

Today's International Relations: A World in Transition

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INTRODUCTION

The contemporary global order stands at a crossroads. Rapid technological change, environmental degradation, shifting alliances, and power realignments have transformed the nature of international relations. The world is witnessing a reconfiguration of political, economic, and security structures that defined the post-Cold War period. The rise of new powers, the resurgence of nationalism, and the weakening of multilateral institutions are reshaping global governance in ways that challenge both theory and practice.

In this transitional context, the study of international relations (IR) has never been more relevant. Understanding how states, organizations, and non-state actors interact under evolving conditions is vital to addressing global challenges such as conflict, inequality, migration, and climate change. This paper explores these dynamics, tracing the ongoing transformation of world politics through theoretical, institutional, and regional lenses.

Keywords International Relations, Multipolarity, Global Governance, Power Transition, United Nations, Great Power Politics, Institutional Reform, Humanitarian Crises, Global-Regional Cooperation

Problem Statement

The international system of 2025 reflects a period of profound transformation marked by major conflicts, shifting power balances, and the erosion of established governance frameworks. Despite the persistence of global institutions such as the United Nations and regional organizations like the African Union and ASEAN, their ability to address escalating crises remains limited. The problem lies in the growing gap between global challenges—ranging from war and displacement to technological and environmental threats—and the capacity of existing international structures to manage them effectively. This study seeks to identify how these structural deficiencies and political divisions contribute to systemic instability and to what extent a transition toward multipolarity may reshape the principles and mechanisms governing international cooperation.

Research Gap

Existing research has extensively analyzed great power competition and the decline of U.S. unipolarity, but limited attention has been paid to the simultaneous institutional fragmentation and normative contestation that characterize the current era. Much of the literature focuses on isolated regions or specific conflicts rather than the interlinkages between global and regional transformations. There is a lack of integrative studies connecting geopolitical realignment, the weakening of liberal norms, and the practical limitations of multilateral governance. This paper fills that gap by providing a comprehensive framework that situates ongoing conflicts and institutional challenges within the broader evolution of international order.

METHODOLOGICAL OVERVIEW

This research adopts a qualitative analytical approach, combining document analysis, discourse analysis, and theoretical synthesis. Primary sources include UN reports, policy briefs from international think tanks (e.g., International Crisis Group, Stimson Center), and statements from global actors. Secondary sources comprise peer-reviewed literature and policy analyses addressing international order transitions. The methodology emphasizes comparative analysis between different regions (e.g., Ukraine, the Middle East, and the Indo-

Pacific) and the evolving roles of great powers and institutions. The study integrates theoretical perspectives from realism, liberal institutionalism, and constructivism to interpret the interaction between power politics, norms, and institutional performance.

Significance of the Study

This research contributes to both scholarly debate and policy discourse by offering an updated, multidimensional analysis of global transitions in the post-unipolar era. It provides insights into how institutional reform, regionalization, and shifting power dynamics affect global governance and humanitarian response. The findings aim to guide policymakers, international organizations, and scholars in developing adaptive governance models that reconcile power realities with the need for legitimacy, cooperation, and human security. The study also advances theoretical discussions by bridging the gap between systemic analysis and normative theory.

Ethical Considerations

The study is based entirely on publicly available sources and secondary data. No human subjects were involved, ensuring compliance with academic ethical standards. The author maintains neutrality by presenting multiple perspectives, particularly regarding contested international events. All data, quotes, and interpretations are appropriately referenced to uphold intellectual integrity and avoid misrepresentation or plagiarism. The analysis aims to respect the diversity of national and regional viewpoints within the evolving global system.

Limitations of the Study

The study's qualitative nature limits its capacity to measure causality or provide quantitative predictions. Given the fluidity of international politics, ongoing developments may alter the conclusions drawn from mid-2025 data. Furthermore, access to confidential diplomatic communications or classified institutional reports is restricted, constraining the depth of analysis in certain cases. Nonetheless, the research provides a robust analytical foundation based on verifiable and credible sources.

RELATED LITERATURE

Research on international order transitions highlights the shift from U.S. dominance to multipolar complexity (Ikenberry, 2018; Acharya, 2014). Realist scholars emphasize renewed great power rivalry (Mearsheimer, 2019), while liberal institutionalists stress institutional resilience amid systemic change (Keohane, 1984; Weiss et al., 2018). Constructivists explore the role of norms, legitimacy, and identity in shaping international behavior (Wendt, 1999; Finnemore & Sikkink, 2001). Recent works by the Center for International Governance Innovation (2025) and International Crisis Group (2024) illustrate practical challenges facing the UN and other multilateral systems. This paper synthesizes these strands to develop an integrated understanding of global transformation in 2025.

Major Conflict Zones Shaping International Relations in 2025

The Middle East: Regional Transformation and Conflict Escalation

The Middle East in June 2025 is one of the most unstable parts of the world, with the Israel-Hamas conflict that started in October 2023.

continuing to change the way things work in the region and in international diplomacy. The fight started when Hamas attacked Israel in a way that had never been seen before on October 7, 2023. About 1,200 people died and more than 200 were taken hostage. Israel's next military campaign in Gaza caused a lot of damage, killed civilians, and caused a humanitarian crisis. By June 2025, the conflict has become a more complicated regional confrontation involving many actors, even though there have been many attempts to reach ceasefire agreements.

The fighting has spread beyond Gaza to include regular gunfire between Israel and Hezbollah along the border between Israel and Lebanon. Hezbollah, with Iran's help, has been carrying out more and more complex attacks on Israeli targets. Israel, on the other hand, has been targeting Hezbollah leaders and infrastructure in Lebanon with airstrikes. This escalation has made people very worried that a full-scale war between Israel and Lebanon could break out and involve other countries in the region. Iran's support for both Hamas and Hezbollah has put it directly against Israel, and the tensions between the two countries have gotten very high. Iran carried out a major drone strike operation against Israeli air bases in May 2025, showing off its advanced capabilities and willingness to directly confront Israel (Understanding War, May 29, 2025).

The conflict has effects on the whole region, not just the people directly involved. The Abraham Accords framework, which helped Israel and a number of Arab states get along better, is having a lot of trouble. The United Arab Emirates and Bahrain still have formal diplomatic ties with Israel, but the progress toward normalizing relations between Saudi Arabia and Israel that seemed likely before October 7, 2023, has stopped. Saudi Arabia is being more careful because it wants to counter Iran's influence while also dealing with the backlash against Israel's military campaign in Gaza at home and in the region.

The conflict has also shown how the roles of outside powers in the region are changing. The United States, which has usually been the most powerful outside force in Middle Eastern affairs, has been criticized for how it has dealt with the conflict. At first, the Biden administration strongly supported Israel, but as the humanitarian situation in Gaza got worse, their position became more complex. However, the damage to U.S. credibility in the region has been significant. Russia and China have tried to take advantage of this by positioning themselves as alternative partners for states in the region. China's efforts to help Saudi Arabia and Iran get along in 2023 showed that it was becoming more powerful. Russia has used its military presence in Syria and diplomatic ties with Iran and Arab states to improve its standing in the region.

The war has had terrible effects on people. Gaza is in terrible shape, with widespread destruction of infrastructure and a lack of basic needs of food, water, and medical supplies, and a lot of people are moving. Since the ceasefire in Gaza broke down, UNRWA says that more than 599,000 people have been forced to leave their homes again. This includes more than 161,000 people who left between mid-May 2025 and now. The humanitarian crisis has put a lot of stress on the international aid system and made people wonder how well international humanitarian law works to protect civilians during war.

The conflict in the Middle East has also had big effects on international organizations, especially the UN. The Security Council has been very divided. At first, the United States used its veto power to stop resolutions that called for a ceasefire. This split has hurt the Council's ability to deal with the conflict and its credibility. The International Court of Justice has gotten involved by taking cases against Israel for breaking the Genocide Convention. This adds a legal aspect to the international response.

The Russia-Ukraine War: Stalemate and Diplomatic Maneuvering

As of June 2025, the war between Russia and Ukraine, which has been going on for four years, is still a major event in the world. The war that started when Russia fully invaded Ukraine in February 2022 has turned into a long war of attrition with big effects on European security, relations across the Atlantic, and the world order.

The military situation on the ground has reached a relative stalemate. Russia is slowly gaining ground in eastern Ukraine, but Ukraine is still fighting back. Ukraine's military strategy has been more and more focused on using asymmetric warfare and new tactics to make up for Russia's numerical advantages. In June 2025, Ukraine carried out a large number of drone strikes on several Russian air bases at the same time, showing that it could hit targets deep inside Russia (Institute for the Study of War, June 1, 2025). The operation hit strategic Russian planes, like the A-50 long-range radar detection planes and the Tu-95 and Tu-22M3 strategic bombers. It caused about \$7 billion in damage and destroyed 34% of Russia's strategic cruise missile carriers.

With Donald Trump back in the White House in 2025, the diplomatic situation around the conflict has changed a lot. Trump has said he wants the war to end quickly, even if that means making the Ukrainians look bad in front of everyone while supporting Russia (Foreign Affairs, May/June 2025). This way of doing things is very

different from the Biden administration's policy of "supporting Ukraine for as long as it takes." Russian and Ukrainian officials are talking about peace in Istanbul, but they still disagree on a lot of important issues (Reuters, June 2, 2025). Russia has started a new offensive, moving at the fastest pace since fall 2024 and starting a new front in the northern Kharkiv region (New York Times, June 2, 2025).

European allies are worried about the change in U.S. policy because they are afraid of being left behind and a deal that favors Russia. This has sped up talks about Europe's strategic independence and defense capabilities. NATO is still officially committed to helping Ukraine, but there are disagreements within the organization about how much help to give and how Ukraine could join.

The economic aspects of the conflict are still changing. Western sanctions on Russia have had big but not game-changing effects on the Russian economy. The economy has changed by doing more business with China, India, and other non-Western partners. The energy ties between Russia and Europe have changed a lot, and Europe now relies less on Russian oil and gas. This has changed the way energy markets work around the world. For example, Russia is now sending more energy to Asian markets, and Europe is getting energy from a wider range of sources.

The conflict is still having a terrible effect on people. Millions of Ukrainians are still living in other countries as refugees or in their own country. Russian attacks on Ukrainian civilian infrastructure, especially energy facilities, have made life very hard for the people of Ukraine. The war has also made it harder for people around the world to get food by stopping Ukrainian agricultural exports. However, some of this effect has been lessened by finding new ways to export goods.

The war between Russia and Ukraine has big effects on the world order. Russia's invasion was a direct attack on the UN Charter's principles of sovereignty and territorial integrity. Western countries have put sanctions on Ukraine and sent troops to help, while many countries in the Global South have taken more neutral positions. This shows that the international community is very divided. These divisions show that there is a bigger fight going on over the rules and norms of the international system.

Indo-Pacific Tensions: Taiwan, China, and Regional Security

In June 2025, the Indo-Pacific region is a key area of geopolitical competition, with tensions between China and the US rising to new heights over Taiwan and other regional flashpoints. Taiwanese security officials say that the situation around Taiwan has become very unstable. In May 2025, China sent two aircraft carrier groups and dozens of ships to the area (Anadolu News, June 2, 2025). This show of military force shows how China is becoming more aggressive toward what it sees as a "renegade province" that needs to be reunited with the mainland.

According to U.S. Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth, China is a "imminent" threat in the Indo-Pacific region. He said that China's army is "rehearsing for the real deal" when it comes to Taiwan (NBC News, June 2025). This language shows that both parties in the U.S. still agree on the threat that China poses, even though the second Trump administration has made changes to other areas of foreign policy. China has warned the U.S. not to "play with fire" over Taiwan (Politico, June 1, 2025), showing how easy it is for the two nuclear powers to make mistakes.

The political situation in Taiwan makes things even more complicated. Cross-strait relations have gotten worse since Lai Ching-te (William Lai) of the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) was elected president in January 2024. China has called Lai a "separatist" and put more pressure on Taiwan through military, economic, and diplomatic means. In Taiwan, the political landscape has changed, and thirty-one Kuomintang (KMT) lawmakers are up for special recall elections. The DPP, which is in charge, has said that it could win more than 10 legislative seats, which would give it a majority (Institute for the Study of War, May 30, 2025).

In addition to Taiwan, maritime disputes in the South China Sea are still causing problems. U.S. officials say that China has put offensive weapons in the South China Sea, which makes its anti-access/area denial capabilities stronger. This could make it harder for the U.S. and its allies to get involved in regional conflicts.

The US has kept up freedom of navigation operations in the disputed waters, which goes against China's broad maritime claims. China is still putting pressure on countries in the region, such as Vietnam, the Philippines, Malaysia, and Indonesia, as they try to keep their relationships with both China and the United States in check.

The technological side of competition in the Indo-Pacific has become more and more important. On May 20, 2025, the United States announced the Golden Dome space-based defense system. It would use a network of sensors and interceptors to protect against missile threats. China, Russia, and North Korea all spoke out against the project, saying it would make space more militarized and could lead to "a global nuclear and space arms race" (Institute for the Study of War, May 30, 2025). Even though people have said bad things about it, China is building its own military power in space. U.S. officials have seen "five different [PRC] objects in space maneuvering in and out and around each other in synchronicity and in control," and they have also noted that China's on-orbit capability has grown by about 620 percent over the past ten years.

As China grows, the security structures in the Indo-Pacific region keep changing. The United States has made its ties with Japan stronger.

South Korea, Australia, and others are also forming smaller groups, like the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad) with Japan, Australia, and India, and AUKUS with Australia and the UK. These deals are part of a plan to build coalitions to counterbalance China's growing power. ASEAN still claims to be the most important group in the region, even though its member states are becoming more divided in how they deal with competition between the US and China.

The economic part of Indo-Pacific relations is still complicated. Even though there are political tensions, China and its neighbors, including U.S. allies, are still very economically dependent on each other. China has met with ASEAN and the Gulf Cooperation Council to promote economic cooperation and lessen the United States' global power. In 2024, trade between ASEAN and China was more than 900 billion US dollars, which is almost twice as much as trade between the US and ASEAN. This economic reality makes it harder to build strong coalitions against China and shows how complicated relationships are in the region.

The situation in the Indo-Pacific shows how hard it is to handle competition between great powers in a region where economies are linked, there are territorial disputes, and there are long-standing grudges. The chance of making a mistake or accidentally escalating the situation is still high, especially when it comes to Taiwan, where China's red lines and the U.S.'s strategic ambiguity create a potentially dangerous mix. The region is probably the most important stage for the future of international order, as the established superpower and the rising challenger interact in military, economic, technological, and diplomatic areas.

Great Power Competition and Realignment

From Competition to Collusion: Evolving Great Power Dynamics

By June 2025, the landscape of great power relations had shifted in ways that fundamentally altered the international system. For nearly a decade, "great power competition" dominated U.S. strategic thinking. The Trump administration's 2017 National Security Strategy declared that "after being dismissed as a phenomenon of an earlier century, great power competition has returned," and the Biden administration's 2022 version reinforced this framing by identifying China and Russia as "powers that layer authoritarian governance with a revisionist foreign policy." These documents reflected a bipartisan consensus that the United States was engaged in long-term systemic rivalry with Beijing and Moscow. However, Trump's return to office in January 2025 rapidly dissolved this consensus. Analysts now describe the emerging landscape not as competitive multipolarity but as "great power collusion," a shift highlighted by Foreign Affairs (May/June 2025) as increasingly reminiscent of the 19th-century Concert of Europe, where major powers coordinated to manage the international order on their own terms.

In this context, great power collusion refers to a strategic environment in which major powers cooperate to negotiate spheres of influence, pursue transactional bargains, and stabilize the global order through elite arrangements rather than multilateral institutions. This represents a departure from the post-Cold War

emphasis on rules-based governance and aligns more closely with hierarchical bargaining in which the interests of smaller states are subordinated. Rather than competing across all domains, the United States, China, and Russia increasingly seek selective cooperation, dividing regions into zones of influence and managing crises through personalized diplomacy between leaders rather than established institutions.

Trump's approach to the Ukraine war illustrates this shift most clearly. Reports from The New York Times (2025) suggest that he has signaled willingness to pressure Kyiv into territorial concessions in order to achieve a rapid settlement, a policy that favors Russian interests and breaks sharply from prior U.S. commitments to Ukrainian sovereignty. Simultaneously, Trump has floated the idea of meeting Xi Jinping "man-to-man" to negotiate a comprehensive package on trade, investment, and nuclear arms control. Analysts such as those at the Stimson Center have referred to this as a "reverse Kissinger" strategy—rather than splitting China from Russia, Trump seeks to work with both to reorder global politics. More broadly, this behavior reflects an emerging model in which great powers collaborate to impose a shared vision of order centered on strongman leadership, transactional diplomacy, and limited regard for the autonomy of smaller states.

This shift toward collusion is further reinforced by Trump's treatment of traditional U.S. allies. At the same time as he extends outreach to Beijing and Moscow, he has intensified economic pressure on partners in Europe and North America. According to Foreign Affairs (2025), he has reportedly suggested forcing Canada into becoming "the 51st state," revived U.S. interest in acquiring Greenland, and even expressed ambitions regarding control over the Panama Canal. These pressures signal a move away from alliances as the foundation of U.S. strategy toward a foreign policy defined by coercion, hierarchy, and unilateral bargaining. This combination—conciliatory engagement with rivals and punitive pressure on allies—marks a dramatic departure from the post-World War II international order.

The implications of this shift from competition to collusion are profound. First, it accelerates the erosion of the rules-based international order by replacing norms of sovereignty, territorial integrity, and human rights with great power bargains. Second, it increases insecurity for small and medium powers, which become objects of negotiation rather than autonomous actors. Third, it weakens collective defense arrangements such as NATO and the EU, which were premised on U.S. reliability and shared commitments. Fourth, it strengthens authoritarian governance models by reducing scrutiny among major powers and enabling mutual tolerance of domestic repression. Finally, while collusion may reduce the risk of direct confrontation between the United States, China, and Russia, it produces a volatile system in which stability depends on the personal preferences of leaders rather than institutional safeguards. This analysis draws on U.S. strategic documents, major media reporting, and expert commentary from sources such as Foreign Affairs, the Stimson Center, and The New York Times, complemented by IR scholarship on multipolarity and great power management.

U.S.-China Relations: Competition, Cooperation, and Confrontation

Even though things are moving toward more cooperation, the relationship between the U.S. and China is still complicated and has many sides. Trump's tariffs are now in effect, and there is a threat of Chinese retaliation, so economic competition is still going on. China has used U.S. tariffs to make itself look like a supporter of multilateralism. It has accused the U.S. of hurting the global trading system and asked members of the World Trade Organization to stabilize trade between countries.

The strategic side of the relationship between the U.S. and China is still changing. China's military modernization is moving quickly, with a focus on capabilities that could threaten U.S. dominance in the Western Pacific. In May 2025, the People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) sent two groups of aircraft carriers to the waters near Taiwan. This shows that they have improved their blue-water capabilities. China's anti-access/area denial capabilities have gotten more advanced, which could make it harder for the U.S. military to operate in Taiwan. Space has become a new area of competition, with both countries building up their military capabilities in orbit. U.S. officials have seen Chinese spacecraft doing complicated maneuvers that could be used for military purposes. China, on the other hand, has criticized the U.S. Golden Dome space defense project.

Even though these competitive factors are at play, Trump's approach shows that he is more willing to work with China on issues that are important to both countries. The possibility of a big deal that includes trade, investment, and nuclear weapons shows that the relationship is more businesslike. This change has worried U.S. allies in Asia, who are afraid that their interests might be put on hold during U.S.-China talks. Japan, South Korea, and Australia have all responded by improving their own defenses while trying to keep good relations with the United States.

The technological aspect of U.S.-China relations is still very controversial. The US still limits China's access to advanced semiconductor technology and other important technologies that can be used for both military and civilian purposes. These rules are meant to slow down China's progress in technology that could be used for military purposes, like artificial intelligence, quantum computing, and biotechnology. China has responded by putting a lot of money into homegrown innovation and looking for other ways to get technology. The technological split between the two biggest economies in the world has big effects on global supply chains and innovation ecosystems.

U.S.-Russia Relations: Accommodation and Strategic Implications

Trump's approach to Russia may be the biggest change in U.S. foreign policy in a long time. Trump has said he wants to improve relations with Moscow after years of bad relations since Russia took Crimea in 2014 and invaded Ukraine in 2022. This change is most obvious in how he has handled the Ukraine conflict, where he has said he supports ending the war quickly, possibly on terms that are good for Russia.

This change is a big break from the Biden administration's policy of backing Ukraine "for as long as it takes." It has also made European allies worry about how committed the U.S. is to European security. NATO members, especially those in Eastern Europe, are worried that a deal between the U.S. and Russia could hurt them. These worries have sped up talks about Europe's ability to defend itself and be strategically independent, but there are still big problems that make it hard to really be free of U.S. security guarantees.

Better relations between the U.S. and Russia have effects on more than just Europe. Russia and China have strengthened their strategic partnership in the past few years by working together on military exercises, sharing technology, and diplomatic efforts. Some experts think that Trump's outreach to Russia is meant to drive a wedge between Moscow and Beijing, which is what was called the "reverse Kissinger" approach earlier. But this strategy may not work as well because of how close China and Russia are and how much they both want to stop the U.S. from being in charge.

Even though its economy is weak, Russia still sees itself as a challenger to the U.S.-led world order. Its military actions in Ukraine, support for the Assad regime in Syria, and growing presence in Africa show that it is determined to reassert itself as a global power. Trump's approach seems to want to get along with Russia instead of keeping it in check. This could mean that he sees Russia as a great power with a lot of influence in its own neighborhood.

Global South and Middle Powers: Strategic Autonomy and Hedging

As the balance of power changes, middle powers and countries in the Global South are having to deal with complicated relationships with the U.S., China, and Russia. India, Brazil, South Africa, Turkey, and Saudi Arabia are all trying to make their foreign policies more independent. They want to have more freedom and use their ties with multiple major powers to their advantage.

India is a good example of this because it keeps its strategic partnership with the US while also keeping its long-standing ties with Russia and dealing with its complicated relationship with China. India is worried about China's growing power, which is why it is part of the Quad with the U.S., Japan, and Australia. However, India has not condemned Russia's invasion of Ukraine and continues to buy Russian oil and military equipment. India's foreign policy is multidirectional, which means it can keep its strategic independence while getting benefits from its relationships with all the major powers.

Middle Eastern countries, especially Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, have also made their international ties more varied. They have strengthened their economic and diplomatic ties with China and Russia while keeping security ties with the United States. Saudi Arabia's interest in joining the BRICS group and its 2023 reconciliation with Iran through China show that it is becoming more independent in its foreign policy. The UAE's balanced stance on the Russia-Ukraine conflict and growing trade ties with China show that it is using a similar hedging strategy.

Brazil, under President Lula da Silva, has once again taken on the role of regional leader and Global South advocate in Latin America. Brazil has kept its relationships with the U.S., China, and Russia in balance while pushing for changes to global governance institutions to give developing countries more say. It wants a more multipolar world system, which is why it is a member of the BRICS group and supports de-dollarization.

The economic aspect of these relationships is especially important. China has worked with multinational groups like the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) to boost economic cooperation and lessen U.S. influence around the world. In 2024, ASEAN's trade with China and the GCC was more than \$900 billion, which is almost twice as much as trade between the US and ASEAN.

These economic ties give China a lot of power and make it harder for the U.S. to build strong coalitions against Chinese interests.

Implications for International Stability and Order

The transition from great power rivalry to a more collusive strategy raises critical questions about the future of international stability and order. From a realist perspective, great power collusion resembles a modern attempt to recreate a concert system, in which dominant states jointly manage global affairs by informally dividing spheres of influence. Historical precedents suggest that such arrangements can produce periods of relative stability, yet they remain fragile: they tend to collapse when power asymmetries shift, when rising states seek to revise the status quo, or when major powers disagree on the boundaries of influence. Whether a 21st-century “concert of powers” can succeed is uncertain, in part because today’s international environment differs profoundly from the 19th-century model realism draws upon.

Several structural factors distinguish the contemporary system. The presence of nuclear weapons, a classic realist constraint, strongly discourages direct confrontation among great powers. Meanwhile, elements emphasized by liberal theory, such as economic interdependence, continue to discourage conflict even amid selective decoupling. In addition, transnational challenges—including climate change, pandemics, and terrorism—require sustained cooperation across ideological divides. These functional pressures create incentives for major powers to collaborate despite geopolitical rivalry. Yet the risks remain significant. Potential flashpoints like Taiwan, Ukraine, or the Middle East could escalate rapidly through miscalculation, and regional powers may seek to exploit either competition or collusion among the great powers to advance their own agendas. In a more fragmented system, non-state actors—from terrorist networks to criminal organizations—may also gain greater operational freedom.

The constructivist dimension of this shift carries equally far-reaching implications. A system grounded in spheres of influence reflects a normative reorientation away from universal liberal principles toward a hierarchical order defined by great-power prerogatives. Such a transition threatens to marginalize norms of sovereignty, self-determination, and human rights, which have been central pillars of the liberal international order. The move toward collusion among major powers therefore not only reallocates material influence but also reshapes the ideational foundations of global governance, potentially eroding the legitimacy of international institutions and weakening support for normative constraints on state behavior.

The reconfiguration of great-power relations in June 2025 thus represents more than a tactical adjustment in U.S. foreign policy; it signals a potential transformation of the international system itself. Whether this emerging order evolves into a stable form of concert diplomacy or descends into intensified instability remains uncertain. What is clear is that the implications will extend across all domains of international relations,

influencing the distribution of power, the functioning of global institutions, and the normative commitments that underpin the international order.

Table 1: Theoretical Interpretations of Great Power Collusion (2025)

IR Paradigm	Core Assumptions	Interpretation of 2025 Great Power Collusion	Predicted Implications for International Order
Realism	- States pursue survival in an anarchic system. - Power and security are primary interests. - Balance of power shapes behavior.	- Collusion is a strategic bargain among major powers to manage rivalry and avoid costly conflict. - Resembles a modern concert of powers dividing spheres of influence. - Trump's 2025 shifts reflect power calculations, not ideology.	- Temporary stability among great powers. - High risk of collapse if power shifts. - Small states' sovereignty becomes vulnerable. - Flashpoints (Taiwan, Ukraine) remain volatile.
Liberalism	- Interdependence reduces likelihood of conflict. - International institutions shape behavior. - Cooperation is possible under shared rules.	- Partial collusion emerges from economic interdependence and institutional fatigue. - U.S., China, and Russia cooperate pragmatically where interests align (trade, nuclear stability). - Weakening multilateral institutions opens space for informal bargains.	- Erosion of the rules-based order. - Institutions weakened but not irrelevant. - Allies feel insecure as U.S. reliability declines. - Increased transnationalism in diplomacy.
Constructivism	- State behavior shaped by identities, norms, and narratives. - Leadership perceptions matter.	- Collusion reflects converging narratives among strongman leaders (Trump, Xi, Putin). - Normative shift away from liberal universalism toward hierarchical great-power governance. - Domestic political identities influence foreign-policy alignments.	- Decline of liberal norms (sovereignty, human rights, self-determination). - Rise of authoritarian legitimacy and strongman diplomacy. - Smaller states lose normative protection.

Realism, liberalism, and constructivism together provide a multidimensional explanation for the shift from great-power competition to collusion in 2025. Realism highlights the structural incentives—shifting power balances, nuclear constraints, and the logic of spheres of influence—that make collusion a rational strategy for managing rivalry. Liberalism adds that economic interdependence, institutional ties, and global challenges create functional pressures that push great powers toward selective cooperation despite political tensions. Constructivism explains the role of leadership identities and shared narratives, particularly the alignment among strongman leaders who prefer transactional, hierarchical governance over liberal norms. When combined, these paradigms reveal that great-power collusion is not driven by a single logic but emerges from the interaction of material interests, institutional constraints, and evolving political identities.

International Order and Governance Challenges

The United Nations System Under Strain

In June 2025, the United Nations system is going through one of the most difficult times in recent history, with several crises putting its ability and legitimacy to the test. The war between Israel and Hamas that started in October 2023 has cast a long shadow over the organization. Many UN members are worried that it is not doing

its main job of keeping the peace and safety (International Crisis Group, September 2024). The U.S., Russia, and China don't get along as well in the Security Council anymore, and UN officials say that morale is low within the organization. The UN's ability to deal with big global problems is getting weaker because of tensions between countries and a lack of resources.

The Security Council, which is the UN's main body for keeping the peace and security around the world, has been especially hurt by divisions between major powers. The conflict between Hamas and Israel changed how the Council does diplomacy, putting the US on the defensive. After being publicly criticized for a long time by the U.S. and its allies at the UN for its attack on Ukraine, Russia quickly accused Washington of having different standards when it came to the two wars. The U.S. blocked several draft resolutions that called for pauses or a complete end to hostilities in Gaza. The U.S. was becoming more and more isolated in the Council, with only the UK offering partial support. The elected members of the Council, led by Malta and the United Arab Emirates, had to convince the U.S. not to veto resolutions that only dealt with the humanitarian aspects of the conflict by the end of 2023.

The Biden administration's stance started to change in early 2024 as they became more upset about how long the war was going on and how it was affecting people. In March 2024, the U.S. finally agreed to stay out of a short resolution that called for a ceasefire. Washington still didn't want the UN to play a political role in the conflict, as shown by its veto of a resolution in April 2024 that would have suggested letting Palestine join the UN as a member state. The way the Biden administration dealt with the UN during the Gaza conflict has hurt the US's reputation in Turtle Bay for a long time (International Crisis Group, September 2024).

The UN has had a hard time dealing with other big wars, like the civil war in Sudan and the war in Ukraine, in addition to the Middle East. The Security Council is still split on Ukraine, and Russia is using its veto power to stop resolutions that criticize its actions. The international community hasn't given enough attention or resources to the situation in Sudan, which has caused one of the world's biggest displacement crises. This shows how hard it is for the UN to deal with more than one crisis at a time.

Even with these problems, the UN is still involved in a lot of peacemaking and humanitarian work in countries where there is conflict. UN aid agencies and peace operations still have a lot of conflict management skills, some of which are even unique. Even when the UN is being abused and is in danger of being ignored, like in Gaza or Myanmar, it helps civilians who can't get help from anyone else. The UN is still the only place where all countries can speak out about major crises in diplomacy.

Reform Initiatives and Governance Challenges

Member states have tried to reform the UN in different ways because they know it can't handle all of today's problems. In September 2025, leaders from around the world will meet for a special Summit of the Future to talk about changing the organization. However, the talks that took place before the summit showed that there is not a common vision among states for the future of multilateralism. It is unlikely that major changes will happen soon in the UN's work on peace and security, but there may be chances for smaller changes to the UN's peacekeeping, peacebuilding, and sanctions systems.

China is now more involved in talks about UN reform. It plans to hold an open debate on "Practicing Multilateralism, Reforming and Improving Global Governance" (Security Council Report, January 2025). This project shows how China's power is growing in multilateral organizations and how it wants to shape the future of global governance. But there are big differences between how China and the West see the world order, which makes it harder to agree on important changes.

Other multilateral organizations, like the UN, are also having trouble. The World Trade Organization's dispute resolution system is still broken, which makes it less useful for settling trade disputes. International financial institutions like the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund have started making changes to their governance to give emerging economies more of a say, but the changes have been slow to happen. The European Union, the African Union, and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations are all examples of

regional organizations that have taken on more responsibilities for dealing with security and economic issues in their own areas. This shows a trend toward regionalization of governance.

Managing new technologies is a big problem. New rules are needed for artificial intelligence, cyber capabilities, and space technologies, but current international organizations are having a hard time keeping up with how quickly technology changes. Competition between major powers makes it harder to set up global tech governance. This can lead to broken approaches and possible gaps in regulation. The U.S. Golden Dome space defense system was announced in May 2025, and China criticized the project for militarizing space. This shows how hard it is to govern new areas of technology (Institute for the Study of War, May 30, 2025).

Multipolar World Order and Normative Contestation

The international system is becoming more multipolar, which means that power is spread out among several centers. To lessen the risks of a multipolar order, we need to rethink the United Nations and other governing bodies (Center for International Governance Innovation, May 2025). As the balance of power in the world changes, there is a growing need for government reforms that create more fair and representative systems (UN DESA, April 2025).

This multipolarity is accompanied by fundamental contestation over the organizing principles of the international order. The rules-based international order that was set up after World War II is having a lot of trouble with rising powers that challenge norms and institutions they see as serving Western interests. China, Russia, and many other countries in the Global South are pushing back against liberal interventionism by reasserting the idea of sovereignty. Authoritarian regimes and even some democratically elected governments that put national sovereignty and non-interference first push back against efforts to promote human rights and democracy.

The rise of illiberal democracy and democratic backsliding in different parts of the world makes the normative landscape even more complicated. Since 2020, there have been a lot more unconstitutional changes of government (UCGs), which makes it harder for international governance (International Peace Institute, March 2025). The international response to coups and other democratic backsliding has not been consistent. In their own areas, regional organizations often take the lead in dealing with UCGs.

The breakdown of agreement on important international norms has consequences for resolving conflicts and providing aid. Finding common ground on how to deal with complicated crises is getting harder and harder without a shared understanding of ideas like sovereignty, self-determination, and the duty to protect. This normative contestation exacerbates the paralysis of international institutions and hinders efforts to resolve significant conflicts and humanitarian crises.

Global Commons and Transnational Challenges

In a world with many poles, it is especially hard to govern global commons like the oceans, atmosphere, outer space, and cyberspace. Even though the Paris Agreement framework is in place, climate change governance is still fragmented because of gaps in implementation and funding that make it harder to keep climate promises. There is a growing consensus that climate security is a peace and security issue, but the UN Security Council is split on whether to treat climate change as a security threat.

Global health governance has also had to deal with a lot of problems. After the pandemic, there haven't been many changes to global health governance. The World Health Organization still has trouble getting money and power. There are still unfair differences in access to vaccines and medical technology, and we are not ready for future pandemics. The COVID-19 pandemic showed that current global health governance systems don't work very well and that countries need to work together more to deal with health emergencies.

Cyberspace is another area where governance systems are not keeping up with the size of the problems. Cyber operations by both state and non-state actors have become more common and advanced, with a focus on critical infrastructure, money systems, and the way democracy works. There has been little progress in

establishing international norms for responsible state behavior in cyberspace. This is because major powers are taking different approaches to cyber governance.

Outer space is becoming a contested area, with major powers building up their military capabilities in ways that could threaten things in space. The U.S. Golden Dome project and China's growing on-orbit capabilities show how space is becoming more militarized and how hard it is to set up good governance systems for this important area.

Existing legal frameworks, including the 1967 Outer Space Treaty, are becoming less and less effective at dealing with modern problems in space governance.

These problems that cross national borders show how limited a state-centered international system is when it comes to solving problems that affect more than one country. To manage global commons well, major powers need to work together and come up with new ways to govern that can balance different interests while encouraging people to work together. The current state of international relations, which is marked by competition or collusion between major powers instead of broad-based cooperation, makes it harder to deal with these common problems in a useful way.

Implications for International Stability and Cooperation

The problems with international order and governance have big effects on global stability and cooperation. The weakening of multilateral institutions and shared norms makes international relations less predictable and makes it harder to deal with common problems. Without good ways to handle conflicts and work together to solve problems that cross national borders, the chances of making mistakes, escalating problems, and failing to govern rise.

The current situation also opens up new ways for global governance to be more creative. In November 2024, the Quincy Institute started a global project that brought together 130 scholars from 40 countries to come up with a plan for making the international security order more stable. These kinds of programs show that people understand that governance systems need to change to fit the needs of today instead of just keeping the ones that already exist.

Regional organizations like the African Union, the European Union, ASEAN, and others are becoming more important in international governance. They are taking on more duties in managing conflicts and running the economy.

This move toward regional governance is a response to the problems with global institutions and may lead to better ways to deal with regional problems.

The G20 has become an important place to talk about global economic problems. It brings together both established and rising powers in a way that is more representative than traditional groups like the G7. In September 2024, the G20 Foreign Ministers called for action on reforming global governance. They stressed the need for international institutions that are more open and effective.

The future of international order and governance will depend on how well countries can adapt to a world that is becoming more multipolar while keeping the institutions and rules that have helped keep the peace. This will necessitate reconciling the legitimate aspirations of emerging powers for enhanced representation and influence with the imperative to uphold fundamental principles such as sovereign equality, the peaceful resolution of disputes, and the safeguarding of human rights. Finding this balance in a world where great powers are competing with each other or working together is one of the biggest problems in modern international relations.

Theoretical Consequences and Prospective Scenarios.

The complicated state of the world in June 2025 puts current theories about international relations to the test and calls for more detailed frameworks to help us understand how things work on a global scale. Traditional

theories offer significant insights but necessitate modification to comprehensively reflect the complex dynamics of modern international relations.

Realist Viewpoints

The present international context offers compelling support for realist analyses of international relations. The return of great power politics, the creation of spheres of influence, and the focus on military strength are all in line with what classical realists expect from states in an anarchic international system. The change in U.S. foreign policy under Trump's second term, which favors working with Russia and China while putting pressure on traditional allies, shows a *realpolitik* approach that puts power ahead of values or institutional commitments.

Defensive realism elucidates the security dilemmas manifest in areas like the Indo-Pacific, where China's military modernization has incited countermeasures from the United States and its allies. The military buildups in the Indo-Pacific, Europe, and the Middle East are examples of security dilemma dynamics. States are improving their abilities to deal with threats, which could make everyone less safe.

Offensive realism could view China's increasingly aggressive actions, especially in relation to Taiwan, as a logical outcome of its rising influence and the necessity to achieve regional dominance.

Neoclassical realism, which includes domestic factors in realist analysis, helps us understand how internal factors affect decisions about foreign policy. The impact of domestic politics on U.S. policy towards Ukraine, Israeli choices concerning Gaza, and Chinese nationalism regarding Taiwan illustrates the necessity of amalgamating domestic and international analytical frameworks. The notion of "strategic culture" elucidates enduring patterns in state behavior that cannot be exclusively ascribed to structural factors.

Challenges to Liberal Institutionalism

Liberal institutionalism encounters considerable challenges in the contemporary international landscape yet remains pertinent in elucidating critical dimensions of state conduct. Multilateral institutions keep working and changing to fit new power dynamics, even though they face challenges. The United Nations is still involved in peacekeeping, humanitarian aid, and diplomatic efforts in many conflicts, even though it is limited by divisions between major powers. The European Union, the African Union, and ASEAN are all regional organizations that are still very important in dealing with security and economic problems in their own areas.

Economic interdependence, a fundamental tenet of liberal theory, endures despite geopolitical tensions and attempts at partial decoupling. The strong economic ties between the US and China are still holding back full decoupling, even though tariffs and limits on technology make things harder. European reliance on Chinese markets and investments hinders the formation of unified coalitions to counterbalance China. This ongoing interdependence bolsters liberal assertions regarding the limiting impact of economic connections on conflict behavior.

Normative frameworks, a key aspect of liberal theory, persist in influencing state behavior and establishing criteria for assessing international conduct. Even though ideas like sovereignty, human rights, and democracy are being challenged, they are still important points of reference in international discussions. The necessity for states to rationalize their actions in accordance with established norms, even when contravening them, indicates the enduring significance of normative factors in international relations.

Insights from Constructivism

Constructivist approaches provide significant insights into the ideational aspects of contemporary international relations. The United States, China, and other powers have different ideas about what the international order should look like. These ideas are based on different stories about what the right way to organize the international system is. China's focus on "a community of shared future for mankind" and "win-win cooperation" offers a different view of the liberal international order that the US and its allies support.

The ongoing dispute about the meaning and use of sovereignty, human rights, and democracy shows how these

ideas are made up by society. Russia and China have advocated for "sovereign democracy" and underscored the principle of non-interference in domestic matters, contesting Western interpretations of these norms. Countries in the Global South have progressively articulated their own interpretations of these concepts, mirroring their historical contexts and current priorities.

Identity politics is becoming a bigger part of foreign policy decisions. Claims of national and civilizational identity are affecting how states act. The emergence of nationalist leaders across several nations has impacted strategies regarding international collaboration, migration, and conflict resolution. Religious and cultural identities persist in shaping conflict dynamics in areas like the Middle East, where sectarian divisions and conflicting historical narratives hinder peacemaking initiatives.

Outside of Traditional Paradigms

The intricacy of modern international relations indicates the necessity for theoretical frameworks that surpass conventional paradigms. The concurrent competition, cooperation, and collusion among major powers cannot be comprehensively represented by theories that prioritize either conflict or cooperation as the principal mode of interaction. The idea of "complex interdependence," which sees that states and non-state actors can interact in many different ways, gives us a more detailed view of these relationships.

Multi-level analysis has grown more important for figuring out how things work between countries. The interplay among domestic politics, regional dynamics, and global trends influences outcomes in a manner that cannot be simplified to a singular analytical level. The effects of populist movements on foreign policy, the function of regional organizations in facilitating global-local interactions, and the influence of transnational networks on state conduct necessitate comprehensive analytical frameworks.

The intricate relationship between material interests and normative factors poses an additional challenge to conventional theories. States pursue material interests while concurrently participating in normative discourse and identity politics.

To comprehend this interplay, theoretical frameworks must encompass both the material and ideational aspects of international relations without diminishing one in favor of the other.

Possible Future Scenarios for the International Order

Several possible scenarios for the future of the international order come to mind when we look at current trends and dynamics. These scenarios are not mutually exclusive and may occur concurrently in various regions or domains.

Managed competition

In this case, the great powers set rules of engagement that keep them from fighting each other directly while still competing in other areas. The US, China, and Russia come to unspoken or spoken agreements about their areas of influence and red lines.

lowering the chance of unintentional escalation. Competition persists in economic, technological, and ideological domains, yet is limited by the acknowledgment of the disastrous repercussions of direct military conflict among nuclear states.

This situation is similar to the "great power collusion" approach that is starting to take shape under Trump's second term, but it has more formal ways to handle competition. There may be deals about how to control weapons, how to talk to each other during a crisis, and how to act in areas where there is a lot of competition, like cyberspace and outer space. Great powers would work together to deal with regional flashpoints like Taiwan, Ukraine, and the Middle East, which could hurt the interests of smaller states.

The managed competition scenario offers a measure of stability but engenders considerable apprehensions regarding the rights of smaller states and the future of liberal values in international relations. It signifies a reversion to a more conventional balance of power framework, albeit within an environment of unparalleled economic interdependence and transnational issues.

Formation of a Bloc

In another scenario, competing blocs could form around the United States, China, and maybe other powers. This would be a more confrontational version of multipolarity, with states having to choose sides more and more in a new "Cold War" situation. Economic decoupling would speed up, with the creation of separate trade, financial, and technological systems that work with different power centers.

In this case, ideological differences would become clearer, with different ideas about how to run a country and how to run the world. The liberal democratic model endorsed by the United States and its allies would contend with the authoritarian state capitalism model linked to China and the nationalist authoritarianism represented by Russia. Countries in the Global South would be under more and more pressure to join one group or the other. However, some might be able to keep their strategic independence by carefully balancing their interests.

The scenario of forming a bloc would probably lead to more geopolitical tension and less economic efficiency than managed competition. If the global economy split into competing spheres, it would be harder to deal with problems that cross national borders, like climate change and pandemics, and trade would be less profitable. There would be a higher chance of proxy wars, especially in areas where there is a lot of disagreement, like the Indo-Pacific, Eastern Europe, and the Middle East.

Adaptation of institutions

A more positive picture is one in which international institutions slowly change to fit the new power dynamics while still upholding the main ideas of the post-World War II order. Both established and rising powers would have to make big compromises for this to happen. The US and its allies would have to agree to let China and other rising powers have more power in exchange for their promise to work within new institutional frameworks.

Institutional adaptation might mean changing the way the Security Council works to reflect how power is distributed today, changing how votes are cast in international financial institutions, and coming up with new ways to govern new areas like cyberspace and artificial intelligence. Regional organizations would become more important, and the principle of subsidiarity would help decide who is responsible for what between global and regional institutions.

This situation would keep some parts of the liberal international order while also meeting the reasonable requests of rising powers for more representation and power. It would necessitate a level of cooperation among major powers that appears difficult in the present geopolitical landscape, yet could become more achievable if common threats like climate change or impending pandemics generate enhanced incentives for collaboration.

Breakdown of the System

The worst-case scenario is that the international order will become more fragmented, which will increase the chances of conflict. In this situation, competition between great powers gets worse because there aren't any good ways to deal with tensions. This leads to arms races, proxy wars, and even direct confrontations. Major powers would further push international institutions to the side or use them for their own ends, making it harder for them to deal with global problems.

Economic nationalism would be the most important thing, with countries putting self-sufficiency and security ahead of efficiency and interdependence. As restrictions on cross-border data flows, scientific collaboration, and technology transfer grow, competition in technology would speed up. The digital world could break up into competing "splinternets" that are run by different rules and technical standards.

This situation would have the highest chance of a major power conflict, which could be caused by a mistake or an escalation in places like Taiwan, Ukraine, or the Middle East. Even if there isn't a direct conflict, the breakdown of international cooperation would make it very hard to deal with problems that cross national borders, which would have terrible effects on human security and global stability.

Final Thoughts

The theoretical implications of modern international relations underscore the necessity for analytical frameworks capable of encompassing the complexity and multidimensionality of global politics. Conventional theories offer significant insights but necessitate modification to comprehensively address the concurrent competition, cooperation, and collusion that define interactions among major powers. The future of the international order is still unclear. There are many possible paths, from managed competition to system breakdown.

It is clear that the time after the Cold War when the U.S. was in charge and the liberal international order grew is over. The new international system is more multipolar, has more conflicts, and could be more unstable. To get through this time of change, we will need smart diplomacy, new ways of doing things in institutions, and a willingness to find common ground even when we disagree strongly. There are a lot at stake, and the effects will be felt around the world, not just in relations between great powers. They will also affect human security, economic growth, and the environment.

CONCLUSION

The New International Order

The international system in June 2025 is at a very important point in time. There are major conflicts going on at the same time, power is shifting, and the established global order is facing serious challenges. This paper has analyzed the collective impact of these developments on the transformation of international relations and the global balance of power. By examining significant conflict zones, great power rivalry, international governance issues, and humanitarian aspects, several critical conclusions regarding the characteristics of the evolving international order are drawn.

First, the time after the Cold War when the U.S. was the most powerful country in the world and the liberal international order grew has come to an end. After the Soviet Union fell apart, the world became less stable and more complicated. China has become a major power, Russia has become more aggressive, and regional powers are pursuing their own foreign policies. This shift in power is happening in many areas, including the military, economy, technology, and social norms. This makes the competition more complex.

Second, the way great powers interact with each other has changed a lot. The transition from great power competition to what certain analysts term "great power collusion" during the second Trump administration signifies a fundamental realignment of U.S. foreign policy. This strategy, which is similar to a "concert" system from the 1800s, puts pressure on traditional allies while trying to get along with Russia and China. It's not clear if this approach will work in the long run, but it could lead to a return to a more traditional balance of power system, even though the world is now more economically interdependent and facing problems that cross borders.

Third, international organizations have a lot of trouble dealing with today's problems. The United Nations Security Council is still stuck on big conflicts. The U.S. is alone on Gaza, and the divisions between Russia and the West on Ukraine make it hard for countries to work together to solve problems. Reform efforts have only made small steps forward, which shows that states don't have a common vision for the future of multilateralism. Regional organizations have assumed increased responsibilities, indicative of a trend towards the regionalization of governance in response to the inadequacies of global institutions.

Fourth, the humanitarian effects of the current wars are very bad and affect a lot of people. There are now 122.6 million people forcibly displaced around the world, which is the highest number ever. The international

humanitarian system is having a hard time keeping up with major humanitarian crises in Gaza, Sudan, Ukraine, and the Sahel region.

Funding shortfalls, access constraints, and the politicization of humanitarian action amid significant power rivalry hinder effective responses to these challenges.

Fifth, the present international context contests established theoretical frameworks in international relations. Realist perspectives provide significant insights into power dynamics and security challenges, liberal institutionalism emphasizes the enduring nature of economic interdependence and normative frameworks, and constructivism reveals conflicting narratives and identity politics; however, no singular theoretical framework comprehensively encapsulates the intricacies of modern international relations. The concurrent competition, collaboration, and collusion among major powers necessitate more sophisticated analytical frameworks.

There are a few possible scenarios for the future of the international order. These include managed competition, where great powers set rules for how to interact with each other that keep direct conflict from happening while they compete in other areas; bloc formation, where competing blocs form around different power centers; institutional adaptation, where international institutions slowly change to fit new power realities; and system breakdown, where the system becomes more fragmented and the risk of conflict rises.

The international system is going through a time of change that is marked by a lot of uncertainty and instability. Nuclear deterrence and economic interdependence make it unlikely that there will be a major power war, but there is still a high risk of miscalculation and escalation in places like Taiwan, Ukraine, and the Middle East. In the next few years, we will find out if a new, stable international order can be created or if international relations will continue to be marked by conflict and fragmentation.

To get through this time of change, we will need smart diplomacy, new ideas for institutions, and a willingness to find common ground even when we disagree strongly. For a more stable and fair international order, we need better ways to handle crises, institutional changes that improve representation while keeping effectiveness, new ways to help people in need during complex emergencies, and rules for new technologies.

The stakes are high, and the effects will be felt not only in relations between major powers but also in terms of human security, economic growth, and environmental sustainability around the world. The decisions of political leaders, international organizations, and civil society in the next few years will have a big impact on the international system for many years to come. The first step to coming up with good answers to these new problems is to understand how international relations work in today's world.

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