefining the security dimension of great power competition. While the weakening of Russia's influence makes China's presence in Central Asia and the South Caucasus more visible, the issue of protecting energy, logistics, and digital infrastructures along these lines is transforming into an increasingly critical security concern.
- Under current conditions, competition over new, groundbreaking, and disruptive technologies is shaping the agendas of multinational organizations like NATO as much as it is shaping those of states. It seems inevitable that technologies such as artificial intelligence, quantum computing, robotics, nano-bio technologies, neurosystems, hypersonic systems, autonomous platforms, and space-based systems³⁶ will remain on the agenda of the Alliance for the coming decades in terms of security and defense.
- NATO is rapidly adapting its defense and deterrence approach in the face of the increasingly accessible use of emerging and disruptive technologies (EDTs) by non-state actors.³⁷ The Alliance is focusing on strengthening artificial intelligence-supported Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance (ISR) capabilities, unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) solutions, directed energy systems, cyber defense, and quantum encryption applications. NATO initiatives such as DIANA and DEXTER³⁸ have also become fundamental tools aimed at limiting

com/2025/08/11/tripp-anlasmasi-turkiyenin-bolgedeki-stratejik-etkisini-guclendiriyor/

(36) Lisa Aronsson and Brett Swaney, "Three priorities for NATO partnerships in a contested world", *Atlantic Council*, June 14, 2021, <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/new-atlanticist/three-priorities-for-nato-partnerships-in-a-contested-world/>

(37) Mehmet Fatih Ceylan, "Yenilikçi Teknolojiler ve Terörizm", Ankara Politikalar Merkezi, July 21, 2025, <https://apm.org.tr/2025/07/21/yenilikci-teknolojiler-ve-terorizm/>

(38) Mehmet Fatih Ceylan. "Güvenlikte Çığır Açan Yeni Teknolojiler (Çyt): Sürec

the misuse of these technologies and accelerating the Alliance's operational response.

V. CONCLUSION

It is now an indisputable reality that a new era has begun with the arrival of the new century. In the first quarter of the century, the course and flow of developments and crises have accelerated, particularly due to the advancements seen in technology.

Over the last decade, geopolitical and geostrategic competition based on power politics among global actors has intensified. In this context, in addition to Russia's aggression and China's global rise, the Trump administrations have dragged the United States onto a path very different from the past in the context of world politics and relations with NATO under the slogan of "America First." This new path leads to serious concerns for allied countries that are far from being resolved in the short term. This attitude of the United States, which openly questions and occasionally erodes the values, rules, and norms established during the post-World War II and post-Cold War eras, constitutes one of the most challenging tests of the new era for NATO as well.

Europe is facing the largest and bloodiest conflict on the continent since World War II on the one hand, and the difficulties posed by the volatile and unstable state of the Middle East for European security on the other. Meanwhile, it is striving to mend the rift that has broken out in the transatlantic community due to the attitude of the Trump administration and attempting to determine a direction for itself in the very heart of the US-China competition.

In addition to the challenges posed by power politics for NATO's European wing, the Alliance also struggles with the autonomy ambitions of members often described as middle powers or swing states. It also remains unclear whether the populist, authoritarian, and centrifugal trends gaining ground among some European allies can be contained.

Nasıl İlerler?", Global Panorama, October 6, 2023, <https://www.globalpanorama.org/2023/10/fc-9/>

When addressing the issue of the Alliance's future, alongside efforts to ensure that Euro-Atlantic security minimizes damage to inter-allied solidarity under current conditions, the possible course of US foreign and security policy in the post-Trump era must also be taken into account. The question is whether the current US stance is based on a structural foundation or a temporary deviation. Should the "US factor" become permanent for NATO, it will make it inevitable, especially for European allies, to re-evaluate the position and role of the Alliance in the coming decades, including its core tasks such as collective deterrence and defense. Even if the United States gains an administration open to embracing its allies and alliances again in the post-Trump period, it would be prudent not to expect the past structure of NATO to continue exactly and without question.

Although the era has changed and is subject to powerful challenges, the Alliance should be expected to proceed in a direction that ensures its survival by adapting itself to new conditions. From this point of view, it cannot be said that a tendency to terminate the existence of NATO carries any specific weight among its members.

The NATO Leaders' Summit to be hosted by Ankara in 2026 is likely to be a key turning point that will shed light on the future of NATO, not only for Turkey but also especially for the European wing of the Alliance.

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THE OSCE AT A CROSSROADS: CAN IT SURVIVE THE DECLINE OF INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS

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I. INTRODUCTION

Over the past three decades, the effectiveness and efficiency of international and regional organizations in shaping global affairs have incrementally diminished. They are currently experiencing a historic crisis of relevance, as well as a lack of operational competence. The United Nations is paralyzed by great power rivalry in the Security Council; the World Trade Organization (WTO) has lost its enforcement authority; NATO is facing grave internal divisions; and the World Health Organization (WHO) has failed to meet expectations in controlling the COVID-19 pandemic.

Most of those major international and regional organizations were indeed established during or immediately after the Second World War. The reasons are rooted in the trauma of the war itself, the failure of the interwar system, as well as the strategic needs of the post-war world order.

Why, then, has the jointly created, rule-based global order increasingly shown signs of unraveling, particularly in the 21st century? Here are the main reasons:

- The post-Cold War US-led unipolar period has ended. Rising powers (China, India, Russia, Brazil, and emerging regional actors) are challenging Western dominance and international organizations that were often built on Western leadership (Multipolarity).

- US-China competition and renewed Russia-West confrontation paralyze multilateral institutions (Great Power Rivalry).
- Most international and regional organizations reflect the power balance of the mid-20th century. For example, the UN Security Council's permanent membership excludes newly rising powers (Outdated Structures).
- Delayed reaction to crises due to heavy bureaucracy, veto powers, and funding shortages.
- Rise of populism and nationalism (defending sovereignty over global governance).
- Selective compliance. States increasingly ignore decisions of international organizations.
- Funding problems and dependence on major powers.
- Inability to address new transnational threats, such as cyber security, climate change, and pandemics.

In this broader decline of multilateral institutions, the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) is a particularly revealing case study. It remains the world's largest regional security organization with 57 participating states from Vancouver to Vladivostok. However, the OSCE also finds itself marginalized, underfunded, and blocked by internal vetoes fifty years after its establishment.

This paper explores the genesis of the OSCE, its past achievements and contributions, current crises and challenges, future prospects, and provides some policy recommendations for reinvigorating its role.

II. THE ORIGINS AND EVOLUTION OF THE OSCE: A PLATFORM FOR EAST-WEST DIALOGUE

The OSCE's origins date back to the early 1970s, to the Helsinki Final Act and the establishment of the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe (CSCE), which during the Cold War served as a significant multilateral forum for dialogue and negotiations between East and West.

The Helsinki Final Act, which was signed on 1 August 1975 by 35 countries, contains a number of commitments on politico-military, economic-environmental, and human rights issues. It also establishes ten fundamental principles that govern the behavior of states towards each other, as well as towards their citizens.

The CSCE built on and extended its participating States' commitments through a series of conferences and meetings from 1975 until the 1980s. It was a unique channel of dialogue between the Eastern bloc and the West, as well as the neutral and non-aligned countries.

Following the end of the Cold War, the Paris Summit of November 1990 set the CSCE on a new course. In the "Charter of Paris for a New Europe", the CSCE was called upon to play its part in managing the historic change taking place in Europe and responding to the new challenges of the post-Cold War period. This tasking led to the establishment of permanent structures, including a secretariat, institutions such as the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR), Representative on Freedom of the Media (RFoM), High Commissioner on National Minorities (HCNM), the Parliamentary Assembly, and the deployment of the field operations.

After the break-up of the former Yugoslavia and the ensuing conflicts, the CSCE helped to manage crises and re-establish peace. It also worked with participating States to support for democratic transition.

The CSCE was renamed the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) in 1994 to more accurately reflect these changes. Since then, the OSCE has continued to evolve to better address security threats and challenges, while remaining rooted in its founding principles.

The Organization has a comprehensive approach to security encompassing three dimensions:

The politico-military, the economic and environmental, and the human dimension. Through this three-dimensional strategy, the OSCE supports its participating States in building trust and working toward a free, democratic, common, and indivisible Euro-Atlantic and Eurasian security community.

Most of the OSCE's staff and resources are deployed in field operations in South-Eastern Europe, Eastern Europe, the South Caucasus, and Central Asia. Field operations are established at the invitation of the host countries, and their mandates are agreed by consensus. These operations support the host countries in implementing their OSCE commitments.

III. THE PAST: ACCOMPLISHMENTS AND CONTRIBUTIONS

Born out of the 1975 Helsinki Final Act and institutionalized in the 1990s, the OSCE has served as a cornerstone of pan-European security. It has played a distinctive and multifaceted role in shaping defense and stability mechanisms, emphasizing cooperative security, conflict prevention, and human rights for nearly five decades. However, the Organization's contributions lay less in enforcement than in norm-setting, transparency, and dialogue. Its achievements formed the soft infrastructure of European security. Here is a brief overview of its key accomplishments and contributions to European security:

a) Confidence and Security Measures (CSBMs-the Vienna Document 1990)

The OSCE's most enduring achievement was the development of transparency and trust-building mechanisms between East and West during and after the Cold War.

b) Peaceful Conflict Prevention and Crisis Management

The OSCE developed early-warning, conflict-prevention, crisis-management, and post-conflict rehabilitation tools that remained unique in the European security architecture. It also established field missions in conflict-prone areas such as the Balkans, Caucasus, and Eastern Europe.

c) Promotion of Human Rights and Democratic Institutions

Through the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) and the field missions, it became a major normative actor shaping post-Soviet transitions to democracy in Central and Eastern Europe.

d) Establishment of a Comprehensive Concept of Security

The OSCE pioneered the “comprehensive security” concept, integrating politico-military, economic-environmental, and human rights dimensions. This holistic approach, which influenced later NATO and EU doctrines, has made the OSCE a norm-setter in modern European security thinking.

e) Sustaining Inclusive Dialogue

The OSCE remains the only pan-European platform where all major actors engage on equal footing (consensus rule). Thus, it has been a bridge between East and West to maintain dialogue even in periods of political tension.

The OSCE also served as a political umbrella and forum for the negotiation and implementation of the CFE Treaty and the Treaty on Open Skies, both of which had distinct legal and institutional status as well as different memberships. Both treaties complemented the OSCE’s objectives of transparency, confidence-building, and military stability.

IV. THE PRESENT: DECLINE AND CRISIS

Over its 50-year history, the OSCE has evolved through various phases, from its early days during the Cold War to its post-Cold War “Golden Age” and now to its current challenges amid rising geopolitical tensions. Particularly in the last ten years, the consensus-based organization has been weakened significantly by the growing divergences among the membership and, above all, by the profound breach in trust between Russia and the rest of Europe.

The OSCE appears to be facing greater challenges to its relevance and effectiveness than many of its peers, due to both structural design and geopolitical context. While the underlying causes of the OSCE’s deepening crisis resemble those that have undermined the effectiveness of other international organizations, there are also several additional specific factors, such as:

a) The Consensus Principle has Become a Strategic Weapon:

The OSCE’s consensus-based decision-making model, originally designed to foster inclusiveness and collective ownership, has increasingly operated

as a de facto pocket veto, constraining the Organization's capacity for timely action. The veto power has been used to paralyze the Unified Budget, terminate the OSCE's flagship field presence in Ukraine (Special Monitoring Mission, SMM), and procrastinate senior leadership appointments since the full-scale Russian attacks on Ukraine.

b) Geopolitical Paralysis:

Russia's unprovoked aggression and continued invasion of Ukraine in 2014 and 2022 have deeply undermined the OSCE's ability to function in all dimensions.

c) Collapse of Core Security Instruments:

Russia stopped providing annual data in accordance with the Vienna Document (CSBMs) and blocked its modernization efforts. The two largest powers in Europe, the US and the Russian Federation, exited the Treaty on Open Skies by the end of 2021. Additionally, the withdrawal of the Russian Federation from the CFE Treaty in 2023 has further undercut the OSCE's politico-military pillar.

d) Field Operations and Mediation Formats Have Shrunk to the Least Common Denominator:

The SMM in Ukraine closed in 2022. Other missions faced severe restrictions or host state resistance.

e) Erosion of Normative Consensus:

Paramount differences about democracy, sovereignty, and intervention have fractured East-West trust.

f) Institutional Competition:

When crises escalate, capitals look first to NATO, the EU, or ad hoc coalitions. The OSCE is left with a residual role—useful but limited.

V. THE FUTURE: POTENTIAL TRAJECTORIES AND SURVIVAL CONDITIONS

a) Possible Scenarios:

The future of the OSCE is likely to evolve along the following possible scenarios:

1- Managed Survival (Realistic) - The OSCE avoids outright collapse but remains paralyzed on strategic issues. Its survival depends on minimal budgets and technical programs funded by extra-budgetary contributions. It exists more as a symbolic framework than as an operational actor.

2- Reform and Renewal (Optimistic) - Triggered by the 50th anniversary of the 1975 Helsinki Final Act (Helsinki+50), participating States seize this occasion to enact limited but meaningful reforms, such as; establish multi-year budgetary authorizations, develop procedures to depoliticize senior appointments, pilot “coalitions of the willing” under the OSCE umbrella, and update the Vienna Document with pragmatic risk-reduction measures. This approach requires political will from both West and East, which currently seems remote under the circumstances but could emerge if broader geopolitical dynamics stabilize.

3- Irrelevance and Marginalization (Pessimistic) - The OSCE loses even its niche roles as the participating States increasingly ignore it. Election observation missions decline, technical programs are transferred to other institutions, field operations close, and the Organization survives legally but becomes de facto defunct.

b) Should the OSCE Survive?

Notwithstanding its political and institutional constraints, the OSCE still retains a distinct relevance and utility within the Eurasian security and dialogue framework. While its “hard security” role has collapsed, the OSCE continues to add incremental, technical, and symbolic value. Its enduring assets and comparative advantages are as follows:

- The OSCE still remains the sole platform bringing together all states from Vancouver to Vladivostok on an equal footing.
- It offers a shared normative framework. The acquis stemming from the Helsinki Final Act, the Paris Charter, and subsequent documents constitutes the only pan-European code of conduct encompassing all three dimensions of security.
- The Organization has well-proven and cost-effective instruments. It delivers practical stability at minimal financial cost through these instruments.

Against this background, from a diplomatic standpoint, the case for the OSCE's continued existence seems to be compelling.

c) Preconditions for the OSCE's Institutional Survival and Continued Relevance

The Organization's future existence cannot be taken for granted; it will largely depend on the collective political will and renewed commitment of its participating States.

Four interrelated factors will shape its prospects:

1- Decision-making Procedures

The consensus rule has too often functioned as a *de facto* veto.

Innovative interpretations—such as “consensus-minus-one” or issue-specific coalitions of the willing—could restore limited functionality without undermining legitimacy.

2- Budgetary Predictability

Recurrent delays in adopting the unified budget paralyze operations. Introducing automatic rollover provisions or multi-year financing for core activities would safeguard institutional continuity.

3- Institutional Autonomy and Adaptation

The independent structures of OSCE institutions such as the ODIHR, HCNM, and RFoM remain essential for the Organization's credibility. Aligning their

work with forward-looking themes—cybersecurity, environmental resilience, and emerging technologies—could renew political relevance.

4- External Partnerships

The OSCE functions best when it complements, rather than competes with, other organizations. Stronger coordination with the UN, the EU, and NATO could multiply its value as a neutral platform for de-escalation, dialogue, and technical cooperation.

VI. CONCLUSION

The OSCE stands as a mirror of the wider crises in international organizations. Its inclusive and consensus-based model, once a strength, has become a vulnerability in an era of open great-power confrontation. Russia's invasion of Ukraine, the collapse of arms control, and the erosion of democratic norms have drastically narrowed its operational space and effectiveness.

Declaring the Organization's death would be premature. Given its enduring assets and distinct comparative advantages, the OSCE remains worth preserving. However, in light of the prevailing international environment and the political dynamics challenging multilateralism, the future of this organization will likely be one of managed survival rather than revival.

In the final analysis, the OSCE's destiny will rest on whether its participating States perceive it as an obsolete burden or an indispensable pillar of cooperative security.

PRESIDENT TRUMP'S UNDERSTANDING OF WORLD TRADE

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In the conclusion of my contribution to last year's report, I noted the necessity of being ready for the blows President Trump, then preparing to return to the White House for a second term, would deliver to the global trading system. Perhaps Trump's most significant trait is that he avoided surprises during the early days of his administration, opting instead to implement exactly what he had pledged during his election campaign. This has been the case not only for foreign trade but across all policy areas. His approach, which prioritizes U.S. interests above any rules, immediately manifested his disdain for the fundamental principles, such as globalization and the multilateral system, that have shaped the Western world for at least the last eighty years. Indeed, in an interview published in December, one of his closest aides, Susie Wiles, described Trump as someone who genuinely believes he can do whatever he wants.¹

Upon assuming the office for a second time, just as he had done when he first took office in 2016, Trump withdrew the United States from the 2015 Paris Agreement on Climate Change² and subsequently withdrew from

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- (1) Chris Whipple, "Susie Wiles, JD Vance, and the 'Junkyard Dogs': The White House Chief of Staff on Trump's Second Term (Part 1 of 2)", Vanity Fair, December 16, 2025, <https://www.vanityfair.com/news/story/trump-susie-wiles-interview-exclusive-part-1>
 - (2) The White House, "Putting America First In International Environmental Agreements", January 20, 2025, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/2025/01/putting-america-first-in-international-environmental-agreements/>

the World Health Organization (WHO),³ UNESCO,⁴ and the UN Human Rights Council⁵. Furthermore, he shut down USAID,⁶ an agency that for several decades has provided indispensable aid for health initiatives across Africa, most notably in the fight against AIDS. In a move signalling a lack of importance placed on the promotion of the United States abroad, he abruptly terminated the broadcasts of “Voice of America,” which reached global audiences in numerous languages, including Turkish.⁷

For the time being, at least, his influence over the nation’s key institutions, namely Congress and the Supreme Court, is so boundless that there is no power remaining to restrain him. While his first term featured experienced figures such as Mike Pompeo, John Bolton, and Mike Pence, who were well-versed in the complexities of global politics; this time he has surrounded himself with close friends and relatives whose primary qualification is their loyalty to him. Their lack of professional experience has been disregarded, and he has demonstrated an inability to part with them despite their errors.

Among these figures, perhaps the most notable is Steve Witkoff, a real estate developer like Trump, a golf partner, and the man who once rescued Trump from bankruptcy. With no diplomatic experience whatsoever and an outsized

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- (3) The White House, “Withdrawing the United States from the World Health Organization”, January 20, 2025, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/2025/01/withdrawing-the-united-states-from-the-worldhealth-organization/>
 - (4) Tammy Bruce, The United States Withdraws from the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), *basın açıklaması*, U.S. Department of State, July 22, 2025, <https://www.state.gov/releases/2025/07/the-united-states-withdraws-from-the-united-nations-educational-scientific-and-cultural-organization-unesco>
 - (5) The White House, “Withdrawing the United States from and Ending Funding to Certain United Nations Organizations and Reviewing United States Support to All International Organizations”, February 4, 2025, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/2025/02/withdrawing-the-united-states-from-and-ending-funding-to-certain-united-nations-organizations-and-reviewing-united-states-support-to-all-international-organizations/>
 - (6) Karen Feldscher, “USAID shutdown has led to hundreds of thousands of deaths”, Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health, November 20, 2025, <https://hsph.harvard.edu/news/usa-id-shutdown-has-led-to-hundreds-of-thousands-of-deaths/>
 - (7) Minh Kim, “Trump to Close Voice of America’s Overseas Offices and Radio Stations”, The New York Times, December 2, 2025, <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/12/02/us/politics/trump-voice-of-america-overseas-offices.html>

self-confidence bordering on arrogance, Trump has taken unpredictable and ill-conceived steps on sensitive issues requiring profound skill and expertise, such as Iran's nuclear program, the situation in Gaza, and the war in Ukraine, by placing his trust in Witkoff and others like him.⁸

Another characteristic of Trump is his tendency to change his mind frequently. We have seen this repeatedly regarding the war in Ukraine, and we continue to see it.

Trump's early steps that arguably mattered most for the global economy were the new tariffs that reached astronomical levels, introduced through a process that began on April 2, 2025, a date he himself described as Liberation Day.⁹ In a manner reminiscent of Colbert, the minister to French King Louis XIV, and the 17th-century mercantilists, Trump embraces the philosophy that "imports are bad, exports are good." In his view, even better than exports is for foreign countries to invest in the United States instead of exporting goods to it, and to manufacture the products they would otherwise export on US soil, thereby providing jobs for American workers. Moreover, according to Trump, if a country imported far less than it sold to the U.S., it had to be punished regardless of its size, population, or level of development.

Consequently, as is surely well-remembered, on April 2 in the Rose Garden of the White House, he announced immediate tariffs on 141 countries at levels meant to be prohibitive. For Lesotho, one of the world's least developed countries, whose name Trump admitted he had never even heard before, a 50% tariff was announced simply because it possesses a strong textile industry based on cheap labour and runs a trade surplus with the U.S..¹⁰ Significant trade partners of the U.S., such as the EU, Japan, South Korea, Switzerland,

(8) Julian Borger, "Steve Witkoff: from property developer to global spotlight as Trump's tough-talking troubleshooter", *The Guardian*, February 22, 2025, <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2025/feb/22/steve-witkoff-trump-gaza-ukraine-envoy>

(9) Al Jazeera Staff, "Trump's reciprocal tariffs: How much will each country be hit?" *Al Jazeera*, April 3, 2025, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2025/4/3/trumps-reciprocal-tariffs-how-much-will-each-country-be-hit>

(10) Al Jazeera, "Trump imposes 50% tariff on Africa's Lesotho, the highest among nations", April 3, 2025, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2025/4/3/trump-imposes-50-tariff-on-africas-lesotho-the-highest-among-nations>

and Vietnam, were subjected to prohibitive tariffs of up to 46% through an unprecedented and arbitrary practice based solely on their trade surpluses.¹¹

In fact, on January 20, 2025, his first day back in the White House, he had already set in motion the preparations for the measures announced on April 2 through the “America First Trade Policy” executive order.¹² Subsequently, on February 1, he announced that a 25% additional customs duty would be imposed on neighbours Mexico and Canada, on the grounds that they had not taken sufficient measures against the smuggling of the China-originated narcotic fentanyl into the U.S..¹³ Citing the same reason, he triggered a new trade war with China by announcing a 10% additional tariff.¹⁴

Two days later, he suspended the tariff threats hurled at Mexico and Canada.¹⁵ Shortly thereafter, China took retaliatory measures, and since then, an environment of ever-increasing uncertainty has been created with all major trading partners.

The most important achievement that the World Trade Organization (WTO) and its predecessor, the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT), have sought to secure, as the backbone of the global trading system, is that trade is conducted according to clear and stable rules. Accordingly, nations have moved to reduce their tariffs in a balanced manner through bilateral or, more often, multilateral negotiations; they have aimed for the stable conduct of trade by committing not to raise these reduced duties again without negotiation (technically referred to as “binding”). Considering the fact that commercial contracts can span long periods and the delivery of

(11) Al Jazeera Staff, “Trump’s reciprocal tariffs”

(12) The White House, “America First Trade Policy”, January 20, 2025, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/2025/01/america-first-trade-policy/>

(13) The White House, “Fact Sheet: President Donald J. Trump Imposes Tariffs on Imports from Canada, Mexico and China”, February 1, 2025, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/fact-sheets/2025/02/fact-sheet-president-donald-j-trump-imposes-tariffs-on-imports-from-canada-mexico-and-china/>

(14) *Ibid*

(15) Natalie Sherman and Michael Race, “Trump expands exemptions from Canada and Mexico tariffs”, BBC News, March 7, 2025, <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c5y03qleevvo>

ordered goods can take several months at best, sudden and frequent changes in customs duties would inflict immense damage on these relationships.

Perhaps the most fundamental of all WTO rules is the “Most Favoured Nation” (MFN) principle. What does this mean? It is the core principle of the Organization that in trade among the WTO’s current 166 members,¹⁶ the same customs duty must be applied to the same product, regardless of its country of origin.¹⁷ This principle is of such significance that it is enshrined in Article I of the WTO Agreement. The sole exception to this is that countries party to free trade agreements or customs unions are not required to extend to non-parties the advantages they grant to one another under those arrangements.

Thanks to the gradual liberalization pursued for many years under the GATT and the WTO, developed countries, with the United States foremost among them, had reduced their average tariff levels to around 3-4%. So much so that it became widely accepted that tariffs no longer constituted an effective barrier in the trade of these countries, and that protection would instead be maintained through non-tariff barriers. As a result, trade negotiations increasingly came to focus on easing, and even eliminating, such barriers.

Trump’s actions have set the global trading system back by 50 to 60 years. He has claimed that ‘tariff’ is the most beautiful word in the English language and has argued that the revenue generated from the higher tariffs he promised to impose would make it possible to reduce other taxes, suggesting that, contrary to expectations, US citizens would ultimately benefit. It is worth noting, however, that views on this issue are far from uniform, and that different experts hold different opinions.

In any case, Trump’s tariff policy clearly violates the MFN rule, which forms the foundation of the WTO Agreement. By imposing different tariff rates on different countries from day one, he has disregarded this rule, effectively planting a stick of dynamite under the WTO and detonating it.

(16) World Trade Organization, “Members and Observers”, https://www.wto.org/english/thewto_e/whatis_e/tif_e/org6_e.htm

(17) World Trade Organization, “General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT 1947)”, https://www.wto.org/english/docs_e/legal_e/gatt47_e.htm

Under normal circumstances, such behaviour would be expected to trigger widespread complaints at the WTO and recourse to its dispute settlement mechanism. However, this mechanism, one of the pillars of the WTO system, has been rendered inoperable by Trump and his predecessors. When the WTO began operating in 1995, one of its most significant innovations was the Appellate Body, consisting of seven members appointed for two four-year terms.¹⁸ For roughly 20 years, the Body's rulings constituted the final word in dispute settlement.¹⁹ Although there was always a US citizen among the seven members, successive US administrations eventually claimed that this Body was going beyond merely applying the rules and was instead adding new ones that should have been determined through negotiations. They also argued that it issued a series of rulings against the United States in cases brought before it, and at one point the administration even went so far as to force the resignation of a US member in order to secure the appointment of another American. Beginning in 2013, during the Obama administration, the United States blocked the appointment of new members by exercising its veto.²⁰ Because Trump in his first term, and later Biden, maintained this same policy, departing members could not be replaced, and the Appellate Body ceased to function in practice.

Perhaps the paralysis of the dispute settlement system is one reason why a flood of complaints against Trump's unlawful policy has not been filed in Geneva. When a complaint is brought under this weakened mechanism, the panel tasked with examining it can still issue a report, but if one of the parties to the dispute disagrees with the panel's findings and recommendations, the only recourse for the other party is to request authorization from the Dispute Settlement Body (DSB), composed of all members, to implement countermeasures.²¹ Since decisions in the DSB do not require unanimity,²²

(18) World Trade Organization, "Appellate Body", https://www.wto.org/english/tratop_e/dispu_e/appellate_body_e.htm

(19) *Ibid*

(20) Gisela Grieger, "International trade dispute settlement: World Trade Organisation Appellate Body crisis and the multi-party interim appeal arbitration arrangement", European Parliament, June 17, 2024, [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2024/762342/EPRS_BRI\(2024\)762342_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2024/762342/EPRS_BRI(2024)762342_EN.pdf)

(21) World Trade Organization, "Dispute Settlement Body", https://www.wto.org/english/tratop_e/dispu_e/dispu_body_e.htm

(22) World Trade Organization, "WTO Bodies involved in the dispute settlement

the veto problem does not arise. And because Trump's objective is not to expand trade, it would be hard to say that such measures against US exports would trouble him very much.

Another reason why countries that have drawn Trump's wrath are reluctant to pursue this path is their desire to resolve the issues at hand amicably. When hit with these tariffs, Japan, South Korea, the EU, Switzerland, and others preferred to sit down at the negotiating table with the US and reach an agreement rather than immediately resorting to countermeasures. Many succeeded in their objective. However, since the tariffs they apply to US products have not increased, their exports are being hit with much higher tariff rates than those applied to their imports.

Only China and Brazil have managed to push Trump back, at least temporarily, through countermeasures. Some of the methods used to soften Trump's stance have also raised eyebrows. For instance, the gold Rolex desk clock and gold bars gifted to Trump to spare Switzerland from the 39% tariff became a major subject of protest in Switzerland.²³ Trump did not hesitate to be photographed with the clock placed on his desk.

Another striking and unusual feature of how Trump conducts foreign policy in general, and trade policy in particular, is his disregard for the line between national interests and family interests. For example, while negotiations were underway with Vietnam, his son Eric Trump visited the country and did not hesitate to state that the tariff negotiations would be positively affected if the Vietnamese authorities took a favourable view of his family's planned luxury hotel and golf club project there. Such a blatant statement would have provoked an outcry from the public, the opposition, and the media, not only in a Western democracy but even in most developing nations. That it met with very little reaction in the United States serves as an indicator of how much the country has changed in the few months since Trump's return to power.

process" https://www.wto.org/english/tratop_e/dispu_e/disp_settlement_cbt_e/c3s1p1_e.htm

(23) Lisa O'Carroll, "Swiss gold and Rolex gifts to Trump arouse 'disgust' in Europe", *The Guardian*, November 21, 2025 <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2025/nov/21/swiss-gold-and-rolex-gifts-to-trump-raise-questions-over-personalisation-of-us-presidential-power>

Undoubtedly, one of the defining features of Trump's foreign trade policy is the extent to which non-trade motives play in shaping it. If the issue were merely about protecting certain industries, shifting investment toward them, or reducing trade imbalances, it might be easier to make sense of what he has done. However, in the case of Brazil, Trump openly declared that the rationale for the tariffs imposed on the country was not commercial or economic, but purely political. He made no secret of his intention to rescue the former President Jair Bolsonaro, one of his key allies in Latin America, who had been sentenced to 27 years in prison on charges of plotting a coup.²⁴ In response, the current Brazilian administration did not back down; on the contrary, it converted Bolsonaro's sentence from house arrest to imprisonment. The countermeasures Brazil imposed on US exports pushed Trump back, and the matter was closed, at least temporarily. Meanwhile, it is worth noting that in Brazil's Congress, which current President Lula does not control, a legislative process has been initiated to pass a law that would reduce Bolsonaro's sentence from 27 years to just 2 years.²⁵

This is precisely where a key characteristic of the Trump administration's policy lies: the agreements reached are generally not long-term or permanent but rather measured in months. This, as I noted above, naturally prevents commercial relations from proceeding in harmony and stability.

I have already noted that Trump's objective is not to expand trade. On the contrary, his aim is to attract investment, increase employment in the US, and thereby retain the votes of blue-collar workers who traditionally voted for Democrats but have recently begun to support him. We see this particularly in the automotive industry. We see him pressure countries such as Germany, Korea, Japan, and even China to move their production to the US instead of selling finished vehicles there, as they have largely done until now. For example, the Korean firm Hyundai announced new investments

(24) Kanishka Singh and Ricardo Brito, "Trump imposes 50% tariffs on Brazil after spat with Lula", Reuters, July 10, 2025 <https://www.reuters.com/world/americas/trump-says-us-will-charge-brazil-with-50-tariff-2025-07-09/>

(25) Le Monde with AFP, "Brazilian lawmakers approve bid to reduce Bolsonaro's jail term after ruckus", Decemeber 10, 2025, https://www.lemonde.fr/en/international/article/2025/12/10/chaos-ensues-in-brazil-s-congress-over-bid-to-reduce-bolsonaro-jail-term_6748333_4.html

in the US totalling \$26 billion.²⁶ However, in a clear sign that the Trump administration's right hand doesn't know what its left hand is doing, about 400 workers, mostly Koreans, working on a factory construction site in Georgia were detained and deported as if they were criminals.²⁷ Although Trump himself invited the workers back after the mistake was realized, those who left when the scandal broke rejected the offer. Naturally, such behaviour does not encourage investors to turn toward the United States.

However, the promise of attracting foreign investment to the US has become a de facto prerequisite for Trump's meetings with visiting leaders. For instance, Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, who was hosted at the White House in November under an unusual protocol, pledged to invest \$1 trillion, an amount nearly equivalent to Turkey's entire annual national income,²⁸ in the United States over the coming years.²⁹ The United Arab Emirates went even further, promising \$1.4 trillion in investments in exchange for certain advantages related to artificial intelligence.³⁰ Similarly, during their meeting at Trump's golf club in Scotland on August 21, EU Commission President von der Leyen committed to purchasing \$750 billion worth of energy products³¹ and making \$600 billion in investments.³² While the European Commission President's authority to make such commitments remains debatable, Trump

(26) Hyundai, "Hyundai Motor Group Increases U.S. Investment to \$26 Billion to Accelerate Growth and Innovation", August 26, 2025, <https://www.hyundai.com/worldwide/en/newsroom/detail/hyundai-motor-group-increases-u.s.-investment-to-%252426-billion-to-accelerate-growth-and-innovation-0000001003>

(27) BBC News, White House has apologised over Georgia raid, says Hyundai boss, November 20, 2025, <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c8ey0nl62ypo>

(28) World Bank, "Turkey", <https://www.worldbank.org/ext/en/country/turkey>

(29) The White House, "Fact Sheet: President Donald J. Trump Solidifies Economic and Defense Partnership with the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia", November 18, 2025, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/fact-sheets/2025/11/fact-sheet-president-donald-j-trump-solidifies-economic-and-defense-partnership-with-the-kingdom-of-saudi-arabia/>

(30) Steve Holland and Federico Maccioni, "UAE commits to \$1.4 trillion US investment, White House says", Reuters, March 21, 2025, <https://www.reuters.com/world/after-trump-meeting-uae-commits-10-year-14-trillion-investment-framework-us-2025-03-21/>

(31) The White House, "Fact Sheet: The United States and European Union Reach Massive Trade Deal", July 28, 2025, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/fact-sheets/2025/07/fact-sheet-the-united-states-and-european-union-reach-massive-trade-deal/>

(32) *Ibid*

reduced tariffs on EU-origin goods from 15% to 10% within the framework of ongoing negotiations. Likewise, Japan's new Prime Minister Takaichi, during her first meeting with Trump in Tokyo on October 27, promised \$550 billion in investments in exchange for tariff reductions.³³

Time will, of course, tell whether these pledges will be fulfilled. What we can already see, however, is that Trump is imposing this approach on leaders from different regions of the world. Those who seek trade concessions from him are expected to make investment pledges running into enormous sums.

What, then, is the picture that emerges when we look at the consequences of Trump's unorthodox approach to trade?

Economists warn that steep increases in tariffs will fuel inflation.³⁴ This was indeed the expectation following Trump's initial announcements. However, at least in the early stages, importers were observed to have narrowed their profit margins and refrained from passing price increases on to consumers. It was also seen that imports did not decrease but rather increased, as orders were ramped up due to a desire to stockpile before the new and high tariffs went into effect. It is clear that inflationary pressures will increase over time. Since the tariffs target not only consumer goods but also industrial inputs, it is obvious that manufacturers will, where possible, be forced to use more expensive domestic inputs instead of cheap foreign ones whenever possible. Annual consumer inflation, which stood at 1.5% when Trump took office, rose to 3% in September³⁵ but declined slightly in October. If this rise continues, there is no doubt it will cause significant difficulties for Trump in the run up to the midterm elections in November 2026. The rise

(33) River Akira Davis, Japan Deals With the Price of Playing to Trump: \$550 Billion, *The New York Times*, October 26, 2025, <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/10/26/business/japan-investment-trump-tariffs.html>

(34) Rebecca Patterson and Ishaan Thakker, "Trade, Tariffs, and Treasuries: The Hidden Cost of Trump's Protectionism", Council on Foreign Relations, December 17, 2025, <https://www.cfr.org/article/trade-tariffs-and-treasuries-hidden-cost-trumps-protectionism>

(35) Michael Sainato, "US prices rose at a 3% annual rate in September, slightly beating forecasts", *The Guardian*, October 24, 2025, <https://www.theguardian.com/business/2025/oct/24/consumer-price-index-report-inflation-september>

in unemployment figures published in December is also likely to prove troubling for him.

Trump also takes pride in the fact that higher tariffs have increased Treasury revenues. In the initial months, this increase was expected to reach a few hundred million dollars on an annual basis. In August alone, tariff revenue flowing into the U.S. Treasury reached \$30 billion.³⁶ However, economists predict that when the long-term effects of these tariffs, such as slowing the economy and fuelling inflation, are considered, they will result in a net loss rather than a profit. Indeed, the figures for December support this view.

The world does not wish to enter into a confrontation with Trump on this front. Only Brazil and China have implemented countermeasures against Trump's tariffs, and both have forced him to back down. By contrast, key trading partners such as the EU, the United Kingdom, South Korea, and Japan, which are in strategic cooperation with the US, have avoided this course. They have refrained from doing so out of concern that they might provoke Trump and that he might bring military cooperation into the equation. To date, only China has pursued this path. As I explained above, China's complaint is unlikely to produce results, or at the very least it is bound to take a long time.

In any case, the WTO's influence over Trump is extremely limited. Although he has been less vocal about it lately, Trump has threatened on various occasions to withdraw the US from the WTO.³⁷ This, of course, would mean the end of the Organization. While this threat has not materialized so far, the WTO can be said to be in a "deep sleep." Negotiations aimed at liberalizing trade have been stalled for many years, and as mentioned above, the dispute settlement mechanism is paralyzed. The only process that continues is the Trade Policy Review Mechanism, which periodically reviews member states' trade policies. However, the defining feature of the TPRM process is that it does not assess whether the policies under review comply with WTO rules; it

(36) Doug Palmer, "US tariff collections hit record \$30.1B in August", PoliticoPro, November 9, 2025, <https://subscriber.politicopro.com/article/2025/09/us-tariff-collections-hit-record-30-1b-in-august-00557970>

(37) BBC News, "Trump threatens to pull US out of World Trade Organization", August 31, 2018, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-45364150>

serves only to promote transparency.³⁸ Nonetheless, it cannot be denied that the reports produced at the end of this process contain useful information for practitioners.

This situation is not expected to change much over the remainder of the Trump era. Given Trump's profound disregard, and even contempt, for international rules across all fields, it cannot be expected that he will show great respect in the final three years of his term for the WTO rules, a system whose creation his country once played a key role in shaping. Therefore, the best that can be hoped for is that the existing structure survives these three years without being too badly battered.

Meanwhile, as a result of legal challenges brought by certain businesspeople and associations, the legal basis of Trump's tariff policy has come under scrutiny. In fact, Trump relies on a 1977 law (IEEPA) that grants the President the authority to take measures bypassing Congress in emergency situations as the foundation for his fluctuating tariff policies.³⁹ Plaintiffs argue that this law does not grant the President such authority. The Supreme Court is expected to render its decision on this matter in January 2026. However, commentators suggest that even if the Court does not rule in Trump's favour, it is highly probable that he will seek an alternative legal justification rather than abolishing the tariffs.

It is also worth examining how our country has been affected by the blows Trump has dealt to the global trading system. Since our trade with the US has hovered around the \$30 billion range for years,⁴⁰ and a trade surplus, albeit a small one, exists in favour of the US, our country was not among the more than 140 nations targeted by the US on April 2 and thereafter. Consequently, only the minimum additional tariff of 15% has been applied

(38) World Trade Organization, "TRADE POLICY REVIEW MECHANISM", https://www.wto.org/english/docs_e/legal_e/29-tpm.pdf

(39) Christopher A. Casey, Jennifer K. Elsea, Liana W. Rosen, "The International Emergency Economic Powers Act: Origins, Evolution, and Use." September 1, 2025, <https://www.congress.gov/crs-product/R45618>

(40) Republic of Turkey Ministry of Foreign affairs, "Bilateral and Economical Relations between Turkey and the United States of America," <https://www.mfa.gov.tr/relations-between-turkiye-and-the-united-states-of-america.en.mfa>

to Turkey.⁴¹ However, in the period since then, as a result of agreements the United States has reached with our trade competitors, above all the EU and the United Kingdom, the tariffs to be applied to them have fallen below 15%, and our competitiveness relative to theirs has therefore declined. In fact, according to recently published figures, our trade volume with the United States has begun to decline.⁴² In any case, under the current circumstances, the long-standing goal of increasing our trade volume with the US to \$100 billion annually does not appear feasible, at least as long as Trump remains in office. As noted above, this is not Trump's objective anyway. Indeed, if our administration has made any attempt to sit down with the US, unlike many other countries, it has not, as far as I can see, been reflected in the media. Naturally, it is clear that in any potential negotiation, Turkey lacks the capacity to pledge investments reaching hundreds of billions of dollars to the United States.

The lack of growth potential in trade with the US under Trump is pushing many countries to seek alternatives. Even before Trump, trade had begun to shift away from globalization and toward regionalization as a result of the pandemic and political uncertainties. It is inevitable that this trend will strengthen over the next few years. The EU is wary not only of the US but also of China. It increasingly views China less as a partner than as a dangerous competitor, and even an adversary, and is moving toward a more cautious approach, especially in trade in high-tech products.⁴³

This situation undoubtedly presents an opportunity for us. Reports and assessments on this subject appear in the media from time to time. Although we are not in a position to compete with either China or the EU in the field

(41) The White House, "FURTHER MODIFYING THE RECIPROCAL TARIFF RATES", July 31, 2025, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/2025/07/further-modifying-the-reciprocal-tariff-rates/>

(42) The U.S. Census Bureau, "Trade in Goods with Turkey", <https://www.census.gov/foreign-trade/balance/c4890.html>

(43) Andreea Brinza, Una Aleksandra Bērziņa-Čerenkova, Philippe Le Corre, John Seaman, Richard Turcsányi, and Stefan Vladislavljey, EU-China Relations: De-risking or De-coupling – The Future of the EU Strategy towards China (Brussels: European Parliament, Policy Department for External Relations, March 2024) https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2024/754446/EXPO_STU%282024%29754446_EN.pdf?utm

of high technology, there are certainly opportunities in other sectors despite the high exchange rate policy being implemented.

To develop trade with the EU, particularly to encompass areas such as the digital economy and the green transition, there is a need for rigorous dialogue, as well as the deepening and modernization of the Customs Union. The conditions for this are clear; however, they fall outside the scope of this article.

Meanwhile, others, observing that the United States does not hesitate to disregard WTO rules and faces no sanctions for doing so, are following the same path. Toward the end of the year, the EU began working on legislation that would mandate a 70% local content requirement in many industrial sectors, especially the automotive industry.⁴⁴ Following the backlash triggered by this idea, which violates WTO rules, the regulation in question was postponed until 2026.⁴⁵ As an alternative approach, there has been talk of a regulation ensuring the use of EU-origin products in projects financed through credit. The Turkish automotive sector has, understandably, begun to voice its concerns regarding these discussions.⁴⁶ This issue will likely be at the top of the agenda for our industrialists to monitor in 2026.

(44) Alice Hancock and Andy Bounds, “Brussels pushes for 70% of critical goods content to be ‘made in Europe’”, *Financial Times*, December 3, 2025 https://www.ft.com/content/b0200e50-dd3a-4e9e-8908-40ead49e7daa?utm_source=

(45) Peggy Corlin, “EU’s ‘Buy European’ strategy delayed by division among member states”, December 9, 2025, https://www.euronews.com/business/2025/12/09/eus-buy-european-strategy-delayed-by-member-states-split?utm_source=

(46) Bloomberg HT, “Otomotivde AB’de üretilmiş ürün tanımına Türkiye’nin dahil edilmesi stratejik gereklilik”, December 22, 2025 <https://www.bloomberght.com/otomotivde-ab-de-uretilmis-urun-tanimina-turkiye-nin-dahil-edilmesi-stratejik-gereklilik-3764501>

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THE DECLINING EFFECTIVENESS OF INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS AND THE FUTURE OF GLOBAL GOVERNANCE: INSTITUTIONAL GRIDLOCK, NEW ACTORS, AND THE RISE OF INFORMAL INTERGOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS

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Introduction

The contemporary architecture of global governance is undergoing a profound test, driven in particular by the political, economic, and technological transformations of the past two decades. While international organizations constitute the core pillars of the liberal institutional order established in the aftermath of the Second World War, their effectiveness and efficiency are increasingly being called into question, alongside growing institutional fragility. A range of multidimensional challenges, including the intensification of great power competition, the resurgence of geopolitical bloc formation, the uneven trajectory of post-COVID-19 recovery, the climate crisis, mounting threats to energy and food security, rising authoritarian tendencies, and the revival of economic nationalism, directly affect not only nation-states but international organizations themselves. Taken together, these dynamics significantly constrain the decision-making capacity of international organizations.

This situation significantly limits the decision-making processes of international organizations. The most concrete indicators of this deficit have

emerged as the inability of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC), which sits at the center of global peace and security, to take binding decisions on vital issues such as the War in Ukraine, the Syrian Civil War, and the humanitarian crisis in Gaza. Due to blockages in veto mechanisms caused by the divergence of interests among great powers, the UN has virtually taken on the appearance of a “gridlocked forum.”¹ A similar institutional erosion is observed in the weakening of the capacity to update and enforce the global trade order following the de facto collapse of the World Trade Organization’s (WTO) dispute settlement mechanism. Various regional organizations such as ASEAN, D-8, and BSEC, whose effectiveness has long been questioned, fail to produce effective results due to structural reasons such as strategic incompatibilities among their members or limited institutional capacity. Conversely, organizations with strong technical capacities that operate in specific fields, such as the UN Development Programme (UNDP), continue their implementation-oriented work on the ground despite political gridlock; this indicates that the ineffectiveness of international organizations is not a one-dimensional process.

All these developments clearly demonstrate that international organizations are struggling not only to produce norms but also to respond effectively to emerging crises and the strains on the liberal international order. The conceptualization of “fragmented multilateralism,”² developed by Emel Parlar Dal, Andrew F. Cooper, and Samiratou Dipama in a special issue of *Third World Quarterly*, places the impasse entered by international organizations into an analytical framework. According to this approach, contemporary multilateralism is a complex institutional ecosystem where formal and informal, global and regional, large and small-scale platforms are intertwined and often compete with one another. In this environment, while the authority of classical international organizations weakens, flexible, low-binding, and leader-oriented mechanisms, primarily Informal Intergovernmental Organizations (IIGOs) such as the G20 and BRICS, are becoming increasingly visible.

(1) Thomas G. Weiss, *The United Nations and Changing World Politics* (New York: Routledge, 2020).

(2) Emel Parlar Dal, Andrew F. Cooper, and Samiratou Dipama, “Fragmented Multilateralism and International Institutions,” *Third World Quarterly*, Special Issue, 2024/25.

This analysis avoids reducing the declining effectiveness of international organizations solely to problems of institutional design. Instead, it examines this erosion in conjunction with broader systemic dynamics, including great power competition, deficits of representation and legitimacy, institutional overcrowding, and membership-related mismatches.

The primary aim is to provide a concise overview of the historical background in order to explain the current crisis of the global order; to highlight performance differences between political and technical organizations; to situate the rise of IIGOs within a coherent analytical framework; and, finally, to offer a comprehensive assessment of the possible models through which global governance may evolve in the future.

Historical Evolution of International Organizations and Origins of the Current Crisis

The evolution of international organizations is commonly examined in the literature through three broad, successive, though not sharply delineated phases. In his analysis of the liberal order, G. John Ikenberry traces this trajectory from a phase of “great power management” that emerged with the Concert of Europe in the nineteenth century, through the institutionalized liberal order established after 1945, and finally to the phase of deepening globalization following the end of the Cold War.³

The first phase was characterized by relatively loose forms of international cooperation grounded primarily in balance-of-power politics, whereas the second phase marked the emergence of a far more formalized institutional architecture, exemplified by organizations such as the United Nations, the Bretton Woods institutions, NATO, and the OECD.

The third phase, by contrast, was shaped by the acceleration of globalization after the Cold War, rising economic interdependence, the spread of regionalism, and the expansion of governance networks.

During this period, the European Union both expanded its membership and

(3) G. John Ikenberry, *Liberal Leviathan: The Origins, Crisis, and Transformation of the American World Order* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011).

deepened its scope of influence; regional organizations such as ASEAN and the African Union strengthened their institutional capacities; and the World Trade Organization assumed a central norm-setting role in global trade.

While the first stage points to a period where international cooperation was looser and based on the balance of power, the second stage signifies the emergence of a much more formalized institutional architecture with organizations such as the United Nations, Bretton Woods institutions, NATO, and the OECD. The third stage is characterized by the wave of globalization that accelerated with the end of the Cold War, economic interdependence, regionalism, and the proliferation of governance networks.^{4,5} In this period, the European Union (EU) both expanded its members and deepened its spheres of influence; regional organizations like ASEAN and the African Union increased their institutional capacities; and the WTO assumed a norm-setting role in global trade.

Since the 2010s, this architecture has come under serious pressure due to increasing geopolitical competition, global inequalities, and challenges to liberal norms. Increasing great power competition,⁶ deepening global inequalities,⁷ the reluctance of populist leaders toward multilateralism,⁸ and legitimacy crises have made the fragility of the existing order visible. Concepts frequently used in the literature in recent years, such as “post-liberal order,”⁹ “contested multilateralism,”¹⁰ and “fragmented multilateralism,”¹¹

(4) Thomas Hale, David Held, and Kevin Young, *Gridlock: Why Global Cooperation Is Failing When We Need It Most* (Cambridge: Polity, 2013).

(5) Zürn, Michael, *A Theory of Global Governance: Authority, Legitimacy, and Contestation* (Oxford, 2018; online edn, Oxford Academic, 19 Apr. 2018).

(6) John J. Mearsheimer, “Bound to Fail: The Rise and Fall of the Liberal International Order,” *International Security* 43, no. 4 (2019): 7–50.

(7) Thomas Piketty, *Capital in the Twenty-First Century*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014).

(8) David A. Lake, Lisa L. Martin, and Thomas Risse, eds., *Challenges to the Liberal Peace and the Multilateral Order: Implications for the European Project* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021).

(9) G. John Ikenberry, “The End of Liberal International Order?” *International Affairs* 94, no. 1 (2018): 7–23.

(10) Julia C. Morse and Robert O. Keohane, “Contested Multilateralism,” *Review of International Organizations* 9, no. 4 (2014): 385–412.

(11) Emel Parlar Dal, Andrew F. Cooper, and Samiratou Dipama, “Fragmented Multilateralism and International Institutions,” *Third World Quarterly*, Special Issue,

highlight different dimensions of this transformation. The common emphasis of these concepts is that the crisis stems not only from disruptions in institutional design and functioning but also from shifting power balances in the international system, an eroding normative basis, and weakening sources of legitimacy. Therefore, understanding the current gridlock requires more than viewing organizations merely as “effective or ineffective bureaucratic structures.” The origin of the crisis lies both in the historical limits of the liberal institutional order and in the new power centers, competing norm initiatives, and fragmented governance networks emerging in the 21st century. Thus, assessing the current functionality of international organizations necessitates a multidimensional analytical framework that addresses continuities and ruptures together.

The Current Crisis of International Organizations: Systemic and Institutional Gridlock

The functional crisis that international organizations face today is a complex phenomenon emerging at the intersection of both systemic and institutional factors. This gridlock deepens around four main axes.

First, the reflection of great power rivalry within institutional structures constitutes the most visible source of paralysis. Strategic competition between the United States and China, Russia’s revisionist foreign policy, and growing divisions within the Western alliance have generated serious blockages, particularly within organizations endowed with political decision-making authority. The frequent use of the veto mechanism in the United Nations Security Council has disrupted decision-making processes and, in Weiss’s formulation, widened the “gap between normative ambition and practical capacity.”¹² Similarly, the near paralysis of the OSCE amid Ukraine-centered tensions illustrates the direct institutional consequences of major powers prioritizing national interests over the multilateral order.

Second, deficits in representation and legitimacy have steadily eroded confidence in existing governance structures. The Security Council’s

2024/25.

(12) Thomas G. Weiss, *The United Nations and Changing World Politics* (New York: Routledge, 2020).

permanent membership reflects the power configuration of 1945, while the exclusion of regions such as Africa and Latin America has deepened its legitimacy crisis. Although recent quota and voting reforms in the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank have produced modest improvements, these changes remain limited and continue to reinforce perceptions among rising powers in the Global South that these institutions are fundamentally “Western-centric.” This perception helps explain why emerging powers increasingly turn to alternative platforms such as BRICS and the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) when efforts to reform existing institutions from within prove ineffective.¹³

The third and fourth axes concern institutional overcrowding and membership-related mismatches. Hale, Held, and Young conceptualize global governance through the notion of “gridlock,”¹⁴ drawing attention to the growing imbalance between the proliferation of institutions and their actual problem-solving capacity. This institutional congestion reinforces the environment of “fragmented multilateralism”¹⁵ described by Dal, Cooper, and Dipama, in which the simultaneous yet poorly coordinated presence of UN bodies, the G20, and regional organizations in areas such as climate change, global health, and financial stability undermines policy coherence.

The fourth axis is discrepancies in membership structures and levels of political ownership. The success of international organizations is closely related to the capacity of member states to generate political will toward common goals. The periodic divergence of threat perceptions in NATO between the US and Europe, or even among European Union members, or the consensus principle in ASEAN structurally slowing down decision-making, shows how the lack of ownership deepens institutional gridlock. Therefore, the current crisis stems not only from institutional design problems but from

(13) Julia C. Morse and Robert O. Keohane, “Contested Multilateralism,” *Review of International Organizations* 9, no. 4 (2014): 385–412.

(14) Thomas Hale, David Held, and Kevin Young, *Gridlock: Why Global Cooperation Is Failing When We Need It Most* (Cambridge: Polity, 2013).

(15) Emel Parlar Dal, Andrew F. Cooper, and Samiratou Dipama, “Fragmented Multilateralism and International Institutions,” *Third World Quarterly*, Special Issue, 2024/25.

the integrated impact of systemic power competition, legitimacy erosion, structure-capacity mismatch, and weakness of political ownership.

Legitimacy and Institutional Impact in Global Governance: Performance Differences Among International Organizations

The performance of international organizations shows significant differences according to the nature of their mandates. As a general pattern, political decision-making bodies experience greater gridlock due to intensifying great power competition and the frequent use of veto mechanisms, whereas institutions with strong technical and operational capacities tend to be more resilient and effective. While political organizations (such as the UNSC or OSCE) are more affected by geopolitical tensions because they are directly dependent on the political will of their members, technical organizations can create a more autonomous sphere of influence.

The roots of this divergence lie not only in external political conditions, but also in the internal institutional design and bureaucratic capacity of international organizations. According to the institutionalist literature, effective organizations are characterized by clearly defined mandates, professional bureaucracies, and flexible decision-making procedures. Michael Barnett and Martha Finnemore argue that through technical expertise and bureaucratic autonomy, organizations can generate rational-legal authority and construct a normative reference framework that extends beyond the state.¹⁶ For this reason, technical organizations not only act more swiftly, but are also able to build more durable forms of legitimacy through the production of knowledge and norms.

For example, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) stands out with its role in producing development data and coordination around Sustainable Development Goals. Similarly, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the World Food Programme (WFP) are accepted as legitimate actors thanks to their rapid mobilization

(16) Michael Barnett and Martha Finnemore, *Rules for the World: International Organizations in Global Politics* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2004).

capacities in humanitarian crises. The World Health Organization (WHO) and the International Labour Organization (ILO), on the other hand, create reference frameworks in international policy-making through their norm-generating and global standard-setting functions. The relative autonomy of technical institutions increases both their capacity to produce knowledge and their normative influence power, thus enabling their operational effectiveness and legitimacy to be sustainable.

On the other hand, the concept of “orchestration”¹⁷ shows that international organizations can assume a regulatory and facilitating role in policy areas by bringing together different actors—states, companies, NGOs. The issue of whether this role is reflected in the performance of organizations appears as a multidimensional issue. Differences in institutional performance stem not only from external political conditions but also from the internal bureaucratic structures of organizations and their capacity to establish expertise-based authority.

The Rise of Informal Intergovernmental Organizations (IIGOs) and New Institutional Dynamics

One of the most distinct trends in contemporary global governance discussions is the increasing visibility and impact capacity of informal intergovernmental platforms, termed IIGOs. Compared to formal international organizations, IIGOs possess advantages such as more flexible institutional designs, low-binding decision-making processes, the opportunity for intense interaction at the leader level, and the capacity to react quickly, especially during crisis periods. These characteristics are making such organizations increasingly central actors in the contemporary international system.¹⁸

(17) Kenneth W. Abbott et al., *International Organizations as Orchestrators* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015).

(18) Emel Parlar Dal and Nobuhide Mert Matsumoto, “Assessing legitimacy of informal intergovernmental organizations in the context of changing multilateralism”, *International Affairs*, Volume 101, Issue 2, March 2025, Pages 419–438, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ia/iaae317>;
Emel Parlar Dal, Andrew F. Cooper, and Samiratou Dipama, “Fragmented Multilateralism and International Institutions,” *Third World Quarterly*, Special Issue, 2024/25.

Among the most prominent examples of this trend, the G20 emerged as a leaders-level forum in the aftermath of the 2008 global financial crisis and has since assumed a key agenda-setting role in areas such as economic governance, financial stability, climate finance, debt sustainability, and global health policy. Indeed, Andrew Cooper and Ramesh Thakur characterize the G20 as the “de facto coordination hub” of the global economic architecture organized around the Bretton Woods institutions.¹⁹

At the same time, the expansion of BRICS and the emergence of the BRICS+ format represent another significant development enhancing the institutional visibility of the Global South in international governance. While these platforms have strengthened their claim to serve as alternative centers to Western-dominated institutions, they also face constraints that limit their capacity to generate concrete outcomes, including intra-group heterogeneity, divergent regional priorities, and relatively low levels of institutionalization. Alongside these developments, regional organizations such as ASEAN have attracted attention for their hybrid structures, which combine formal and informal elements. The notion of “ASEAN centrality” places the organization at the core of regional security and cooperation architectures as a flexible, non-binding, yet functionally effective coordinating actor. As Amitav Acharya has noted, ASEAN offers a distinctive institutional model that combines weak formal institutionalization with comparatively strong normative influence.²⁰

All these examples point to a significant structural transformation regarding the future of global governance. It is observed that alongside highly formalized, rules-based organizational models in the classical sense, an informal institutional architecture based on more flexible, non-binding cooperation mechanisms relying on interaction at the leaders’ level has emerged. The rise of informal and hybrid organizations reshapes the debate on the effectiveness of international institutions and shows that global governance is increasingly acquiring a polycentric, flexible, and network-based character.

(19) Andrew F. Cooper and Ramesh Thakur, *The Group of Twenty (G20)* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2013).

(20) Amitav Acharya, “Ideas, Identity, and Institution-Building: From the ‘ASEAN Way’ to the ‘Asia-Pacific Way’?,” *Pacific Review* 10, no. 3 (1997): 319–346.

Future Models of Global Governance

Debates on the future of global governance are shaped around four main trends due to deepening geopolitical competition, accelerating crisis cycles, and increasing complex global problems. These trends make the limitations in the functioning of the existing international institutional architecture visible and produce alternative scenarios for new governance models.

The first trend is the strengthening of flexible minilateralism. Small group platforms such as the G20, G7, BRICS+, QUAD, and AUKUS have the capacity to provide rapid decision-making and coordination in specific thematic areas or moments of crisis by partially circumventing the veto, representation, and slow decision-making problems faced by broad-membership formal institutions.

The second trend is the institutionalization of polycentric governance models, which emerge because the solution to complex global problems exceeds the capacity of a single institution, as emphasized in the “gridlock” analysis.²¹ This multi-layered structure provides flexibility and diversity on the one hand, while bringing coordination and coherence problems on the other.

The third trend is the resurgence of regional organizations. Organizations such as ASEAN, the African Union, and the European Union are assuming more visible roles in both regional integration and global governance. The acceptance of the African Union as a permanent member of the G20 is a concrete example of regional organizations’ search for representation and influence at the global level.

The fourth and potentially riskiest trend is the increase in institutional bloc formation. The BRICS+ expansion and the G7’s effort to reposition itself at the center of the Western coalition indicate that international organizations may realign around geopolitical axes. While this situation may facilitate cooperation in some areas, it increases the risk of inter-bloc tensions creating new gridlocks given that global problems require common solutions.

(21) Thomas Hale, David Held, and Kevin Young, *Gridlock: Why Global Cooperation Is Failing When We Need It Most* (Cambridge: Polity, 2013).

Possible developments regarding the future of international organizations can be summarized as follows:

Trend	Definition	Examples	Impact
Flexible Minilateralism	Strengthening of small group platforms with rapid decision-making capacity in times of crisis or specific thematic areas.	G20, G7, BRICS+, QUAD, AUKUS	Partially overcoming the gridlock of broad-membership formal institutions.
Polycentric Governance	Simultaneous role assumption by different institutions because solving complex global problems exceeds the capacity of a single institution.	UNFCCC, G20 in climate; WHO, GAVI in health.	Providing flexibility and diversity, but increasing coordination and coherence problems.
Rise of Regional Organizations	Regional organizations assuming more visible roles in regional integration and global governance.	ASEAN, African Union (G20 membership), EU	Concretization of the search for global representation and influence.
Institutional Bloc Formation	Realignment of international organizations around geopolitical axes.	BRICS+ expansion, G7 becoming the core of the Western coalition.	Facilitating cooperation in some areas, but increasing inter-bloc tension and new gridlocks.

Taken together, these four trends suggest that the future of global governance will not rest on a hierarchical model of “world government,” but rather on a hybrid and multilayered governance architecture in which formal and informal, global and regional, as well as large- and small-scale institutions operate in parallel.

While such an architecture enhances flexibility, it will also generate new governance challenges in terms of coordination, legitimacy, and the production of coherent and integrated policy responses.

Conclusion

Although the declining effectiveness of international organizations is often discussed under the rubric of a “crisis of multilateralism,” it in fact points to a deeper and more complex transformation. Traditional, highly formalized organizations are increasingly struggling to maintain their functional effectiveness under pressures such as intensifying great power competition, deficits in representation and legitimacy, and growing institutional density.

By contrast, organizations with strong technical and operational capacities, together with more flexible and leader-oriented mechanisms such as Informal Intergovernmental Organizations (IIGOs), are emerging as relatively more effective actors in international cooperation. The future of global governance will largely depend on the extent to which the coordination and coherence problems created by this fragmented and polycentric ecosystem of institutions can be managed. In this context, it is vital for think tanks like the Global Relations Forum to analyze these complex dynamics and propose innovative and inclusive governance models that will revitalize international cooperation. Specifically, increasing uncertainty during crisis periods necessitates the empirical and theoretical examination of questions such as which institutions can assume leadership in which areas, how organizations of different scales can complement each other, and how existing structural gridlocks can be overcome.

This transformation in global governance requires revisiting the fundamental assumptions of the international relations discipline and examining the role of new actors and informal structures in greater depth. Understanding the contributions of these actors to the formation of international norms, policy coordination, and crisis management will not only expand the analytical capacity of the discipline but also contribute to the construction of a more inclusive and effective global governance model.

Acknowledgement

I would like to thank my project assistant Dr. Nilay Tüzgen for her technical and research assistance.

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THE ORGANISATION FOR ECONOMIC CO-OPERATION AND DEVELOPMENT (OECD) AND INTERNATIONAL ENERGY AGENCY (IEA)

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The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) is a multilateral organisation established under the OECD Convention, signed in Paris on 14 December 1960 and entering into force on 30 September 1961¹, with the aim of promoting policy coordination in support of economic growth, stability, and prosperity.² The core purpose at its founding was to move beyond the aims and objectives of its predecessor, the OEEC (Organization for European Economic Cooperation), which had been created to rebuild Europe after the Second World War, and to assume a broader set of tasks, including supporting sustainable development, liberalising trade, increasing employment and welfare, and strengthening coherence between economic and social policies.³

Today, the OECD serves as a policy and economic think tank and a rule-setting platform aimed at producing shared solutions to global challenges. Its motto, “Better Policies for Better Lives,” captures the organisation’s overall orientation. The OECD is, in essence, part of the global economic order shaped under the leadership of the United States (US) in the aftermath of the Second World War.

(1) The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development , “Our history”, <https://www.oecd.org/en/about/history.html>

(2) The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development , “About”, <https://www.oecd.org/en/about.html>

(3) The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development , “Our history”

Members and Main Bodies

The OECD currently consists of 38 member countries.⁴ Turkey is among the first 20 founding members.⁵ The European Commission participates fully in the organisation's work as a full participant, but it does not have voting rights.⁶ As of December 2025, Argentina, Brazil, Peru, Croatia, Romania, Indonesia, and Thailand are among the candidate countries.⁷

The OECD Secretariat is based in Paris.⁸ Mathias Cormann, a former Australian Minister for Finance, is the current Secretary-General and has served in the post since 2021.⁹ His predecessor, the Mexican Secretary-General Ángel Gurría, devoted part of his tenure to strengthening the organisation's relations with South American countries and did so with notable success.¹⁰

The OECD Council

The Council is the OECD's principal decision-making body.¹¹ It meets regularly at least once a month, with the participation of member countries' Ambassadors/Permanent Representatives and the attendance of the EU representative.¹²

(4) The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, "Members and partners", <https://www.oecd.org/en/about/members-partners.html>

(5) The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, "Turkey", <https://www.oecd.org/en/countries/turkiye.html>

(6) The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, "Members and partners"

(7) The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, "Members and partners"

(8) The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, "Organisational structure", <https://www.oecd.org/en/about/organisational-structure.html>

(9) The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, "OECD Secretary-General", <https://www.oecd.org/en/about/secretary-general.html>

(10) United Nations, "Mr. Angel Gurría", <https://sdgs.un.org/panelists/mr-angel-gurria-30350>

(11) The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, "Organisational structure"

(12) *Ibid*

The Council also meets once a year at ministerial level (MCM).¹³ These meetings are chaired by the economy minister of one of the member countries. The minister holding the chair, together with their team, leads the preparations for the Ministerial Meeting in close cooperation with the OECD Secretary-General and the Secretariat. At these meetings, ministers discuss key issues under the heading of the global economy and trade and provide guidance to the organisation in light of the global outlook and current challenges. In this context, the Ministerial Council reviews the organisation's work, sets forward-looking strategies, and approves decisions that will steer its activities.

After the Council, the organisation's most important bodies are its Standing Committees. The Executive Committee, the Budget Committee, the External Relations Committee, and the Technical Committees constitute the OECD's core organs.

The OECD Executive Committee

The Executive Committee is the Council's most important standing committee. Meeting with the participation of Deputy Permanent Representatives—and, depending on the significance of the items on the agenda, Permanent Representatives as well—it reviews the documents, reports, analyses, and draft decisions prepared by hundreds of technical committees. While it approves some of these, it submits major decisions and key documents to the Council for discussion and approval. The Executive Committee is also responsible for preparing for and following up on the Ministerial Council meeting.¹⁴ The Chair of the Executive Committee is elected by the member countries. In 2013, for the first time in the organisation's history, Turkey's Permanent Representative at the time was elected Chair of the Executive Committee.¹⁵

(13) Republic of Turkey Ministry of Foreign Affairs, "The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)", https://www.mfa.gov.tr/iktisadi-isbirligi_ve-gelisme-teskilati-_oecd_.tr.mfa

(14) The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, "The Council and Executive Committee Secretariat", <https://www.oecd.org/en/about/directorates/the-council-and-executive-committee-secretariat.html>

(15) Haberler, "Türkiye'nin OECD'de Temsili", <https://www.haberler.com/guncel/>

The External Relations Committee

The External Relations Committee manages the organisation's global relations and its cooperation with other multilateral and regional institutions, as well as with partner countries. The Chair of the Committee attends many international events on behalf of the Secretary-General and conveys the organisation's positions.

A significant portion of the OECD's work is carried out through more than 300 technical committees and working groups, whose reports, strategy documents, and research findings are submitted to the Executive Committee and the Council for approval.

The Budget Committee

The OECD's activities are financed through a budget funded by member countries' assessed contributions.¹⁶ The contribution formula is based on members' gross national income (GNI). Voluntary contributions are also provided for certain projects.

The OECD Istanbul Centre

The OECD Istanbul Centre was established with contributions provided by Turkey and became operational in June 2022.¹⁷ The Centre supports the implementation of the organisation's regional programmes in Southeast Europe, Eurasia, Southeast Asia, and the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), thereby contributing to the OECD's global outreach.¹⁸

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(16) The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, "Budget", <https://www.oecd.org/en/about/budget.html>

(17) Republic of Turkey Permanent Delegation of Turkey to the OECD, "Büyükelçinin Mesajı", <https://oecd-dt.mfa.gov.tr/Mission/Message>

(18) The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, "OECD Istanbul Centre", <https://www.oecd.org/en/about/programmes/oecd-istanbul-centre.html>

The OECD's Evolution - New Areas of Activity

Among the OECD's objectives are promoting economic growth and stability, strengthening financial stability, and improving living standards in member countries.¹⁹ Removing barriers to international trade—which is directly linked to global economic growth—liberalising trade and ensuring that it is conducted within agreed rules are also among the organisation's aims.²⁰ The OECD also carries out dedicated work on developing countries, focusing on accelerating socio-economic development, strengthening good governance and institutional capacity, and improving the effective use of development assistance.²¹

In recent years, the OECD has not only deepened its expertise in its core fields of economic policy and finance; it has also evolved into an organisation that conducts intergovernmental work, develops good-practice examples, and sets standards in areas such as digital transformation, artificial intelligence, the energy transition, education, migration, population ageing, pension and insurance systems, health, tax regulation, sustainable development, inclusive growth in line with the “Leave No One Behind” principle, and, ultimately, the environment and climate change.²² In this context, drawing on comprehensive evidence and data-based analysis in these fields, the OECD offers policy recommendations to member countries and develops reference norms in areas including education (PISA standards), international tax standards, Base Erosion and Profit Shifting (the BEPS Action Plan),²³ the Principles of Corporate Governance, Anti-Corruption Principles, and artificial intelligence.

(19) The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, “Trust in Global Co-operation: The vision for the OECD for the next decade”, <https://www.oecd.org/en/about/legal/trust-in-global-cooperation-the-vision-for-the-oecd-for-the-next-decade.html>

(20) *Ibid*

(21) *Ibid*

(22) The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, “Leave No One Behind”, https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/leave-no-one-behind_eadd2f8d-en.html?utm

(23) The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, “Base erosion and profit shifting (BEPS)”, <https://www.oecd.org/en/topics/policy-issues/base-erosion-and-profit-shifting-beps.html?utm>

The Consensus Rule

An important point to note here is that the codes, principles, standards, and norms developed by the organisation do not have legal binding force.²⁴ The OECD's real strength stems from the fact that the work carried out in technical committees and working groups, and the reports, principles, and norms produced across various fields, are adopted and implemented by all member countries on the basis of consensus.

OECD-G7-G20 Cooperation

While the OECD has contributed to the work of the G7 since the 1970s, it has, from the 2000s to the present, taken on a role that provides substantial support to the G20 and in certain areas has effectively served as a kind of secretariat. For example, tax-related documents prepared by the organisation's relevant bodies have been submitted to the G20 for approval.

NAEC: New Approaches to Economic Challenges

The OECD is among the organisations tasked with developing solutions to problems arising from global challenges and strains. For example, around a decade ago it carried out a comprehensive project entitled “New Approaches to Economic Challenges” (NAEC) to examine the root causes of the 2008 financial crisis and to prevent similar crises in the future.²⁵ Through this project, the Organisation sought to improve what is, in effect, the largely absent fair and generous face of capitalism and the liberal economic order. It also focused on developing the concept of “inclusive growth”, aimed at embracing vulnerable groups, such as women, children, older persons, minorities, and migrants, within and across countries, enabling them to benefit from economic growth, and reducing poverty. In essence, as noted earlier, the inclusive growth agenda was intended to prevent a repetition of

(24) The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, “Arrangement and sector understandings”, <https://www.oecd.org/en/topics/arrangement-and-sector-understandings.html>

(25) The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, “New Approaches to Economic Challenges”, <https://www.oecd.org/en/about/programmes/naec.html>

the 2008 crisis and to partially “humanise” the capitalist order, but it has not yet succeeded.

Critical Minerals

Most recently, the OECD has launched an initiative aimed at ensuring access to critical minerals and rare earth elements,²⁶ an issue that, due to China’s dominance in the sector and its actions, poses a serious challenge for Western countries and demands urgent solutions, and at developing policy responses to potential disruptions in supply chains. It remains to be seen to what extent this initiative, entitled the “OECD Critical Minerals Initiative for Sustainable Growth and Development”, will help address the difficulties encountered in this field.

A similar effort is also being carried out by the International Energy Agency (IEA).

As can be seen, beyond its global economic outlook and country reports, the OECD, much as it has in the past, continues today to work toward producing solutions to global problems. Drawing on initiatives by the Secretariat and/or guidance from member countries, the Organisation seeks to maintain its role by undertaking comprehensive work, leveraging the contributions of thousands of experts and its extensive data repository.

Peer Review

One of the OECD activities that stands out is its peer reviews. Under this framework, each member country is subject to review at regular intervals by experts designated in advance. In the member country under review, an assessment is carried out in areas such as economic and trade policy, education, employment, innovation, energy security, and environmental and climate policies, and the positive or negative developments recorded compared to the previous reporting period are evaluated.²⁷

(26) The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development , “Making critical minerals work for sustainable growth and development”, <https://www.oecd.org/en/topics/sustainable-mining-for-development.html>

(27) The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development , “Development co-operation peer reviews and learning”, <https://www.oecd.org/en/topics/>

In this context, review missions are conducted to member countries, and meetings are held with relevant ministries and institutional officials, as well as with representatives of the private sector.²⁸ Reports are then prepared covering issues such as the country's strengths and weaknesses and the suitability of its investment environment. These reports are discussed in the relevant OECD committee and, where necessary, further consultations are held with the country authorities after the review in order to resolve any differences in views and approaches regarding the country report to be published.

The OECD Forum

The OECD Forum is a high-level dialogue platform organised each year by the OECD Secretariat.²⁹ The Forum is typically held in parallel with the OECD Ministerial Council Meeting and is important for bringing together the public and private sectors, academia, civil society, international organisations, and business leaders. The Forum's main aim is to enable a thorough discussion of inclusive and sustainable policies in the face of global challenges and change, and to connect the OECD's analytical work with a broad range of stakeholders.³⁰ In other words, the Forum provides space for open exchange of views outside the formal negotiation process and serves as an important bridge between policy makers and other stakeholders. It also increases the visibility of the organisation's activities and of its analyses and recommendations on a range of current issues.

While the agenda varies from year to year, topics addressed in recent years include the global economic outlook and growth, energy security, the green energy transition, the climate crisis and its adverse effects, artificial intelligence and innovation, digitalisation, critical minerals and rare earth elements, inequalities and inclusive growth, global governance, and the fight against corruption.

development-co-operation-peer-reviews-and-learning.html

(28) *Ibid*

(29) The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, "OECD Global Forum on Local Development", <https://www.oecd.org/en/networks/oecd-global-forum-on-local-development.html>

(30) *Ibid*

The Financial Action Task Force (FATF)

The Financial Action Task Force (FATF) was established at the G7 Summit held in Paris in 1989.³¹ While its primary objective is to combat money laundering, over time the fight against terrorist financing and against the financing of the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction has also become part of its core areas of work.³²

The FATF is a structure based within the OECD. It operates at the OECD headquarters in Paris and its Secretariat is provided by the OECD. However, although it works very closely with the Organisation, the FATF is legally independent, which makes it possible for non-OECD countries to participate in its work. Tasked with preventing the misuse of the global financial system and with establishing common minimum standards among countries, it works closely with institutions such as the United Nations, the IMF, the World Bank, and Interpol.

One of the FATF's key activities is to assess member countries in terms of technical compliance and effectiveness of implementation. As a result of this process, countries are placed into the categories of regular monitoring, the grey list, or the blacklist.³³

FATF decisions and the standards it sets are not legally binding. Nevertheless, their impact is considerable. For example, they can have serious consequences for international credit and fund flows, a country's risk premium (CDS), and foreign direct investment.

The International Energy Agency (IEA)

The International Energy Agency (IEA) was established under the OECD umbrella in 1974 to prevent a repetition of the oil embargo triggered by the 1973 Yom Kippur War and of the oil crisis that followed.³⁴ The organisation,

(31) The Financial Action Task Force, "The FATF", <https://www.fatf-gafi.org/en/the-fatf.html>

(32) *Ibid*

(33) *Ibid*

(34) The International Energy Agency, "History", <https://www.iea.org/about/history>

whose name was coined by Henry Kissinger, aimed to develop common policies and measures against sudden disruptions in oil supply and sharp price increases faced by developed countries that were highly dependent on oil imports.

The 1973 oil crisis caused serious bottlenecks in global oil markets. In response, consumer countries established an organisation designed to serve their own interests and priorities, described as a “consumer watchdog”, with a focus on uninterrupted oil supply and energy security³⁵. One of the most important obligations undertaken by member countries was the requirement to hold a three-month strategic oil stock.³⁶ This stock was seen as a buffer to offset the adverse effects and instability that punitive actions by OPEC member countries could cause in global oil markets.

The IEA’s initial core objective was oil supply security, but its mission and areas of activity have expanded over time. In this context, ensuring energy security, helping shape energy policies for member countries and providing recommendations in areas where gaps are identified, and monitoring energy markets through the preparation of energy data, statistics, and comprehensive reports such as the annual World Energy Outlook have become part of the Agency’s work.

As noted earlier, in response to new developments and challenges, the Agency has broadened its scope and now develops evidence based analysis and recommendations across a wide range of areas, including oil, natural gas, coal, renewable energy, energy efficiency, the Net Zero 2050 energy transition, nuclear energy, electricity markets, battery technology, the relationship between the climate crisis and energy sources, emissions reduction, clean energy technologies, critical minerals, rare earth elements, and supply chains. Another important function of the IEA is to monitor the energy policies of major non-member energy players and partners, and to maintain close dialogue with those countries.

Turkey is among the IEA’s 16 founding members.³⁷ Latvia is the most recent

(35) The International Energy Agency , “Mission”, <https://www.iea.org/about/mission>

(36) The International Energy Agency , “Mission”, <https://www.iea.org/about/mission>

(37) The International Energy Agency , “History”

country to join the organisation as its 32nd member. Brazil, an “associate” member and one of the major global energy players, submitted an official application for full membership on the margins of COP 30 held in Belém. Brazil’s accession would mark an important milestone in the IEA’s evolution into a truly global organisation. The Agency’s partner countries with which it cooperates are Argentina, the PRC, Egypt, Indonesia, Kenya, Morocco, Senegal, Singapore, South Africa, India, Thailand, and Ukraine. Norway, a net energy exporter, holds a special status under a concluded agreement and has been a member of the Agency since 1974.

The IEA is currently headed by Dr Fatih Birol as Executive Director.³⁸ He served for many years as the Agency’s Chief Economist and has been in office since 2015. The modernisation and expansion process he initiated at the Agency gained momentum and depth in 2023 and 2024. In this context, Birol has set out key goals such as opening the Agency more fully to developing economies, strengthening cooperation with those countries, redefining energy security, which is the Agency’s core responsibility, in line with today’s rapidly changing conditions, and leading the transition to a cleaner and more sustainable energy system, thereby contributing to efforts to address the climate crisis.

In sum, the International Energy Agency, founded 51 years ago with the participation of 16 founding countries, began its work with a relatively narrow mandate focused on ensuring oil supply security and monitoring oil markets, while prioritising the interests of consumer countries. Over time, it diversified and expanded its areas of work, increased its membership, and became a major organisation producing reliable studies and analyses on energy issues. In this context, the Agency’s rise as a global actor across the full spectrum of energy and its increased visibility have been made possible by Executive Director Dr Fatih Birol’s effective leadership, the timely strategy and policy adjustments he introduced, and, above all, the close relationships he has built with leading figures in the energy world and with political leaders.

(38) The International Energy Agency, “Dr. Fatih Birol”, <https://iea.blob.core.windows.net/assets/24f4751c-50d1-4f52-ac88-14e6bd11d3ba/DrFatihBirol-Biography.pdf>

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PAST AND FUTURE OF THE UNITED NATIONS

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In the 1920s, the famous Italian political philosopher Antonio Gramsci said, “The old world is dying, and the new world struggles to be born: now is the time of monsters.”¹

These words evoke the international crisis we are currently experiencing, while also prompting reflection on the factors that have triggered it. This period is generally understood to have begun with the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. The “end of history” envisioned by Francis Fukuyama after the Cold War -namely, the belief that ideological conflict would give way to a peaceful era based on liberal democracy and the free-market economy- lasted barely a decade, before the rupture created by the September 11 attacks ushered in a new era.²

Ideologies gradually gave way to identity politics. As ethnic and sectarian polarization intensified, seemingly confirming Samuel Huntington’s “clash of civilizations”³ thesis, and conflicts expanded to include terrorist movements reaching Western Europe, another source of instability emerged in parallel. The 2008 financial crisis revealed how globalization, despite fostering political and social liberalization, had deepened economic inequalities and triggered mass migration flows from the Global South. The populist right gained momentum alongside the growing influence of social media, and the

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- (1) Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, ed. and trans. Quentin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1971), 276. (Paraphrased in popular culture as “time of monsters” by Slavoj Žižek)
 - (2) Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (New York: Free Press, 1992), 45.
 - (3) Samuel P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996), 28.

abandonment of “politically correct” discourse and behavior, most visibly in the United States under President Trump, began to shape international relations. As a result, the liberal world order based on international law, established after the Second World War, has increasingly been sacrificed to the pre-1914 logic of “might makes right,” as democracy, development, and human rights are openly disregarded.

How long this period will last and how it will ultimately unfold remain uncertain. For this reason, many scholars of international relations describe the present era as one of “great uncertainty.” The most serious casualty of this uncertainty, as starkly illustrated by the wars in Ukraine and Gaza, has been the erosion of international law and international humanitarian law, together with the damage inflicted on the international institutions founded upon—and responsible for upholding—these norms and principles.

Today, as it marks its eightieth anniversary in 2025, the United Nations system, widely regarded as the cornerstone of the post-Second World War international order, is facing the most severe existential crisis in its history. Here, the term “system” refers not only to the United Nations as an organization, but to the broader institutional architecture of which it forms a part. Beyond the UN’s principal organs—namely the General Assembly, the Security Council, the Economic and Social Council, the International Court of Justice, and the Secretariat—the United Nations system includes more than thirty entities. These comprise subsidiary organs and programmes including peace operations; and bodies such as UNHCR, UNRWA, UNICEF etc. and specialized agencies established at the initiative of member states, including the IMF, WHO, UNESCO, IAEA and ILO. Over the course of eighty years, this system has operated in four main areas: the maintenance of peace and security, the promotion of human rights, social and economic cooperation, and contributions to the development of international law. A general assessment suggests that the first of these, apart from preventing an all-out war, has achieved limited success, largely due to the structure of the Security Council. The second has been effective in establishing norms and principles, but weak in implementation, while the third and fourth, though less widely recognized, have delivered relatively the most successful outcomes. Although the system’s limits are defined by the policies of sovereign member states, over

which it possesses no enforcement power, as well as by growing budgetary constraints and structural problems, multilateral organizations -above all the United Nations- have nonetheless left an unprecedented imprint on international relations since the 1940s.

The most compelling evidence lies in the numbers. Since its founding, the United Nations has carried out more than 40,000 missions. These have included operations in 190 countries; the deployment of 68,000 peacekeepers; the delivery of 50 billion US dollars in humanitarian aid; and assistance to 139 million people fleeing war, hunger, and persecution. The UN has also supported 56 million people through social assistance programmes, improved the lives of 440 million children, and saved the lives of 3 million people through vaccination campaigns. In addition, it has assisted 49,000 victims of torture in 90 countries, helped protect the electoral rights of 377 million people in 50 countries, contributed to the adoption of 80 human rights treaties, and defended the rights of women and girls in 83 countries.⁴ Despite this extensive record, significant deficiencies remain, both structural and operational, and addressing them is a matter of urgency.

The UN System at Eighty

On the occasion of the United Nations' eightieth anniversary, the Summit of the Future was convened at UN Headquarters in New York in September 2024. Pursuant to General Assembly resolution 79/318, a comprehensive reform programme entitled the *UN80 Initiative*, prepared under the leadership of Secretary-General António Guterres, was issued as a summit outcome document built on three pillars: the Pact for the Future, the Global Digital Compact, and the Declaration on Future Generations.⁵

The introduction to the Pact for the Future underscores the United Nations' awareness that the international system is undergoing a period of profound transformation and successive crises, and expresses the intention to turn

(4) UN80 Initiative Workstream 2: Report on the Mandate Implementation Review, United Nations, New York, September 2024.

(5) *U.N. Summit of the Future, Outcome Documents: Pact for the Future, Global Digital Compact and Declaration on the Future Generations* (New York: United Nations, September 2024).

this moment into an opportunity for renewal. It emphasizes the need for a new beginning in multilateralism for the future of humanity. In this context, sustainable development, peace and security, and human rights are defined, within the framework of international law and fidelity to the founding principles of the United Nations, as the Organization's three fundamental pillars.

In other words, the message conveyed is that neither the persistent poverty of the Global South, nor the wars in Ukraine and Gaza, nor violations of international humanitarian law and human rights will “deter the United Nations from its ideals.” Whether this will ultimately prove to be utopian, however, remains to be seen, because ultimately it is the policies of member states that have rendered the UN insufficient in all three of these areas; paradoxically, the very states that established the Organization's fundamental principles have also become their greatest adversaries. At the same time, it is evident that the reform programme enters a second phase with the *UN80 Initiative Workstream 2: The Mandate Implementation Review*, which constitutes an objective exercise in structural self-criticism. Thus, while core principles are being reaffirmed, internal institutional change is also being explicitly addressed.

Let us examine these in turn:

The Pact for the Future is structured around five sections comprising a total of 56 action plans and sets out the substantive priorities of the reform agenda. The first section, entitled “Sustainable Development and Development Financing,” sets out twelve action plans aimed at fully achieving the objectives of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and, in doing so, eliminating challenges such as poverty, hunger, inequality, and the climate crisis, while mobilizing the resources required to meet these goals. The section on “International Peace and Security” puts forward fifteen action plans which, in addition to reaffirming the core principles of the UN Charter, respond to pressing global realities by focusing on the resolution of humanitarian crises, the protection of civilians -particularly women and young people- in situations of armed conflict, and the fight against terrorism and organized crime. The third section, titled “Science, Technology, Innovation and Digital Cooperation,” consists of five action plans designed to enhance the United

Nations' role in these fields and to strengthen its support for member states. The section on "Youth and Future Generations" proposes four action plans in a domain addressed for the first time, focusing on providing social and economic support to younger generations, safeguarding their rights, and ensuring their participation in both national and international processes.

The final and most comprehensive section, entitled "Transforming Global Governance," puts forward eighteen action plans. These include, most notably, reform of the Security Council; the revitalization of the General Assembly, which has gained considerable momentum in recent years, as reflected, for example, in the requirement that any state exercising its veto in the Security Council must explain its decision before the Assembly; the acceleration of the Economic and Social Council's work on sustainable development; the strengthening of the UN system as a whole; and the adaptation of the international financial architecture so that it can shoulder the demands of today's global challenges.

Annex I of the summit document, the *Global Digital Compact*, contains five action plans based on core approaches. These include expanding the digital economy for the benefit of all humanity, creating an open, transparent, secure, and human-rights-respecting digital environment, and developing international governance of artificial intelligence for the good of humankind. Annex II, the *Declaration on Future Generations*, frames all the goals mentioned so far as a promise to younger generations.

It is a fundamental reality that the realization of all these goals and principles depends not only on the political will of member states and the resources available, but equally on the United Nations' ability, as an organization, to put its own house in order.

Accordingly, after setting out the updated set of goals described above, the *UN80 Initiative* released a report entitled *Mandate Implementation Review*, which outlines the steps required to make the UN system more coordinated, efficient, and results-oriented.⁶

(6) United Nations, *UN80 Initiative Workstream 2: Report on the Mandate Implementation Review* (New York: United Nations, September 2024).

At the beginning of the report, the term “mandate” is clarified. It encompasses the tasks assigned to various units through member-state votes in the UN’s principal organs or subsidiary bodies, such as establishing peacekeeping missions, achieving development objectives, responding to humanitarian crises, and advancing human rights. The report examines the broad responsibilities assigned by member states to different UN entities in three stages: mandate creation, mandate delivery, and mandate review. It identifies problems and proposes solutions at each stage.

At the mandate creation stage, a fundamental problem is the lack of overall visibility, that is, the inability of member states to immediately see how many such mandates exist across the UN system as a whole, leading to overlap and unnecessary losses of time and resources. This coordination deficit needs to be addressed by the United Nations through digital means and the use of artificial intelligence. In addition, design flaws at the creation stage can significantly reduce the effectiveness of mandates, including excessively long and complex decision texts and inadequate budgetary foresight. The annual word count of UN decisions has now exceeded 3 million. These issues must be addressed from the outset, and the Secretary-General must be granted greater flexibility in this regard.

At the implementation stage, what stands out is an inflation of meetings and reports, coupled with a flawed division of labor. The United Nations hosts an average of 27,000 meetings each year, at a cost of approximately 360 million US dollars! Moreover, sub-units operating in different fields often perform the same tasks without being aware of one another, further exacerbating this inflation. These problems can only be addressed by granting greater structural flexibility to management bodies, introducing streamlined reporting formats, and adopting “smart” programme planning.

At the review stage, two fundamental problems stand out: shortcomings in system-wide mandate evaluation and, as a consequence, limited accountability. Although oversight mechanisms exist at the level of individual units, there is neither formal coherence among them nor an automatic flow of information to a central authority. Some mandates have continued for decades, as there is no obligation to bring them to a conclusion or to define a clear time frame. Every mission should therefore have a fixed duration

and be required to submit a final outcome report to headquarters in a standardized format. Only under these conditions can accountability be effectively ensured.

Overall, improved coordination, cost savings, and more effective organization are required, and responsibility for this rests with the United Nations itself. Mandate decisions must also be taken by member states in a more deliberate manner and with clear, concrete objectives. The Security Council has paid particular attention to mandate-related problems and, as early as 2015, sought to address them by drawing attention to the so-called “Christmas tree” phenomenon, namely, the overloading of a UN peacekeeping operation with tasks that exceed its capacity, as underlined in the report of the *High-Level Independent Panel on Peace Operations*. Efforts are therefore under way to limit and streamline such mandates.

The next, and third, phase of the *UN80 Initiative* is intended to encompass structural reforms and greater coherence among programmes, while also reshaping the United Nations’ field operations. In this context, an evaluation will be conducted at the direction of the Secretary-General with a view to enhancing the effectiveness of UN regional offices and the Secretary-General’s Special Envoys. In May 2025, a “confidential” internal UN document related to this process was obtained by the Reuters news agency and subsequently leaked to the public.⁷ Drawing on the overlaps, resource losses, and fragmented mandate structures identified in earlier stages of the reform process, the document proposes a series of far-reaching measures.

These include grouping and merging numerous subsidiary bodies and specialized agencies according to their areas of activity, for example, the consolidation of the World Food Programme, UNICEF, the World Health Organization, and the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees into a single humanitarian organization, a proposal that has already met resistance from these entities on the grounds of preserving specialization. The document also calls for regional offices and Special Envoys operating in the same regions to function within unified structures, such as merging the

(7) Michelle Nichols, “UN eyes big overhaul amid funding crisis, internal memo shows,” *Reuters*, May 1, 2025, <https://www.reuters.com/world/un-eyes-major-overhaul-amid-funding-crisis-internal-memo-shows-2025-05-01/>

UN Office to the African Union with the Office of the UN Special Envoy for the Great Lakes Region; combining the UN Office for Central Africa with the UN Stabilization Mission in Central Africa and the UN Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo; and bringing all UN bodies based in Rome under a single institutional roof.

In addition, it proposes relocating staff, other than those assigned to the Security Council and the General Assembly, from costly hubs such as New York and Geneva to alternative locations, and reducing the overall number of international civil servants, a process that has already begun in many UN entities as a result of budgetary constraints. These structural changes would, in turn, automatically lead to reductions in ancillary costs: fewer meetings would mean fewer simultaneous interpreters and lower expenditures on conference facilities and technical equipment; fewer reports would reduce the need for secretarial and translation services, and even paper costs would decline.

The driving force behind the *UN80 Initiative* has been the United States, which has long criticized the Organization's structure and expenditure patterns. The United States currently owes 1.5 billion US dollars to the UN's regular budget and 1.2 billion US dollars to the peacekeeping budget, and funding cuts under the Trump administration are expected to compound this situation.

Concluding Remarks

Yet it is worth emphasizing that, as history has repeatedly shown, leaders come and go, regimes change, and ideologies collapse; but legitimate institutions, even when wounded, endure, remain in place, and transform themselves by learning from experience. In the very hall from which President Trump openly criticized the United Nations in his 2025 General Assembly address, Cuba's leader Fidel Castro once turned a fifteen-minute speaking slot into a 269-minute ideological marathon in the 1960s, and it was in this same chamber that Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev made headlines by removing his shoe and pounding it on the desk in protest. Today, these episodes are remembered as nothing more than historical anecdotes. Whereas the United

Nations, despite all its shortcomings and the criticisms it faces, remains firmly in place and is actively engaged in an effort at renewal.

Despite all obstacles and challenges, the United Nations and similar multilateral organizations are today more necessary and more important for humanity than ever before. Italian President Sergio Mattarella articulated this view in a recent address to the German Bundestag, where he spoke as guest of honour at Germany's National Day of Mourning commemorations for the victims of war:

*“Today, the representatives of the global conscience are multilateral actors such as the United Nations, the International Criminal Court, peace missions, and humanitarian organizations. Multilateralism, contrary to the dismissive view of powerful states, is not ‘nothing but bureaucracy’; it is the language of shared responsibility. It is the guarantee of the value of every human life. Above all, it is a means of protection against the strong crushing the weak. Let us not forget: national sovereignty does not mean the freedom to oppress others. National interest is not defended by wronging the innocent. From Kyiv to Gaza, a war of aggression is always a crime. Therefore, multilateralism is the greatest guardian of peace.”*⁸

These words, which reflect the voice of democratic Europe, outline a roadmap for the future of the United Nations.

(8) Discorso del Presidente della Repubblica, Sergio Mattarella, in Occasione della Cerimonia del Giorno del Lutto Nazionale, Berlino, 16/11/2025, Presidenza della Repubblica, *Il Quirinale*, <https://www.quirinale.it/elementi/144987>

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THE WORLD'S PAINFUL TRANSFORMATION PROCESS

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Introduction: Where Do We Stand?

As we complete the first quarter of the 21st century, the world we are accustomed to is being transformed before our very eyes. We are bystanders witnessing how the established order of the previous century is becoming increasingly obsolete. The system created after 1945, which has continued to function, albeit maladroitly, to this day, can no longer keep up with current developments. This transformation is not merely about technological breakthroughs like the internet, artificial intelligence, Bitcoin, or drones that have changed our lives. It's mostly about power and the changes it is going through. With the end of the Cold War in the early 1990s, the balance of power in international relations has shifted twice.

For a certain period, the United States remained the sole global superpower. Yet over time, China emerged as a competitor, and middle powers gradually became more visible and effective.

Russia, having lost its global power status after the collapse of the Soviet Union, tried to reclaim its former sphere of influence under a new identity.

During this short period, there was a prevailing belief that old conflicts were now behind us, especially in Europe where the two global wars began. The expansion of the European Union, the creation of the monetary union, and the introduction of free movement fostered a sense of optimism.

However, the optimism that followed the end of the Cold War did not create lasting stability. While globalization fueled economic growth, it also

produced inequalities, regional tensions, and identity-based conflicts, all of which have become increasingly visible. This exposed how fragile the post-Cold War “end of history” narrative truly was. Looking back today, we can see that the end of the Cold War was not merely the closing of one chapter, but the beginning of a more complex, unpredictable, and multi-actor era.

Even those countries once called the “Third World,” seeking not to be trapped between East and West, had limited room to manoeuvre. This narrow garment no longer fit anyone. As the Cold War receded those countries which were in either one camp or the other found new freedom to act.

Eighty years after the creation of the international institutions led by the United States, those bodies have become unable to cope with emerging problems or to offer effective solutions. They have failed to resolve conflicts between states, especially when those conflicts involved, directly or indirectly, one of the permanent members of the United Nations Security Council. As a result, the effectiveness of international institutions declined over time.

Moreover, the world now faces multiple, simultaneous global crises: interstate conflicts continue (even with changing actors), while migration and asylum pressures, energy issues, climate-related disasters, and technological challenges such as artificial intelligence and cryptocurrencies, along with trade disruptions and rising inequality, affect us all.

In the past, we also had problems but fewer and mostly local ones. Today, in a deeply interconnected world, these challenges have become global in nature.

Challenges We Face

Because everyone now has instant access to information, problems no longer remain local. We even see that different generations view events differently, with younger people becoming more active through social media. Priorities and values vary not only between countries but also between generations.

The speed of the digital age has transformed not only the flow of information but also public perception and societies’ responses to crises. Today’s youth,

unlike earlier generations, are less patient, more demanding, and expect rapid solutions, a reality that deeply influences politics, international relations, and social priorities.

If we were to define our time in a single word, it would be complexity or perhaps uncertainty. Another hallmark of this era is unpredictability. Many geopolitical crises can no longer be explained through traditional power balances, as we now live in a world where non-state actors, technology companies, and even individual entrepreneurs can exert global influence. This limits the ability of states to calculate outcomes and forces international relations into a constant mode of “crisis management.”

Today’s economy is no longer built solely on trade in goods. We now operate within global ecosystems, dynamic networks of knowledge, skills, technology, and trust that have deepened mutual interdependence. Geography remains relevant, but it is no longer decisive; geopolitical outcomes depend increasingly on leader-to-leader relations rather than purely on geography, power, or natural resources.

Moreover, leaders’ personal ambitions often outweigh national interests and this trend seems to continue. Ideologies have been replaced by egos. Instead of the institutions and rules established after the Second World War, politics, both domestic and international, is increasingly shaped by the personal ambitions of leaders.

Erosion of the Post-War Order

The order built by the United States after World War II is now being dismantled by Washington itself, as it no longer serves U.S. interests. During the Cold War, the world appeared largely black and white, with little room for shades of grey, broadly divided between East and West, Communism and Capitalism. Although there were groupings such as the Third World or “developing countries,” most states still aligned with, or leaned toward, one camp.

Europe relied on the United States for a long time for its security and took this for granted. As the Soviet threat continued for over four decades,

European countries became accustomed to the American shield. Yet, with the Cold War ending, Washington soon decided that Russia was no longer an existential threat and insisted that other NATO partners increase their contributions. Europe did not understand or simply ignored this change and today it suffers from its own hubris. It was only Russia's invasion of Ukraine and the decisions of the second Administration of President Trump that the EU is finally rising from its stupor.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the blocs disappeared, allowing countries greater flexibility yet relations became more intricate and unpredictable. Regional alliances emerged: Israel, for instance, aligns with Muslim Azerbaijan against Christian Armenia, while Iran has drawn closer to Armenia.

The world has thus become both multipolar and multi-layered. Power is no longer distributed only among the U.S., European Union, China, or Russia. Middle powers such as Brazil, India, Turkey, the Gulf states, and South Africa pursue multi-alignment policies engaging on an issue-by-issue basis rather than binding themselves to a single bloc.

India, for example, buys discounted Russian oil while courting Western investment and technology; Saudi Arabia builds close ties with the U.S., even as China mediates between Riyadh and Tehran.

This is not entirely new, weaker states have always sought to balance stronger powers against one another. Today's so-called Global South follows a similar approach.

The Return of Hard Power

The illusion that "soft power" had replaced traditional force after the Cold War has proven false. Hard power is back, evident not only in Russia's invasion of Ukraine but earlier in the U.S. interventions in Iraq and Afghanistan. "Frozen conflicts," such as in Karabakh, have been resolved militarily after decades of failed diplomacy. Azerbaijan, strengthened economically and militarily, took advantage of international inaction to reclaim Karabakh and peace with Armenia was reached without the help of any international organization.

This return of hard power does not only mean military action. It also includes the aggressive use of non-military tools such as economic sanctions, technology embargoes, and energy leverage, all instruments of coercion in today's global politics. Energy prices and critical mineral exports have become tools of foreign policy, illustrating both the fragility of global supply chains and the accelerating search for strategic autonomy.

Efforts by the European Union to strengthen its defense capacity, by China to build its own technological ecosystem, and by the U.S. to reshore production are all part of this broader trend.

Decline of International Institutions

Eighty years on, the international system created after World War II has lost much of its effectiveness. Institutions once meant to maintain peace now often fail to act. The UN Security Council, paralyzed by the veto powers of its permanent members, has become dysfunctional. Other bodies, such as the World Trade Organization, have also lost their authority as dispute mechanisms no longer function. Neither the UN nor the EU played a meaningful role in the Russia-Ukraine or Israel-Hamas wars; China stayed passive, and again, the burden fell to the U.S., whose influence also has limits.

The decline stems partly from the fact that today's global power distribution no longer reflects the political and economic realities of 1945. Regions such as Africa, Latin America, and South Asia remain underrepresented, fueling perceptions of injustice in global governance.

Efforts like the G7, G20, and BRICS groupings have emerged to fill the gap, but with limited success. BRICS itself is divided, particularly between China and India.

U.S. Leadership and Global Drift

President Trump's return to power in 2025 has accelerated global uncertainty. No longer constrained by advisers or checks as he was in his first term, he has taken Washington in an unpredictable direction. Trump devalues alliances,

tolerating NATO only reluctantly. Although the U.S. will host the 2026 G20, his personal agenda dominates.

When South Africa hosted the 2025 G20 Summit, the U.S. sent no representatives; Trump later announced that he would not invite South Africa to the 2026 Summit in Miami.

His “America First” policies continue to disrupt trade, threaten partners and rivals alike with tariffs, and weaken global cooperation on shared challenges like climate change, creating a vacuum others struggle to fill.

A Leaderless World

The world today faces not only conflicts but also overlapping crises, from public health to climate change to migration. To cope with these issues, two options remain. Either existing international institutions will reform and renew to make them more representative and effective or allow ad hoc coalitions of willing countries to uphold agreed rules among themselves.

A global leadership of the kind once provided by the United States no longer exists. For decades, U.S. influence rested on its economic, military, and cultural power and even when acting in its own interest, it brought together like-minded nations. As a growing power China accepted this system because it benefited from it. Now, the U.S. sees that same order as working against its interests and seeks to dismantle it.

In November 2025, the U.S. National Security Strategy explicitly stated that Washington no longer intends to act in coordination with others, even when cooperation would serve its interests, signaling a retreat from global engagement on issues like climate or public health among others.

Rethinking Common Values

Much has been said about “shared values.” But are they truly shared? Is a global society based on values possible and whose values would those be?

Are we referring to human rights, freedom of expression, gender equality, or to sovereignty and security? Liberal and illiberal visions now clash. If we

are to speak of “global values,” they would need to be defined in a way that reflects majority perspectives, a prospect that is both difficult to attain and debatable in essence.

Values differ between Afghanistan and Europe, just as they do in reactions to Russia’s invasion of Ukraine. Many in the Global South see that war not as aggression but as a conflict within the Western sphere. Thus, “universal values” are increasingly contested, as cultural and political boundaries reassert themselves in the digital age.

Even within societies, polarization deepens; value-based divisions are straining democratic institutions worldwide.

Conclusion: Between Crisis and Renewal

Humanity is now in a period that requires governing, innovating, and cooperating on a planetary scale to ensure collective well-being.

Only through joint effort can we harness the benefits and mitigate the dangers of artificial intelligence, nuclear power, and climate change.

The coming years will be critical as the main challenges would be to reform international institutions, develop new models of cooperation and redefine interdependence among states.

If the system fails to adapt to technological and political change, fragmentation and regionalization will intensify. For now, problems will likely be handled through ad hoc arrangements until a new equilibrium emerges.

This transition will be painful, but history shows that crises often pave the way for renewal. Today’s uncertainties may yet become the foundation for a more inclusive and functional global order in the future.

Global Relations Forum (GRF) is an independent, non-profit membership association committed to being a platform for engaging, informing and stimulating its members and all interested individuals in all matters related to international affairs and global issues.

GRF was founded with the enthusiastic support of 40 accomplished Turkish men and women who have assumed prominent roles in international fora and have received international recognition for their efforts throughout their careers. The founding members include former secretaries of state, university presidents, members of the armed forces, central bank governors, ECHR justice and retired ambassadors as well as leading business leaders, scholars, artists, and journalists. It was officially registered on May 11th 2009 and its first General Assembly was held on November 9th, 2009.

GRF intends to advance a culture that rewards the fertile tension between passion for intellectual diversity and dedication to innovative and objective synthesis. It nurtures uninhibited curiosity, analytic inquiry, rational debate and constructive demeanor as the elemental constituents in all its endeavors. It contributes to the shared understanding of and aspiration for humanity's path to peace, prosperity and progress as an accessible, inclusive and fair process for all.

GRF does this in a variety of ways: by sponsoring Task Forces and policy reports; by convening meetings with prominent global leaders; by organizing roundtables with experts; and by fostering cooperation with global counterparts as well as through its community programs. GRF also uses its website and other channels as a vibrant forum for sharing independent analyses on current events involving international relations and Turkish foreign policy.

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