



• ANALYSIS

The Dissolution Of The Rules- Based Order: The Global Age Of Normlessness and Türkiye's Strategic Role

Ali Murat Kurşun

**THE DISSOLUTION OF THE
RULES-BASED ORDER:
The Global Age Of
Normlessness And Türkiye's
Strategic Role**

ALI MURAT KURŞUN

COPYRIGHT © 2025 by SETA

All rights reserved.

No part of this publication may be reprinted or reproduced or utilized in any form or by any electronic, mechanical or other means, without permission in writing from the publishers.

The conclusions and recommendations of any SETA Foundation publication are solely those of its author(s), and do not reflect the views of the Institution, its management, or its other scholars.

SETA Yayınları

ISBN: 978-625-5703-31-6

Editorial Team: Ebrar Üzümcü, Sudib Sontoran
Layout: Said Demirtaş

SETA | SİYASET, EKONOMİ VE TOPLUM ARAŞTIRMALARI VAKFI

Nenehatun Cd. No: 66 GOP Çankaya 06700 Ankara TÜRKİYE

Tel: +90 312 551 21 00 | Faks: +90 312 551 21 90

www.setav.org | info@setav.org | @setavakfi

SETA | İstanbul

Defterdar Mh. Savaklar Cd. Ayvansaray Kavşağı No: 41-43

Eyüpsultan İstanbul TÜRKİYE

Tel: +90 212 395 11 00 | Faks: +90 212 395 11 11

SETA | Washington D.C.

1025 Connecticut Avenue, N.W., Suite 1106

Washington D.C., 20036 USA

Tel: 202-223-9885 | Faks: 202-223-6099

www.setadc.org | info@setadc.org | @setadc

SETA | Berlin

Kronenstraße 1, 10117 Berlin GERMANY

berlin@setav.org

SETA | Brussels

Avenue des Arts 27, 1000 Brussels BELGIUM

Tel: +3226520486

CONTENTS

SUMMARY | 7

INTRODUCTION: THE DISCONNECT BETWEEN RHETORIC AND ACTION | 8

THE VENEZUELA INTERVENTION AND THE ILLUSION OF NORMS | 9

**CODES OF THE NEW ORDER: TRANSACTIONAL POLITICS
AND HYBRID TOOLS | 13**

**RESTORATION CALLS, THE EUROPEAN UNION,
AND THE WALL OF SELECTIVE SOLIDARITY | 14**

DAVOS 2026: CONFESSIONS OF THE GLOBAL AGE OF NORMLESSNESS | 16

THE “BOARD OF PEACE” AND POST-UN ARCHITECTURE | 18

**TÜRKİYE AND TURKISH FOREIGN POLICY
IN THE AGE OF NORMLESSNESS | 21**

CONCLUSION | 23



In this new ecosystem dominated by the impossibility of restoring the old order and the dilemma of “being at the table or on the menu,” the historical justification of Türkiye’s criticisms of the international system is emphasized once again.

SUMMARY

This analysis identifies that the liberal international order, along with the Trump administration’s revisionist policies and the “America First” doctrine, has left its place to a “Global Age of Normlessness” determined not by rules, but by transactional will and interests. The legitimacy crisis created by the U.S.’ violations Venezuelan sovereignty, the West’s selective solidarity between Gaza and Ukraine, the confessions of Western leaders at Davos 2026 that “the old order has ended,” and the Gaza Board of Peace bypassing the U.N. system, are some of the most concrete evidence of the system’s new power-based nature.

In this new ecosystem dominated by the impossibility of restoring the old order and the dilemma of “being at the table or on the menu,” the historical justification of Türkiye’s criticisms of the international system is emphasized once again. Arguing that Türkiye’s moves for strategic autonomy in the defense industry, multi-faceted alliance architecture, and leader diplomacy capacity are not a choice but a necessity for survival, the analysis reveals the country’s profile transforming from a passive “bridge” in this chaotic transition process into one of the founding and central actors of the global system.

INTRODUCTION: THE DISCONNECT BETWEEN RHETORIC AND ACTION

The liberal international order, built under U.S. leadership after World War II, is experiencing the deepest crisis of legitimacy and functionality in its history. Supposedly built on normative pillars like democracy, human rights, free markets, and the rule of law, this order has entered a phase of exhaustion where the gap between its promises and its practices on the ground has widened irreparably. However, unlike past conjunctural crises, the current process points to a structural collapse where the founding pillars of the system are being demolished by its very founders.

This dissolution has now moved beyond mere criticism voiced by the system's opponents or the Global South. As clearly stated by Western leaders at Davos 2026, the "end of the old world" has turned into a reality, registered and accepted by the architects of the system themselves.

The Donald Trump administration's America First doctrine, in particular, has been the catalyst in this transformation. The Trump era represents a breaking point where the U.S. questioned its need for international institutions and alliances to maintain global hegemony, and where multilateralism was replaced by bilateral bargaining. In this new era, where politics runs on transactions rather than values, diplomatic relations and even peace-building processes are being reduced to transactional negotiations.

The paralysis in the U.N. Security Council has not eliminated the demand for global governance; on the contrary, as seen in the Board of Peace initiative. It has paved the way for the emergence of parallel and elitist mechanisms designed with a corporate logic that prioritizes rapid action and financial capacity over universal legitimacy. In this ecosystem, where institutional mechanisms have lost their function and international law has become an option rather than a binding force, the source of security and legitimacy for states has shifted from international consensus to a doctrine of self-help and bearing the cost.

The rules of this new transitional order are quite clear. The warning voiced by the Canadian Prime Minister at Davos, “If you are not at the table, you are on the menu,” is the simplest and most striking explanation of why Türkiye is seeking strategic autonomy in every field – from the defense industry to diplomacy. As will be detailed in this analysis, the only guarantee protecting states from being on the menu in the age of global normlessness is not the umbrella of international law, but their deterrent power at the table.

This analysis examines the codes of the “Global Normlessness Age” across a spectrum ranging from sovereignty violations in Venezuela to the West’s selective solidarity between Gaza and Ukraine, and from the confessions at Davos to new institutional pursuits. The main thesis of the analysis is to demonstrate that the restoration of the old order is impossible and that the strategic reflexes developed by Türkiye are not merely a choice but a historical necessity for survival in this chaotic transition process.

THE VENEZUELA INTERVENTION AND THE ILLUSION OF NORMS

It is evident that the rules-based international political order is undergoing a significant transformation in the current period. Until now, actions, criticisms, and debates targeting the order have been conducted over secondary norms such as the dysfunctionality of international organizations, the non-application of international law, or the lack of fair representation in global governance. However, the transformation we are experiencing today involves the explicit opening of the foundational norm to debate. In international politics, the concept of sovereignty and the principle of non-interference in the internal affairs of states have been accepted as the fundamental norms of the modern state system since the Peace of Westphalia, and have survived to this day as perhaps



The paralysis in the U.N. Security Council has not eliminated the demand for global governance; on the contrary, as seen in the Board of Peace initiative. It has paved the way for the emergence of parallel and elitist mechanisms designed with a corporate logic that prioritizes rapid action and financial capacity over universal legitimacy.

the oldest and undisputed foundational norms of the international community. Yet, the Trump administration's recent intervention in Venezuela and its direct action against President Nicolas Maduro demonstrate that even this foundational norm can be eroded.¹

It is well known that similar regime change and coup-planning operations interfering with the sovereignty norm occurred, particularly during the Cold War (the 1953 Iran Coup, the 1954 Guatemala Intervention, the 1961 Lumumba Assassination, the 1973 Chile Coup, etc.). However, the process we are seeing today and the Maduro case differ qualitatively from similar interventions witnessed by the international system. In almost all previous examples, there was an intense emphasis on the liberal international order at the discursive level during and after the interventions. In other words, the U.S. tried to convince actors that it was expanding and sustaining the liberal international order with these interventions. Normative frameworks such as democracy, human rights, and protection from alternative orders (communism) were indispensable discursive elements of these interventions.

In the Venezuela example, however, there was no need for any ground of legitimacy provided by international law or the U.N. Charter. U.S. domestic law and military power were substituted for sovereignty, the foundational norm of the liberal international order. This radical change in attitude is most clearly seen in Washington transforming its own legal and economic instruments into weapons that substitute the norms of the international system with unilateral will. The U.S. Department of Justice indicting a sitting head of state on charges of narco-terrorism and placing a \$25 million bounty on his head can be read as elevating national jurisdiction over the principle of global sovereignty. Furthermore, the seizure of a Venezuelan state-owned plane in the Dominican Republic based on U.S. laws and its flight to Florida² proved that the U.S. applies its own domestic law with extraterritorial authority. The Trump administration and the subsequent congressional will subjecting third parties trading with Venezuela to U.S. sanctions through regulations like the BOLIVAR Act³ have removed the issue from being a diplomatic dispute and reduced it to an act of American internal administrative discretion. This series of practices de facto nullifies the principle of sovereign equality of states and surrenders the source of legitimacy from international consensus to Washington's unilateral will and coercive power.

1 Kadir Üstün, "Maduro Operasyonu ve Amerika'nın Yeni Stratejisi", SETA, 07 January 2026, <https://www.setav.org/maduro-operasyonu-ve-amerikanin-yeni-stratejisi>, (Access: 12 January 2026).

2 "ABD, Venezuela Devlet Başkanı Nicolás Maduro'ya ait uçağa el koydu", BBC News Türkçe, 02 September 2024, <https://www.bbc.com/turkce/articles/c624d62qp0eo>, (Access: 11 January 2026).

3 "H.R.621 - BOLIVAR Act", Library of Congress, <https://www.congress.gov/bill/117th-congress/house-bill/621/text>, (Access: 13 January 2026).

This state of normlessness is not limited to states that the U.S. views as adversaries. It reaches a dimension that opens territorial integrity to debate even within the liberal international order's closest alliance relationships. Trump's offer to buy Greenland from Denmark in 2019 was dismissed at the time in the international public opinion as a diplomatic discourtesy or a commercial absurdity. However, the picture faced today in Trump's second term has evolved far beyond that commercial offer into a direct and coercive threat to sovereignty.⁴ Today, Washington is no longer proposing a "real estate bargain" regarding the transfer of Greenland. It clearly implies that if the control of the island is not left to the U.S., American power will de facto take it over. This approach by Trump shows that the norm of sovereignty can turn into a commercial offer and even rhetoric of annexation, even in the tightest alliance relationship. The Washington administration acts with the certainty that the European Union or Copenhagen cannot show any concrete resistance against a potential de facto situation. This situation exposes how vulnerable the Transatlantic Alliance, which established the liberal international order, is not only against external threats but also against the will of the alliance's leader.⁵ The Greenland case is proof of how the hierarchy within the Western bloc crushes the principle of sovereign equality and that the EU is treated by Washington not as a strategic partner, but as an actor whose will can be ignored.⁶

Essentially, all these developments we have witnessed, from the coercive intervention practice in Venezuela to the annexationist approach in Greenland, are neither accidental deviations nor the result of Trump's impulsive personality. On the contrary, this situation is the inevitable reflection of the "American Grand Strategy" on the ground. When the American National Security Strategy document⁷ is examined, it is seen that the U.S. has abandoned the mission of being the founder and guardian of the liberal international order due to its unnecessary cost and has instead retreated to a revisionist line focused on maximizing its own national interests with the "America First" principle.

When the points indicated in the strategy document are read carefully, it becomes clear that the U.S. has set aside goals presented with normative frameworks, such as democracy promotion and the universalization of international

4 Murat Aslan, "ABD, NATO, AB ve Grönland Meselesi", SETA, 10 January 2026, <https://www.setav.org/abd-nato-ab-ve-gronland-meselesi>, (Access: 11 January 2026).

5 Zaki Laidi, "Trump Wants to Make Europe White Again", *Project Syndicate*, 08 December 2025, https://www.project-syndicate.org/commentary/trump-national-security-strategy-must-serve-as-wake-up-call-for-europe-by-zaki-laidi-2025-12?utm_source=x&utm_medium=organic-social&utm_campaign=page-posts-december2025&utm_term=politics&utm_content=link-image, (Access: 12 January 2026).

6 Matthias Matthijs & Nathalie Tocci, "How Europe Lost: Can the Continent Escape its Trump Trap?", *Foreign Affairs*, 12 December 2025, https://www.foreignaffairs.com/united-states/how-europe-lost-matthijs-tocci?utm_campaign=tw&utm_content=&utm_medium=social&utm_source=twitter, (Access: 10 January 2026).

7 "National Security Strategy of the United States of America", the White House, November 2025, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2025/12/2025-National-Security-Strategy.pdf>, (Access: 11 January 2026).

norms. As explicitly stated in the document, for Washington, the main priority is no longer the survival of the international order, but the “preservation of the American way of life” and achieving superiority in great power competition, which is evaluated within the China equation. Therefore, ignoring sovereignty in Venezuela or coercive diplomacy toward allies is the practical implementation of this new approach theorized in the document, which prioritizes results over rules.



The precedent created by Washington by violating the rules will also be used by Moscow and Beijing as a legitimizing ground to expand their own spheres of influence.

The liberal international order and its norms were seen by their founders as a goal that had to be sustained despite all costs. However, the U.S. now categorizes alliance relationships not as a community of common values, but as transaction-based partnerships based on cost and risk sharing. Trump’s executive order initiating the withdrawal process from 66 international organizations, which he declared⁸ ineffective, harmful, and a waste of resources, should also be evaluated within this framework. This massive and systematic detachment of the U.S. from global governance mechanisms, or at least showing this intention to detach, is not just a savings measure but a conscious liquidation operation, targeting the institutional cost of the liberal international order. This decision, taken in accordance with the America First doctrine, hollows out the ground for international cooperation based on normative framing and transfers the solution of global problems from institutional mechanisms to bilateral bargains and transactional mechanisms. These mental ruptures in the U.S. administration explain why Washington now makes moves based directly on will without seeking normative legitimacy.

The rising revisionism of other actors also plays a determining role in shaping this new ecosystem. Parallel to the erosion of the liberal order, China and Russia are trying to remove international politics from the democracy-autocracy dichotomy and base it on a new pragmatism centered on development and security. The model of unconditional political support offered by China with its “Belt and Road” initiative and the regime security guarantees Russia tries to test in the line – extending from Africa to the Middle East – attempt to form a concrete alternative to the condition-imposing approach of the liberal international order. These two powers read the current state of normlessness not as chaos, but as a window of opportunity where Western hegemony dissolves and multipolarity is de facto built. Therefore, the precedent created by Washington by violating the rules will also be used by Moscow and Beijing as a legitimizing ground to expand their own spheres of influence.

⁸ “Withdrawal from Wasteful, Ineffective, or Harmful International Organizations”, U.S. Department of State, 07 January 2026, <https://www.state.gov/releases/office-of-the-spokesperson/2026/01/withdrawal-from-wasteful-ineffective-or-harmful-international-organizations/>, (Access: 11 January 2026).

CODES OF THE NEW ORDER: TRANSACTIONAL POLITICS AND HYBRID TOOLS

The emphasis on normlessness highlighted in this context does not mean that the international system is drifting into absolute anarchy or that all rules have evaporated overnight. Undoubtedly, norms still function in technical areas such as trade law, maritime jurisdiction, or technology standards, and states continue to use norm-based strategies to frame their actions. However, the crisis lies in how these norms are applied. The picture we face today is one where norms have ceased to be a universal ceiling binding everyone. Rather they have turned into an instrumentalized mechanism. Therefore, what is meant by normlessness is the application of rules with a hierarchical and asymmetric selectivity.

This process the liberal international order is undergoing is no longer an interval of uncertainty where the old rules-based order is dying but the new one has not yet been born. This procedure is clarifying the operational codes of the new international ecosystem that will shape world politics for some time. This evolving order is shaped not by grand normative values or long-term institutional alliances, but by result-oriented approaches, power projection, and transaction-based partnerships.

The transforming structure of the global system rises on four main pillars:

I. Institutional Paralysis and the Self-Help Doctrine: The U.N. Security Council is experiencing a structural deadlock due to the geopolitical polarization of its permanent members with veto power. In no major international crisis, from Syria and Ukraine to Gaza and Africa, have international institutions been able to demonstrate a will to prevent or terminate conflicts. When Washington's practices of withdrawing from international organizations are added to the mix, it is registered that multilateral mechanisms have lost their global problem-solving capacity. The collapse of the collective security umbrella provided by institutions drives states back to the "self-help" doctrine, the fundamental assumption of the realist approach. Now, every state bases its security not on international guarantees, but solely on its own power and alliance capacity.

II. Leader Diplomacy and Overcoming Bureaucracy: The procedural nature of traditional diplomacy, continuing since Westphalia, cannot respond to the speed of crises, their interconnectedness, or the result-oriented expectations of the new era. This situation results in foreign policymaking processes moving out of the institutional files of diplomats and directly into leader-to-leader dialogue. This trend, symbolized by Donald Trump but also observed in leaders like Erdoğan, Putin, and Modi, should be read not merely as personalized foreign policy, but as a need to overcome the bureaucratic inertia brought by the new

era. Established protocols are being replaced by the personal initiatives of leaders. The risk-averse traditional technocrat, diplomat profile, strictly bound to process, protocol, and hierarchy, is leaving its place to a pragmatic “deal-maker” profile capable of taking initiative and producing flexible solutions in times of crisis. In the new period, diplomatic success is no longer measured by the process’ compliance with rules, but by the production of a concrete and applicable result at the table.

III. Economic Statecraft and the Weaponization of Law: In the new ecosystem, the struggle has moved far beyond the frontline. Trade, finance, and law are turning into foreign policy instruments as destructive as conventional weapons. The application of domestic law against allies with extraterritorial authority, as seen in the Countering America’s Adversaries Through Sanctions Act (CAATSA), is the clearest example of the instrumentalization of law. Similarly, threats of expulsion from the SWIFT system, tariff walls, and technology transfer bans are becoming fundamental mechanisms of economic statecraft. The use of the dollar’s global reserve status as an element of blackmail forces target countries into seeking strategic autonomy and de-dollarization.

IV. Regional Ownership and Cost-Oriented Legitimacy: The most critical transformation of the international order that became evident with the Trump era is the U.S. withdrawal from its global policeman role and the filling of the resulting power vacuums by regional actors. The new consensus relies on an offshore balancing strategy that does not intervene in regional crises but expects regional partners to take initiative. In this equation, leaders who shoulder the security and financial costs of regional politics gain legitimate interlocutor status in the eyes of the U.S. and the international order. Legitimacy no longer comes from compliance with U.N. resolutions or defending the values of the liberal international order. On the contrary, it comes from the capacity to establish order on the ground and not make the U.S. pay for it. For example, Türkiye taking initiative in Syria, Libya, and Karabakh to ensure its own security, while simultaneously contributing to regional stability is read as a rational partnership model, where the cost is transferable. Therefore, the new era witnesses the rise of strong regional leaders who solve their own region’s problems rather than creating them.

RESTORATION CALLS, THE EUROPEAN UNION, AND THE WALL OF SELECTIVE SOLIDARITY

The abandonment of the liberal international order by the transatlantic hegemony has created the greatest shock in Continental Europe, the primary beneficiary

of this order. Faced with signals that the American security umbrella⁹ will not unconditionally¹⁰ cover the EU and the rise of economic protectionism with the “America First” doctrine, the European Union and American Democrats have initiated calls to restore the system. Calls voiced particularly by European leaders and Western opinion leaders¹¹ to “restore the rules-based order at all costs,” “protect multilateralism,” and “return to global norms by integrating the Global South” appear as a normative reflex to prevent chaos. However, when examined from a realistic perspective, it is understood that these calls are not a search for universal justice, but a survival strategy for Europe as a geopolitical actor in the transforming international system. Europe, whose transactional action capacity is limited and whose strategic autonomy is eroding, is aware that it will be a more fragile actor in an order where rules lose their binding force.

However, it is observed that this restoration call by the established order's defenders in the transatlantic hits a historical wall in the eyes of the Global South. The fundamental factor forming this wall is the practice of “structural selective solidarity,”¹² displayed by the Western alliance over the last quarter-century, and especially in the recent period.

The instrumentalist attitude of the West toward international norms has crystallized in the comparison between the Ukraine War and Israel's genocidal war on Gaza.

In the Ukraine crisis, European capitals defined concepts such as sovereignty, territorial integrity, protection of civilian infrastructure, and war crimes as non-negotiable red lines and activated the most comprehensive sanctions regime in history against Russia. Decisions by the International Criminal Court (ICC) against the Russian leadership were applauded, civilian deaths were described as “barbarism,” and support for Kyiv was coded as “the war of democracy against autocracy.” However, the same bloc suspended all these norms it defended in Ukraine during the genocide in Gaza after Oct. 7, 2023. In Gaza, over 70,000 civilians were killed, hospitals and schools were targeted, and food was used as a weapon of war, the Geneva Conventions and norms of international humanitarian law were de facto nullified with Western political support.



The instrumentalist attitude of the West toward international norms has crystallized in the comparison between the Ukraine War and Israel's genocidal war on Gaza.

9 Rifat Öncel & Murat Yeşiltaş, “Amerikan Sınırlaması Altında Avrupa Güvenliği”, *SETA Analiz*, Sayı: 440, (April 2025), <https://www.setav.org/amerikan-sinirlamasi-altinda-avrupa-guvenligi>, (Access: 11 January 2026)

10 Leonard A. Schütte, “America First, Europe Fourth”, *War on the Rocks*, 04 December 2025, <https://warontherocks.com/2025/12/america-first-europe-fourth/>, (Access: 12 January 2026).

11 Daron Acemoglu, “What Now for the Rules-Based Order?”, *Project Syndicate*, 09 January 2026, <https://www.project-syndicate.org/commentary/trump-venezuela-rules-based-order-must-be-built-ancw-by-daron-acemoglu-2026-01?>, (Access: 13 January 2026).

12 Ali Murat Kurşun, “Strategic Solitude: Why Europe cannot Rescue liberal order”, *Daily Sabah*, 18 December 2025, <https://www.dailysabah.com/opinion/op-ed/strategic-solitude-why-europe-cannot-rescue-liberal-order>, (Access: 12 January 2026).

European Commission officials, who counted cutting off electricity to civilians in Ukraine as a war crime, parenthesized cutting off water and electricity in Gaza as Israel's right to self-defense, revealing Europe's selective solidarity in the rules-based liberal order.

The structural selective solidarity and double standards embodied in this example have created a deep crisis of trust and legitimacy in a vast geography, extending from Brazil to South Africa, from Indonesia to Saudi Arabia. For Global South countries, the current table of the international order has proved that Europe's call to return to norms is not a universal principle but an apparatus to protect geopolitical interests. South Africa filing a genocide case against Israel at the International Court of Justice (ICJ) is a significant turning point in this context.¹³ Taking the flag of law and justice from the West, the Global South challenged the liberal order's claim to moral superiority by judging actors protected by the West in courts established by the West.

Therefore, calls rising from the European public opinion today to restore the system and return to norms face a structural legitimacy barrier in the Global South geography. The fundamental problem in the eyes of non-Western actors is that the West, which accepts sovereignty and human rights norms as absolute reference points in the Ukraine crisis, suspends the same norms for the sake of its geopolitical preferences in the case of Gaza. This ambivalent attitude causes the proposed restoration to be understood not as the revival of a universal rules-based order, but as the re-consolidation of a hierarchical international status quo that prioritizes Western security and views destruction in other geographies as secondary. This perception weakens the West's claim to normative leadership and renders the proposed ground for cooperation void from the very beginning.

This questioning turns into a strategic orientation beyond a mere emotional reaction. The expansion of alternative platforms like BRICS+ or countries turning to local currencies in trade is not the result of an ontological anti-Westernism. This is a reflex of actors suffering from a structure, where the norms of the rules-based liberal international order cannot provide assurance, seeking to protect themselves from the arbitrariness of the order's founders.

DAVOS 2026: CONFESSIONS OF THE GLOBAL AGE OF NORMLESSNESS

The discussions at the 2026 Summit of the World Economic Forum (Davos), held from Jan. 19-23 and considered the intellectual and economic heart of the

¹³ Yücel Acer, "Uluslararası Adalet Divanından Hukuki Tespit: İsrail Gazze'de İnsani Sorumluluklarını Ağır Biçimde İhlal Etti", *SETA Analiz*, Sayı: 452, (November 2025), <https://www.setav.org/uluslararasi-adalet-divanindan-hukuki-tespit-israil-gazgede-insani-sorumluluklarini-agir-bicimde-ihlal-etti>, (Access, 12 January 2026)

liberal international order, demonstrated that the diagnosis of the “Global Age of Normlessness” put forward in this analysis has been confirmed at the highest level by the established actors of the order themselves. The summit ceased to be a feast of idea exchange celebrating globalization as we are used to from previous meetings. Rather, it took on the identity of a “crisis table” where it was confessed that the old world dominated by norms and rules has started to erode and power-based global politics has returned. The leader statements that stamped the summit register that the Western world and defenders of the liberal order have moved out of the denial phase and into the phase of accepting the chaotic new reality and turning to new pursuits.

The general atmosphere at the summit became the most concrete proof of the thesis of the impossibility of restoration. Danish Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen’s statement, saying: “One of the things that can be drawn from the events of recent weeks is that the old world order no longer exists ... I don’t know if it will return, but it probably won’t,”¹⁴ is one of the examples showing that it is now accepted in Western capitals that the liberal order cannot be brought back. Similarly, French President Emmanuel Macron describing the world as a place “without rules, where international law is trampled underfoot and where the only laws it seems to matter is that of the strongest,”¹⁵ is the moment liberal institutionalism raised the flag of bankruptcy. The post-World War II order, based on the assumption that norms could limit state behavior, is now defined by its very founders as a “power arena” where imperial ambitions surface. These confessions are signs that the system is governed in this new era not by normative limitations, but by a raw power struggle almost resembling the 19th century.

The most critical theoretical and discursive breaking point of the summit, and perhaps of the new era, was recorded with the words of the Prime Minister of Canada Mark Carney. He described the current situation not as a transition but as a sharp “rupture” and issued this vital warning: “Middle powers must act together because if we’re not at the table, we’re on the menu.”¹⁶

This metaphor serves as the unwritten constitution of the Age of Normlessness. Carney’s statement shows that in an environment where the umbrella of international law is pierced and collective security mechanisms are paralyzed, state security no longer depends on rules, but entirely on their own capacities and dip-



“Middle powers must act together because if we’re not at the table, we’re on the menu.”
-Mark Carney, Prime Minister of Canada.

14 “Old world order no longer exists, says Danish premier”, Anatolian Agency, 27 January 2026, <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/europe/old-world-order-no-longer-exists-says-danish-premier/3812321>, (Access: 29 January 2026).

15 “Davos 2026: Special address by Emmanuel Macron, President of France”, World Economic Forum, 20 January 2026, <https://www.weforum.org/stories/2026/01/davos-2026-special-address-by-emmanuel-macron-president-of-france/>, (Access: 26 January 2026).

16 “Carney says old World order ‘is not coming back’”, BBC, 20 January 2026, <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cly3d28p4p80>, (Access: 27 January 2026).

lomatic alliance relationships. If there are no binding norms to protect you, the only way to survive is to attain the power and capacity to “sit at the table.” This situation clearly reveals that middle powers can no longer take shelter under the protection of a “rule-making” hegemon. Instead, they must increase their autonomous capacities to open space for themselves in the system, otherwise, they will be “swallowed up” in the great power competition. However, while this situation may be new for Western middle powers, it has been the reality for non-Western middle powers for a long time.

Carney’s statement is not surprising for Canadian diplomacy, which historically bases its foreign policy on middle power activism. Indeed, these theses are well-known prescriptions that have been in circulation in both academic literature and diplomatic practice for some time. The main paradox here lies not in the novelty of the ideas, but in the change of the recipient. The founders of the established order, who have been in a state of strategic deafness regarding the demands of middle powers to balance the system until today, clung to this rhetoric like a lifebuoy when the turbulence created by the system hit their own comfort zones for the first time.

However, a critical annotation must be made here: The thesis that middle powers should take the stage as a “balancing element” against the destructiveness of great power competition is not a new discovery of Western capitals. This doctrine is the very reformist objection that has been systematized for years by the non-Western world, and particularly by Türkiye. Therefore, at this breaking point where the system produces crises, it is of vital importance not to surrender the intellectual property and discursive superiority of the solution to the Western actors, who are the perpetrators of the crisis. The West should not be allowed to instrumentalize this rhetoric to exit its own crisis; on the contrary, the fact that the true owners of this thesis are the actors who have been criticizing the system on the axis of justice for years must be kept on the table.

THE “BOARD OF PEACE” AND POST-UN ARCHITECTURE

One of the most concrete institutional experiments of the “Global Age of Normlessness” is the “Board of Peace” initiative, opened for signature under U.S. leadership on the margins of the Davos Summit. This initiative differentiates itself from efforts to reform the United Nations (U.N.) system, the center of the liberal international order, by proposing a new diplomatic architecture that aims to overcome the bureaucratic constraints of the current structure and focuses on results rather than process. The establishment of the Board of Peace is the clearest indicator that “rules-based processes” in the international system

are beginning to be replaced by transactional mechanisms based on capacity and action.

Reading the Board of Peace initiative solely as a product of American unilateralism would be an incomplete assessment. The emergence of this structure serves as proof of how sluggish the current U.N. order remains in times of crisis, how decision-making processes are clogged, and how dysfunctional it has become in extinguishing fires on the ground.

The Board of Peace traces its origins to the 20-point peace plan accepted for Gaza in the U.N. Security Council in November (Resolution 2803). However, from the perspective of the Trump administration and figures like Marco Rubio,¹⁷ U.N. mechanisms lack the speed and flexibility to implement this plan. His approach, which criticizes diplomatic procedures and long negotiations, summarizes the motivation of this new structure: Prioritizing effectiveness on the ground over bureaucratic legitimacy. Therefore, the Board of Peace is an attempt to substitute the governance void and state of inaction created by the U.N. with a more limited but capable structure.

According to draft documents reflected in the media,¹⁸ the institutional design of the structure departs from the traditional principle of the sovereign equality of states and is based on a management model grounded in shareholder logic. The facts that Donald Trump will remain at the head of the structure as Chairman even after his U.S. presidency, and that a participation fee of \$1 billion is demanded from countries for permanent membership status, point to a new model in global governance.

This model institutionalizes a hierarchy where diplomatic representation is directly proportional to financial capacity rather than political equality. Unlike conventional organizations where membership processes take years, the direct inclusion of an actor providing a \$1-billion contribution into the decision-making mechanism shows that diplomacy is being redesigned with a more pragmatic and fast-operating, executive board logic. Trump's veto power, authority to suspend members, and power to appoint a "High Representative" confirm that the structure is constructed with a CEO-style management approach prioritizing rapid decision-making rather than democratic deliberation, which is the fundamental claim of the liberal international order.



The Gaza Board of Peace model institutionalizes a hierarchy where diplomatic representation is directly proportional to financial capacity rather than political equality.

¹⁷ "Secretary of State Marco Rubio at the Board of Peace Charter Signing Ceremony", U.S. Department of State, 22 January 2026, <https://www.state.gov/releases/office-of-the-spokesperson/2026/01/secretary-of-state-marco-rubio-at-the-board-of-peace-charter-signing-ceremony>, (Access: 27 January 2026).

¹⁸ Adam Rasgon & Natan Odenhimer, "Board of Peace Set to Hand Trump Sweeping Powers Over Gaza", NY Times, 27 January 2026, <https://www.nytimes.com/2026/01/27/world/middleeast/board-of-peace-trump-gaza.html?smid=nyt-core-android-share>, (Access: 29 January 2026).

The Board of Peace has also brought about a new divergence in the international community. While actors like France and the U.K., as well as Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez, have kept their distance on the grounds saying that it is “outside the U.N. framework,”¹⁹ this structure has formed an alternative for other actors who believe the system is clogged.

The main point of attention here is the position of Global South countries.²⁰ Some Global South countries (such as Indonesia), which have criticized the representation injustice in the current U.N. system for years, have made a pragmatic choice by joining this new structure. This choice is a result of the reflex of being at the decision-making table rather than legitimacy debates. The difference between China and Brazil’s insistence on remaining under the U.N. umbrella and Indonesia’s participation in the new structure shows that the Global South is not a homogeneous block. It indicates that one part prioritizes institutional legitimacy while the other prioritizes pragmatic cooperation with new power centers.

We are passing through a period where the gap between the promises of the liberal international order and its practices on the ground has widened irreparably. This process, which we have conceptualized as the “Global Age of Normlessness” throughout this analysis, signifies a chaotic interim period, where rules lose their binding force, international law ceases to be a reference point and becomes an option, and diplomacy becomes corporatized. The confession by Western leaders at Davos 2026 that the old world is dead and the emergence of formations like the U.S.-led Board of Peace prove that this diagnosis is no longer an interpretation but a fact accepted by the established actors of the system.

However, reading the Board of Peace initiative opened for signature at Davos with the claim of bypassing the U.N. system directly as the declaration of a permanent and established new order alternative to the U.N. would be a hasty deduction. It is more accurate to read this structure not as a harbinger of a crystallized future, but as a symptom and manifestation of the current age of normlessness. The Board of Peace is the institutionalized form of power and action-based transactional politics. Although its permanence is uncertain, this board is a historical document reflecting the spirit of this transition age: a period where unquestionable action replaces sluggish legitimacy.



It is more accurate to read this structure not as a harbinger of a crystallized future, but as a symptom and manifestation of the current age of normlessness.

19 “Looking for signs of Trump’s new World order after Davos”, the Washington Post, 26 January 2026, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2026/01/26/t/>, (Access: 28 January 2026).

20 C. Raja Mohan, “Trump’s Board of Peace Cracks the BRICS Wall”, Foreign Policy, 27 January 2026, <https://www.foreignpolicy.com/2026/01/27/trump-board-of-peace-brics-united-nations-china-russia-global-south/>, (Access: 29 January 2026).

TÜRKİYE AND TURKISH FOREIGN POLICY IN THE AGE OF NORMLESSNESS

The “Age of Normlessness” entered by the global system and the collapse in the institutional architecture is not an unexpected crisis for Türkiye; on the contrary, it is a structural reality that has been pointed out and prepared for over a long time. When the recent transformation of Turkish foreign policy under the leadership of President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan is examined, it is seen that Ankara was not caught off guard by this chaotic transition period; rather, it read the codes of the new era in advance with the doctrines it developed. In this framework, Türkiye’s position should be read through three fundamental strategic pillars.

First, the “The World is Bigger Than Five” doctrine, which Türkiye has been voicing for years, has ceased to be a rhetorical criticism at this point and has proved its historical justification as an important prescription to unlock the blockage of the global system. The accuracy of this strategic foresight, which was initially attempted to be marginalized in the West as an emotional or revisionist discourse, has been seen in all its starkness during the Gaza crisis. The deadlock of the U.N. Security Council, even in the face of genocide, due to the veto of a permanent member (the U.S.), proved that the system is morally and functionally bankrupt. With this stance, Türkiye rises to the position of a norm-setter proposing order and justice to the chaotic order, rather than just a complainant criticizing the status quo. When evaluated for a period where initiatives like the Board of Peace will increase, Türkiye’s call for reform is no longer a wish, but a mandatory emergency intervention for the sustainability of the international system.

However, this new era brings a critical test for Türkiye and Global South countries, as well as for all actors in the global system. It is of vital importance how actors who have been advocating for years that the U.N. Security Council must be reformed, and the “World is Bigger Than Five” thesis will position themselves against these new boards, which might be a narrower and more autocratic version of U.S. hegemony, as could be the case with the Board of Peace initiative.

Here lies a great historical responsibility for Türkiye and the non-Western world. Even if participating in such platforms – established with the claim of being action and result-oriented – the emphasis on justice and conscience in the global system must not be compromised. For there is a risk that legitimate criticisms directed at the current U.N. order could be instrumentalized by new structures based entirely on the law of power to create an even more unjust system. Türkiye must protect its national interests by taking part in or staying close to such new formations with the reflex of being at the table; on the other hand, it must block these boards from using the criticism of the U.N.’s dysfunctionality to destroy the universal values represented by the U.N. Otherwise, the legitimacy

of the demand for a fairer order alternative to the U.N. will face the risk of being damaged.

Second, the current international conjuncture has confirmed that the goal of strategic autonomy, which Türkiye has persistently pursued in the defense industry, energy, and diplomacy over the last 20 years, is a matter of survival. In a world where alliance relationships hang by a thread, supply chains are used as elements of political blackmail, and covert/overt embargoes come from allies themselves, the off-the-shelf procurement doctrine is collapsing. Possessing indigenous national defense capacity is the sine qua non condition

on the ground for diplomacy to remain at the table. Türkiye's dismantling of the terror corridor in northern Syria, keeping the legitimate government alive in Libya, and establishing the equation that ended the 30-year occupation in Karabakh was only possible thanks to the leverage created by this hard power capacity. This self-reliant capacity, which does not wait for approval, has elevated Türkiye from the status of a middle power that is intervened upon to a power that intervenes and sets the game.

Third and perhaps most importantly, Türkiye in the new era is abandoning the passive and instrumental role of a "bridge between East and West" and turning toward functional alliance relationships²¹ that wink at a central/founding actor role in the transformation of the system. While the bridge metaphor expresses a passive structure that is passed over, Ankara today possesses an active diplomatic network that can speak to both worlds simultaneously, conduct negotiations, and achieve results.

As an ally with the second-largest army in NATO, located at the center of the Western security architecture, Türkiye also possesses unique strategic flexibility thanks to the deep relationships it has developed with platforms like the Organization of Turkic States, the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, and BRICS, and the new transactional alliance relationships it tries to establish on the ground. This multiple engagement is an axis fortification required by the age of normlessness. The Grain Corridor initiative and the mediation role in the Russia-Ukraine war have shown that Türkiye can take initiative on vital issues like global food security without being trapped in the West's selective solidarity. As the sole actor capable of translating the Global South's search for justice to the Western system and conveying the West's security concerns to the East on a rational ground,²² Türkiye stands as the keystone of the global balance to be established.



Türkiye in the new era is abandoning the passive and instrumental role of a "bridge between East and West" and turning toward functional alliance relationships that wink at a central/founding actor role in the transformation of the system.

21 Murat Yeşiltaş, "2026'da Türk Dış Politikası: Yakın Kuşakta Güvenlik, Küresel Siyasette Denge Arayışı", *Sabah*, 27 December 2025, <https://www.sabah.com.tr/yazarlar/perspektif/murat-yesiltas/2025/12/27/2026da-turk-dis-politikasi-yakin-kusakta-guvenlik-kuresel-siyasette-denge-arayisi>, (Access: 12 January 2026).

22 Nebi Miş, "Gelecek kaygısı artan Avrupa'da Türkiye'nin önemi", *Sabah*, 19 December 2025, https://www.sabah.com.tr/yazarlar/nebi_mis/2025/12/19/gelecek-kaygisi-artan-avrupada-turkiyenin-onemi, (Access: 13 January 2026).

CONCLUSION

This analysis has demonstrated that the Liberal International Order built after World War II has left its place to the “Global Age of Normlessness” as the gap between its promises and its practices on the ground has widened. The confessions of Western leaders at Davos 2026 that the old world is dead, prove that the findings in this study have ceased to be a mere academic prediction and have turned into a concrete fact registered by the architects of the system themselves.

At this point, initiatives like the U.S.-led Board of Peace are historical symptoms reflecting the spirit of the transition age we are in, rather than the construction of a permanent order yet. Such structures signal an interim period where sluggish international legitimacy is replaced by unquestionable action and transactional politics.

This new ecosystem brings with it a critical test and a historical responsibility for Türkiye, which advocates for the search for global justice with the “World is Bigger Than Five” thesis. It is a requirement of national interests for Türkiye to take part in these new action-oriented platforms with the reflex of being at the table. However, this participation should not mean compromising the emphasis on justice and conscience in the global system. Legitimate criticisms regarding the U.N.'s dysfunctionality must not be allowed to be instrumentalized to establish more unjust and exclusive systems based entirely on the power of money. While taking part in these platforms, Türkiye is the sole moral and political actor that will block the search for a new order from evolving into the law of the jungle.

Ultimately, in this ruthless age described by the warning that “those not at the table are on the menu,” Ankara’s strategic autonomy moves in the defense industry, multi-faceted alliance architecture, and leader diplomacy are not a choice, but a necessity for survival. With this capacity it has developed, Türkiye has not only “gotten off the menu,” it has ceased to be a passive “bridge” between East and West and has transformed into one of the game-changing actors of a new table that centers its own interests and global justice. The “Age of Normlessness” is not a destiny, but a challenging tunnel to be shaped by the capacities of states, and at the exit of this tunnel, Türkiye takes its place not as an object of the system, but as its founding subject.

ALİ MURAT KURŞUN

Ali Murat Kurşun is an Assistant Professor in the Department of International Relations at the Faculty of Political Sciences, Marmara University. He completed his Ph. D. in the Department of International Politics at Aberystwyth University. His research focuses on international order and international society, and Turkish foreign policy.

The Dissolution Of The Rules-Based Order: The Global Age Of Normlessness and Türkiye's Strategic Role

Ali Murat Kurşun

The Liberal International Order, built after World War II, has entered a phase of exhaustion where the gap between its promises and practices on the ground has widened irreparably. In particular, revisionist policies centered on the "America First" doctrine and Europe's "selective solidarity" displayed in the Gaza and Ukraine crises have dragged the global system into an "Age of Normlessness" where raw power, not rules, is the determinant. Western leaders' confessions at Davos 2026 that the "old order has ended" and the "Board of Peace" initiative bypassing the U.N. system prove that this new age is no longer an assumption but a registered reality.

In this new ecosystem, where institutional mechanisms are paralyzed, the source of security and legitimacy for states has shifted from international consensus to the doctrine of "self-help." While demonstrating the impossibility of restoring the old order and the evolution of the global system into a transactional structure, this analysis examines the historical justification of Türkiye's objection that "The World is Bigger Than Five." The study argues that in this ruthless transition process where "those not at the table are on the menu," Türkiye's moves for strategic autonomy and multi-faceted diplomacy are not a choice but a necessity for survival, concluding that Ankara is not a passive part of the system but one of its founding actors.



ANKARA • İSTANBUL • WASHINGTON D.C. • BERLİN • BRUSSELS

www.setav.org