

Shifting Sands: Global Challenges and Turkey in 2025 - Mehmet Ögütçü



As we step into 2025, tensions are escalating both domestically and internationally, and uncertainties abound. Particularly, with Donald Trump poised to assume the U.S. Presidency for a second term on January 20, 2025, the world is already witnessing a shift in the global narrative.

Even before officially taking office, Trump has already captured global attention with provocative statements and bold cabinet selections. With strengthened control over both the House of Representatives and the Senate, his “America First” agenda reflects a determination to reverse America’s perceived decline in the global order.

By promising sweeping policy shifts, Trump aims to recalibrate international dynamics. However, his ability to deliver these ambitious changes is uncertain, as

he steps into the presidency amid a world transformed by economic realignments, geopolitical tensions, and emerging powers challenging traditional U.S. dominance.

TRUMP'S AGGRESSIVE START

Trump has signalled that he will not depart from his previous approach, launching a strong entry into global trade policies using all instruments and resources in his power. At his recent meeting with Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau in Miami, he jokingly urged Canada to become the "51st state" while threatening to impose 100% tariffs on BRICS countries, which propose a new currency to reduce dependence on the dollar.

The already strained rules of global trade seem set to face further disruption, and the consequences of these trade wars will undoubtedly have significant ramifications for many countries, including Türkiye.

Trump's assertion that he will "end the Russia-Ukraine war immediately" may initially appear as a diplomatic gesture toward peace. However, his characteristic negotiation style suggests that resolving such a complex conflict would require substantial concessions, particularly from Ukraine. In this context, the concessions that may be put on the table regarding Ukraine's interests and sovereignty and the guarantees or gestures Trump might offer to persuade Putin to remain uncertain.

While Putin is known to be insistent on his political and territorial claims over Ukraine, it remains unclear whether Trump plans to accept some of these demands or negotiate by threatening to withdraw Western support for Ukraine. Potential concessions, such as recognizing the annexation of Crimea internationally, legitimizing pro-Russian administrations in the Donbas region, or abandoning NATO and EU expansion plans for Ukraine, could be among Trump's bargaining chips.

THE TRUMP DIFFERENCE IN ENERGY AND CLIMATE CHANGE

There are strong indications that Trump will continue to advocate for the “global energy dominance” narrative regarding the U.S. oil, natural gas, and nuclear sectors, which he frequently emphasized during his previous term. His energy policies reflected an approach centered not only on economic interests but also on geopolitical implications. Revising these policies could create a “golden age,” especially in the fossil fuel sector, which already constitutes 81% of global energy.

During his previous presidency, Trump promoted shale oil and natural gas production to make the U.S. a more effective player in global energy markets and argued for renewed investment in nuclear energy. The progress made by the Biden administration in the last four years by rejoining the Paris Climate Agreement and implementing carbon neutrality-targeting policies may be interrupted by Trump’s return. It would not be surprising for him to withdraw from the Paris Climate Agreement again or enact policies that undermine it.

Moreover, the billions of dollars in green energy incentives provided under Biden’s Inflation Reduction Act, investments in energy efficiency projects, and renewable energy infrastructure could also become targets for Trump. Reducing or eliminating these incentives could hinder the growing momentum in the renewable energy sector and increase reliance on fossil fuels. Cuts to subsidies for electric vehicles, solar, and wind energy projects could divert the U.S. from its carbon reduction goals and harm the global climate fight.

Another aspect of Trump’s energy policies could involve strategies to increase production to undermine OPEC+’s influence in global energy markets. By collaborating with non-OPEC countries like Brazil, Guyana and others to boost oil and gas production, he could aim to drive down prices and thwart OPEC+ countries’ efforts to control the market. This situation could place energy giants like Saudi Arabia and Russia in economically and politically tricky positions, leading to market imbalances and a “price war” in the oil markets.

This potential transformation in U.S. energy strategy could reshape economic landscapes and geopolitical balances. The key factors determining the long-term effects of Trump's policies will be how a balance will be established against the European Union's and China's claims of leadership in renewable energy investments.

CHINA: A POWER NOT TO BE IGNORED

China is a formidable strategic competitor to Trump's America, showcasing its economic and technological superiority on the global stage. With achievements in artificial intelligence, automobile production, renewable energy, space and ocean technologies, it has become a significant player in shaping the dynamics of the global economy. China is increasing its influence in the international system through initiatives like BRICS, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, and the Belt and Road Initiative.

China's control over critical minerals and rare earth elements makes it an indispensable player in energy and technology supply chains. These elements, which have a wide range of applications from wind turbines to electric vehicle motors and high-performance magnets to battery technologies, account for 80% of global production and over 90% of processing capacity. Additionally, Beijing's production and processing dominance in strategic minerals like natural graphite, cobalt, nickel, and manganese enables it to play a key role in energy transitions and high-tech manufacturing.

This dominance concerns the U.S. (and the European Union) and provides Beijing with strategic leverage against Trump. Projects are being developed to reduce dependency on China, particularly in renewable energy, semiconductors, and battery technologies, but establishing alternative structures in the short term is challenging due to China's existing infrastructure and technological superiority.

China's strategic advantage will continue to be a decisive factor in the global

power struggle. As the U.S. is expected to intensify its trade wars and sanctions against China, Beijing's strategic responses will emerge as one of the hottest topics in the international system in the coming period.

IRAN: A GEOPOLITICAL NEXUS

Iran is likely to remain a significant aspect of Trump's presidential agenda. Iran's regional influence has come into question, especially with the weakening of proxy forces like Hezbollah and Hamas. The recent intensification of Israeli airstrikes has rendered Iran's air defense systems largely ineffective, limiting Tehran's maneuverability in the Middle East. This situation could hinder Iran's ability to maintain its regional influence and lead to shifts in regional balances.

The severe weakening of Hezbollah could result in Iran losing its influence over Lebanon. Similarly, the power loss of Hamas may reduce Iran's pressure on Israel through Palestine. Bashar al-Assad's regime has collapsed, and the Syrian opposition has successfully captured Damascus, leaving the country in disarray and creating a highly uncertain future for its governance.

This collapse of Assad's authority will have profound implications for the Middle East, especially in the context of Iran's regional influence. This power vacuum could prompt Iran to form new alliances or adopt more aggressive tactics, potentially destabilizing an already volatile region. It is likely that Iran can be the next target in terms of disintegration as in Syria, Libya, and Iraq.

Domestically, the Iranian regime faces increasing public discontent and calls for reform under the heavy burden of economic sanctions. The Trump administration's potential tightening of sanctions to weaken the regime from within may yield results. If successful, this could lead to a strengthening of internal dissolution and reform movements in Iran.

The diminishing influence of Iran in the Middle East could enable countries like Israel and Saudi Arabia to play a more pronounced role in the balance of power. Additionally, actors like Türkiye, seen as a “regional superpower,” may seek opportunities to fill the vacuums created.

THE DECLINE OF GLOBALIZATION AND THE WEAKENING OF EUROPE

The global economy is entering a phase where the golden age of globalization is over, and international cooperation is weakening. Due to the pandemic, supply chain crises, and geopolitical tensions, regional blocs and protectionist policies are replacing economic integration. Trump is likely to accelerate this process even further.

The EU’s increasing loss of competitiveness and struggles to maintain consistent and robust solidarity among its 28 member states are concrete examples of globalization’s decline. As the EU loses its historical advantages in economic efficiency, innovation, and energy independence, it becomes a more dependent actor in the extraordinary power competition between the U.S. and China.

The economic and technological rivalry between the U.S. and China is forcing the European Union to take sides. Currently, the EU aligns itself with Washington, but this position comes with economic costs. Limiting economic ties with China presents Europe with greater technology, energy, and trade challenges.

Recent European Commission data shows that energy costs in the EU have become significantly higher than those in the United States. For instance, electricity prices in the EU in 2022 saw sharp increases, with some countries experiencing up to a 70% rise, particularly in the context of the energy crisis driven by factors like the war in Ukraine. These price hikes have put the EU well above U.S. energy costs, where prices have remained more stable during the same period.

The disparity in energy prices between the EU and the U.S. can be attributed to a combination of factors, including the EU's increased reliance on gas imports, the transition to renewable energy, and the varying degree of government intervention in energy markets across member states.

Many European firms have lost their competitive edge in favor of Chinese and American companies, and the losses are likely to continue. At the same time, the U.S. efforts to make Europe more dependent on energy and defense are undermining the EU's strategic autonomy goals. This situation deepens existing disparities within the Union; while some member states support closer cooperation with the U.S., others believe this dependency will be harmful in the long run.

TURKIYE'S ROLE IN A CHANGING REGION

Türkiye in 2025 stands at a critical juncture, facing profound geopolitical and domestic challenges that will shape its future. Situated at the nexus of Europe, Asia, and the Middle East, Türkiye's role is defined by its intricate balancing act between the US, the EU, Russia, China, Africa, and the broader Middle East. This complex positioning demands Ankara to adapt strategically to global realignments while addressing internal pressures that influence its foreign and domestic policies.

Redefining Relations with the European Union

Türkiye's relationship with the EU is fraught with historical tensions and unmet expectations. Ankara must prioritize building a forward-looking, win-win partnership with the EU in a world reshaped by global crises.

Key areas of cooperation, such as modernizing the Customs Union, advancing green energy collaborations, and ensuring energy security, could pave the way for

a renewed relationship. However, for this to succeed, the EU must evolve its view of Türkiye—from a migration buffer and low-cost production hub to a critical strategic partner. Türkiye's geographic location and influence on global challenges demand equal treatment and engagement on shared goals.

As a committed NATO member, Türkiye remains indispensable to the alliance's strategic calculus. However, its pursuit of a more independent foreign policy—marked by growing ties with Russia, involvement with BRICS, and deepening engagement in the Middle East—has generated unease among its traditional Western allies. Ankara's challenge lies in maintaining its NATO commitments while capitalizing on emerging partnerships to bolster its autonomy and address regional complexities, including tensions over NATO expansion and Cyprus.

Post-Assad Syria and the Regional Reconfiguration

The collapse of Bashar al-Assad's regime in Syria has created a leadership vacuum and heightened instability in Türkiye's southern neighborhood. Türkiye has been deeply involved in the Syrian conflict through direct interventions and support for opposition forces.

The shifting dynamics demand a recalibration of Ankara's approach to securing its borders, managing the refugee crisis, and influencing the region's political future. Simultaneously, the disintegration of Iranian influence in the region, driven by US and Israeli strategies, adds another layer of complexity to Türkiye's role in shaping the new Middle Eastern order.

Türkiye's growing engagement with BRICS nations, particularly China and Russia, signals its intent to diversify alliances in response to stalled EU accession and Western skepticism. This alignment, however, poses challenges to traditional partnerships while providing opportunities for economic and geopolitical leverage. Ankara's ability to integrate its role within Western frameworks and

emerging multipolar structures will be pivotal in determining its influence in the evolving global order.

Internal Dynamics Influencing Foreign Policy

Domestic challenges remain deeply intertwined with Türkiye's international posture. The ongoing "Öcalan initiative," aimed at addressing the Kurdish issue, is central to achieving social cohesion. Yet, this initiative faces significant political and public hurdles, and its outcomes will have profound implications for Türkiye's domestic stability and global reputation. Addressing economic vulnerabilities, inflationary pressures, and societal divisions is equally critical as Ankara seeks to position itself as a resilient, forward-looking player on the world stage.

Türkiye's ability to navigate this multifaceted environment will hinge on strategic intelligence and bold leadership. Balancing its historical alliances with emerging opportunities in the East while addressing domestic imperatives, Türkiye must redefine its global role with a focus on long-term stability, economic growth, and regional influence.

In doing so, Türkiye stands poised to emerge as a cornerstone of the new global order, bridging continents, ideologies, and ambitions.

The Question of Succession

Succession looms as a critical issue in Turkish politics. President Erdoğan faces the constitutional challenge of re-election or preparing a "crown prince" to secure his legacy. His ability to maintain political continuity will significantly shape Türkiye's trajectory. Meanwhile, despite leading in public opinion polls, the opposition grapples with internal divisions, credibility issues, and succession rivalries within the CHP.

If Erdoğan remains in power, the focus will likely continue enhancing political stability and pursuing strategic alliances, albeit against polarized domestic politics. Conversely, if the opposition assumes power, it must contend with pressing challenges, including rampant inflation, unemployment, and the need for sustainable economic growth strategies.

The year 2025 signals a period of profound political transition, both domestically and internationally. With careful navigation, Türkiye could leverage its geographic, military, and geopolitical strengths to secure its position as a pivotal global player. Success will depend on Ankara's ability to anticipate changes, adapt to evolving dynamics, and implement forward-thinking policies that balance domestic cohesion with international ambition.



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