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WORLD TRENDS: BEYOND THE 2026 CONFLICT ENVIRONMENT**

Abstract

A look at the scientific “crystal ball,” officially termed forecasting, is a fundamental task for political scientists and a standard component of risk analysis specialists. This article examines the prognosis of major world trends, with a degree of attention paid to cultural developments. To this end, the author engages with different methodological approaches and employs the philosophy of history as a framework for understanding the future through an analysis of the past, as well as underlying processes that shape contemporary developments and the motivations of key actors. This article is divided into four sections. The introduction outlines the importance of scientific prognosis and the various methods used in this field. The second section examines the processes characterizing the current historical moment and recent decades that have led to the present state of international confrontation. Third identifies main trends in international politics as conflicts inside World War Three: among the great powers for the redistribution of power and the definition of the spheres of influence, and the conflict between previously dominant globalists against national elites, particularly present in Europe and in North America. The final section argues that the end of morality in international politics will only feed the war.

Keywords: World War III, raw materials, emergency, world order, world trends, great powers

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“Science is no other than an attempt to read the future [...] Science condemns the prophets, and yet, itself tries to predict the hereafter [...] One who proclaims the war is doing it only because he thinks that he can predict its course or at least its ending” (Đaja 1977, 36).

INTRODUCTION

A key mechanism through which contemporary world trends are changing direction is a war – war at the global scale. This is particularly evident following the Russian military intervention in Ukraine in February 2022, which came after several days of Ukrainian shelling of predominantly Russian-inhabited Donetsk and Lugansk. In the aftermath, Russia announced the annexation of four additional regions of Ukraine – in addition to Crimea – in what it framed as a ‘Special military operation.’ The destabilization of the post-Second World War international order did not begin in 2022; rather, it is the culmination of a longer process of systemic transformation. The current phase is characterized by a major redistribution of global power, with the United States (US), China, and Russia emerging as key actors, alongside a weakening of intergovernmental institutions and a decline in the influence of the European Union (EU). Politics is also shaped by culture, which informs the worldviews of decision-makers. The promotion of LGBTQ+ policies in US diplomacy during the Obama and Biden administrations reflected the values and morals of those in power in Washington, as well as broader trends in parts of the West. Christian traditional values are emphasized in political discourse in countries such as Poland and Hungary, as well as within the MAGA and America First movements in the US. Russia has similarly justified aspects of its foreign policy and the moral reasons behind the clash with the West through appeals to traditional values (President of Russia 2025a).

The current US administration has, in contrast to previous decades, shown (after the 1980s) renewed support for traditionalist and conservative policies, including those promoted by Viktor Orbán in Hungary (until 2026, and by Péter Magyar later) and Robert Fico in Slovakia. At the same time, Russia continues to reflect the heritage and legacy of its Soviet past, with part of its elites still influenced by the values and norms of the Soviet *nomenklatura*. In both Russia and China, the war has also intensified internal struggles over power within the ruling elites.

Consequently, cultural wars occur not only among countries but more precisely within them, thereby shaping political dynamics across the global system.

Following the end of the Cold War, ideological confrontation declined, but moral precepts in politics did not disappear. Instead, the moralization of policy gained prominence through the asserted primacy of human rights over sovereignty, which was presented as a justification for the further expansion of what Samuel P. Huntington described as “dead souls,” or the rule of cosmopolitans (Huntington 2004, 4–7). This development represented the first step in the construction of new values and norms that challenged earlier frameworks.

Wars, both large and small, are fuelling global instability within the ongoing restructuring and redistribution of power at the international level. Historically, when such redistributions of power occur, it generally requires major confrontation, and the most significant such process is World War.¹ Although no universally accepted definition of a world war exists, after examining various approaches, it can be understood as “a conflict between two or more great powers with the participation of a number of other actors from multiple continents. In other words, it is a straining confrontation of great powers from two or more continents (in all cases to date, the Global North has been the main theatre), which has multiple dimensions – certainly spiritual/ideational and material in character – and necessarily includes military operations on more than one continent” (Janković 2023a, 141).

When the United States and its allies provided Ukraine with logistical, military, and financial aid in its war against Russia, they became indirectly involved in the conflict according to the definitions of war. Simultaneously, various conflicts across the globe involving either the participation or indirect support of Russia and the United States, alongside China’s expanding economic and diplomatic engagement – from Venezuela to Africa and the Middle East – have contributed to the emerging Third World War with distinct contemporary characteristics.

¹ Historically, wars have served as catalyst processes through which new geopolitical positions were established and verified, whether in relation to control of shipping routes and international trade or to political control over particular regions of the world. China’s historical reluctance to engage extensively with the outside world, combined with the development of firearms and military technology in Europe, enabled European colonial powers to gradually assume the economic takeover of China and India. Likewise, Spain’s defeat by England facilitated the gradual rise of the English crown, first as the dominant maritime power and later as the center of the world’s largest colonial empire.

By February 2026, a Third World War entered its fifth year in full intensity, while the foundations of the gradually evolving global order were under increasing strain. Concepts such as state sovereignty, the nation-state as a basic unit of the international system, the authority of international financial institutions established by the victors of WWII and international legal limitations on war have all faced growing challenges or are indeed suffering complete erosion.

With the eradication of Palestinian Arabs, and multifront war with the occupation of the swaths of neighbours' territory, with threats to Turkey and Iraq, war of aggression (called pre-emptive) against Iran and repeatedly bombed civilian nuclear program facilities, Israel is one of the most obvious examples of the order crusher. Broader West is being utterly differentiated, increasingly even inside the EU. The coalescing power of the West remains mainly negative – against Russia and China – and positive in support for Israel against the Islamic Republic of Iran. To sum it up, the frictions inside NATO, with the Secretary-General trying to amend them, point to the high probability of the end of this Cold War heritage (Lungescu 2026).

Threats by Donald Trump and Elon Musk – both prior to and following their personal and political divergence – as regards Greenland and the Panama Canal, as well as their proposals concerning the ethnic cleansing of Arabs in Gaza, are manifestations of the aforementioned weakening of the post-war international order. Same or similar arguments have been made regarding the military abduction of the Venezuelan president and his wife, the seizure of foreign cargo vessels, sanctions imposed on Francesca Albanese, and proposals for the Board of Peace, with Donald Trump serving as a veto-holding, lifelong chairman (Magid 2026).

At the same time, cryptocurrencies, artificial intelligence (AI), and renewed competition in space exploration, alongside rapid technological innovation and the continued digitalization of economies, public administration, and services, are transforming societies worldwide. The automation of industrial production has accelerated these changes further. A significant proportion of individuals employed in low-income sectors across Western nations face growing challenges in maintaining basic living standards, most notably regarding nutrition and affordable housing, increasingly in parallel with the socio-economic realities of populations in the Global South. Simultaneously, the electric vehicle battery industry is struggling to remain competitive without substantial state support, while strategies concerning energy transformation are being revised in accordance with energy security and production requirements.

The aim of this paper is to identify the main political trends at the global scale, without neglecting the importance of technological change, culture, and economic transformation. In order to understand world trends in 2026 and beyond, it is necessary to move beyond the failed theories of international relations, including those centered on institutional state-building, the abstract notion of national interest, and various realist, idealist, post-Marxist, feminist, and other approaches understood through foggy theoretical glasses.

The contemporary Italian classicist Luciano Canfora argues that, in a context in which money-lenders to nation states – whether corporations or individual persons – exercise significant influence, real power is often held by actors who do not formally occupy public office (Canfora 2022, 3–7). He further cites, among others, the French liberal thinker and political philosopher Benjamin Constant to support the claim that, in contemporary conditions, private actors prevail over political authority (Canfora 2022, 6).

From this perspective, the nation-state framework only partially explains international relations, as it overlooks actors with global reach, including what are sometimes described as contemporary imperial formations such as Russia, China, and India. Post-structuralist and postmodern theories, in this reading, are of limited critical value, as they primarily critique a world order that no longer exists as such.

By contrast, Wallerstein's world-systems theory and certain strands of critical theory focusing on structural relations and the organization of economy as reflection of economic relations, essentially as a crisis of capitalist dynamics (Wallerstein) and intergroup clashes (Cox and Hobsbawm) prove to understand at least part of the world that can be subsumed under the notion of the West (Wallerstein 2005; Wallerstein 2013; Harvey 2003). However, even these approaches are limited, as they remain grounded in core Marxist theory, according to which organization of production determines all relevant types of social behavior, including statecraft. Furthermore, Wallerstein noted in 1976 that his framework "works best for the Anglo-American core of the world-system" and reflected a broader disciplinary consensus of a world composed of multiple states as the basic units of analysis (Wallerstein 1976, 344).

Similarly, Cox introduces a more nuanced approach that incorporates elite structures and their will to preserve power, while Mosca already addressed elite competition at the beginning of the twentieth century. In this perspective, contemporary global politics may be understood as a

competition of state-linked elites alongside Western globalized oligarchic structures extending beyond including the traditional Anglo-American core (Janković 2023b, 60–82).

It is necessary to clarify one more theoretical point before engaging in forecasting. Why are nation-states insufficient as a framework for understanding international relations? The assumption that nation-states formulate and implement their foreign policy on the basis of clearly defined national interests within a global institutional order – composed of rules accepted by countries and international organizations through which power is exercised, negotiated, or imposed – is superfluous. Transnational elites control over more than 50 percent of the world's material wealth. They utilize national and international institutions to advance their interests, at times infringing the sovereignty of states, including even those considered their nominal homelands (Janković 2023b, 60–70).

Pedro Baños Bajo, a high-ranking Spanish military intelligence officer, citing a French former military intelligence general, argues that the utmost importance for the ruling elites – whether in democratic or non-democratic systems – is gaining a) control of the flow of raw materials, and b) the psychological control of the masses through media, religion, and education (Baños 2020, 24). If this is true, then the concept of the 'informed citizen' – assuming that this mythical person was ever an accurate description of the majority of people – has lost its meaning in recent decades.

The backlash of people against injustice and corruption of the political system, with policies highly unpopular among the domestic population, coupled with the unsatisfied part of the elites helped the change in some societies. Cancellation of the first round of presidential elections in Romania and later arrest of the candidate who got most of the votes, is just the latest and blatant aggression on the sovereign right of people to at least express their opinion. Thus, formal institutions do matter only partially while the power is for long in the hands of informal elites (at least in regimes of formal democracies), which is disregarded by most of the political science production.

Many politically relevant decisions are not necessarily taken within governmental institutions. Instead, negotiations and exchanges of influence occur within informal or semi-formal fora such as the Bilderberg Group, the Trilateral Commission, or the World Economic Forum (WEF) (Janković 2023b, 87; 213).

Nevertheless, focusing on elites as the primary agents of International Relations does not negate the foundational role of populations and their cultural contexts. History and culture profoundly shape the strategic mindset of national elites in states such as China, Russia, South Africa, and the United States. In contrast, these nations also contain globalized elites defined by a distinct detachment from national culture. Viewing the world as a collective asset to be managed globally, this transnational cohort inherently champions policies oriented towards global governance.

The new administration in the United States, following the second electoral victory of Donald Trump and his movement, represents a segment of Western elites, both economic and political, willing to reshape their geopolitical sphere in response to challenges posed by emerging powers. China, India, and Russia, as rising actors, have strengthened international influence through alternative institutional frameworks, such as BRICS, while simultaneously expanding their presence in regions and spheres of influence previously dominated by Western states and corporations.

After defining the key actors in international relations, it is necessary to scrutinize the methodology of forecasting. How should the future be approached analytically? Looking into the future is the supreme task of the social scientist, who tries to understand and have insight into the patterns, social mechanisms, and processes that will enable us to predict future behavior and broader social trends. Giusti writes about “anticipatory governance,” describing it as “a proactive approach to policy-making with the aim of anticipating disruptions and critical events” (Giusti 2025, 192).

World trends manifest themselves across numerous fields, including, *inter alia*, politics, economics, technology, culture, and agriculture. The primary focus of this study is international politics, while other trends are examined insofar as they influence or interact with political developments. The long-term analysis of large data sets helps researchers develop the ability to identify important trends and structural transformations. This requires the constant study of empirical data and evolving social processes, which, when combined with experience, may help a researcher to improve the precision and depth of interpretation. “Phronesis (right judgment) and the accordance of mind, ratio and heart are characterizing people in the state of soul purity,

which is not something scientifically described, and therefore cannot be called upon. In the West, Tomas Aquinas wrote on the subject recalling St. Augustin” (Janković 2016, 126).

In this sense, as previously stated, “if one seeks to establish a coherent analytical framework, then the Italian neoclassical geopolitical school – which combines *volontà* (the will of decision-makers to implement particular policies or achieve specific objectives), history and geography as structural influences on decision-making, and broader civilizational or philosophical conceptions of the world – appears particularly suitable for analyzing global trends without rigid theoretical preconceptions. The influence of historical experience and geographical conditions on relations between states is evident in shaping the perspectives of political actors” (Janković 2023b, 181–182).

If one considers the history of the US imperial ambitions – more specifically, the aspiration to control the Americas, and if the culture that shaped US conservative and liberal elites is that of the constantly moving frontier with the vision of the country as the beacon of freedom, then the thinking of its elites is influenced by this history and culture. When this perspective is combined with economic indicators, technological development *vis-à-vis* the competing powers, and strategic efforts to preserve the sphere of influence traditionally associated with the Monroe Doctrine, it may be argued that, in conditions of a diminishing technological and military advantage, American elites are likely to pursue policies aimed at consolidating their geopolitical sphere of influence and apply several tactics to delay or stop the economic, political, technological and military rise of rival powers.

To summarise, historical knowledge, partially intuitive judgment, and the ability to discern the broader framework within which trends emerge are necessary skills of scientific prediction. It seems almost impossible to define forecasting methodology beyond this combination of historical interpretation, analytical reasoning, and contextual understanding.

ARRANGEMENT OF THE WORLD ORDER

For a period following the end of the Second World War, the international system largely preserved the framework of the United Nations, formally based on the sovereign equality of nation-states, the abolition of colonial empires, and the development of intergovernmental organizations operating through multilateral and bilateral relations. At the same time, numerous non-state entities continued to function with influence at local, regional, and global levels. These

included religious institutions transcending national borders, such as the Orthodox Church, the Roman Catholic Church as well as political and economic actors including Hezbollah, Blackrock, sovereign wealth funds from the Gulf region, and multinational technology corporations including Google's parent company Alphabet Inc. and Microsoft.

While Western countries experienced significant expansion of the public sector and state involvement in the economy during much of the post-war period (Zinovjev 2002, 148–151), a reversal of this trend started during the administrations of Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher in the Anglo-American sphere. This transformation preceded the collapse of the European communist regimes. Victory of gigantic corporations or better said of the West in general by the end of that decade meant the start of overregulation, but of the private sphere, aimed at changing customs and culture in parallel with the takeover of the economy and media by the very few superrich and seemingly super powerful people. The transfer of public ownership to private was not obvious in political spheres, although it happened. Proliferation of “independent” public institutions, like the ombudsman, and, most importantly, the so-called independent judiciary.² Moreover, the independence of central banks meant gradual loss of national sovereignty.

Before the current global crisis, negotiations concerning the behavior of states and broader questions concerning global governance increasingly took place within formal, semi-formal, and informal structures. Peter Phillips would frame these fora as facilitators of the decisions made by the shrinking number of superrich. The facilitators “World Bank, IMF, G30, G20, G7, WTO, World Economic Forum, Trilateral Commission, Bilderberg Group, Aspen Institute, Council on Foreign Relations (CFR), and Bank for International Settlements” pass decisive advices to national bodies in order to advance the interests of the globalist elite, the few hundred superrich individuals (Phillips 2018, 11; 61; 161; 162).³

Although Moscow and Washington may both criticize aspects of the previous international order, they do so from distinct strategic and ideological positions. The role of the People's Republic of China within the evolving world order is particularly important, given that

² See: Ran 2008; Guarnieri and Pederzoli 1997; Weiden 2011; Antonucci 2022; Russo 2022; Janković 2023b, 96–99.

³ Numerous authors have written about the influence exercised by these informal centers of power over various spheres of public policy, ranging from diplomacy and economic governance to education planning (see: Phillips 2018, 11, 61, 161, 162; Parmar 2002, 235–263; Trumbour 1999, 57–60; Sklar 1980, 135–156). Critics of global governance often argue that it is essentially a concept that may facilitate the expansion of transnational forms of political and economic management that extend beyond democratic and national mechanisms of accountability.

its extensive economic footprint is present globally, stimulating modernization and the creation of new infrastructure of transport. Partially inward attention, or better said the additional growth provided by the internal market, guided by the central government, of the Chinese economic giant also produces political consequences.

The African second wave of decolonization may be understood as the first phase of a broader transformation in international relations. A second appears to be more tumultuous, with decoupling and the fragmentation of global supply chains. The introduction of tariffs and other trade restrictions is placing the Bretton Woods system of financial institutional architecture, including the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, and the World Trade Organization under significant pressure, although they continue to be supported primarily by actors in Western financial hubs such as Brussels and London. This process of decoupling may also affect the rivaling associations, like that of BRICS, particularly given divergences among member states – for example, tensions between India and Pakistan, as well as differing strategic alignments, including India’s comparatively closer relations with Israel than with Iran.

TREND DIRECTIONS

Modes of production are basically invariable, and as much as Wallerstein, Marx, Fukuyama, and others would like to define the economy as a primary attribute of the system, it is secondary to the culture and political organization of people and territory. In this regard Nowak describes the various facets of globalization attributes distinctive interpretations and responses to it based on the cultural heritage of distinct collective identities. Further he attributes part of the economic crisis in the West to perceived change in the ethical foundations of societies (Nowak 2025, 9; 10). Having that in mind, one may conclude that contemporary change in economic policy is driven by political transformation in the US and not *vice versa*.

There are two major trends in the international political sphere, and two in the cultural sphere. At the level of international politics, the emergence of a new multipolar order is characterized by the reconfiguration of the spheres of influence among the United States, China, and Russia. The second major trend is the ongoing conflict between these poles of power and the previous ruling structure, commonly described as the ‘Collective West.’

Informal circles of power are losing part of the geographical scope, and, in some cases, their strategic significance – for example, the declining relative prominence of the WEF. While

governmental actors in Washington, Beijing, and Moscow remain in competition with one another, all three are engaged, at varying levels of confrontation also with the EU and the United Kingdom across multiple domains, including economics, security, and cultural influence.

Corporate and financial actors also form an important part of this configuration, as transnational corporations increasingly participate – directly or indirectly – in geopolitical competition (Baños 2020, 67; Phillips and Osborne 2013; Janković 2023b, 100–107; 110–114). Hence, contemporary international politics can be interpreted as involving two interrelated dimensions of conflict: a) competition among major powers over the redefinition and partial recreation of spheres of influence; and b) a broader ideological and structural contest between what Donald Trump has described as the so-called “deep state”, or, as Samuel P. Huntington phrased it, “dead-soul” oligarchs on the one hand,⁴ and the governing elites of the great powers of China, Russia, and the United States on the other hand.

These forms of confrontations occur between representatives of the ruling elites, with or without visible presentation of the decision-makers at the international level, and inside different societies and countries, including inside the United States, Russia, and China. Advancement of multipolarism is closely linked to processes of industrial reactivation and reindustrialization. While China has benefited greatly from the previous economic model, both Russia and the United States have, in different forms, initiated policies aimed at partial reindustrialization (see also Table 1).⁵

Protective measures introduced by the United States – ‘tariff war’ – together with essentially racketeering of the Persian Gulf monarchies and the imposition of the defense spending on NATO and key allies of the United States and the United Kingdom will have set of three interrelated effects. They include, in the absence of an internal US crisis, which should not be underscored: a) increased domestic employment and industrial output within the United States, b) expansion of the domestic production base for both export and internal consumption; and c) further economic and technological decoupling between the US and China. The first and

⁴ For this qualification of the informal centers of power, see: Huntington 2004, 5–18.

⁵ The Russian economy grew by approximately 4.1 percent in terms of GDP in 2024, according to various statistical sources, representing a slightly higher growth rate than in 2023. Economic expansion continued during Q1 2025, albeit at a moderate pace (see: *Trading Economics*, n.d.).

third effects, in particular, may contribute to mitigating the potential economic shocks associated with a broader escalation of geopolitical tensions in the Indo-Pacific region.

How US military planners are pursuing strategies to expand domestic defense production is evidenced by the increase in military procurement among Washington's traditional allies. At the same time, part of the benefits from the accelerated growth of the defense industry will also extend to Asian and European partners. South Korea supplies advanced armaments to Poland and Romania and actively participates in the so-called 'Asian NATO,' through coordination efforts with Japan, Australia, New Zealand, and US forces in the Pacific and Indian oceans.

Poland and Romania primarily, together with Finland and potentially several other nations are expected to assume the role of massive conscript armies, popular during the USSR, *vis-à-vis* Russia. The consensus expressed by the European Commission in the White Paper for European Defence (European Commission 2025) clearly signals not only the militarization of political discourse, but also preparations of the public for scenario of open and direct war with Russia (European Commission 2025, 4). German governments have followed this trend. This represents one of the stages of a broader confrontation, accompanied by intensified internal propaganda for the hybrid war (Parezanović and Proroković 2024, 43; 46). Similar mechanisms are employed by Russian elites (President of Russia 2025b).

The militarization of the EU accelerated particularly after the start of the Ukrainian war and the large-scale entry of Russian forces into Ukrainian territory. What occurred was the "collapse of the liberal paradigm that once held that war between states – especially in Europe – was inconceivable," accompanied by the EU's shift towards more classical conceptions of power (Skolimowska 2025, 274; 278; 279).

Tariff wars initiated by the West against China had begun prior to the aforementioned events. One of the first major disputes concerned the automotive industry and port management (Evans and Facey 2025; Vineyard 2019). Under pressure from the US government, the Long Beach Container Terminal was ultimately sold by the Chinese company (Vineyard 2019). At that time, US tariffs on Chinese goods were already close to 20 percent.

At the beginning of his new mandate, Trump intensified the trade war. Tariff wars are far from over and are likely to continue to be adjusted according to the dependency of specific industries, particularly American industries (Huld 2025). US achievements in securing the

unparalleled large-scale international agreements occurred between April 30 to the middle of May 2025 including accords on the transfer of access to undersoil resources in Ukraine, in exchange for purchases and orders of US civilian aircrafts, weapon systems, software, and other IT products by Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and the United Arab Emirates (White House 2025b; White House 2025c; White House 2025d). The amount of peculiar state racket is indeed impressive, as these arrangements are “bringing the total of investment agreements in the Gulf region” reportedly exceeding \$2 trillion (White House 2025e).

Table 1. Top Ten Countries by Real GDP (Purchase Power Parity)

Country	2023 estimate (US Dollars)
China	\$31,230,000,000,000
United States	\$24,977,000,000,000
India	\$13,173,000,000,000
Russia	\$5,816,000,000,000
Japan	\$5,747,000,000,000
Germany	\$5,295,000,000,000
Brazil	\$4,016,000,000,000
Indonesia	\$3,906,000,000,000
France	\$3,786,000,000,000
United Kingdom	\$3,728,000,000,000

Source: The author’s own elaboration based on *CIA World Factbook* 2026.

Entrenchment within NATO and the restructuring of the European Union move in tandem with the militarization of Western public opinion and preparations for the entry of new combatants into armed conflict. The coming year will extend a volatile strategic rivalry between the current US administration and the leadership in London, Paris, Brussels, and Berlin. Confronted by political scandals and widespread public dissatisfaction, the Brussels establishment may find its only path to domestic preservation through the escalation of external conflict. If major equity markets suffer a significant correction during 2026, the transition toward military options will accelerate as a desperate measure to ward off a broader economic depression, similar to that in the US (Federal Reserve Economic Data 2026; Wiseman 2026).

Continued decline in reliance on the US dollar in mutual trade – especially in Asia – is indicative. BRICS's economic and financial cooperation continues with the announced introduction of an alternative financial system. In lieu of the Western SWIFT, “a new network, called BRICS Cross Border Payment Initiative (BCBPI) would be digital, based on national currencies” (Nogueira Batista 2026, 9).

As Asia continues to grow in terms of its share of global industrial production, the relative use of the dollar may continue to decline and could, by the end of 2026, fall to the level of 50 percent of global currency reserves for the first time since the end of the Second World War (currently around 56 percent). The gradual weakening of the petrodollar system as a reserve world currency may prompt the US government to rely more heavily on geopolitical and military instruments in securing its strategic sphere of influence and to be able to act globally, as the dollar itself was, and partly for a while still is one of the major instruments of foreign policy.

A Russian breakthrough towards Dnipropetrovsk, which is an obvious strategic objective of the Donbas campaign, as well as towards Odesa, cannot be stopped through the forms of military assistance used so far. Therefore, two broad scenarios are emerging: either an attempt by Brussels to persuade Russia to agree to a ceasefire, or a further expansion of military operations and an attempt at a full blockade of Kaliningrad, which would enable Russian military action in the Baltic region. In order to weaken Russia, part of the Western elites, i.e., the previous status quo representatives, are seeking to encourage tensions between Moscow and one of the Central Asian states.

Africa remains a continent in which the EU matters less and less, a development that could lead to further attempts to interfere in the internal affairs of African states, many of which have already reduced or dismantled earlier forms of French dominance. A key question is whether Germany and the core EU states will move towards a direct military confrontation with Russia first – potentially without the support of several member states, or whether the Visegrád Group countries, together with Italy, will instead intensify opposition to further EU centralization. In essence, two possible paths lie ahead of the European Union: gradual disintegration or deeper centralization accompanied by increasing restrictions on freedom of speech and political opposition.

The Middle East remains a region shaped by competing large-scale infrastructure projects, ranging from China's Belt and Road Initiative to the Indo-Mediterranean Corridor announced in 2023, currently put on hold because of the new war in and around the Persian Gulf. The latter reflects both America's attempt to counter China and the EU's search for reliable partners through the creation of an economic corridor linking the Italian port of Trieste with India via Israel's Haifa, the Suez Canal, the United Arab Emirates, Qatar, and Saudi Arabia. In this context, weakening the Houthis became strategically important. Although India may strengthen cooperation with Italy and some European partners, Trump's tariff policies have also pushed New Delhi towards maintaining closer cooperation with Beijing.

Two major trends are also evident in the cultural sphere. The first is the growing strength of nationalism and sovereign patriotism, which have achieved initial successes against attempts to promote the alteration of the human being as an entity without fixed characteristics. Russia, Hungary, Poland, the United States, and Argentina are among the countries associated with this trend, particularly through their emphasis of traditional marriage, restrictions on or opposition to the restructured image of a man (as a human being), gender transition policies, and criticism of LGBTQ+ promotion.

An important shift occurred in the United States with the significant reversal of previous policies that undermined even the definitions of man and a woman.⁶ Previous waves of sovereigntist and populist policies, particularly following the economic and migrant crises within the EU, laid the foundations for this broader reaction against progressive social policies (Góralczyk 2016, 14; 22),

The second cultural trend is the result of the combination of the duplicity of official policies and the relativization of previously held customs with the collapse of morality in politics and the refusal of the West (with notable exception of Spain) to condemn the eradication of the Palestinian Arabs, and the plight of Alavites and Christians in Syria. This impotence toward the massive clamp in particular against international humanitarian law in the Holy Land is another

⁶ Therefore, a set of formalized definitions was introduced in US federal policy discourse, defining key biological and familial terms in explicit and reproductive terms. According to official US government terminology, 'sex' is defined as "a person's immutable biological classification as either male or female." These definitions were introduced within the broader policy framework of the White House administration (White House 2025a).

characteristic of the world war and the collapse of the world order established after World War WII.

The combination of progressive policies and ongoing cultural reshaping has been met with a revival of traditional piety in parts of the West, mostly among those baptized within the Roman Catholic Church. While postmodern relativization is far from being over, given the persistence of conflicting situations worldwide, the emergency agenda under which rule by decree has expanded continues to reshape liberal democratic systems transforming them into forms of administrative governance increasingly detached from the general will. Arbitrary rules are often associated with the demise of the sovereignty of peoples and the growing prominence of executive or technocratic decision-making. This represents a reversal of the historical process that, since the nineteenth century, progressively expanded mass participation in political life.

CONCLUSIONS

Contemporary cultural transformations have triggered reactions within segments of society that perceive rapid and radical ideological and institutional change as destabilizing. Political responses from part of the elite that reject cosmopolitan and post-material frameworks, so-called “wokeism”, and similar, have also drawn on discontent related to economic inequality, non-European migration patterns, and cultural change. In parallel, emerging non-Western powers continue to deepen collaboration and develop alternative financial and geopolitical arrangements. In parallel with cultural clashes the perpetuation of the war in Ukraine and over it, the wars in the Middle East, in particular the war between Israel and the United States against Iran, are changing the transport, energy, and commercial map of the world, with a structural crisis of international law application.

Hence, the forecasted trends are as follows:

Structural Reconfiguration and Domestic Crises within the West

Challenges to the contemporary international order originate both from systemic challengers in the East and from acute structural contradictions within the Western core. A pronounced domestic backlash against progressive socio-cultural norms is unfolding concurrently with rapid digitalization and the expansion of state-backed regulatory and surveillance frameworks aimed at monitoring political and social behavior. To counter resulting

systemic instability and acute geopolitical competition, Western decision-making elites in centers such as Brussels, Paris, and Berlin are increasingly embracing neo-militarism. This shift serves as a strategic mechanism to maintain a post-traditional, supranational liberal agenda.

Another element contributing significantly to the governance crisis is large-scale immigration, which has fundamentally transformed Western labor markets and accelerated domestic political polarization. While a small segment of European states has maintained demographic continuity of native population among younger generations, the majority of the European Union is undergoing profound demographic and cultural shifts driven by extra-European migration trends since the 1990s. Compounded by the gradual erosion of the welfare state and a contraction in middle-class living standards, these shifts have fueled the rise of populist and right-wing political movements. This dynamic has widened the divergence between ruling elites and the general populace.

Institutional Instability and the Exportation of Internal Protest

The domestic consequence of these systemic policies is an enduring state of political crisis, exemplified by recent developments in the United Kingdom and across the broader EU space. Civil friction and mass demonstrations are projected to intensify, manifesting as localized unrest across several Western nations. A prominent indicator of this institutional friction is observed in Great Britain, where state authorities have faced scrutiny for undermining investigations into widespread systemic violence against domestic populations (UK Parliament 2025). As critical analyses observe, the supranational architecture of the “EU is a mechanism for the implementation of a continuous *coup d'état*. Its unelected officials see as their main purpose to implement further centralization of power in their own hands” (Trifkovic 2025).

The strategic exportation of internal unrest via proxy conflict against Russia – historically positioned as a symbolic challenger– will fail to mitigate internal European social contradictions without eventual resort to emergency domestic security measures. Furthermore, this internal crisis is exacerbated by an emerging multipolar reality: the primary material inputs required for technological and technocratic control are increasingly concentrated under the sovereign control of Russia, China, and the United States, systematically marginalizing the European Union's resource access.

Geopolitical Alliances and the European Theater

Despite these internal fractures, a reconfigured Western alignment remains operational at some level through security structures designed to threaten Moscow and Beijing, primarily anchored by the AUKUS and broader military integration. In this dual-threat matrix, China serves as the primary economic challenger, while Russia constitutes a fundamental cultural and ideological counterweight. The accelerating militarization of the EU and the partial reinstatement of conscription portend a direct, long-term military confrontation with the Russian Federation, with Germany positioned as a central operational actor. Alternatively, these expanding military structures will likely to be deployed internally to stabilize fracturing post-EU space.

Indo-Pacific Confrontation and Resource Dependencies

Concurrently, the Western strategic posture toward Beijing relies heavily on ‘so-called access denial’ mechanisms aimed at restricting China’s commercial, economic, and military expansion. On the strategic level, Beijing is actively seeking operational control over the South China Sea through land reclamation, islet militarization, and the accumulation of massive ballistic missile stockpiles intended to neutralize Taiwanese defense capabilities. This build-up serves as the structural precursor to an overt military confrontation projected to materialize by 2030. While the opening of a Pacific front remains latent, the nascent, so-called ‘Asian NATO’ initiative will generate substantial immediate procurement streams for the US defense-industrial complex. Within this equation, India’s strategic posture remains the decisive variable.

Simultaneously, competition for newly defined spheres of influence necessitates strict control over regional supply chains and critical raw materials. A strategic shift in the U.S. posture toward Greenland – mirroring prior arrangements regarding Ukraine – will likely be facilitated by a compliant European political landscape (with the exception of Denmark) as Washington assumes control over a territory containing 24 of the 35 identified critical and rare earth elements (Brasso Sørensen 2024; Diogo *et al.* 2023, 121). Combined with expanded liquefied natural gas (LNG) capacity, massive defense procurement backlogs, and assertive maritime security policies, these developments will drive a temporary industrial expansion within the United States.

Multipolar Fragmentation and Regional Flashpoints

While the current US administration focuses on preserving domestic systemic survival and rebuilding its core economic and moral structures, the European Union faces an intense backlash from sovereigntist forces reacting to the decay of the modern nation-state and the

imposition of supranational governance. Although NATO historically functioned as the primary coalescing vector linking the Euro-Atlantic and Indo-Pacific theatres under Anglo-American leadership, its capacity to sustain this unifying role is clearly eroding. The intra-Western conflict announces the emerging scenario of NATO's dissolution in the near term.

Globally, structural market adjustments within China are reacting directly to the protectionist barriers erected by the US administration. This dynamic will accelerate the relocation of low-cost manufacturing sectors to the Indian subcontinent and Southeast Asia, while laying the groundwork for an impending industrial revolution across the African continent.

Regional warfare remains structurally embedded in the geopolitical architecture of the Middle East. The expansionist trajectory of Israel portends escalating regional conflicts, accelerating the broader collapse of normative constraints in international politics. The tacit diplomatic approval of the West regarding the military campaign in the Gaza Strip is actively exacerbating systemic fractures within their own highly divided societies. Perennial flashpoints, including Libya, Syria, Yemen, Iraq, and Iran, remain highly volatile. This destabilization will unfold against the backdrop of broader regional conflicts, precipitating further institutional and military fragmentation inside Lebanon amid a structurally altered posture for Hezbollah.

Systemic instability is accompanied by an emergent domestic political authoritarianism. Consequently, international organizations that previously served as primary vectors for globalist elite governance will continue to lose institutional substance and relevance. The overarching driver of contemporary systemic change is not merely the alignment of revisionist challengers, but the unilateral actions of Washington. Meanwhile, the war in Ukraine will persist indefinitely, as neither the Kremlin nor Kiev nor its external backers has achieved their structural objectives.

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СВЕТСКИ ТРЕНДОВИ: КОНФЛИКТНО ОКРУЖЕЊЕ НАКОН 2026**

Резиме

Овај рад има за циљ да научно сагледа будућност, што представља врхунски задатак међународних односа у свету након 2026. године. Рад полази од чињенице да савремени међународни систем пролази кроз дубоку прерасподелу моћи коју карактеришу слабљење међувладиних институција, пад утицаја Европске уније и успон мултиполарне борбе у којој учествују Сједињене Америчке Државе (САД), Кина и Русија. Кључни механизам путем којег ови глобални трендови мењају правац јесте рат глобалних размера. Руска војна интервенција у Украјини у фебруару 2022. године, која је уследила након вишедневног украјинског гранатирања већински руским становништвом насељених делова Доњецка и Луганска, представља кулминацију дуготрајне системске трансформације а не изненадни раскид. Пружањем логистичке, војне и финансијске помоћи Украјини, Сједињене Америчке Државе и њихови савезници постали су индиректно увучени у конфликт. Ова напрегнута конфронтација великих сила са више континената, која обухвата и материјалну и духовну димензију, указује на то да је у току Трећи светски рат. Последишно, кључни темељи правне инфраструктуре успостављене након Другог светског рата суочавају се са потпуном ерозијом. Ово урушавање глобалне правно-политичке инфраструктуре вођено је агресивним акцијама на више позоришта које дестабилизују суштинске геоекономске коридоре. Шири западни табор пролази кроз унутрашњу диференцијацију. Трвења се интензивирају унутар Европске уније и НАТО-а у погледу њиховог односа према Сједињеним Америчким Државама, које делују све мање вољне да задрже своју традиционалну улогу неприкосновеног лидера Западног блока. Ова унутрашња и међународна нестабилност пресликава се и кроз екстремне политичке маневре, као што су

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поништавање првог круга председничких избора у Румунији и накнадно хапшење водећег кандидата, што представља очигледну агресију на народни суверенитет. Такође, унутрашња и међународна политика су снажно обликоване културним парадигмама које информишу погледе на свет самих доносилаца одлука. Насупрот тзв. Прогресивним политикама владе у Пољској и Мађарској, покрет „Америка на првом месту / МАГА” у САД-у, снажно наглашава традиционалне хришћанске вредности. Русија на сличан начин уоквирује своју конфронтацију са Западом као моралну одбрану традиционалних вредности. Ови културни ратови се не дешавају само између држава, већ и унутар њих. Како би управљале резултујућом унутрашњом нестабилношћу и реакцијом јавности против непопуларних мера, европске елите се све више ослањају на „управљање путем ванредног стања”. Транзиција ка зеленој енергији и индустрија батерија за електрична возила суочавају се са озбиљним проблемима конкурентности без масивних државних субвенција. Званични наративи губе ауторитет. Разумевање ових процеса захтева другачији приступ од оног који заговарају традиционалне теорије међународних односа. Позивајући се на Лучана Канфору (*Luciano Canfora*) и Бенжамена Константа (*Benjamin Constant*), аутор тврди да стварну моћ држе приватни актери и зајмодавци који не заузимају формалне јавне функције. Транснационалне елите контролишу преко 50% светског материјалног богатства и користе националне институције као пукe инструменте, неретко нарушавајући суверенитет сопствених номиналних домовина. Стратешки начин размишљања елита је историјски и културно условљен. Закључно, савремени међународни односи се најпрецизније могу концептуализовати као структурни сукоб између државних елита Русије, Кине и Индије са једне стране, и транснационалних, глобализованих олигархијских мрежа Запада са друге. Вођени историјском парадигмом покретне границе (фронтијера) и трајним стратешким императивима Монроове доктрине, амерички доносиоци одлука – додатно оснажени другим председничким мандатом Доналда Трампа – систематски делују у правцу учвршћивања и стабилизације свог традиционалног геополитичког периметра. Надируће ревизионистичке силе заобилазе механизме глобалног управљања под вођством Запада, развијајући алтернативне институционалне архитектуре, што се најјасније огледа у ширењу формата БРИКС-а.

Кључне речи: Трећи светски рат, сировине, ванредна ситуација, светски поредак, светски трендови, велике силе