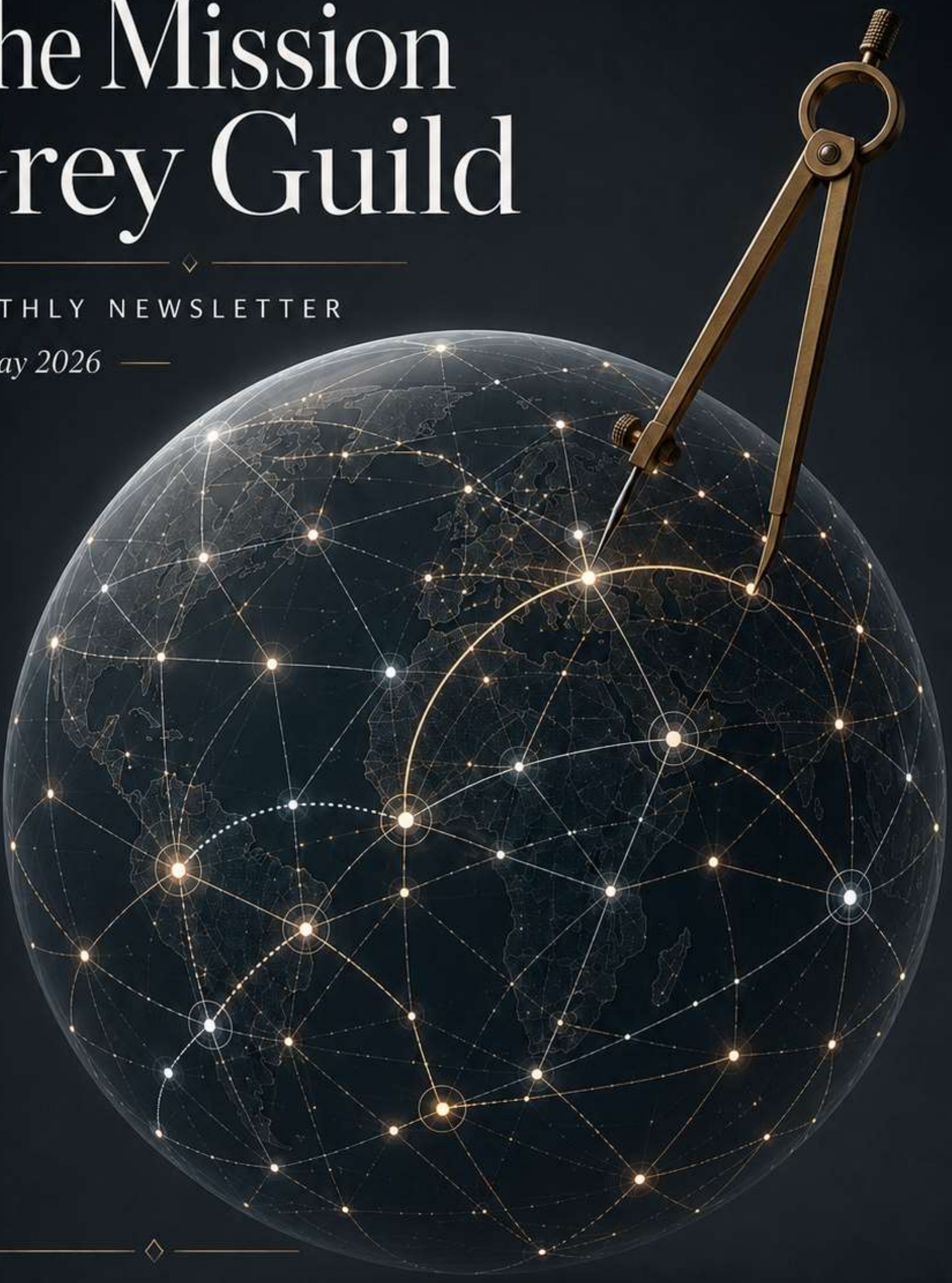
The Mission Grey Guild

MONTHLY NEWSLETTER

May 2026



Transforming Alliances, Reshaping Regulations, Reconsidering Supply Chains

(UN)CONVENTIAL WISDOM

"A human being should be able to change a diaper, plan an invasion, butcher a hog, conn a ship, design a building, write a sonnet, balance accounts, build a wall, set a bone, comfort the dying, take orders, give orders, cooperate, act alone, solve equations, analyze a new problem, pitch manure, program a computer, cook a tasty meal, fight efficiently, die gallantly. Specialization is for insects."

– Robert A. Heinlein

Foreword

Insects and Executives

The world economy is not fragmenting, nor is it simply integrating. It is being reorganized.

For much of the past three decades, executives could assume that geopolitics existed largely outside the operating model. Political crises interrupted markets; markets eventually adjusted. Efficiency remained the dominant principle, and globalization, despite periodic shocks, continued its forward march.

That assumption no longer holds.

In 2026, alliances increasingly determine regulation. Regulation increasingly determines supply chains. Supply chains increasingly determine alliances. The result is not deglobalization, nor a simple return to blocs. It is the emergence of a new operating system for the global economy, one in which political admissibility matters almost as much as commercial competitiveness.

The implications reach far beyond geopolitics. For businesses, the challenge is no longer identifying where demand exists or where production is cheapest. It is determining whether a product, supplier, technology, logistics route, or investment will remain acceptable across an increasingly fragmented regulatory and political landscape.

Understanding that transformation requires looking beyond individual events. Tariffs, sanctions, industrial subsidies, procurement rules, carbon regulations, and strategic corridors are often discussed as separate developments. In reality, they are interconnected expressions of a deeper shift.

A tariff alters investment incentives. An investment decision reshapes industrial policy. Industrial policy changes alliance structures. Alliance structures affect access to technology, capital, talent, energy, logistics, and markets. What appears as a regulatory adjustment in one jurisdiction may emerge as a supply-chain vulnerability in another. The first-order effect is often visible. The second and third-order consequences increasingly determine who wins and who loses.

This is why a holistic understanding of dependencies has become a competitive advantage.

The modern executive faces a world where economic, political, technological, security, environmental, and societal developments are no longer separate domains. They are interconnected variables within the same operating environment. Organizations that analyze them in isolation risk seeing only fragments of the picture. Organizations that understand their interactions gain something far more valuable: foresight.

This principle has guided the *Mission Grey* team long before artificial intelligence became a boardroom buzzword. While AI has become an important operational tool within our processes, it was never the foundation of our work. *Mission Grey* was built around a different conviction: that better decisions emerge from disciplined human analysis, diverse expertise, structured scenario planning, and the ability to connect developments across domains that are too often treated separately.

Technology enhances that mission. It does not define it.

Our objective has never been to produce information. Information is abundant. The challenge is interpretation. More importantly, the challenge is translating interpretation into action. For our Guild Members, this means not merely tracking geopolitical, regulatory, and market developments, but understanding their practical implications, exploring alternative futures, and preparing concrete responses before circumstances demand them.

That is why *Mission Grey*'s work extends beyond monitoring trends. We help organizations examine dependencies, identify vulnerabilities, test assumptions, and evaluate scenarios before they become realities. The value lies not only in knowing what is happening, but in understanding what may happen next and what should be done about it.

There is an old observation by **Robert Heinlein** that "specialization is for insects." Stripped of its provocation, the underlying insight is remarkably relevant to the present moment. Complex environments reward those who can connect disciplines rather than remain confined within them. The ability to understand logistics alongside finance, regulation alongside technology, security alongside supply chains, and politics alongside markets is no longer an intellectual luxury. It is becoming a strategic necessity.

The same principle applies to organizations. The most resilient firms are not necessarily those with the deepest expertise in a single domain. They are those capable of integrating expertise across many domains and recognizing how developments in one sphere create consequences in another.

This month's feature examines that reality through a practical sector-by-sector framework. It also revisits six core dynamics that increasingly define the global operating environment, treating each as a distinct relationship that shapes outcomes in the real economy.

For boards and leadership teams, the central question is no longer where production can be located at the lowest cost. It is whether a product, supplier, facility, technology, or trade route will remain commercially, politically, and strategically viable across competing systems.

The world is not merely globalizing or deglobalizing; it is being recoded. Understanding that code, and anticipating how it evolves, has become one of the defining tasks of leadership in our age.

Pekka Virkki
Guildmaster
Editor-in-Chief

Global Conjunctures

The Great Rewiring

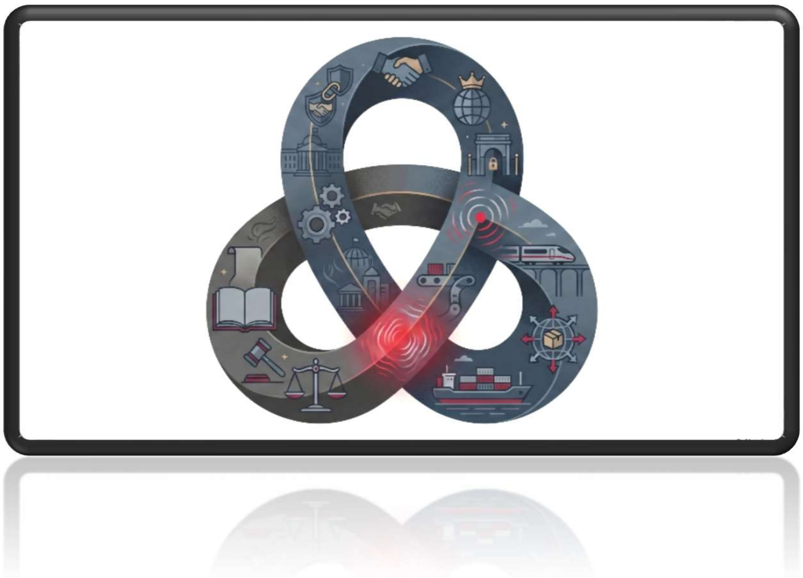
How alliances, regulations, and supply chains became one system?

The conventional vocabulary of globalization no longer adequately describes the world economy.

For much of the post-Cold War era, governments pursued alliances, regulators pursued market rules, and companies pursued efficiency. The three spheres interacted, but each largely operated according to its own logic. Diplomacy shaped security. Regulation shaped markets. Supply chains followed cost.

That separation is disappearing.

The six dynamics examined here reveal how that shift is unfolding.

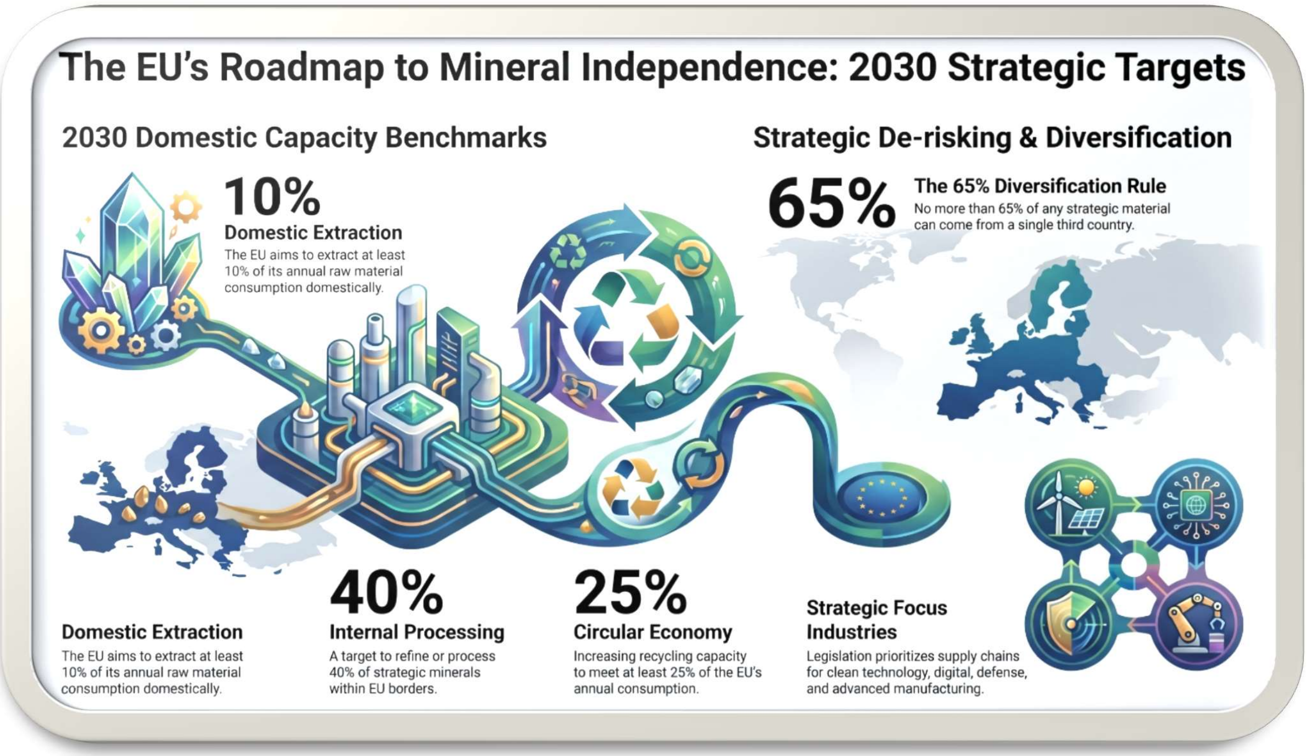


When Alliances Become Regulation

The first transformation is the conversion of political alignment into legal architecture.

A generation ago, alliance structures influenced trade policy indirectly. Today they increasingly determine market access itself. The distinction matters.

Europe's Critical Raw Materials Act illustrates the trend. On the surface, it is an industrial policy instrument aimed at securing access to critical minerals. In practice, it reflects a broader geopolitical judgment: excessive dependence on a single supplier, particularly China, is no longer viewed as compatible with economic security.



What makes this significant is not merely the policy itself but the mechanism through which it emerged. Strategic concerns shared across Europe and among allied partners have been translated into binding requirements governing sourcing, processing, recycling, and supplier diversification. What was once a geopolitical preference has become a commercial obligation.

This represents a broader pattern. Across batteries, semiconductors, defense technologies, energy infrastructure, and advanced manufacturing, alliance structures are increasingly being encoded into regulatory frameworks. Trusted partners receive advantages in procurement, subsidies, industrial cooperation, and strategic investment. Supply relationships that once depended solely on economics are increasingly judged through the lens of resilience and security.

For business leaders, the consequence is clear. Exposure to a critical supplier is no longer merely an operational issue. It is becoming a regulatory one.

The End of Complacent Nearshoring

The second dynamic reveals how alliance politics increasingly reshape production networks.

North America remains deeply integrated economically. Yet the ongoing review of the United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement suggests that integration alone is no longer sufficient. What matters now is the political acceptability of what lies beneath that integration.

For decades, firms assumed that relocating production to Mexico or Canada would satisfy concerns about geopolitical exposure. That assumption is becoming harder to sustain. Increasing scrutiny of rules of origin, embedded content, and supply-chain provenance reflects a growing determination to distinguish between nominal regional production and genuinely regional value creation.

The implication is profound. Manufacturing inside a friendly jurisdiction may no longer guarantee market access if the underlying supply chain remains dependent on strategically sensitive inputs or opaque sourcing networks.

Nearshoring, in other words, is evolving into something more demanding. Geography alone no longer solves political risk.

The factory matters less than the ecosystem behind it.

Europe's Strategic Awakening

If alliances increasingly shape regulation, regulation is also reshaping alliances.

Nowhere is this more visible than in Europe. For years, European debates about China revolved around the language of openness, engagement, and managed interdependence. That language has not disappeared, but it has been supplemented by a growing concern about industrial resilience, technological dependence, and strategic vulnerability.

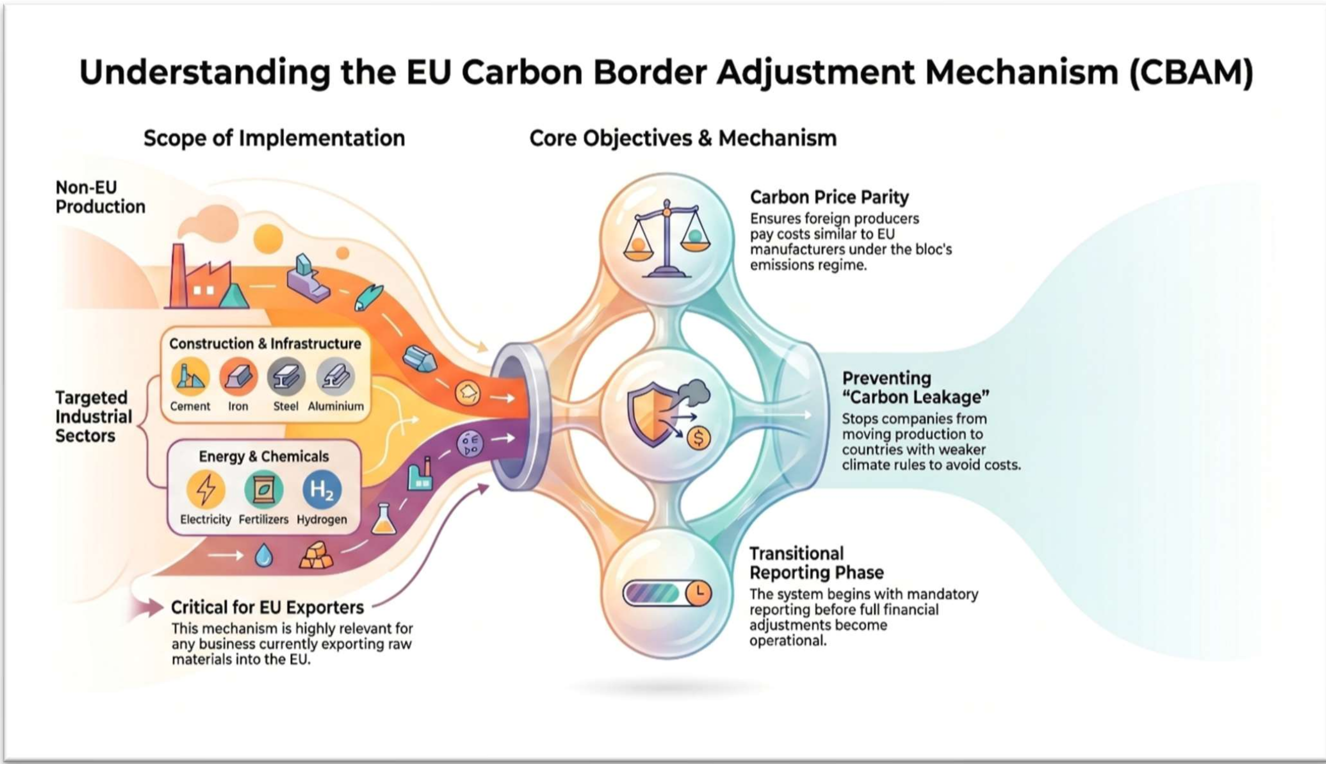
The shift has accelerated as concerns about Chinese overcapacity, state support, and supply-chain concentration have spread across sectors ranging from machinery and chemicals to batteries, telecommunications, and renewable-energy equipment.

What makes this development particularly important is that it is producing greater political alignment within Europe itself. Countries that once approached China through very different commercial and strategic lenses are gradually converging around a shared concern: preserving Europe's industrial base in an era of intensifying competition.

American pressure has contributed to this process. President **Donald Trump**'s threat to raise tariffs on European automotive exports sharpened existing debates and increased the urgency of transatlantic negotiations.

Yet attributing Europe's evolving position primarily to Washington would misunderstand the nature of the shift. The deeper driver is European anxiety about its own industrial future.

Europe is not simply responding to China, nor is it simply responding to the United States. It is responding to a growing realization that dependence can become vulnerability from multiple directions simultaneously. The continent is learning to hedge against pressure from both.



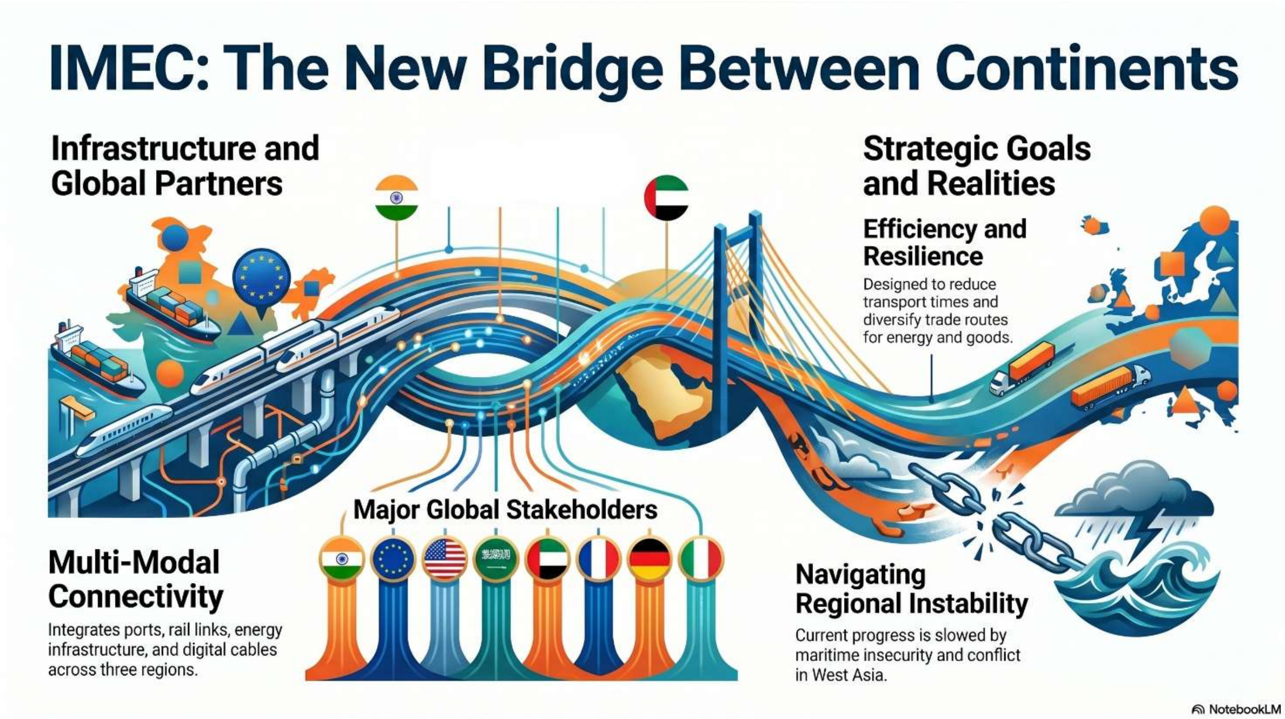
Regulation as Industrial Geography

The Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM) demonstrates how regulation increasingly redesigns supply chains directly. The significance of CBAM lies not in environmental policy alone. Its real importance is that it transforms carbon intensity into a market-access variable.

Historically, companies evaluated suppliers primarily on cost, quality, reliability, and delivery. Increasingly, emissions profiles, energy sources, and traceability systems are joining that list.

This alters sourcing decisions far beyond Europe. Steel producers in Asia, fertilizer manufacturers in North Africa, energy-intensive exporters in the Gulf, and industrial firms across emerging markets are discovering that access to European markets increasingly depends on information as much as production.

Factories can be relocated slowly, but regulatory requirements arrive quickly. As a result, documentation, transparency, and data quality are becoming competitive advantages in their own right. The lesson extends beyond climate policy. Regulation increasingly functions as a tool for redesigning industrial geography.



How Supply Chains Create Alliances

The relationship also works in reverse. As companies and governments seek alternatives to concentrated dependencies, new partnerships emerge.

The India-Middle East-Europe (IMEC) corridor illustrates this process. What began as a diplomatic initiative is gradually evolving into a strategic response to route vulnerability, supply-chain concentration, and geopolitical uncertainty.

Traditionally, alliances often preceded commercial integration. Increasingly, commercial necessity is driving strategic cooperation. Ports, logistics hubs, customs frameworks, energy networks, digital infrastructure, and industrial investment are becoming the foundations upon which political partnerships are built.

This dynamic reflects a broader reality of the twenty-first century. Infrastructure increasingly shapes geopolitics as much as geopolitics shapes infrastructure. The countries capable of providing trusted routes, trusted logistics, and trusted industrial ecosystems are acquiring new strategic importance. In this sense, corridors are more than transportation projects. They are alliance architectures.

When Shortages Become Law

The final dynamic may be the most consequential. When supply-chain vulnerabilities become sufficiently painful, governments regulate.

Semiconductors provide the clearest example. So do rare earths, advanced magnets, drones, batteries, and defense electronics. Across these sectors, concentration has triggered a predictable policy response: subsidies, localization incentives, procurement restrictions, stockpiling requirements, and export controls. What begins as supply-chain risk eventually becomes legislation.

The pattern is becoming familiar. Governments tolerate dependence during periods of stability. They regulate it once vulnerability becomes politically visible. This process is unlikely to remain confined to advanced technologies. Any sector associated with economic resilience, industrial competitiveness, or national security may eventually face similar scrutiny.

The broader lesson is straightforward: supply chains are no longer passive consequences of policy. Increasingly, they are drivers of policy.

The Emergence of Strategic Markets

Taken together, these six dynamics point toward a larger conclusion. The global economy is not dividing neatly into competing blocs, nor is it returning to the hyper-globalized model that preceded the pandemic and the Ukraine war.

Instead, major economies are gradually becoming strategic markets.

Europe conditions access on resilience, decarbonization, and strategic compatibility. North America is moving toward a more securitized model of regional production. The India-Gulf-Europe corridor is emerging as a diversification platform. East Asia remains the world's most sophisticated manufacturing ecosystem while simultaneously experiencing growing segmentation in strategic technologies.

Each region is adapting to the same reality through different mechanisms. The age of frictionless globalization is ending. The age of managed interdependence is taking its place.

The Boardroom Challenge

For companies, the practical implications are significant. The critical question is no longer whether a supplier is efficient, a route is inexpensive, or a factory is productive. The question is whether those assets remain commercially and politically viable across multiple future scenarios.

That requires a different form of strategic planning.

Firms must distinguish between strategic and non-strategic supply chains. They must evaluate political admissibility alongside commercial performance. They must monitor coalition shifts as closely as legislative changes. They must understand not only first-order consequences but also the second- and third-order effects that increasingly determine competitive outcomes.

Most importantly, they must recognize that alliances, regulations, and supply chains no longer operate sequentially. They operate as a loop.

A regulatory change influences sourcing decisions. New sourcing decisions alter alliance behavior. Alliance behavior produces new regulations. The cycle repeats. This is the defining characteristic of the emerging geopolitical economy.

The winners will not necessarily be those with the largest scale, the lowest costs, or even the most advanced technologies. They will be those who understand the architecture of dependencies before it becomes visible to everyone else.

THE GEOPOLITICAL ECONOMY 2026–2028

Five Scenarios, Six Exposed Sectors, One Strategic Question:

Will your supply chain remain admissible?

1 Managed De-Risking Becomes the Baseline

Likelihood ★★★★★

Impact ★★★★☆

WHAT HAPPENS

- Selective diversification replaces full decoupling
- China remains important
- Strategic sectors gain redundancy
- Compliance burden rises

BUSINESS RESPONSE

- Create tiered sourcing model
- Build regional backup suppliers
- Increase inventory visibility
- Expect higher working capital

MOST EXPOSED SECTORS

Automotive · Technology · Industrials

2 Alliance Blocs Harden

Likelihood ★★★★☆

Impact ★★★★★

WHAT HAPPENS

- Critical minerals become strategic assets
- Trusted-country sourcing expands
- Strategic technology access narrows
- Procurement becomes alliance-driven

BUSINESS RESPONSE

- Join trusted ecosystems early
- Pursue JVs and recycling partnerships
- Secure government-backed projects

MOST EXPOSED SECTORS

Technology · Defense · Automotive

3 Regulation Outruns Relocation

Likelihood ★★★★☆

Impact ★★★★☆

WHAT HAPPENS

- Rules change faster than supply chains
- CBAM expands
- Origin scrutiny increases
- Compliance failures emerge

BUSINESS RESPONSE

- Prioritize traceability
- Improve emissions accounting
- Strengthen customs architecture
- Increase contractual flexibility

MOST EXPOSED SECTORS

Industrials · Automotive · Technology

4 Chokepoint Shock

Likelihood ★★★☆☆

Impact ★★★★★

WHAT HAPPENS

- Hormuz disruption
- Rare-earth restrictions
- Shipping delays
- Commodity inflation

BUSINESS RESPONSE

- Stress-test 30/60/90-day disruptions
- Pre-book alternative logistics
- Stockpile critical materials
- Map chokepoint exposure

MOST EXPOSED SECTORS

Energy · Logistics · Defense

5 Partial Détente, Strategic Tightening

Likelihood ★★★☆☆

Impact ★★★☆☆

WHAT HAPPENS

- Commercial easing
- Strategic controls remain
- Mixed regulatory environment

BUSINESS RESPONSE

- Build product-level exposure maps
- Avoid binary assumptions
- Separate strategic products

MOST EXPOSED SECTORS

Automotive · Consumer Goods · Industrials

2. SECTOR EXPOSURE MATRIX

Severe · High · Medium · Low

SECTORS	SCENARIO 1 Managed De-Risking	SCENARIO 2 Alliance Blocs Harden	SCENARIO 3 Regulation Outruns Relocation	SCENARIO 4 Chokepoint Shock	MAIN RISKS	BOARD INSTRUCTION
AUTOMOTIVE	Severe	Severe	Severe	High	• Batteries • Magnets • Origin rules • Chinese competition	• Model three battery pathways • Model three origin-rule pathways
TECHNOLOGY	High	Severe	High	Medium	• Export controls • AI chips • Semiconductors • Advanced equipment	• Separate strategic and commercial technology governance
ENERGY	High	High	Medium	Severe	• Maritime routes • LNG • Hydrogen • Grid equipment	• Include route-risk in capex decisions
DEFENSE	High	Severe	Medium	High	• Magnets • Drones • Electronics • Rare earths	• Elevate material security to board level
INDUSTRIALS	High	High	Severe	Medium	• CBAM • Steel • Aluminium • Chemicals	• Prepare compliance before relocation
CONSUMER GOODS	High	Medium	Medium	High	• Packaging • Batteries • Connected devices	• Upgrade supplier visibility

3. WHAT TO DO MONDAY MORNING

1 MAP POLITICAL ADMISSIBILITY

- Which suppliers may become unacceptable?
- Which markets may tighten access?

2 SEPARATE STRATEGIC SUPPLY CHAINS

- Chips
- Magnets
- Batteries
- Defense inputs

3 STRESS-TEST ORIGIN RULES

- Automotive
- Machinery
- Electronics

4 BUILD CARBON TRACEABILITY

- Product-level emissions
- Material documentation

5 CREATE CORRIDOR OPTIONALITY

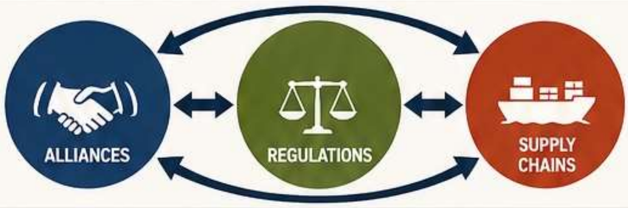
- IMEC
- India-Gulf-Europe
- Alternative maritime routes

6 MONITOR COALITIONS

- Watch political alignment
- Not only legislation

7 EMBED GEOPOLITICS INTO CAPEX

- Test every major investment
- Ask: Would this still be viable under *Scenario 4?*



THE CORE LESSON

- A change in one domain now rapidly propagates into the others.
- Companies that optimize only for cost will repeatedly be surprised.
- Companies that optimize for *admissibility*, resilience, and *optionality* will preserve market access, financing, and strategic freedom.

Collaborations

Mission Grey and Exergy International to Work Together

Mission Grey and Exergy International are pleased to announce a strategic partnership built around two initial initiatives.

“Exergy and Mission Grey have had really productive discussions regarding our core capabilities and see significant room for growth and collaboration. It's an exciting time," said **Scott Siler**, Principal and Founder of Exergy International and Mission Grey Guild Member.

First, Exergy will deliver training on the *Mission Grey* platform to members of its Political Risk Demystified (PRDM) Community.

Second, the two companies will collaborate around Exergy's new Political Risk Resilience (PRR) product. PRR is built for underwriters, diligence teams, boards and risk teams, and AI/data teams who need firm-level political-risk intelligence.

Together, *Mission Grey*'s external intelligence platform and *Exergy*'s PRR product—which measures firm-specific responses to political and geopolitical events—create a powerful and distinctive offering for the market.


The Great Rewiring
How the operating system of the global economy is being rewritten
NEW LINKS
STRENGTHENED
AT RISK
DISRUPTED
DISCONNECTED
ALLIANCES
ENERGY
TECHNOLOGY
CAPITAL
REGULATION
DEFENCE
SYSTEM UPDATE
> ALLIANCES.exe updating...
> ENERGY.sys rerouting...
> TECHNOLOGY.dll upgrading...
> CAPITAL.dat syncing...
> REGULATION.sys patching...
> DEFENCE.sys assessing...
> STATUS: RECODING
CHIP SHORTAGE
NAVAL CHOKEPOINT
SEMICONDUCTOR FAB
PORT
LNG TERMINAL
RARE EARTH MINE
DATA CENTER
CRITICAL FACTORY
LOGISTICS HUB
SATELLITE NODE
SATELLITE LINK
FINANCIAL MARKET
TARIFFS
SANCTIONS
ELECTIONS
EXPORT CONTROLS
TRADE DISPUTES
ENERGY PIPELINE
ELECTION OUTCOME
SUPPLY CHAINS
FINANCING NETWORKS
UNDERSEA CABLES
INDUSTRIAL DEPENDENCIES
STRATEGIC MINERALS
ENERGY SYSTEMS
LOGISTICS CORRIDORS
REGULATION CHANGE
RECONFIGURED
SANCTION
SUPPLY CHAIN RIPPLE EFFECT
ENGINEER
FINANCIER
DIPLOMAT
MILITARY STRATEGIST
LOGISTICS PLANNER
ENERGY ANALYST
MISSION GREY GUILD
SEEING WHAT OTHERS DON'T. UNDERSTANDING HOW IT CONNECTS. ADVISING WHAT TO DO NEXT.

Interns' Letter

Transforming Alliances

By ***Mission Grey Interns***

The year 2024 was called the "Super Year" of elections: more democratic votes cast in a single calendar year than at any point in human history. Roughly half the world's population went to the polls, from India to the United States, from Mexico to the European Parliament. The results did not simply change governments. They changed the architecture of global alliances. What followed was not a gradual evolution but a cascading realignment, one that is still reshaping the international order as you read this.

This edition maps the transformation, beginning with the force most responsible for accelerating it: the return of **Donald Trump** to the American presidency. From there, we move to the rise of middle-power coalitions and then the complicated momentum of BRICS. The thread running through all of it is the same: the old assumptions no longer hold.

The Trump Variable: Alliance as Transaction

No single factor has done more to accelerate the transformation of global alliances than the return of Donald Trump to the American presidency in January 2025. Where previous administrations, even contentious ones, operated within a broadly shared framework of institutional loyalty, Trump brought something categorically different: a transactional view of alliance in which loyalty flows toward those who flatter, and punishment falls on those who resist.

Israel's **Benjamin Netanyahu** nominated Trump for the Nobel Peace Prize and handed him the nomination letter personally, on camera. "It's well deserved, and you should get it," Netanyahu told him. Since then, Israel and the United States have forged their closest alliance in decades. The coordination between the two nations during the Iranian conflict, particularly the bombings, has been historic, representing a level of military integration and strategic unity the world hasn't seen since the Gulf War coalition of 1991.

Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and Poland, each in their own way, read the same playbook. The Gulf states offered investment pledges and arms purchases calibrated to appeal to Trump's transactional instincts. Poland, long eager for a permanent US military anchor on its soil, positioned itself as Washington's most enthusiastic European partner. New US Secretary of Defense **Pete Hegseth** praised Poland as "the model ally on the continent," and Trump has consistently treated Warsaw as his preferred interlocutor in Central and Eastern Europe.

The penalty for not playing along has been equally consistent. When German Chancellor **Friedrich Merz** publicly stated that the United States was being "humiliated" by Iran and criticized Washington's strategy in the Middle East, the response was swift. The Pentagon announced the withdrawal of approximately 5,000 troops from Germany, citing the country's insufficient support for US operations in Iran. European leaders called on the continent to take responsibility for its own defense, while Polish Prime Minister **Donald Tusk** condemned what he called the "ongoing disintegration" of the transatlantic alliance.

The Spain episode, however, may be the clearest illustration of the new order. When the US and Israel commenced airstrikes against Iran in February 2026, Spanish Prime Minister **Pedro Sánchez** denied American forces permission to use the jointly operated bases at Rota and Morón for offensive operations, condemning the strikes as violations of international law. Trump's response was immediate and personal: "Spain has been terrible. I told **Scott [Bessent]** to cut off all dealings with Spain. We're going to cut off all trade with Spain. We don't want anything to do with Spain." The US relocated fifteen aircraft, including refueling tankers, out of Spanish military bases within days.

The episode crystallizes the fundamental tension running through every alliance relationship in the Trump era: the cost of accommodation versus the cost of resistance. Countries that comply preserve access and avoid economic punishment, but surrender a degree of sovereign decision-making and democratic credibility at home. Countries that resist protect their legal principles and domestic standing, but invite coercion from their most important security partner

The Middle Powers

The fracturing of the US-led alliance framework has not left a vacuum, but it has created an opening. If 2024 was the year the old order was voted on, 2025 was the year the middle powers decided they could no longer wait for the great powers to set the terms.

Canadian Prime Minister **Mark Carney** delivered a speech at Davos that went viral in foreign policy circles, pleading for leaders of other middle powers to join Canada in resisting great-power coercion. But while Carney's speech made headlines, the European Union was already implementing the diversification strategy he called for.

The EU has described its current moment as a "geopolitical awakening." Germany's Bundestag approved $61 billion in military procurement in December 2025, covering Puma infantry vehicles and Arrow 3 missiles. Disagreements have emerged, however, between those advocating "buy European" versus "buy with European" procurement strategies, revealing that strategic autonomy in defense remains internally constrained by member states' plural industrial capacities and political priorities.

The frank challenge for the middle powers is converting political will into structural weight. The EU's geopolitical engine cannot fire on all cylinders if its internal political cogs are constantly jamming and domestic politics across the continent remain fractured. NATO faces a parallel stress test: with the United States reducing its European footprint and pausing weapons donations to Ukraine, the alliance's eastern flank nations are funding their own deterrence while simultaneously trying to hold the consensus together.

The middle power coalition, if it can be called that, is real, but it is also fragile.

BRICS: Expansion Without Direction

While the Western alliance debates its own coherence, the bloc most often cited as an alternative pole of global power has been expanding with quiet momentum, even as it generates fewer headlines than it once did.

At the October 2024 summit in Kazan, Russia, the original five BRICS members welcomed Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran, and the UAE. Indonesia formally joined in January 2025, and Saudi Arabia completed its membership in July 2025. The bloc has also designated thirteen additional "partner countries," including Belarus, Bolivia, Cuba, Kazakhstan, Malaysia, Nigeria, Thailand, Uganda, and Uzbekistan.

The July 2025 Rio Summit, hosted by Brazil under President **Lula da Silva**, produced declarations on IMF quota reform and support for a UN framework on international tax cooperation. The Trump administration escalated pressure on the bloc by threatening 100% tariffs on BRICS members over what it characterized as anti-American policies, with additional 10% tariff threats introduced in July 2025.

What makes BRICS genuinely difficult to assess is what it is not: it is not an alliance, not a military bloc, and not a coherent economic union. The expanded bloc operates through networked diplomacy — flexible, issue-specific, bypassing institutional constraints — particularly in energy markets, regional development financing, and emerging financial technologies. The New Development Bank continues to finance infrastructure across the Global South, with an accelerating share of loans denominated in local currencies rather than dollars.

Notably, **Xi Jinping** missed the Rio summit for the first time since 2013, citing scheduling conflicts, while **Vladimir Putin** participated only via video link due to the ICC warrant outstanding against him. The absence of both the bloc's two most powerful leaders from its flagship annual event was not coincidental. BRICS is increasingly a platform China uses instrumentally rather than one it shapes from the center.

The prediction worth making here: BRICS will not fall. But it will continue to fragment into tiers. The inner ring — China, India, Russia, and Brazil — will pursue divergent interests under a common banner. The newer members will use the platform primarily for development financing and de-dollarization hedging, not geopolitical alignment. Growth in membership does not equal growth in cohesion.

Looking Forward

The transformation of alliances underway since 2024 does not resolve into a simple new order. What is emerging is something more unstable and more interesting: a world of tiered partnerships, hedging strategies, and institutional frameworks that serve as stages for competition as much as cooperation.

The United States, under Trump, has converted alliance relationships into instruments of leverage, rewarding compliance, punishing dissent, and leaving every partner calculating the personal and political cost of pushback. The EU and its middle-power peers are attempting to convert geopolitical urgency into lasting capability, with uneven results. BRICS is expanding in membership while diffusing in coherence. Understanding these shifts requires watching not only what governments sign, but what they quietly need and what they are quietly afraid of losing.

The alliances of the next decade will not look like those of the last. They will be more transactional, more conditional, and more contested. The countries that navigate this terrain most effectively will be those that resist the temptation of comfort; whether that comfort comes in the form of old guarantees or new patrons.

Our Interns

Mission Grey interns are a valued part of the company operations and play an essential role in many Guild projects. Please meet them.

Logan Warlick
BA in Political Science with a minor in Russian Studies from James Madison University.
Experience in international development research and institutional support.
Specialized in Russia, Eastern Europe, and Central Asia.

Seán McLoughlin
Master's degree student in International Politics at the University of Tampere.
Experience in municipal and youth politics.
Specialized in strategic and security studies.

General Information

The Mission Grey Guild is a carefully curated community with rigorous standards of expertise and engagement.

For our customers, the Guild ensures that Mission Grey's intelligence is not only automated and data-driven, but also linked to real-world expertise, turning signals into insight that drives action.

Guild members are experts at using the Mission Grey platform: they know how to extract the most value from its intelligence and help customers apply it in practice. They support clients not only in interpreting insights, but also in implementing strategies, managing risks, and capturing opportunities informed by external intelligence.

https://missiongrey.com/partners-guild

https://missiongrey.com/insights

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Fabio Frettoli
International Security Analyst & Project Designer

Dorota Maczuga
East Asia Expert & Co-founder of Polylocal

Rori Comiskey
US Special Forces Officer

Ludvig Lund
Seasoned Security Consultant

Marino Auffant
Harvard-awarded Historian & Strategist

Pekka Väisänen
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Kelly Couto
Latin American Specialist & Business Consultant

Mathieu Boulègue
Transatlantic Security Researcher & Consultant