Global Tensions in Geopolitics

by George Friedman - November 2, 2026

I normally refrain from addressing tensions inside countries; tensions of all kinds are routine, and only rarely do they shape geopolitical behavior. However, I believe we are in a period so wracked by tensions, both national and regional, that it's necessary to search to see if there is a commonality driving them, even if the tensions present themselves very differently.

To be sure, it is endemic to no single country or region. The United States – the world's only superpower – is approaching the midterm elections, which have evinced more interparty (and intraparty) stress than usual. Europe is plagued by widespread protests that have, at times, turned violent. The Middle East, a region where a degree of tension is the norm, is experiencing both the regular tensions between Sunnis and Shiites and profound tensions beyond the norm, while the Gulf states' level of stress has soared given the war in Iran. That conflict has bled into parts of Africa, particularly around the Horn, and virtually every other region of the world because of its impact on trade and energy prices. India is experiencing political and social unrest, especially in the northeast, over basic political processes. In China, at last week's Communist Party plenum, some 33 members of the party were expelled, and five of the seven members of the Military Committee – China's facsimile of the Joint Chiefs of Staff – have also been expelled. According to Freedom House reports, there is also growing unrest among Chinese workers over economic conditions. And last but not least, there is still a war in Ukraine that has wrecked Russia's economy (to say nothing of the physical damage inflicted on both sides).

Individually, none of these events is all that unique. Taken together, what is of interest is not that these things are happening in these countries but that so many countries and regions are experiencing them at roughly the same time. That there is apparently no single cause behind these tensions – that they have their own origins and unique manifestations – is what makes them so intriguing.

The answer I have is uncertain, but it is the only one that offers itself. As the center of gravity of the entire global system, what happens in the U.S. affects the world. It is undergoing a radical change in how it approaches (and in some cases manages) the world by offloading some responsibility to regional allies in the Eastern Hemisphere and focusing its attention on the Western Hemisphere. Washington's decision to do this was, to me, inevitable, though I could not predict the manner in

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which it would be executed. The shift has been nonlinear, having advanced with a significant degree of uncertainty, with lurches, shifts and contradictory actions.

The U.S. disengagement from Europe, and the difficulty of its constituent nations to fill the gap – politically, militarily and psychologically – has forced Europe to reconsider its present and future, which has ultimately led to destabilization. In the Middle East, the U.S. lurch away from disengagement has forced the Mecca accord into existence and triggered a war that has hurt the economies of virtually every country on Earth, including Israel's.

Washington's desire to reach an accommodation with China, and the Chinese need to export to a destabilizing world, creates an economic problem in Beijing – which has triggered a need for China to change course, and therefore triggered a political crisis.

Meanwhile, the U.S. pivot to the Western Hemisphere has created a crisis in Canada, given the way the change was conducted, which, along with the invasion of Venezuela, has caused the Western Hemisphere to restructure itself uncertainly and painfully.

There is no way to turn one political system, and the normal order, into another without creating an abnormal world that ultimately emerges with a new geopolitical model. But changes to a geopolitical system brought on by the central power of the system create the need for other nations and regions to reorganize themselves, leading to tension and fear.

I offer this theory not because I am convinced that it is correct, but because it's the best I can do. I would welcome comments, criticisms and in particular alternative theories. I am certainly not wedded to this model, but it's my first attempt and so far best explanation. Thank you for your thoughts in advance.

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