

GLOBAL WATCH WEEKLY BRIEF

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It's tempting to describe the global system as collapsing under the weight of American disruption. But that's not quite right. What we're witnessing in early 2026 is something subtler — and arguably more consequential. Power hasn't disappeared; it's **recalibrating**.

Washington is no longer the steadying hand of the international order. President Trump's foreign policy is built on purposeful unpredictability — leaving institutions, squeezing adversaries, and pushing allies to fend for themselves. This isn't disengagement. It's redefinition. America is still leading, but through coercion and leverage rather than consensus.

The result is a world in motion. Middle powers — India, Brazil, Turkey, Saudi Arabia — are no longer waiting for great-power guidance. They are carving out strategic autonomy, choosing alignment issue by issue, and reshaping regional security architectures. Africa and Latin America, meanwhile, are turning to Beijing for reliable capital and to Moscow for political insulation.

None of this signals the end of American influence. But it does mark the end of American inevitability. In 2026, the United States can still set the agenda — it just can't guarantee others will follow it.

What comes next isn't chaos. It's competition — and a global order being rewritten in real time.

The World Scrambles as America Rewrites the Rules

One week into 2026, global politics already feels like a map in mid-redraw.

The United States — confident, disruptive, and uninterested in refereeing — continues to bend the international order to its will.

The rest of the world is reacting, improvising, and in some cases, resisting.

From Davos to Dar es Salaam, from Lviv to Greenland, one truth is emerging: **we're no longer in a U.S.-led world, but one defined by how others respond to American power.**

1. The Trump Doctrine: Disruption as Strategy

Washington is governing the globe less through institutions and more through **transactions, coercion, and spectacle.**

Davos and the End of Consensus

President Trump's upcoming Davos keynote is expected to jettison the last remnants of the postwar multilateral mantra.

“America First” has evolved from slogan to governing architecture:

- alliances optional
- institutions disposable
- deals conditional
- sovereignty weaponized

Foreign capitals are listening closely — not for inspiration, but for warning.

Retreat From Multilateralism

The U.S. exit from 66 international bodies — including 31 UN agencies — is more than bureaucratic vandalism.

It is a vacuum generator.

Where Washington exits, **Beijing and Moscow enter**, armed with:

- financing,
- trade deals,
- and a willingness to write the rules others live by.

The consequences will be generational — especially in tech governance, climate, and AI.

2. The New Battlegrounds: Arctic, Andes, Gulf, and Cyberspace

Greenland: The Arctic Becomes Real

Trump's message — “the easy way or the hard way” — is no throwaway line.

It signals:

- **Arctic militarization,**
- **mineral entitlement,**
- **a U.S. willingness to break taboos about territorial acquisition.**

Greenland's parties rejected the overture unanimously.

But the Arctic is now officially a geopolitical theater, not a frozen frontier.

Venezuela: A Sovereign State Under Receivership

The U.S. capture of President Nicolás Maduro — and seizure of Venezuela's oil wealth — marks a **strategic line-crossing**.

Washington now:

- controls Caracas' revenue flows,
- has installed de facto custodianship over a national economy,
- and has dragged Latin America back into Cold War logic.

Allies are uneasy. Rivals — China, Russia, Cuba — are sharpening counter-moves.

Iran: Revolution Meets Retaliation

Protests are metastasizing across the Islamic Republic.

Reza Pahlavi's reemergence gives them a narrative — Trump gives them air cover — but neither gives them inevitability.

Tehran's response is now existential:

- communications blackouts,
- street-level repression,
- and messaging that paints every chant as an American operation.

With U.S. bombers repositioned, **miscalculation becomes risk, not theory.**

3. Wars That Refuse to End

Ukraine: Escalation Without Resolution

Russia's hypersonic strike on Lviv illustrates Moscow's evolving theory of victory:

- survive sanctions,
- expand territorial control,
- inflict attrition until the West blinks.

Ukrainian defenders are exhausted.

Russian losses are soaring.

No side has the capacity — or political space — to concede.

The war has entered a **long, grinding phase of violent stalemate**, with Europe footing the bill.

Gaza, Syria, Sahel, Myanmar

Across the world's conflict zones, three strategic patterns are clear:

1. **Ceasefires no longer hold.**
2. **Regional actors are replacing global ones.**
3. **Humanitarian norms are losing leverage.**

The conflicts are smaller than Ukraine — but collectively, they are **reshaping UN peacekeeping, refugee corridors, and Western aid budgets.**

4. Technology and Trade Are the New Front Lines

Who Owns the Future?

Two stories define the week:

- **Nvidia's new self-driving alliances**
- **Washington's retreat from drone restrictions**

Together, they show a superpower caught between:

- security hawks warning of Chinese penetration,
- and Silicon Valley insisting on global supply chains.

America wants technological supremacy — but it no longer knows if it wants to compete **through decoupling or domination.**

India, Europe, and the Global South

India's quiet negotiation to buy Venezuelan oil — while cutting Russian dependence — signals a new playbook:
follow US rules only when convenient.

Europe's dash for a 700-million-person trade pact with South America shows another truth:
the West has finally realized China won the globalization race — and is scrambling to catch up.

5. Africa, Latin America, and the Rise of Alternative Power Brokers

While Washington pivots to showdowns with Iran, Russia, and China, Beijing is writing a different script — one of patient statecraft:

- infrastructure loans,
- political courtship,
- and partnerships that last decades, not news cycles.

Wang Yi's Africa swing is not symbolic — it is a strategic reminder:
China shows up when others are distracted.

THE TRENDLINE: Realignment, Not Collapse

Across all continents, three themes dominate:

1. Great Powers Are No Longer Stabilizers

The U.S., China, and Russia are competing — not arbitrating.

2. Middle Powers Are Acting Like Strategists

India, Turkey, Brazil, Saudi Arabia, South Africa — each is crafting foreign policy independent of blocs.

3. People Are Revolting Faster Than Governments Can Adapt

Iran, Minneapolis, Gaza, Khartoum — anger is global, organized, and increasingly transnational.

The Bottom Line

The world hasn't rejected American leadership.
It has outgrown American predictability.

Trump is reengineering foreign policy into a **series of unilateral bets**,
and the rest of the world is accepting that:

- alliances are temporary,
- legal norms are negotiable,
- and power is back to being exercised, not convened.

The international system is not collapsing.
It is **rebalancing**, faster than Washington can claim, and faster than Beijing can absorb.

2026 will not be defined by who leads —
but by **how every state chooses to respond to a leaderless world**.