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What new world lies ahead?

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Putin, Trump and Netanyahu have undermined the system of international relations that we have known for decades. Putin's war of aggression in Ukraine, Trump's claims over Greenland or Canada, the use of tariffs as a means of exerting pressure, the removal of Maduro in Venezuela, and the bombing of civilian populations in Gaza or Iran no longer comply with international law as it has stood since 1945. For Putin, Trump and Netanyahu, the use of force is legitimate as a means of achieving their objectives. This is a major shift that affects every country in the world, and which must prompt us to analyse its consequences and anticipate possible future developments.

THE RIVALRY BETWEEN CHINA AND THE UNITED STATES WILL CERTAINLY REMAIN A CONSTANT FEATURE OF INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

China aims to be the world's leading power by 2049, something the United States finds unacceptable, but it is unlikely to be able to prevent this happening. Economic growth is primarily driven by innovation, and in this field, China is advancing faster. It trains 1.5 million engineers every year and employs 2.4 million researchers. The United States, by contrast, trains 200,000 engineers a year and employs 1.7 million researchers. In 2010, China overtook the United States in the number of patents filed each year. China, which invented, amongst other things, the compass, gunpowder and paper, has a great capacity for innovation. It is already making its mark with its industrial capabilities in many fields, from electric cars to renewable energy.

During his second term, Donald Trump has weakened US competitiveness by cutting research funding and excluding certain researchers on political grounds. By waging war against Iran, he has also brought about the blockade of the Strait of Hormuz, which has boosted interest in hydro, wind and solar power at the expense of fossil fuels. This is working to China's advantage, which has become the world leader in renewable energy. Finally, Trump's unpredictability, lies and mistakes have tarnished the United States'

image and made China appear as... a beacon of stability!

China does have a weakness however: its demographic decline, though the effects of this will only be felt in ten or twenty years' time. Furthermore, we cannot rule out the possibility that, having been able to rapidly reduce its birth rate through the one-child policy, it may find a way to reverse this trend.

ECONOMIC POWER IS SUSTAINABLE ONLY IF IT IS UNDERPINNED BY MILITARY MIGHT

The United States realised this a long time ago, and its military spending accounts for half of all military spending worldwide. Donald Trump has increased the military budget to nearly \$1,000 billion and is aiming for \$1,500 billion. China tripled its military budget over the past decade or so and this now exceeds \$300 billion. Every four years, it builds the equivalent of the entire French navy. It has become impregnable.

Russia's invasion of Ukraine has made Europe realise that peace is not guaranteed forever and that it was illusory to rely on the United States for its defence. It has begun to rearm, but, in the meantime, it cannot do without the United States. Ukraine's resistance to the Russian invasion has given it a few years to become a military power that Russia will no longer dare to attack. However, it remains dependent on major

American digital companies (Amazon, Apple, Alphabet, Microsoft, Nvidia) and American satellite networks, which limits its ability to resist American directives. It will have to invest hundreds of billions to create its own digital and artificial intelligence companies and, perhaps, form an alliance with Chinese firms.

A STRONG MILITARY FORCE IS NECESSARY, BUT THIS CAN BE DEFEATED BY A SMALLER ONE

The wars in Ukraine and Iran have highlighted the importance of drones, robots and artificial intelligence. Ukraine, with a population three times smaller than Russia's, has more than held its own against the Red Army by developing new technologies to manufacture drones or to intercept them. With its underwater drones, it has succeeded in blocking the Russian fleet in the Black Sea at Sebastopol. Ukrainian land-based robots are retrieving the wounded from the front line. In the Persian Gulf, the Americans have failed to prevent the Iranians from sending drones towards the Emirates or at ships passing through the Strait of Hormuz. The number of tanks, guns or aircraft is now less important than the capacity to manufacture AI-equipped vehicles capable of striking anywhere on enemy territory. Superiority of the skies is not enough to defeat an enemy that has gone underground.

AS THE WORLD'S LEADING MILITARY POWER, THE UNITED STATES HAS FAILED TO LEARN FROM ITS FAILURES

Since 1950, they have failed to impose their order in Korea, Vietnam, Somalia, Iraq or Afghanistan. Trump, who was elected on the promise of no longer waging wars abroad, has repeated the same mistake in Iran. The result is nothing short of catastrophic.

Iran has shown that, with just a few drones, it is possible to block passage through a strait and destabilise the global economy. There are many important straits around the world, and it is likely that, in future, countries bordering them will bear this example in mind. Maritime trade will have to factor in this element of uncertainty.

The Iranian government, responsible for the deaths of tens of thousands of protesters in January 2026 – a government that Netanyahu and Trump sought to topple within days through massive air strikes – has demonstrated its resilience. It has forced the United States to negotiate an agreement. Israel will have to accept that it cannot eliminate the existential threat that Iran poses to its survival. The Arab Gulf states are realising that US military bases cannot protect them against all drone or missile attacks and that these are in fact turning them into targets. They will certainly diversify their international relations, for example by drawing closer to China and Europe, and build new oil pipelines to reduce their dependence on the Strait of Hormuz. Although predominantly Sunni, they will nevertheless be forced to reach an agreement with Shia Iran, as both sides need access to the strait.

DONALD TRUMP HAS UNDERMINED THE CREDIBILITY OF THE UNITED STATES AND DAMAGED ITS RELATIONS WITH ITS ALLIES

By laying claim to Greenland until [recently](#), criticising NATO and insulting his European allies, the US President has made it clear to Europe that he is no longer a reliable ally. By abruptly cutting off official development assistance, he has lost a great deal of support in Africa. With his tariffs fluctuating according to his whim, he has alienated many countries, notably countries such as Brazil, India and Canada.

Putin's Russia, which has not come to terms with the end of the USSR, is trying to regain the ground it has lost. If it fails to defeat Ukraine and if European countries manage to rearm themselves over the next four or five years, Russia will have to abandon its ambitions regarding the Baltic states, Poland and Moldova. It will have no choice but to become China's vassal.

Since 1996, Israel has chosen to impose its will on its neighbours by force. This has proven to be an impasse. The 10 million Israelis, 20 per cent of whom are Arabs, live alongside 160 million Arabs and 90 million Iranians. Every time Israel kills an enemy, it creates a new generation of children who will want to

avenge their fathers. It can only assert itself against its neighbours because it benefits from US military support, but this support will not last forever, as the US no longer has many interests in this region. The alternative to endless war would be for Israel to finally accept the two-state solution and organise a rollback of settlement activity in the West Bank. This would allow it to build closer ties with Arab countries that have an interest in cooperating with Israel in the context of their confrontation with Iran.

The African continent remains fraught with danger. Its population has swelled from 284 million in 1960 to 1.55 billion today and is set to reach 2.5 billion by 2050. It is unable to feed itself and is home to the majority of the world's poor. The wars in eastern Congo have claimed more than six million lives over the past thirty years – a world record. In the Sahel, Sudan and southern Africa, conflicts between farmers and herders will claim an ever-increasing number of lives due to the decline in grazing land and population growth. Africa is unable to provide jobs for the 20 million poorly educated young people entering the labour market each year. Half of Africa's population, which has no access to electricity, will not reap the benefits of artificial intelligence. Africa possesses vast mineral resources but accounts for less than 3 per cent of international trade. The international community has never succeeded in preventing conflicts in Africa, and these are likely to persist whilst the rest of the world remains largely indifferent.

India has the potential to become the second or third most powerful country in the world. It has a young and growing population, and its engineers are renowned. It invests heavily in sectors of the future, such as semiconductors, artificial intelligence, renewable energy and the space industry. It skilfully manages its relations with China, the United States and Russia. Its future will depend on its ability to overcome its social and religious divisions.

Global warming will affect different parts of the world in different ways. Much of Africa, and particularly the Mediterranean region, will suffer increasingly from drought. Every country in the world

will be forced to adapt to extreme weather events (floods, storms, heatwaves, drought). The northern countries, primarily Canada and Russia, will gain millions of hectares of arable land and easier access to their mineral resources. In the Arctic, shipping lanes along the Russian and Canadian coasts will become navigable almost all year round. Conversely, the Panama Canal could well run out of a sufficient water supply rendering its enormous locks inoperable.

Recent developments in AI are impacting every aspect of the global economy. Artificial intelligence will lead to the loss of many jobs, and it is not yet clear whether it will result in the creation of many employment opportunities in other sectors. The ability to utilise artificial intelligence has become a key driver of development.

The UN and international law have lost their credibility. The five permanent members of the Security Council have all breached the UN Charter in recent decades. In 2003, the United States and the United Kingdom invaded Iraq without a UN mandate. In 2011, the United Kingdom and France failed to comply with the UN mandate, which was limited to the protection of the people of Benghazi, and contributed to the fall of Gaddafi and Libya. In 2014, Russia seized Crimea by force. In 2016, China rejected the international arbitration ruling that awarded the Philippines islands in the South China Sea. The Security Council has been unable to impose sanctions on Israel, which has failed to comply with UN decisions since 1948. Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022 and Donald Trump's blatant disregard for international law have marked a further step towards the primacy of force over law and have illustrated the impotence of what is known as the international community.

Democratic values have been on the decline worldwide, and the universality of human rights is being challenged. Many countries believe that the rights of the community should take precedence over the rights of the individual. China is working on a new definition of human rights, under which each country has the right to define its own model. The United States, which was once regarded as a model of

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democracy, is setting a bad example, with a President who has disputed the validity of Joe Biden's election, who has pardoned the rioters who stormed the Capitol in January 2021, who grossly insults his predecessors and opponents, and who uses the law to serve his own personal interests.

All of these upheavals are leading us towards a new world order the functioning of which is difficult to predict.

If we take a pessimistic view, we might consider that international law will continue to be flouted and that the most powerful countries will try to impose their will by force. In that case, states could lose much of their significance to the benefit of empires. Since the Roman Empire, history has provided us with numerous examples of this situation, with conquerors such as Genghis Khan or Napoleon, or more recently Hitler or Stalin. It is possible, and indeed probable, that the arrogant Trump fancies himself as emperor of the world.

If we take an optimistic view, we can see that the use of military force by Putin, Trump and Netanyahu has not helped them succeed in their endeavours. This restores the standing of the democratic model based on respect for the rule of law, as represented by the European Union. By resorting to force, Putin, Trump and Netanyahu have disrupted the functioning of the global economy and harmed the interests of many countries. Trade relations between all the countries of the world require stability. It is likely that China, and perhaps the BRICS countries, will attempt to return to a more stable world order. This could lead to a reform of the UN, which has long been discussed but may now return to the forefront. The system of international relations established in 1945 after the Second World War, largely dominated by the United States, cannot be restored. The European Union cannot afford to fall out with the United States, but it is certainly in its interests to work towards defining a new system of international relations that would give much greater weight to rising powers such as China, India, Brazil, Indonesia, etc. A multipolar world, in which each country defends its own interests but does not seek to impose its ideology, remains a possibility.

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