

Global Watch Weekly Briefing

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A week into 2026, geopolitics is already surging with remarkable shifts, signalling a turbulent year ahead. From Washington's withdrawal from international institutions to rising battlefield costs in Ukraine and resurgent protests across Iran, the global landscape is shifting rapidly. Here are the top developments shaping diplomacy, conflict, and strategic rivalry worldwide.

The most seismic tremor came from Washington, where the Trump administration announced that the United States will withdraw from 66 international organisations — 31 linked to the UN and 35 others outside the system. The move represents one of the most sweeping retreats from multilateral governance in U.S. history. While supporters say the exits reflect a renewed focus on sovereignty and burden-sharing, critics warn it risks ceding global rule-making to China and Russia at a time when the United States can least afford disengagement.

Across Europe's eastern frontier, the battlefield attrition in Ukraine continues to surge. Ukrainian officials report Russian military fatalities have climbed to levels that can no longer be sustained under the current system of voluntary recruitment. Kyiv warns that without mobilisation, Moscow's war machine risks exhausting itself — though history suggests Russia may absorb staggering human losses before shifting course. For NATO and EU planners, the trend reinforces projections that the conflict will remain bloody, draining and unpredictable well into the year.

Beijing, meanwhile, finds itself pulled into multiple fronts of confrontation. China issued a pointed warning to the United States after a U.S. lawmaker claimed President Trump had effectively greenlit a bipartisan sanctions bill targeting Russia. China framed the comments as an unwelcome intrusion into its economic ties with Moscow — signalling that Beijing sees Washington's sanctions reach as expanding in scope and ambition.

On a separate but connected front, China began choking off the export of rare earth materials and advanced magnets to Japan. The move threatens supply chains in global chipmaking, defence manufacturing and electric vehicles — all areas where Tokyo plays a central role. The rare earths squeeze marks the latest escalation in a simmering commercial and geopolitical stand-off between Asia's two most powerful economies.

Adding heat to regional tensions, two prominent Chinese think tanks released a report warning that Japan retains the industrial capacity to produce nuclear weapons within a short timeline. The report urged global actors to remain vigilant against what Beijing described as a resurgence of Japanese militarism — a claim Tokyo rejects but one that resonates in China's domestic audience.

Turkey too is repositioning itself as a crisis mediator as clashes intensify in northern Syria. Ankara said it is monitoring the battle for Aleppo "hour by hour," signalling readiness to support de-escalation following fierce fighting between government troops and Kurdish

forces. Thousands have already fled, and Washington is believed to be involved in back-channel mediation.

In the Middle East, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu returned from Washington buoyed by renewed support from President Trump. Critics argue the diplomatic backing allows Israel to prolong its military campaign in Gaza and across the region, reinforcing the perception that Gaza has become a strategic linchpin — not just a humanitarian catastrophe.

Meanwhile, unrest is testing the Iranian state, where economic grievances have fuelled twelve consecutive days of protests. Security forces used tear gas against demonstrators while exiled opposition leaders urged more nationwide mobilisation — raising fears that Iran's domestic volatility will intersect with growing external pressure.

In what could be a sign of escalating maritime tensions, U.S. forces seized a Russian-linked oil tanker in the Atlantic, prompting Moscow to dispatch naval escorts. The move underscores that sanctions enforcement is shifting into hard-power domains.

Finally, President Trump will attend the World Economic Forum in Davos later this month, accompanied by senior advisers. The summit could be his first opportunity, in a global spotlight, to articulate Washington's evolving strategy toward trade, sanctions and institution-building — or dismantling.

From diplomatic ruptures to street uprisings and naval brinkmanship, 2026 is already shaping up as a year defined not by stability, but by disruption.

Here are the 10 stories shaping the world Today

1

Description: The Trump administration will pull the United States out of 66 international organisations — 31 linked to the United Nations and 35 non-UN entities — marking a sweeping retreat from global governance.

Headline: The Trump administration announces withdrawal from 66 global organisations

Link:

<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2026/1/8/which-are-the-66-global-organisations-the-us-is-leaving-under-trump>

2

Description:

Ukraine reports Russian combat deaths are rising beyond sustainable levels, warning Moscow may need forced mobilization to compensate for battlefield attrition.

Headline:

Russian war deaths are rising to unsustainable levels, says Ukraine

Link:

<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2026/1/8/russian-war-fatalities-are-rising-to-unsustainable-levels-says-ukraine>

3

Description:

Beijing warns Washington against interfering with China-Russia trade after a US lawmaker claimed President Trump approved a bipartisan sanctions bill targeting Moscow.

Headline:

China warns US against disrupting trade ties with Russia over sanctions bill

Link:

<https://www.aa.com.tr/en/asia-pacific/china-warns-us-against-disrupting-trade-ties-with-russia-over-sanctions-bill/3793445>

4

Description:

China has begun restricting exports of rare-earth metals and magnets to Japan, threatening industries that rely heavily on them, including chipmaking, electric vehicles and defence production.

Headline:

China deprives Japan of rare-earths supply, escalating dispute

Link:

<https://www.wsj.com/world/asia/china-deprives-japan-of-rare-earths-supply-escalating-dispute-41e7750c>

5

Description:

Two Chinese think tanks warn Japan could rapidly develop nuclear weapons, urging global vigilance to prevent a revival of Japanese militarism and protect global non-proliferation.

Headline:

Chinese think tanks warn of Japan's nuclear ambitions, capabilities, call for international vigilance

Link:

<https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202601/1352656.shtml>

6

Description:

Turkey says it is monitoring battle developments in Aleppo "hour-by-hour" and is prepared to assist efforts to halt clashes that have displaced thousands and triggered global concern.

Headline:

Turkiye ready to help end conflict in Syria's Aleppo, parliament speaker says

Link:

<https://www.arabnews.pk/node/2628621/middle-east>

7

Description:

After a Washington trip that strengthened his political backing from President Trump, Netanyahu returns home bolstered amid accusations he is prolonging the Gaza war for strategic gain.

Headline:

Gaza as a linchpin: Six reasons why Netanyahu is prolonging conflict in the Middle East

Link:

<https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20260108-gaza-as-a-linchpin-six-reasons-why-netanyahu-is-prolonging-conflict-in-the-middle-east/>

8

Description:

Iran's security forces again used tear gas to disperse demonstrations triggered by economic hardship, as opposition abroad urges protesters to intensify pressure on the regime.

Headline:

New clashes in Iran as opposition urges more protests

Link:

<https://english.alarabiya.net/News/middle-east/2026/01/08/new-clashes-in-iran-as-opposition-urges-more-protests->

9

Description:

US forces reportedly seized a Russian-linked oil tanker in the Atlantic, prompting Moscow to deploy naval vessels — a fresh flashpoint in sanctions enforcement.

Headline:

US forces seize Venezuela-linked oil tanker; Russia sends naval escort

Link:

(Reuters wire widely carried; substitute official link if required)

10

Description:

President Trump will attend the World Economic Forum in Davos with top advisers in a trip expected to outline US priorities on global trade, economic policy and sanctions enforcement.

Headline:

Trump will attend 2026 World Economic Forum in Davos with key aides

Link:

<https://www.reuters.com/world/us/bessent-lutnick-wright-join-trump-davos-source-says-2026-01-08/>

Ends