



When Spheres Meet Regions: Regional Architectures, Major Power Influence, and Mosaic Order

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Core argument

- / **Contestation** defines interstate relations
- / The international system resembles **a mosaic**; there are ordering attempts rather than a coherent order
- / **Regional security and economic architectures** are now primary arenas of major power contestation
- / Stability under these conditions rests on **“negotiated pluralism”** that preserves indispensable cooperation amid competition

The return of spheres of influence

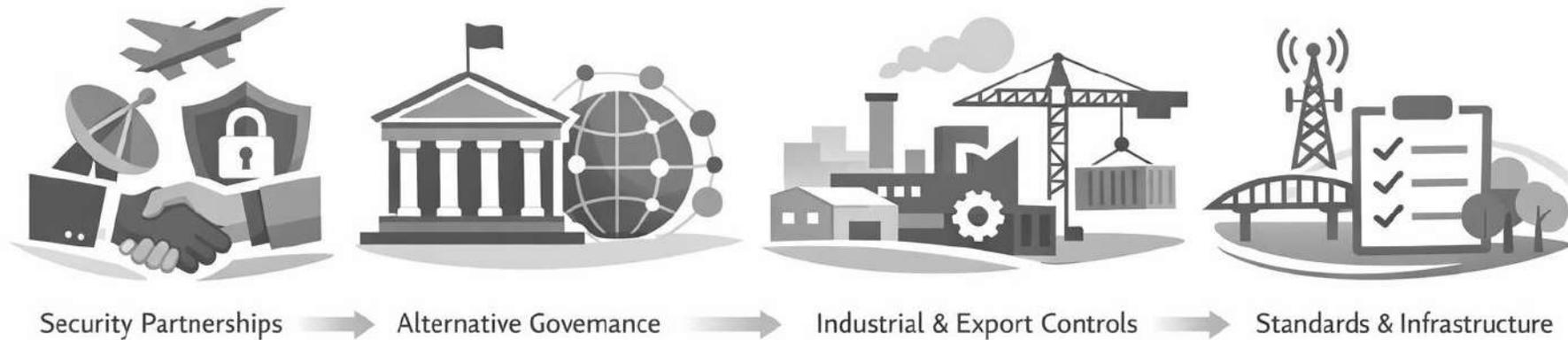
- ! The three largest nuclear powers are all attempting to assert spheres of influence
- ! This is not your great-grandfather's variant of spheres of influence
- ! Contemporary spheres of influence are rarely built through solely territorial control



The Plumb-pudding in danger (James Gillray, 1805)

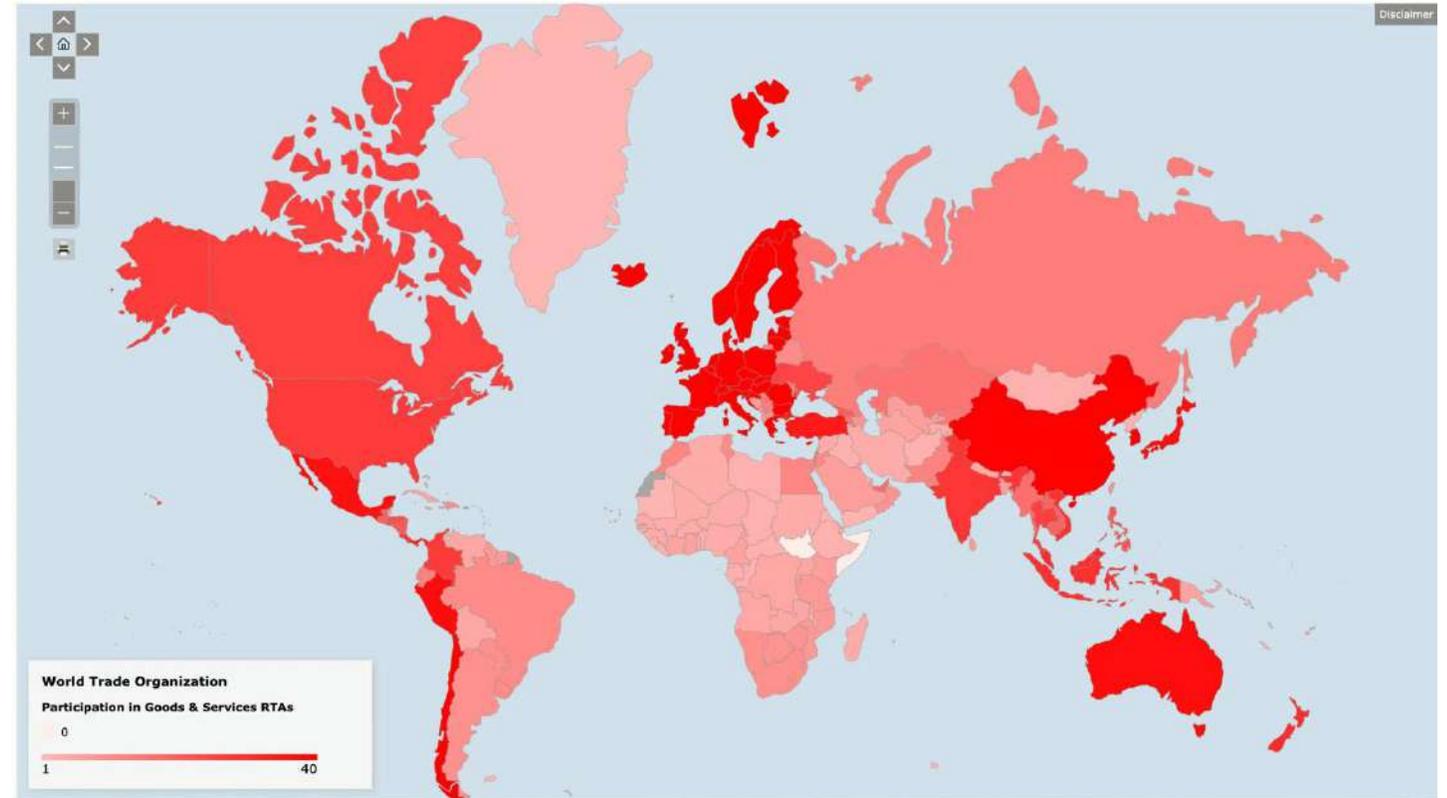
Major power strategies

- Major powers rely on institutional, economic, technological, and regulatory tools to create durable dependencies and shape regional choices.



How regions fit in and why they matter

- Regions can act as **buffers** against major power influence or **conduits** for it
- Institutional capacity** shapes outcomes
- Strong institutions resist and mediate pressure
- Weak institutions enable dependency formation



Note: WTO statistics on RTAs are based on notification requirements rather than on physical numbers of RTAs. Thus, for an RTA that includes both goods and services, we count two notifications (one for goods and the other services), even though it is physically one RTA.

Regional responses



Defiant Regionalism



Instrumentalised Regionalism



Fluid Regionalism

A mosaic order

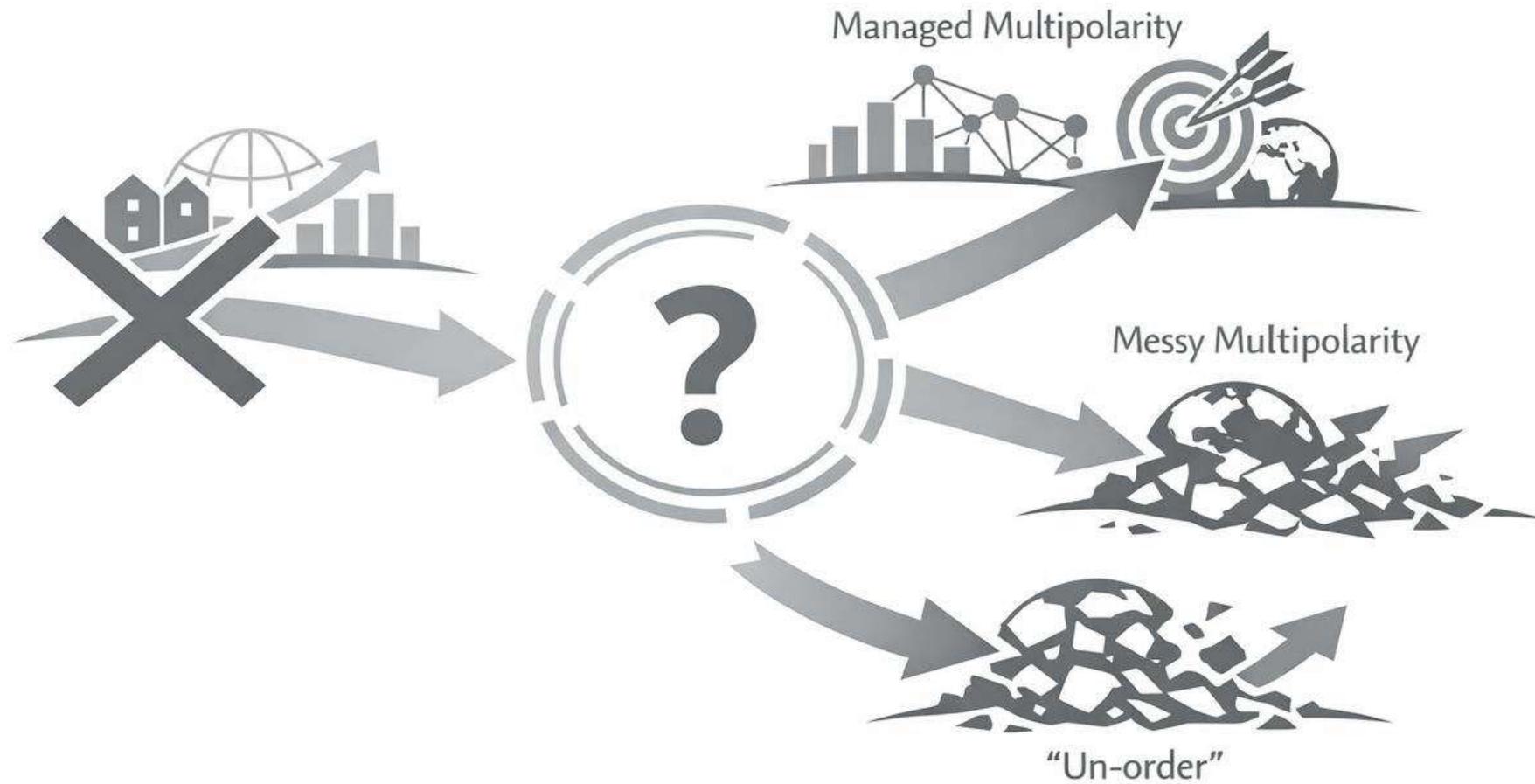
- I *Logic of cooperation*** still governs certain global commons where the functional need for coordination overrides rivalry, but more instrumental and fragile
 - ▮ e.g., International Civil Aviation Organization, the International Maritime Organization, and International Telecommunications Union
- I *Logic of autonomy*** characterises regional cores that possess sufficient institutional density and normative cohesion to manage interdependence on their own terms
 - ▮ Beyond just individual regions, also some cross-regional efforts; e.g., linking EU-CPTPP
- I *Logic of control*** appears where major powers attempt to institutionalise privileged influence, shaping governance around hierarchy, dependency, and exclusion
 - ▮ e.g., US claims over the Western Hemisphere, China's BRI and Digital Silk Road, Russia's EAEU

Risks ahead



- ! Escalation spirals
- ! Regulatory fragmentation
- ! Competitive bloc formation
- ! Institutional paralysis

What does the future hold?



Policy implications: negotiated pluralism

- ▮ If stability is key: pragmatic management of plurality
- ▮ Acceptance of persistent contestation
- ▮ Strengthening of regional capacities to avoid alignment pressures
- ▮ Development of bridge mechanisms with the like-minded
- ▮ Preservation of indispensable cooperation

Questions

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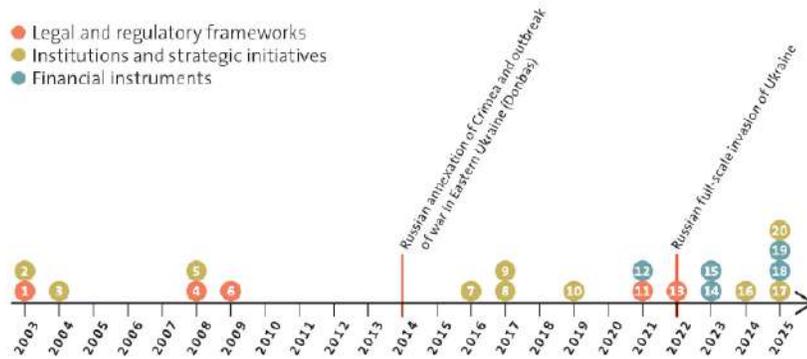
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Annex

Strategic Trends 2026: supplemental graphics

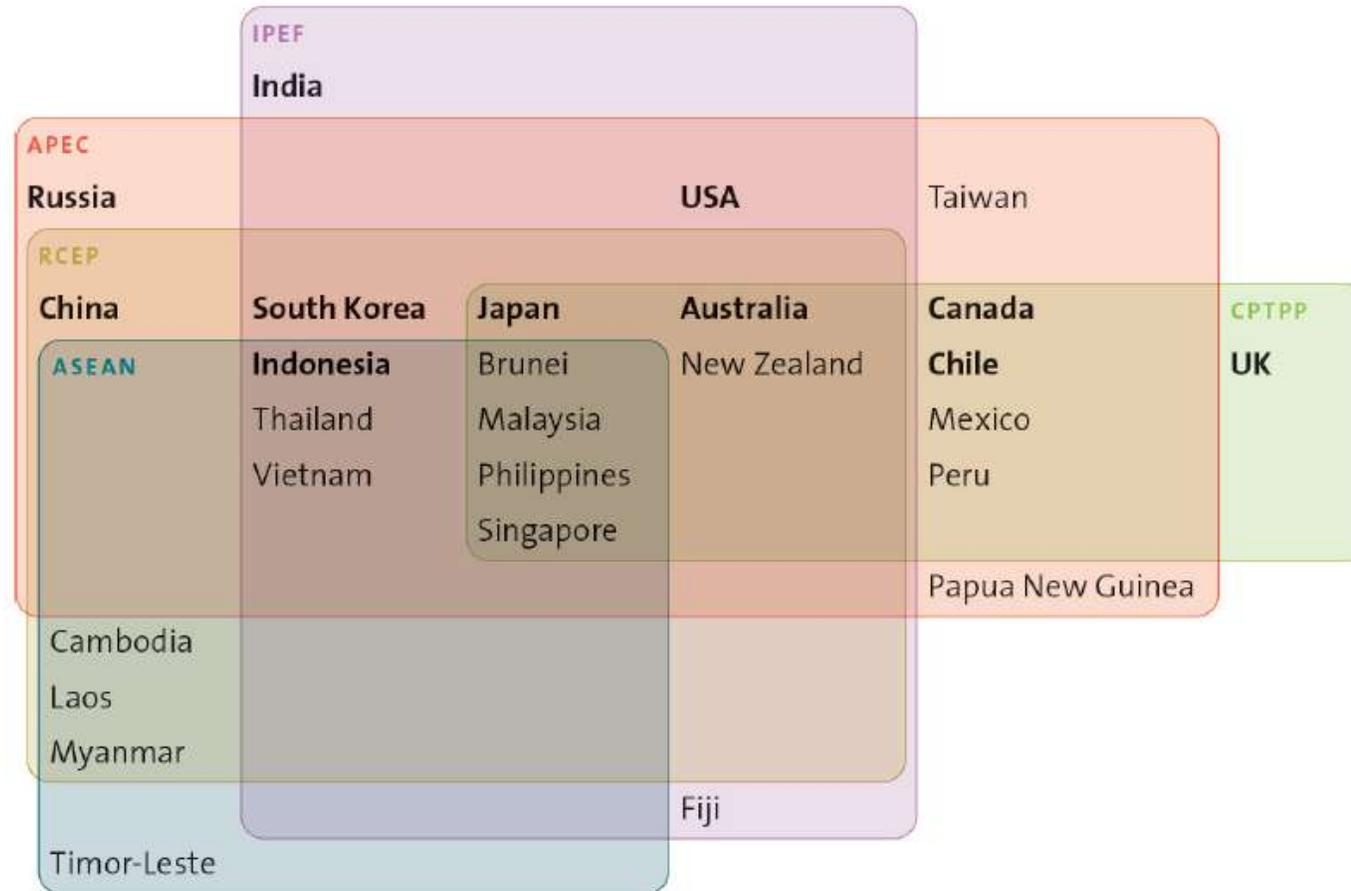
The EU: Security and Defense Initiatives and Institutional Deepening



- 1 Common Position 2003/468/CFSP on the control of arms brokering**
Establishes controls on arms brokering to prevent circumvention of EU arms export controls.
- 2 European Security Strategy**
The EU's first comprehensive articulation of common strategic vision in the realm of security.
- 3 European Defense Agency (EDA)**
Supports cooperative European defense projects and coordination among European ministries of defense.
- 4 Council Common Position 2008/944/CFSP on arms exports**
Defines common rules governing control of exports of military technology and equipment.
- 5 Capability Development Plan (CDP), EDA**
Identifies priority military capabilities needed for future EU defense planning and cooperation.
- 6 Directive 2009/43/EC on intra EU transfers of defense products**
Simplifies terms and conditions of transfers of defense-related products within the Community.
- 7 EU Global Strategy (EUGS)**
Guides the EU's foreign and security policy, replacing the 2003 European Security Strategy.
- 8 Coordinated Annual Review on Defense (CARD)**
Annual review of member states' plans to better link national defense planning and EU priorities.
- 9 Permanent Structured Cooperation on Defense and Security (PESCO)**
Framework for participating member states to deepen defense cooperation through joint capability projects.
- 10 Directorate General for Defense Industry and Space (DG DEFIS)**
Leads the European Commission's activities in the European defense industry and European space sectors.
- 11 Regulation 2021/821 on dual-use control exports**
Sets up a Union regime for the control of exports, brokering, technical assistance, transit and transfer of dual-use items.
- 12 European Peace Facility (EPF)**
Off-budget fund financing EU military and defense actions under the CFSP.

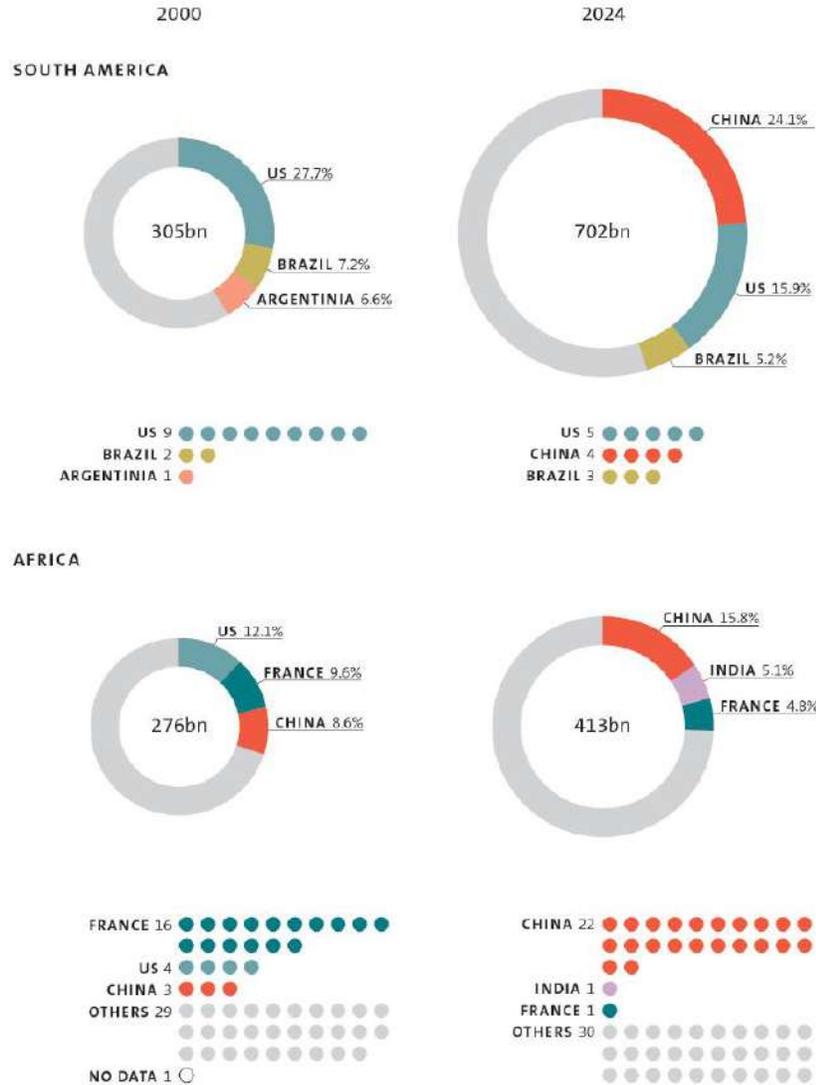
- 13 Directive 2023/277 on the alignment of Directive 2009/43/EC with updated Common Military List**
Amends Directive 2009/43/EC to update the list of defense-related products in line with the EU Common Military List.
- 14 European defense industry reinforcement through common procurement act (EDIRPA)**
Incentivizes joint defense procurement among member states for critical capabilities.
- 15 Act in Support of Ammunition Production (ASAP)**
Strengthens EU defense industrial capacity to ensure timely supply of ammunition and missiles in Europe.
- 16 European Defence Industrial Strategy (EDIS)**
Aims to enhance the EU's defense readiness, particularly its defense industrial capacity, by 2035.
- 17 ReArm Europe/Readiness 2030**
Outlines concrete legal and financial means to support the defense investments of member states.
- 18 Security Action for Europe (SAFE)**
€150 bn EU loan instrument to support joint defense capability investments under ReArm Europe.
- 19 European Competitiveness Fund**
The Commission proposes a €131 bn defense and space window under the European Competitiveness Fund as part of the 2028–2034 Multiannual Financial Framework.
- 20 EU Defense Readiness Roadmap 2030**
Strengthens the link between military priorities and EU defense funding instruments, focusing on four Readiness Flagships.

The Indo-Pacific: Overlapping Economic Integration and Influence Vectors



G20 members are marked in bold.

South America and Africa: Trade Patterns and Principal Partners



Circle size represents total trade value in constant 2000 USD (CIF-valued imports and FOB-valued exports). Dots represent individual countries within the continent and dot color denotes the largest trading partner by total trade volume. Nominal 2024 trade values have been converted to constant 2000 USD using regional import and export unit value indices from the CPB World Trade Monitor (annual averages of monthly series).

Source: IMF International Trade in Goods Database