

A world against world order



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OPINION

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the United States, as the winner of the Cold War, stepped up its support for the international order more than ever before; an order that was now riding on the coattails of a unipolar world following the fall of communism. But who were the anti-order players?

They were the remaining countries with leftist ideologies, mostly sprouting up in Latin America, and those who seemingly were not leftist but defined their independence by standing up to the global order. These countries didn't care how much it cost them to be anti-order.

By acting out this way on the world stage, they felt a sense of existence. So, no matter how high this cost was for their citizens, no matter how much it stalled their progress and development, it was still preferable for them to push back against the global order. In the balance of domestic politics, being anti-order helped shore up legitimacy for the power centers and their affiliated groups — this was the main reason for their role in the international arena. Therefore, after the Soviet collapse, we faced a world order where, except for a handful of countries representing at best 3% of the global GDP, everyone else fell in line with this order. Even Russia and China also changed course and welcomed this order, benefiting greatly from their cooperation, of course. Although they did not open up their political structures like the leaders of the existing order, they opened up their economic institutions, carved out a position in the global economy, and through this, their per capita income shot up dramatically. Since then,



The illustration shows US President Donald Trump looking down at a fractured globe.
● BILL KUCHMAN/POLITICO

Russia's per capita income has multiplied by more than six times, and China's by over 19 times.

Undoubtedly, the leaders of the current order capitalized on these conditions and expanded their hegemonic power. But after the financial shock of this century and rising dissatisfaction, the murmur grew louder in the United States that the unipolar world was no longer as it seemed. It was as if the whole world was riding on America's back, with America footing the bill for everyone else. This scenario struck a chord with voters, and Trump was able to sell it twice.

While previously in the less developed world, isolationists

were the main anti-order players, with Trump coming to power, the country that should have most stood up for the existing order became itself a disruptor. Even under previous US administrations, when international institutions stood up against American will, they still carried out their course, as witnessed in the Iraq invasion, but the legitimacy of these institutions was never questioned. However, Trump pushed back against these institutions, viewing them as highway robbers for Americans and arguing that in a lawless jungle, America could call the shots whenever it wanted, so why bother with international bodies bleeding the pockets of American taxpayers?

Previously, commitment to freedom, rules, and the rule of law were values that gave the United States its credibility. Today, the government in power holds itself to no standards.

This anti-order stance has reached the point where countries that once saw themselves as America's friends are now suffering from it. Israel's attack on Qatar is a glaring example of the US abandoning its previous global role. If America didn't know about this attack, it means it has no control over its main ally; If it did know, it implicitly approved the attack on another ally and welcomed the disruption of order for short-term tactical gains. Both scenarios chip away at America's credibility. It

seems a world lies ahead where, the further we go, the more it resembles a lawless jungle disorder. Is this trend temporary? Will America step up again and reclaim its previous role?

Whatever the future holds, the world has learned since World War II that having any rules is better than none at all. So, if the current order hypothetically falls apart, there will undoubtedly be a new order that springs up. Meanwhile, one can only hope that the collapse of the current order will not come with widespread chaos and human catastrophe.

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Japan's diplomatic discontents after US strikes on Iran



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OPINION

The Israeli and US strikes on Iran in June 2025 highlighted a critical dilemma for Japanese policymakers. Japan's reaction reflects immediate diplomatic and economic interests in its dealings with the United States and the Middle East, as well as anxieties over its wider international strategy in the longer term.

Japan was, at first, more vocal in criticising Israel's strikes on Iran. Prime Minister Shigeru Ishiba stated on June 13, 2025, that the use of military force amid ongoing diplomatic negotiations was "unacceptable". Japan signed the June 17 G7 statement that reiterated Israel's "right to defend itself". Still, Ishiba continued to stand by his earlier statement and call for restraint between Israel and Iran. Japan then shifted its position following the US strikes on Iran, with Ishiba on

June 23 expressing "understanding" of the US determination to prevent Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons.

Ishiba's initial critique of Israel was clearly driven by immediate concerns over the further expansion of conflict and instability in the Middle East. These concerns were compounded by Japan's carefully nurtured "special relationship" as an interlocutor with the Iranian government, the risks of China exploiting the Middle Eastern conflict to enhance its regional influence and Japan's dependence on energy supplies from the Middle East amid a domestic cost of living crisis.

Ishiba's seemingly contradictory stance over Iran and the US strikes signified a reluctance to create a rupture in ties with Washington, particularly during negotiations over tariffs and before Japan's July 2025 upper house election.

Japan's policymakers chose to keep their heads down as the crisis over Iran's nuclear program unfolded. Even as they continue

to walk a cautious line so as not to alienate US President Donald Trump and his administration, there is likely a sense of unease over the potential implications for Japan's broader diplomacy and security. The Trump administration seems far bolder in disregarding or dismantling entirely the rules-based order than before, heightening Japan's concerns.

The Trump administration's increasingly overt pursuit of an international strategy predicated on power politics was manifested in its strikes on Iran. Japan, by contrast, has sought to argue in its diplomatic pronouncements and actions for the "rule of law" internationally. Government officials are reported to equivocate on whether or not US strikes violated international law by amounting to unilateral preemptive attacks.

Japan has carefully championed the rules-based international order, as seen in its Free and Open Indo-Pacific vision and condemnations of China's behaviour in



Japanese Prime Minister Shigeru Ishiba (c) arrives at Andrews Air Force Base outside of Washington, D.C., US, on February 6, 2025.
● PRIME MINISTER'S OFFICE OF JAPAN