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Reglobalization, Whereto? A Summary and Outlook of Six Years of Reglobalization, 2019–2025

Series | Re-Globalization
December 29, 2025 | Volume 16 | Issue 10
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When we introduced the term "reglobalization" at the start of this thematic series in 2019, our aim was to describe a historical moment in which the global order was no longer progressing smoothly nor dissolving, but rather re-ordering itself through a multiplicity of pressures, crises, and innovations. We proposed the "five Rs"—refining, redefining, reframing, reforming, and revisioning globalization—as analytical markers of this transition. Six years later, the trajectory of global developments has not only validated the concept of reglobalization, but also ingrained it deeply into the political, economic, technological, and cultural discourse.

Reglobalization, half a decade in:
A "long half-decade" has embodied reglobalization

The last six years have been, to paraphrase Eric Hobsbawm, a "long half-decade": a compressed period of a particularly intense synchronicity of systemic shocks and overlapping transformations. They dismantled the assumptions of the (in the meantime classical, almost vintage-perceived) "happy globalization" of the 1990-2020 era and instead inaugurated an epoch of instability, liminality, and acceleration. As globalization scholar Saskia Sassen noted already in 2014, globalization periodically changes its organizing logics—and since 2019, those logics have been shifting again at remarkable speed.

Today, in 2025, reglobalization serves as both an analytical framework and a tangible phenomenon. It refers to the restructuring of principles, priorities and power dynamics that we see at work at all levels on the planet. Reglobalization signifies 1) the decline of the liberal-market cosmopolitanist momentum that prevailed during the post-Cold War era, and 2) its continuing replacement by the rise of a fresh contested system where various globalization models coexist and contend. How might we encapsulate the changes that got reglobalization to breakthrough from 2019 to 2025? And what conclusions can we draw when we consider the attempts to anticipate core aspects of what lies ahead?

1. *Refining* Globalization: New Pacts, New Priorities, New Futures

Let us go step by step through the "five Rs" and start in sequence with the first one. The *refining* of globalization over the time period of 2019 to 2015 happened mainly via institutional efforts aimed at improving and modernizing worldwide governance,

but also at refining its temporal focus. The most influential of these efforts for reglobalization was the United Nations Summit of the Future held in September 2024, resulting in the global Pact for the Future endorsed by all 193 UN member countries. It established new frameworks for a more futures-oriented governance, the inclusion of artificial intelligence and better intergenerational justice. Especially important here was the decision to transform the UN into the "UN 2.0", i.e. from a present- to an anticipatory institution; and the visions concerning future generations and AI. Taken together, the UN efforts of the 2020s of transforming itself into a more anticipatory institution indicate that foresight, ethics and long-term considerations have at last been integrated institutionally into global policymaking. The change of the UN system toward a stronger dedication to futures is meant to build bridges over growing inter-national differences in politics, economics, technology, and ideology, by eventually including "imaginal politics" in what could be called global *realpolitik* – a move which was long overdue and has become a core part of the reglobalization process.

This development also aligns with requests for a *substantial inter- and trans-disciplinary evolution of policy-making* which under the pressure of hyper-complex systemic crises has been on the table of basically all nations since the 2020s. Experts in futures studies have proposed such an evolution for years. As, for example, Wendell Bell wrote, "The future is not predetermined; it must be anticipated, imagined, and chosen." Following this dictum, from 2019 to 2025 anticipation shifted from the realm of academia to the forefront of systemic and systematic policy development. Every key power—whether democratic or authoritarian—now incorporates futures research, foresight and anticipation within their strategic frameworks. It is exactly this significantly stronger focus on anticipation that makes reglobalization a widely different place from previous globalization phases, in ways which the generations of the post-Cold War 1990s and 2000s could have hardly imagined.

On a complementary level, i.e. down on the ground of everyday politics and its notorious "presentism", the growth of global "futures literacy" was propelled by the double constellation of rapid change and unpredictability: a reality where swift technological progress now meets political instability with growing intensity and unpredictability, and has become the new normal. The COVID-19 pandemic from 2020 to 2023 further hastened this transformation, revealing the fragility of linear planning and the poor adequacy of governance structures for not completely

controllable hyper-complexity.

Overall, improving the governance of globalization through foresight has been more than a technical refinement. It has also triggered a two-fold socio-philosophical shift: 1) moving from overseeing continuity to steering discontinuity; and 2) progressing from the “presentism” of “late modern” politics towards longer-term perspective-making which will, driven by the necessity of civilizational evolution, characterize the era until the mid of the century.

2. *Redefining* and *Reframing*: The Struggle for Global Standing in a Multipolar World

Two further crucial aspects of the reglobalization era of 2019-2025 were the struggles among major powers to *redefine* and *reframe* their global roles by including an unprecedented readiness for a much broader bandwidth of options and risk-takings than previously. The United States, Europe, China, India, Russia, and regional middle powers all engaged in redefining their positions within a shifting global constellation.

a) The Rise of “Two Globalizations”

One of the pathbreaking features with regard to this repositioning amidst *redefining* and *reframing* has been the emergence of two competing globalizations—an authoritarian-state-capitalist model versus the so far dominating Western-liberal model. This development, driven by a stronger alliance of non-democratic states such as China, Russia, Iran, and North Korea which used Russia’s Ukraine war to get closer to each other, created a new dichotomy with profound implications for the global order. As Ian Bremmer put it in Foreign Affairs, the world is no longer globalizing, but bifurcating. This bifurcation is visible in the creation of competing global orders in technology ecosystems, trade flows, tourism organizations, security architectures, and information spheres. Tariffs are only its external side manifestation; since the end of the 2010s, the split reaches much deeper into the ideological sphere once again. The Pakistan-India information war, Russia’s confrontation with the West, intensified by the weaponization of migration and demography, and the terrorist and anarchy threats taking on new, capillary diversified digital forms confirmed that power politics is again shaping global and

glocal flows—something often underappreciated during the heyday of neoliberal-cosmopolitan globalization from the 1990s to the 2010s with its, in retrospect, somewhat naïve belief in trade and economic interdependencies as universal peace-makers.

b) The Cultural and Demographic Dimensions

A surprising, but not completely unexpected role for redefining and reframing the globalization narrative in the direction of reglobalization came from an actor which classical neoliberal-cosmopolitan globalization had strongly marginalized: culture. After decades of treating culture as – and reducing it both theoretically and practically to – a "soft" factor, the 2010s saw its unexpected return as a decisive driver of global politics. Since the 2020s, culture re-emerged not only as a stabilisator via identity-making in times of volatility but also as a strategic resource in the new ideological competitions between democratic and non-democratic actors. UNESCO's MONDIACULT conference in October 2025 was a symbolic milestone for this return. It defined a potential turning point in the relation between culture and politics, designating culture as a new stand-alone goal in the Post-2023 Agenda of the United Nations, and calling for an 18th SDG on culture and a universal declaration of cultural rights to mitigate and compensate for political and ideological re-polarization.

Demography, too, became politicized and even weaponized—what some scholars called "demographic geopolitics." Globalized societies are increasingly divided between migration, the aging pyramid, shrinking nations in the Global North and youthful, expanding ones in the Global South, shaping not only domestic policy but international alignments. It is no wonder that in 2024, John G. Ikenberry presented – though in still somewhat Western-centered, thus conceptually debatable ways – the "new world" of reglobalization as the open struggle between the geographic and demographic "three worlds: The West, East and South and their competition to shape global order".

c) The West's and Europe's Ambiguous Positioning

Europe has struggled to adapt to this reframed landscape. Torn between strategic autonomy and dependence on the U.S., between economic ties to China and security concerns about Russia, Europe exemplifies reglobalization's core dilemma: how to navigate a fragmented globalization without withdrawing from it. As, for

example, the rifts caused by the EU's normative long-term planning on prohibiting internal combustion engine cars from 2035 on showed, reglobalization has enacted an ecosystem in which long-term normative political action is always less possible due to ever more rapid technological advancements and social changes, thus restricting politics on short-term norms or non-normative long-term planning which requires new approaches based on a multiplicity of options and the flexibility to choose among them *en route* instead of fixing preferred arrival spaces. This has triggered a shift of politics and policies from normative and linear to probabilistic and adaptive.

Something similar is true for the U.S. and its other Western allies, which are torn between a reorientation of the Anglo-American world onto itself and the continuation of their role as world-stabilizing – and to some extent rule-making – "center of gravity powers". Although the U.S.'s and Europe's ambiguities differ in their structural and ideological bases, they are happening synchronically and in interdependence. Not least as an effect of the ambiguous development of security concepts now at the intersection of new relevant topics such as AI, climate change, information warfare or migration, the global backbone of modern democracies, the Atlantic axis, has found itself in open waters not just since the start of the second tenure of Donald Trump in 2025 but, in essence, since the end of the first decade of the century.

3. *Reforming* Global Structures: Rearmament, War, and Institutional Realignment

Another crucial characteristic of how reglobalization materialized in the past six years is that the fragility and volatility of global patterns revealed the need for fundamental institutional *reform*. Since 2019, armed conflict has returned to nearly every major global region. As a consequence of the fact that in 2024 the world saw the post-WWII record of 60 wars, the global military expenditure reached unprecedented levels, confirming what Mary Kaldor called the advent of "new wars" that blur boundaries between domestic and international, state and non-state.

At the same time, major alliances underwent significant transformation:

- NATO was strengthened and reaffirmed by an increasingly unpredictable global ecosystem.

- U.S.-led and Indo-Pacific security frameworks expanded.
- The UN Security Council weakened, since seen by many as unable to reform and increasingly bypassed.

This shift from normative to factual order—"the strong take it all"—marked a regression backwards to 19th-century style geopolitics, with territoriality, power projection, expansion logics and coercion returning to the forefront.

A final defining reform shift after the pandemic, although a rather unexplicit and informal one, was the factual move from sustainability to resilience as the guiding notion of international development. As noted in international analysis, "Resilience is the new master concept of the international policy discourse", to some extent replacing sustainability as the main talking point in international affairs. This shift was not merely rhetorical: particularly to non-democratic powers, resilience appears as less normative and more pragmatic, aligning with a world where further shocks are assumed to be inevitable. On the other hand, from the view of global democracies, resilience is less ambitious in its transformative goals than sustainability. This contributed to the rise of a new global direction in which a "sustainability politics for the human family", as it was declared in mainstream rhetoric during the Obama era 2009-2017, has been partly replaced by a new trend towards "bouncing-back"-oriented *realpolitik*, including more traditional and sometimes regressive patterns.

4. *Revisioning*: Technology, Cybernetics, and the New History of Ideas

While all these developments have played significantly into the process of reglobalization, perhaps the most transformative dimension of them all has been the technological one. Fast and partly unexpected technological advancements were particularly impactful in enacting the fifth and last of our Rs: *revisioning* globalization. Between 2019 and 2025, the convergence of advanced biology, AI – including the unprecedented rise of chatbots –, blockchain, neo-cybernetics, fusion energy research, as well as quantum and bio computing reshaped not only economies but also the underlying philosophies of modernity, creating the prerequisites for a veritable bio-cyber-fusion revolution. The rise of generative AI—symbolized by the global chatbot transformation—created new forms of

knowledge use and cognition habits, communication, and thus power relations, but also new ways of reducing the plurality of information via “information integrators” embedded into search enginges which since the launch of ChatGPT in November 2022 tend to standardize and level the quality of information. The result is a world in which everybody increasingly receives the same or similar “medium” information as everybody else, fostering more uniform patterns of thinking and further marginalizing dissent and dissidents—which have now become even greater outsiders than before the “information integration” revolution led by major global corporations in both the East (China) and the West (U.S.). These corporations use the new tools not only to shape the history of ideas according to their own interests and perspectives, but also to consolidate data power and, consequently, economic and political influence. With this, what was called “soft power” by Joseph S. Nye in the good old times of “happy globalization” was consecrated to become the real “hard power” of the second quarter of the century.

Finally, two last decisive developments in full swing are dramatically revisioning globalization. It is the return of cybernetics and the ongoing (re-)expansion of humanity into space. Both are not disconnected from each other. The renewed interest in cybernetics emerged at the start of the 2020s when, as a consequence of the recurring systemic crises, policymakers sought frameworks to understand ever more complex, adaptive systems in real time. This to some extent marked a conceptual return to the 1970s and 1980s, parallel to – and entailing – the return of systems thinking and futurism. It was coupled with attempts to integrate feedback loops, predictive analytics, and anticipatory governance into national strategies which, together with new anticipatory data and sensoring tools via AI-elaborated predictive instruments, initiated a new era for anticipating futures in more empirical and sober ways than before, thus replacing ideology in futures affairs at least to some extent.

To this was added humanity’s expansion into space, accelerating rapidly since the second half of the 2010s. It added a new frontier of reglobalization which is cosmologization. Some expect that “classical” globalization might eventually be replaced, in its self-image and basic concepts, including globalism, by cosmologization, including cosmologism, in whatever ways these might be conceived and evolve in the coming decades. What is certain is that space is—already in the midst of the 2020s—no longer a domain of sheer exploration but of economic infrastructure, military security, and civilizational projection. It is

transforming the meaning of territory, sovereignty, and human destiny and thus has become a substantial aspect of reglobalization.

5. Reglobalization as the Rise of Tripolar New Cleavages: Neo-Cosmopolitans versus Neo-Neoliberals versus Techno-Universalists

One major surprise of the past years has been the internal fragmentation of traditional political and intellectual camps. Cosmopolitans and neoliberals—once uneasy partners in promoting a more or less “open” globalization—entered into open conflict at the end of the 2010s at the latest. The division of the improbable partners of the “happy” globalization phase evoloved step by step and was driven by the recurring global crisis of the 2010s and 2020s, in retrospect starting already with 9/11 and evolving over the Arab Spring, the migragion crises, Brexit, Donald Trump and the pandemic. The rise of techno-universalism which always more often behaved as techno-imperialism in the U.S. and China, characterized by platform monopolies and AI-driven information control, marginalized the global intellectual sphere. As Evgeny Morozov warned, “The digital public sphere has been colonized by extraction-driven corporate architectures.” Knowledge production became more important and less influential at the same time: heavily integrated into security, foreign policy, and technological competition, yet paradoxically losing direct sway over decision-makers and tending to weaken democratic solidarity by its appropriation for polarization and populism. To these developments responds the resurgence of the three “neo”-groups of neo-cosmopolitans, neo-neoliberals and techno-universalists which are now in open competition, if not ideological fight to each other. Their fight is about the interpretation supremacy of reglobalization.

6. The Prospects of a Neo-Humanist Sustainability

Lastly, on an overarching immaterial (and thus mainly imaginary) dimension, during the past six years a profound philosophical question of the reglobalization process emerged: Can sustainability evolve into a broader planetary humanism that includes not only humans but all beings and ecosystems? The next stage of sustainability—integrating resilience towards a “sustainable resilience” or “resilient sustainability”—may require what some scholars call “planetary humanism”:

expanding the humanist project to the entire biosphere without erasing the distinct value of human agency. This could be the “Herculean task” of the coming decades, if reglobalization proceeds: to humanize the planet without de-humanizing humankind. There is no doubt that from a viewpoint in the future, the judgement regarding the historical reglobalization phase will decisively co-depend on the outcomes of this task.

7. Evaluating Our Predictions: Accuracy, Gaps, and Surprises

Taking all this together, will it, as a consequence, then be "Reglobalization to the rescue", as Ephrat Livni wrote, emblematically for the era, in The New York Times? In other words: Will reglobalization turn out to be not just a transitory passage in history, but to have a value and meaning in itself – not only as the “great transformator” of weights and relations, but as a geopolitical situation which might indicate the path the world will take as its new normal in this century?

Looking back at our 2019 analysis of what reglobalization is and how it might evolve over time, and including the articles in this series which followed, we tend to categorize the outcomes into three groups.

a) Predictions that materialized:

- The rise of competing global models.
- The shift from a normative to a factual global order.
- The centrality of technology and AI.
- The intensification of demography-driven geopolitical strategies.
- The return of war and rearmament.
- The spread of foresight and futures research.

b) Predictions still unfolding:

- Wide-reaching reform of global institutions.
- The emergence of new “resilient sustainability” paradigms.
- A cultural reframing of global governance.
- The deeper integration of future generations into policymaking.

- The development of a focus on futures in international relations and institutions.
- The coming-into-existence of a post-historical global humanism (perhaps not bearing this – in essence euro- and western-centric – name and related imaginaries).

c) Predictions that proved inaccurate or premature:

- The expectation of a stronger resilience and quicker renewal of normative, agreement- and rule-based multilateralism.
- The belief that cosmopolitanism would adapt more fluidly to a more multilateral world.
- The assumption of decreasing ideological polarization due to technological advancements leading to cultural levelling.

Taking all three thematic groups together, the overall picture confirms the value of the “reglobalization” conceptual framework but also underlines that the process described with it is nonlinear and open-ended.

8. Outlook: Re-Globalization, Half a Decade In.
Is “Reglobalization” Here to Stay?

Summing up, the answer to the guiding question: Does reglobalization remain a valid umbrella term for the world we are entering? has to be taken with a grain of salt. Our assessment, based on six years of observation, is yes—but with conditions:

- The term will remain highly relevant through the UN Post-2030 Agenda, including still unpredictable ramifications.
- It may continue to be useful even beyond 2050, though likely in hybrid forms with returns and innovations of known and unknown previous globalization features.
- By mid-century, reglobalization processes may merge via the axes of new paradigms shaped by artificial intelligence, planetary ecology, and multi-planetary expansion of humanity beyond earth.

Summing up, reglobalization is, for all this, not a final state but a transitional epoch—one that captures the profound reorientation of global systems after the three decades long arc of post-Cold War globalization. That is how we conceived it

from the start, yet now the international community can see this character of contemporary change even clearer. As we move toward the 2030s and mid-century, the world is entering its perhaps most open-ended historical era since 1945, 1968, 1989 and 2001. The assumptions of peaceful, predictable, and consensual global integration have, for the time being, dissolved. In their place stands a global arena marked by uncertainty, competition, innovation, and the search for new forms of coexistence. Our task—intellectual, political, and civic—is, and over the coming years will remain, to navigate and shape this evolving landscape with clarity, responsibility, and anticipation.

In its true effects, consequences and ramifications, the age of reglobalization is far from over. It has only just begun.

Recommended re-reading (oldies but goldies)

1. Saskia Sassen, *Expulsions: Brutality and Complexity in the Global Economy.* Harvard University Press, 2014.
2. Wendell Bell, *Foundations of Futures Studies*. Routledge, 2003.
3. Ulrich Beck, *World Risk Society*. Polity Press, 1999.
4. Henry Farrell & Abraham Newman, “Weaponized Interdependence,” *International Security* 44, no. 1 (2019).
5. Mary Kaldor, *New and Old Wars*. Stanford University Press, 2012.
6. G. John Ikenberry, “The End of Liberal International Order?” *International Affairs* 94, no. 1 (2018).
7. Luciano Floridi, *The Fourth Revolution: How the Infosphere is Reshaping Human Reality*. Oxford University Press, 2014.
8. Amitav Acharya, *The End of American World Order*. Polity Press, 2014.
9. Shoshana Zuboff, *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism*. PublicAffairs, 2019.

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