

Global Political Developments in 2025

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The year **2025 proved to be profoundly disruptive and transformative for international politics**. Shifts in global power balances, the weakening of international organizations, the deepening of regional crises, and the rise of leader-centric politics pushed world affairs into a new era dominated by uncertainty and competition. Against this backdrop, one of the most consequential developments of the year was **the return of U.S. President Donald Trump to power for a second term** and the far-reaching implications of this development for the international system. The United States began to pursue an openly hegemonic approach, the repercussions of which were felt globally and influenced the behavior of other major powers.

Donald Trump's return to the presidency in January 2025 marked a fundamental shift in the United States' role in world affairs. By overturning established diplomatic practices, Trump adopted rhetoric and policies that reduced U.S. commitment to traditional alliances, including NATO. America's leadership role within the global security architecture weakened noticeably. Trade wars and tariff policies returned to the forefront, and the extensive use of economic pressure against both allies and rivals generated widespread uncertainty in the global economy. By distancing itself from international cooperation on climate change, public health, and technology, the Trump administration significantly reduced the U.S. role in addressing global challenges, creating a substantial leadership vacuum.

As a result, Trump's return reinforced a broader trend toward a **leader-driven, unpredictable, non-institutional, rule-averse, and hegemonic international order**. This tendency, observable in many other countries as well, is likely to persist into 2026.

In this evolving environment, the **European Union which is caught between the United States, Russia, and China, struggled to define its role on the global stage**. In particular, it was compelled to retreat in trade matters under U.S. pressure. France experienced repeated changes of government, while President Macron's weakening domestic position led him to focus increasingly on strengthening the EU's external role. Following the February 2025 elections, Friedrich Merz became Chancellor of Germany as leader of the CDU/CSU. The new German government adopted a more security-focused foreign policy and a more cautious approach toward relations with the United States.

As doubts grew about U.S. reliability within NATO, debates within the EU over defense integration and strategic autonomy gained momentum. While the war in Ukraine continued, the EU's limited military capabilities became increasingly apparent. At the same time, during the final European Council of the year, progress was made in securing financial support to sustain Ukraine's ability to continue fighting. Another major challenge confronting the EU was the renewed escalation of migration pressures and the corresponding rise of far-right movements across several member states. The likelihood of far-right parties coming to power in additional European countries increased significantly.

The **Russia–Ukraine war entered a new phase in 2025**. As the conflict approached its fourth year, Russia made advances in certain regions, while Ukraine maintained its resistance and even managed to conduct strikes deep inside Russian territory. International support mechanisms weakened, with the reduction of the U.S. role representing a critical turning point. President Trump’s wavering and at times pro-Russian stance affected not only Ukraine but also EU policy calculations. While Ukraine continued its efforts to secure a ceasefire, President Putin’s uncompromising position contributed to the prolongation of the war.

Another major flashpoint emerged in the **Taiwan Strait**, where China increased its military activities. The Trump administration’s more explicit support for Taiwan once again hardened relations between Beijing and Washington. The emergence of a more nationalist government in Japan and its recent rhetoric added to regional tensions, while South Korea moved to strengthen its security posture. The possibility of renewed U.S.–North Korea engagement reminiscent of Trump’s first term, caused unease in Seoul. Unlike during Trump’s initial presidency, U.S.–India relations deteriorated, while Washington’s policy toward Pakistan evolved in the opposite direction.

In the **Middle East**, the Israel– Hamas war continued to shape regional dynamics throughout 2025. Trump’s strong support for Israel, the bombing of Iran, and subsequent efforts to force a ceasefire in Gaza reduced tensions but provided only temporary and superficial relief. Saudi Arabia and the Gulf states, unsettled by U.S. policy uncertainty, moved to diversify their relations with China and Russia. Iran’s regional influence declined following blows dealt to Hamas and Hezbollah, the collapse of the Syrian regime, and strikes on nuclear facilities. In the immediate neighborhood, following the overthrow of the Assad regime, Syria’s new leadership sought to consolidate control, though the country remained de facto divided. In the Caucasus, normalization steps between Azerbaijan and Armenia progressed after the Karabakh war, while Turkey attempted to mediate between Afghanistan and Pakistan.

Although elections were held in many African countries, political instability and military interventions continued to define the continent’s overall outlook. Diplomatic tensions during South Africa’s G20 presidency led to a noticeable deterioration in U.S.–Africa relations.

Decisions were taken for **Turkey to host both the NATO Summit and COP31 in 2026**. Heightened concern over the threat posed by Russia prompted the EU to move closer to Turkey. However, this did not translate into tangible progress in bilateral relations. While Trump’s return to power led to increased contact and a sense of rapprochement between Ankara and Washington, the long-sought breakthroughs regarding F-16 and F-35 fighter aircraft failed to materialize. The negative impact of the S-400 systems acquired from Russia on bilateral relations persisted.

In the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus, presidential elections introduced a new political atmosphere, yet expectations of a substantive resolution remained low. Periodic UN-led mediation efforts show little prospect of producing concrete results. Relations with Greece neither improved nor deteriorated significantly.

Overall Assessment

The year **2025 marked a clear turning point**, illustrating the rapid evolution of the global system toward a **multipolar, multilayered, and personality-driven structure**. As national and international institutions weakened, the influence of individual leaders increased. International cooperation increasingly gave way to ad hoc, short-lived arrangements. The United States' withdrawal from leadership or its unpredictable conduct created a geopolitical vacuum that compelled other actors to seek their own solutions. At the same time, Trump's exaggerated application of "me-centered" policies blurred distinctions between allies and adversaries from Washington's perspective.

Looking ahead to 2026, the risk of new conflicts being added to existing ones appears to be growing. U.S. policies toward Venezuela and rhetoric concerning Greenland point to potential future tensions. Russia's confidence in its ability to prevail in Ukraine suggests the war will continue for an extended period. The Middle East, as ever, remains marked by persistent uncertainty, with low-level tensions unlikely to subside. Although numerous summits are expected throughout the year, expecting concrete progress would be an overly optimistic assessment.