



**ZEROFOX® INTELLIGENCE**

# | Assessment |

## Geopolitical Forecast 2026

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## Scope Note

ZeroFox Intelligence is derived from a variety of sources, including—but not limited to—curated open-source accesses, vetted social media, proprietary data sources, and direct access to threat actors and groups through covert communication channels. Information relied upon to complete any report cannot always be independently verified. As such, ZeroFox applies rigorous analytic standards and tradecraft in accordance with best practices and includes caveat language and source citations to clearly identify the veracity of our Intelligence reporting and substantiate our assessments and recommendations. All sources used in this particular Intelligence product were identified prior to 11:30 AM (EST) on December 16, 2025; per cyber hygiene best practices, caution is advised when clicking on any third-party links.<sup>1</sup>

# | Assessment | Geopolitical Forecast 2026

## | Key Findings

- ZeroFox assesses that the most significant geopolitical shift of 2025 was the Trump administration's restructuring of U.S. national security priorities to curtail the United States' role as a primary enforcer and financier of international security commitments. Therefore, in 2026, the greatest geopolitical impact will likely stem from these changing priorities.
- In 2026, the United States will very likely redirect further resources towards establishing a secure foothold in Latin America, countering Chinese influence, and tackling narcotics trafficking and immigration priorities. The shifting U.S. focus towards Latin America will likely coincide with the region electing more political leaders focused on addressing crime and security concerns.
- With the United States less focused on Eastern Hemisphere security, there will very likely be an increase in armed conflict and social unrest there—particularly in southeast and west Asia and parts of Africa.
- Settlements in the Israel-Hamas and Russia-Ukraine wars, if reached, are unlikely to hold in the long term—a trend that is likely to apply to other conflicts where U.S. interests have diminished.
- U.S. tariffs were very likely the most important supply chain development of 2025. In 2026, affordability and limiting the inflationary impact of U.S. tariffs will likely be prominent supply chain concerns.

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<sup>1</sup> Report Purpose: The purpose of this report is to provide monthly updates on significant geopolitical occurrences and logistics developments, as well as potential impacts to the global supply chain.

- Unlike in 2025, the United States and China are likely to avoid major policy decisions that reignite the trade war in 2026. However, over the long term, U.S-China relations will likely remain acrimonious.

## Europe

Russia's failure to capture more than 20 percent of Ukraine after nearly four years of fighting has coincided with the Trump administration urging Europe to take a more active role in the continent's defense.

- In October 2025, U.S. Secretary of War Pete Hegseth called for a European-led North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO).<sup>2</sup> While Hegseth said the United States will continue to fulfill its obligations to NATO (a security alliance created initially after World War II to deter Soviet military aggression in Europe), he stressed that a European-led NATO and a strong Ukraine would be the biggest deterrents against Russia, rather than the U.S. military.

In 2025, NATO's European Union (EU) members committed to spending 5 percent of their gross domestic product (GDP) on defense in the coming years, and there will very likely be a continued uptick in defense spending announcements throughout 2026.

- Consequently, the European defense sector will likely be in a considerably stronger position in the coming years to manage the Russian threat with a more limited U.S. military presence.<sup>3</sup>

There will likely be a continued shift westward in Russia's hybrid tactics into 2026, as NATO's Western European members are taking on greater financial and defense commitments for both Ukraine and themselves. This will very likely be reflected in the threat landscape, where Russian-backed groups will very likely launch a broad array of hybrid measures with the aim of influencing public opinion and political discourse to weaken an already-weary European population and further erode support for a robust military response, which differs greatly between Eastern and Western Europe.<sup>4</sup>

- Russia will likely prioritize disrupting critical infrastructure, banking, and transportation services.
- Russia will also likely seek to disrupt Europe's military-industrial complex as the continent works to re-arm and provide increased military aid to Ukraine and its member states.

<sup>2</sup>

[hXXps://www.irishtimes\[.\]com/world/europe/2025/10/15/us-says-european-led-nato-must-deter-russia-and-aid-ukraine/](http://www.irishtimes[.]com/world/europe/2025/10/15/us-says-european-led-nato-must-deter-russia-and-aid-ukraine/)

<sup>3</sup> ZeroFox Intelligence Flash Report: U.S. Secretary of War Calls for European-led NATO, October 16, 2025

<sup>4</sup> ZeroFox Intelligence Flash Report: Increasing Violations of NATO Air Space Threaten Wider War, September 25, 2025

- Poland and the Baltic states have historically faced the brunt of Russia's hybrid measures, though Russia expanded targeting westward across the continent in 2025. Countries that are taking leadership roles in Ukraine's defense (such as France, Germany, and the United Kingdom) are at a higher risk of hybrid attacks. These hybrid attacks are likely designed to dissuade NATO's EU members from replacing the U.S. military role in Europe to undermine the alliance in the long term.

Russia's war in Ukraine is likely to remain a stalemate and continue through 2026, unless either side experiences a seismic domestic political shift or operational breakthrough on the frontlines.

- While high-level diplomatic talks will almost certainly continue through 2026, Ukraine's and Russia's conditions for peace remain diametrically opposed, which likely means any negotiated settlement is unlikely to hold long-term. Russia continues to demand Ukraine cede wide swaths of territory, abandon its NATO ambitions, and agree to other restrictions on its sovereignty. Meanwhile, Ukraine continues to assert its territorial integrity and autonomy and insist on strong Western-backed security guarantees.
- The Trump administration will likely continue its strategy of alternatively pressuring each side into a peace deal. While its specific pressure tactics remain unpredictable, the administration's overarching goals are expected to frame U.S. actions. The United States will likely seek a negotiated settlement that very likely partitions Ukraine while simultaneously benefiting the U.S. economy. The Trump administration has repeatedly explored possible economic ventures with Russia and signed a deal with Ukraine to ensure U.S. markets have access to rare-earth minerals post-conflict.<sup>56</sup>
- A battlefield victory for either side also remains unlikely in 2026. While it maintains personnel and material advantages, Russia has demonstrated its inability to achieve meaningful breakthroughs or quickly capture significant Ukrainian population centers throughout the course of the war. Russian advances have been slow with limited gains at high attrition rates, a trend that is highly likely to continue through 2026. Meanwhile, Ukraine does not have the resources to conduct a successful large-scale counter effort that would drive Russia from Ukrainian territory.

## Middle East

In the Middle East, Iran's network of proxies across the region has been degraded in the last two years since Hamas attacked Israel on October 7, 2023; since that time, Israel has weakened both Hamas' capabilities in Gaza and Hezbollah's in Lebanon. Israel has also destroyed significant

<sup>5</sup>

[hXXps://www.wsj\[.\]com/world/europe/u-s-blueprint-to-rewire-economies-of-russia-ukraine-sets-off-clash-with-europe-72484515](https://www.wsj.com/world/europe/u-s-blueprint-to-rewire-economies-of-russia-ukraine-sets-off-clash-with-europe-72484515)

<sup>6</sup> [hXXps://x\[.\]com/Svyrydenko\\_Y/status/1917695985507053772](https://x[.]com/Svyrydenko_Y/status/1917695985507053772)

elements of Iran's air defenses, nuclear program, ballistic missile program, and military leadership.<sup>7</sup>

- It is in this context that Israel and Hamas reached a ceasefire in October 2025. Together, the U.S.-allied states of Turkey and Israel and the U.S.-allied Gulf states will likely take on more military responsibility in the region, starting with attempting to enforce the ceasefire.

However, ZeroFox does not anticipate that the U.S.-negotiated ceasefire between Israel and Hamas will hold long-term, largely over opposition to the creation of a Palestinian state and Israel and Hamas' unwillingness to disarm. Moreover, security threats towards Israel remain in parts of the Middle East, including a potentially resurgent Iranian nuclear program. These will likely necessitate an Israeli military response.

- Because Iran and other opponents of U.S. geopolitical priorities in the region have even fewer traditional military options, there will very likely be a continuation of the asymmetric and hybrid responses seen in recent years. This means that Israeli entities, including private and government sectors, will very likely remain at the epicenter of both espionage and political hacktivism.
- As U.S. allies in the region take a stronger role in Middle Eastern security, there will likely be an increase in targeting of the Gulf states and possibly Turkey for their perceived security ties to Israel.
- Meanwhile, the Trump administration is very likely pushing to move on to phase two of the current ceasefire and deploy an international stabilization force to the Gaza Strip by the original deadline of January 2026.<sup>8</sup> However, no country has publicly confirmed that it is willing to participate—regardless of the timeline—despite the United States reportedly approaching 70 countries to join the effort.<sup>9</sup> Complicating matters further are statements from U.S. officials that the force will not fight Hamas, even though the group remains armed and in control of approximately 50 percent of the enclave.<sup>10</sup> Therefore, it remains likely that a peacekeeping force will not be deployed in the short- to medium-term.
- In Lebanon, Israel has been steadily escalating its strikes against what it claims are Hezbollah-related targets whose existence violates the terms of the current ceasefire between the group and Israel. Israel officials have also justified these attacks by citing the

<sup>7</sup> ZeroFox Intelligence Flash Report: Israel and Iran at War, June 13, 2025

<sup>8</sup> [hxxps://www.cnn\[.\]com/2025/12/12/middleeast/trump-gaza-ceasefire-second-phase-intl](https://www.cnn.com/2025/12/12/middleeast/trump-gaza-ceasefire-second-phase-intl)

<sup>9</sup>

[hxxps://www.wsj\[.\]com/world/middle-east/u-s-presses-other-countries-to-send-troops-to-gaza-but-none-have-stepped-forward-yet-9c204999](https://www.wsj[.]com/world/middle-east/u-s-presses-other-countries-to-send-troops-to-gaza-but-none-have-stepped-forward-yet-9c204999)

<sup>10</sup>

[hxxps://www.timesofisrael\[.\]com/isf-will-not-fight-hamas-say-us-officials-who-still-seek-to-deploy-force-next-month/](https://www.timesofisrael[.]com/isf-will-not-fight-hamas-say-us-officials-who-still-seek-to-deploy-force-next-month/)

Lebanese government's failure to disarm Hezbollah, as previously agreed.<sup>11</sup><sup>12</sup> However, any attempt by the Lebanese military to do so by force would likely trigger a civil war that the government would almost certainly lose. Amid these rising tensions, there is a roughly even chance of a large-scale Israeli ground operation inside Lebanon to further degrade Hezbollah's military capabilities at some point in 2026.

## U.S.-China Tensions

In our 2025 Key Forecasts report, ZeroFox predicted that geopolitical tension between China and the United States would intensify, with the latter focused on reducing its trade dependence on China. We warned that, in response, China had the tools to retaliate—including reciprocal tariffs, cyber espionage, and asset seizures. While this forecast largely played out, a recent summit between the U.S. President Donald Trump and Chinese President Xi Jinping ended amicably, and 2026 will very likely see fewer trade-related disruptions when compared to 2025. Since the summit, both sides have gone to great lengths to avoid reigniting tensions, underscoring the importance of maintaining the deal in the short term until key vulnerabilities can be resolved.

- However, the long-term trajectory of U.S.-China trade relations is very likely to be acrimonious, with both sides limiting each other's access to the most advanced technologies, including U.S. semiconductors, biotech, aerospace, and quantum computing and Chinese critical minerals.
  - In late 2025, the U.S. State Department convened the Pax Silica coalition with member states that are all vital to technology supply chains for critical minerals, artificial intelligence (AI) systems, and semiconductor production.<sup>13</sup> The pact fails to mention China by name or invite Taiwan as an official member, likely to avoid threatening the U.S.-China deal of 2025. However, its express purpose is to reduce "coercive dependencies," very likely a reference to China's dominance of critical minerals. This demonstrates that the United States is eager to maintain a short-term truce with China while it develops alternative supply chains.
- Although the United States is unlikely to deprioritize its role as an economic and political broker in the Asia-Pacific region in the same way it has in Europe and the Middle East, it is likely to cede some leadership responsibility.

<sup>11</sup>

[hXXps://www.reuters\[.\]com/world/middle-east/israeli-defense-minister-says-lebanese-government-must-fulfill-commitment-disarm-2025-11-02/](http://www.reuters[.]com/world/middle-east/israeli-defense-minister-says-lebanese-government-must-fulfill-commitment-disarm-2025-11-02/)

<sup>12</sup>

[hXXps://www.timesofisrael\[.\]com/israel-said-to-warn-lebanese-army-its-failing-to-prevent-hezbollah-from-rearming/](http://www.timesofisrael[.]com/israel-said-to-warn-lebanese-army-its-failing-to-prevent-hezbollah-from-rearming/)

<sup>13</sup> [hXXps://www.state\[.\]gov/releases/office-of-the-spokesperson/2025/12/pax-silica-initiative](http://www.state[.]gov/releases/office-of-the-spokesperson/2025/12/pax-silica-initiative)

- Accordingly, the Trump administration is likely to pressure the United States' regional allies (South Korea and Japan in the north Pacific and Australia in the south) to take on a greater security role in the region while urging its Western allies to enact similar trading restrictions on China.

## Taiwan

The biggest short-term risk to the U.S.-China accord will very likely center around Taiwan. In the weeks leading up to the November agreement, Taiwan was rarely discussed, and issues that would normally have inflamed tensions were avoided. For example, Chinese military drills (designed to mimic an invasion of Taiwan) were much fewer than normal, while Taiwan's president, William Lai, was denied entry into the United States during the negotiation period.<sup>14</sup> This decision was a departure from past practice, which had allowed Taiwanese presidents to stop over in the United States. The primary motivation was very likely to avoid antagonizing China during the accord talks.

Rather than China and the United States instigating the issue, there is a roughly even chance that Taiwan itself or other nearby allies such as Japan create a difficult scenario in which the United States is perceived as siding with Taiwan, in which case China would very likely reinstitute rare-earth export curbs, thus imperiling the entire U.S.-China deal.

- For example, in October 2025, Taiwan's President Lai announced that Taiwan will build an air defense dome, "T Dome," to counter increasing Chinese incursions into Taiwanese waters and airspace.<sup>15</sup> A project like this requires a massive budget, and President Lai pushed for a special military budget of USD 40 million to fund it but was blocked by opposition parties.<sup>16</sup> Were the budget to be approved, China would very likely respond with aggressive military actions.
- Additionally, in mid-November 2025, tensions between Japan and China escalated into trade bans and military movements following new Japanese Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi's comments suggesting that Chinese military movement around Taiwan could

<sup>14</sup>

[hXXps://www.aljazeera\[.\]com/news/2025/7/29/us-stopover-by-taiwans-president-cancelled-trump-mulls-china-trip-report](http://www.aljazeera[.]com/news/2025/7/29/us-stopover-by-taiwans-president-cancelled-trump-mulls-china-trip-report)

<sup>15</sup> [hXXps://www.bbc\[.\]com/news/articles/c4gwnwep9qeo](http://www.bbc[.]com/news/articles/c4gwnwep9qeo)

<sup>16</sup>

[hXXps://www.bloomberg\[.\]com/news/articles/2025-12-02/trump-signs-bill-to-deepen-us-taiwan-ties-amid-china-concerns](http://www.bloomberg[.]com/news/articles/2025-12-02/trump-signs-bill-to-deepen-us-taiwan-ties-amid-china-concerns)

trigger a Japanese military response.<sup>17</sup> U.S. President Donald Trump quickly acted to de-escalate the situation, with rare phone calls between both leaders on the same day.<sup>18</sup>

China will very likely react to any provocation regarding Taiwan, including defense budgets perceived as being confrontational towards China or diplomatic engagement seen as pro-Taiwan.

## Five-Year Plan

In the latter part of 2025 and early part of 2026, China is due to release its 2026–2030 Five-Year Plan (FYP) and the areas it prioritizes will very likely determine the direction of U.S.–China relations for the coming years.

- The 2020–2025 FYP focused on developing high-quality manufacturing and ensuring China moves to a trading system that reduces reliance on foreign adversaries. During this period, ZeroFox observed Chinese state and state-sponsored actors targeting specific industry verticals and regions, with campaigns largely driven by objectives set out in the FYP.
- This includes targeting organizations deemed to be critical and high-value in the defense, energy, financial services, government, manufacturing, telecommunications, and technology sectors in Southeast Asia, the United States, and Europe. This widespread activity was consistent with China's aggressive cyber espionage strategy aimed at acquiring sensitive information and intellectual property from targets of interest to advance its FYP.
- Although the 2026–2030 plan will not be finalized until March 2026, it is likely to limit China's exposure to trade retaliation. For now, China's economy remains heavily reliant on exports, which leaves it extremely vulnerable to Western policies that limit its export customers. Early excerpts from the FYP show that China is doubling down on technology manufacturing, which will reportedly be the number one priority after being second in the last FYP. This is likely to make China indispensable to global trade and runs counter to the U.S. preference of increasing the purchasing power of Chinese residents, which is again expected to be the number three priority of the new FYP.<sup>19</sup>
  - Were China to genuinely pursue a policy that prioritized domestic consumption over exports, it would almost certainly need to limit overcapacity at its

<sup>17</sup>

[hXXps://www.reuters\[.\]com/world/asia-pacific/china-suspend-imports-japanese-seafood-amid-diplomatic-dispute-kyodo-reports-2025-11-19/](http://www.reuters[.]com/world/asia-pacific/china-suspend-imports-japanese-seafood-amid-diplomatic-dispute-kyodo-reports-2025-11-19/)

<sup>18</sup>

[hXXps://www.wsj\[.\]com/politics/national-security/trump-after-call-with-chinas-xi-told-japan-to-lower-the-volume-on-taiwan-3af795d6](http://www.wsj[.]com/politics/national-security/trump-after-call-with-chinas-xi-told-japan-to-lower-the-volume-on-taiwan-3af795d6)

<sup>19</sup>

[hXXps://www.bloomberg\[.\]com/news/articles/2025-10-28/china-vows-to-significantly-boost-household-consumption-rate](http://www.bloomberg[.]com/news/articles/2025-10-28/china-vows-to-significantly-boost-household-consumption-rate)

manufacturing facilities, which allow it to cheaply export goods such as electric vehicles and solar panels while maintaining elevated employment in those sectors at prices that Western competitors cannot match. In addition, China would need to push domestic policies that increase consumption, like wage increases and social benefits, to ensure Chinese consumers can afford to purchase items Westerners may not. Together, this would likely devalue the Chinese economic model while leading to an increase in unemployment, making a major shift unlikely. Instead, limited measures to improve consumption and reduce overcapacity (thus maintaining the accord with the United States over the short term) while still pursuing a technology advantage over competitors are expected rather than a full reversal.

- Therefore, the expected 2026–2030 FYP policies with the biggest implications will likely revolve around the production of advanced-technology products (especially those dominated by Western firms, such as semiconductor chips and AI systems) while increasing the gaps in areas China dominates, such as manufacturing.
- Threat actors are likely to focus on targeting industries and companies involved in technology production that are competing with China's interests. There will likely also be an increase in cyber espionage targeting classified defense and technology projects.

## | South America

The deprioritization of Europe, the Middle East, and (to an extent) Asia leaves the United States better-able to police its periphery in Latin America, where a considerable U.S. military presence began emerging in August 2025.<sup>20</sup> With the easing of pressures in Europe and the Middle East, the United States has redirected resources towards its own hemisphere, with a focus on establishing a secure foothold in Latin America, countering Chinese influence, and tackling narcotrafficking.

This new focus reflects the findings of the U.S. Intelligence Community's (IC) annual threat assessment, a ranking of threats aligned with the U.S. president's priorities. The IC's 2025 assessment ranked "Foreign illicit Drug Actors" as a primary threat to U.S. national security.<sup>21</sup>

- While Latin America has consistently endured drug-related violence in places like Colombia and Mexico, high murder rates in Brazil and Venezuela, and gang-related activity in Central America, the last five years have seen an increased level of lawlessness spread across the region, especially in places with historically low crime rates.

<sup>20</sup> ZeroFox Intelligence Brief: U.S. Counter Narcotic Actions in Latin America, September 8, 2025

<sup>21</sup> <https://www.dni.gov/files/ODNI/documents/assessments/ATA-2025-Unclassified-Report.pdf>

- Countries such as Costa Rica, Uruguay, Chile, and Ecuador have seen major increases in violence and crime, as they are now used as transit hubs for drug redistribution which ultimately reaches the United States, posing a direct national security threat.<sup>222324</sup>
- As cartels have expanded from drug-smuggling to controlling territory and other revenue streams, they have become increasingly militarized, likely posing a broader security threat. Some of the larger cartels have become so powerful that they now likely have the ability to challenge state governments and therefore present a wider security threat to the United States.<sup>25</sup>

The military capabilities of these Latin American countries remain limited, and the major U.S. deployment is very likely a reflection of the Trump administration's belief that other leading countries in the region need assistance in order to handle the security threat detailed in the 2025 IC threat assessment. This is in direct contrast to Europe and the Middle East, where threats to the United States are widely considered to have diminished.

- Expect more regional states to enact policies that demonstrate their willingness to work with the United States, particularly on security issues. In December 2025, Peru joined Argentina, Colombia, and Brazil as countries designated "major non-NATO allies" because of their willingness to host U.S. troops. The United States also signed Status of Force (SOF) agreements with Paraguay that would also allow U.S. soldiers to operate there.<sup>262728</sup>

## Venezuela

Since August 2025, the United States has been amassing a military presence in the Caribbean significantly above the levels seen in recent decades. There are more than a dozen major warships with over 15,000 U.S. Marines just off the coast of Venezuela, alongside U.S. bombers and military drones.<sup>29</sup> While the stated goal of the deployment is to perform counter-narcotics operations, which has resulted in the targeting of drug boats over a dozen times, the military presence far exceeds what is required to combat drug smuggling, suggesting a larger operational goal at play.

<sup>22</sup> [hxxps://insightcrime\[.\]org/news/costa-rica-ecuador-criminal/](http://hxxps://insightcrime[.]org/news/costa-rica-ecuador-criminal/)

<sup>23</sup> [hxxps://insightcrime\[.\]org/news/uruguay-faces-rising-threat-organized-crime/](http://hxxps://insightcrime[.]org/news/uruguay-faces-rising-threat-organized-crime/)

<sup>24</sup> [hxxps://insightcrime\[.\]org/news/interview/ex-intel-official-explains-chiles-organized-crime-explosion/](http://hxxps://insightcrime[.]org/news/interview/ex-intel-official-explains-chiles-organized-crime-explosion/)

<sup>25</sup> [hxxps://newlinesinstitute\[.\]org/state-resilience-fragility/the-rise-of-militarized-cartels-in-mexico/](http://hxxps://newlinesinstitute[.]org/state-resilience-fragility/the-rise-of-militarized-cartels-in-mexico/)

<sup>26</sup> [hxxps://en.mercopress\[.\]com/2025/12/15/peru-grants-us-troops-access-next-year](http://hxxps://en.mercopress[.]com/2025/12/15/peru-grants-us-troops-access-next-year)

<sup>27</sup> [hxxps://www.riotimesonline\[.\]com/paraguay-opens-door-to-u-s-military-cooperation-testing-regional-trust/](http://hxxps://www.riotimesonline[.]com/paraguay-opens-door-to-u-s-military-cooperation-testing-regional-trust/)

<sup>28</sup>

[hxxps://www.bloomberg\[.\]com/news/articles/2025-12-12/trump-to-name-peru-as-a-major-non-nato-ally-amid-anti-drug-push](http://hxxps://www.bloomberg[.]com/news/articles/2025-12-12/trump-to-name-peru-as-a-major-non-nato-ally-amid-anti-drug-push)

<sup>29</sup> [hxxps://www.cfr\[.\]org/article/mapping-us-military-buildup-near-venezuela](http://hxxps://www.cfr[.]org/article/mapping-us-military-buildup-near-venezuela)

The goal of the larger-than-needed U.S. deployment is likely to ramp up pressure (through ground operations, targeted missile strikes, or diplomatic isolation) to oust Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro.

- Venezuela has reportedly already offered major compromises in return for a reprieve from U.S. pressure, including Maduro stepping down and going into exile.<sup>30</sup> However, there are likely too many moving parts for a negotiated settlement to work, as financial and security assurances cannot be guaranteed to all the power brokers inside Venezuela.

The current trajectory likely involves some U.S. military or covert action inside Venezuela focused on narcotrafficking targets. A decision will likely be made before 2026, given the diplomatic and monetary costs of maintaining a naval operation of this size in the Caribbean, as well as the commercial and political impact of continued partial closure of airspace. The *USS Gerald R. Ford*<sup>31</sup> aircraft carrier in particular will likely be moved across the globe by early 2026, thus reducing the possibility of a military escalation against land-based targets in Venezuela.

- A military operation involving boots on the ground currently remains a highly unlikely scenario given the U.S. deployment's lack of land-based capabilities, the potential high cost to U.S. personnel, and the likely resulting power vacuum.
- Instead, the initial targets will likely be linked to alleged government-sponsored drug trafficking, such as in ports or airports, storage facilities, and transshipment points near the major drug-producing nation of Colombia. However, given the role reportedly played by the Venezuelan government in drug smuggling, U.S. targeting of more traditional military sites such as navy and air force bases as part of the counter-narcotics operations is also likely.

## How the Wider LATAM Region Reacts

The shifting U.S. focus towards Latin America will likely coincide with the region becoming more politically aligned with the United States, particularly over the issue of transnational crime. 2025 ended with several developments that favor closer U.S-LATAM relations.

- **Chile:** Tough-on-crime conservative José António Kast defeated socialist candidate Jeanette Jara, replacing socialist President Gabriel Boric, who came to power largely over economic inequality issues.<sup>32</sup> As president, Kast will very likely push policies that limit migration, maintain pressure on Venezuela, and crack down on criminal networks, as the issue of security has topped Chilean voter concerns throughout this electoral process.

<sup>30</sup> [hxxps://www.telegraph.co.uk/us/politics/2025/12/03/maduro-trump-venezuela-president-surrender/](https://www.telegraph.co.uk/us/politics/2025/12/03/maduro-trump-venezuela-president-surrender/)

<sup>31</sup> [hxxps://www.reuters.com/graphics/USA-CARIBBEAN/MILITARY-BUILDUP/egpbbnzryrpq/](https://www.reuters.com/graphics/USA-CARIBBEAN/MILITARY-BUILDUP/egpbbnzryrpq/)

<sup>32</sup> [hxxps://en.mercopress.com/2025/12/15/kast-s-win-marks-return-of-rightwing-govt-to-chile](https://en.mercopress.com/2025/12/15/kast-s-win-marks-return-of-rightwing-govt-to-chile)

- **Bolivia:** In October, Bolivia made a similar political transition following the election of center-right President Rodrigo Paz after nearly two decades under the MAS (Movement towards Socialism) party.<sup>33</sup> Paz will very likely look to push pro-U.S. economic policies while reviewing Bolivia's long-standing reliance on Russia and China ( both countries hold a major stake in Bolivia's lithium supply). In his bid to accelerate Bolivia's entry into the global lithium market, Paz has signaled openness to including Western firms in the process and renegotiating with China and Russia, but he will need to build effective coalitions to secure congressional approval on this agenda.
- **Argentina:** Also in October, the United States negotiated an economic bailout of up to USD 40 billion for Argentina that helped secure a midterm election victory for U.S. ally and Argentinian President Javier Milei, making it much more likely Argentina will support U.S. initiatives in the region. Notably, the U.S. Treasury Secretary stated in an interview that Milei was "committed to getting China out of Argentina" as part of the economic bailout, emphasizing the strategic importance of securing an ally to curb Chinese influence in Latin America.<sup>34</sup>
  - Argentina launched an interagency initiative called the Paraná Plan, which aims to strengthen border security and limit transnational gang crime along the Paraná-Paraguay Waterway(a key trade route that connects Argentina with Brazil, Bolivia, Paraguay, and Uruguay).<sup>35</sup> This initiative is likely a reflection of Argentina's willingness to cooperate on U.S. security policies in the region.

Going forward, Colombia and Peru's 2026 presidential elections will likely follow similar trends to those in Chile and Bolivia, where leaders less favorable to the United States were replaced by those actively seeking to pursue U.S.-friendly policies.

- Were Nicolás Maduro to be ousted and Venezuela similarly transitioned, it would likely further weaken the anti-U.S. axis that includes Nicaragua and Cuba as well.

While Latin America's two largest economies, Brazil and Mexico, will still likely be ruled by left-leaning politicians, they are unlikely to pursue policies that harm the United States. Mexico needs a successful re-negotiation of the U.S.-Canada-Mexico free trade agreement, which will likely ensure President Claudia Sheinbaum remains pragmatic when it comes to Mexico's most contentious issues with the United States: migration, narcoculture, and trade. Brazil will be heading into a presidential election as well in 2026 and will likely similarly want to avoid worsening tensions

<sup>33</sup> [hXXps://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/crmx7nw24dlo](https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/crmx7nw24dlo)

<sup>34</sup>

[hXXps://buenosairesherald.com/world/international-relations/beijing-break-up-trump-wants-china-out-of-argentina-could-milei-afford-it](https://buenosairesherald.com/world/international-relations/beijing-break-up-trump-wants-china-out-of-argentina-could-milei-afford-it)

<sup>35</sup> [hXXps://en.mercopress.com/2025/11/18/argentina-launches-parana-plan-to-target-waterway-crime](https://en.mercopress.com/2025/11/18/argentina-launches-parana-plan-to-target-waterway-crime)

with the United States in the lead-up. If tensions do worsen, there is a roughly even chance a more U.S.-friendly conservative candidate will win the late 2026 Brazilian elections.

## Trade Trends

U.S. tariffs were very likely the most important supply chain development of 2025. In 2026, affordability and limiting the inflationary impact of U.S. tariffs will likely be prominent supply chain concerns.

- To end 2025, President Trump announced a series of trade accords with Latin American states that included hundreds of tariff exemptions—mainly on food products produced there. In 2026, further trade policy that limits price increases on important inflationary categories such as food and energy is likely, even if it means rolling back some of the inflationary tariffs the Trump administration imposed in 2025.

However, in order to achieve these tariff exemptions, Latin American states are going to need to meet U.S. geopolitical and security objectives. For example, the trade accords reached with Guatemala, El Salvador, Ecuador, and Argentina to lower tariffs on coffee, bananas, and meat required those countries to meet certain U.S. standards for migration restriction or security cooperation. They also require the countries to terminate crucial business dealings with China.<sup>36</sup>

- Under the new frameworks, the United States drops tariffs on specific products but only if partners meet certain geopolitical and commercial conditions. Standard levies of 10–15 percent remain in place on most goods, and the United States maintains the right to impose additional tariffs in the future for national security purposes or to prevent unfair trade practices.<sup>40</sup>

The above criteria will likely be employed with other LATAM countries, led by the Dominican Republic, Uruguay, Paraguay, Chile, and Costa Rica. However, countries such as Peru (which has a

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<sup>36</sup>

[hXXps://www.whitehouse\[.\]gov/briefings-statements/2025/11/joint-statement-on-framework-for-a-united-states-argentina-agreement-on-reciprocal-trade-and-investment/](https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/2025/11/joint-statement-on-framework-for-a-united-states-argentina-agreement-on-reciprocal-trade-and-investment/)

<sup>37</sup>

[hXXps://www.whitehouse\[.\]gov/briefings-statements/2025/11/joint-statement-on-framework-for-united-states-guatemala-agreement-on-reciprocal-trade/](https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/2025/11/joint-statement-on-framework-for-united-states-guatemala-agreement-on-reciprocal-trade/)

<sup>38</sup>

[hXXps://www.whitehouse\[.\]gov/briefings-statements/2025/11/joint-statement-on-framework-for-united-states-ecuador-agreement-on-reciprocal-trade/](https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/2025/11/joint-statement-on-framework-for-united-states-ecuador-agreement-on-reciprocal-trade/)

<sup>39</sup>

[hXXps://www.whitehouse\[.\]gov/briefings-statements/2025/11/joint-statement-on-framework-for-united-states-el-salvador-agreement-on-reciprocal-trade/](https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/2025/11/joint-statement-on-framework-for-united-states-el-salvador-agreement-on-reciprocal-trade/)

<sup>40</sup> [hXXps://americasquarterly\[.\]org/article/the-risks-and-benefits-of-trumps-latin-america-trade-deals/](https://americasquarterly.org/article/the-risks-and-benefits-of-trumps-latin-america-trade-deals/)

large Chinese-built port), Brazil, Colombia, Panama, and possibly Honduras will likely have difficulty meeting these commitments, absent a change in leadership and could be at a disadvantage compared to other neighbors who produce the same exports but have a more favorable trading relationship with the United States.

There is also evidence of this practice being used in other trade deals. Japan, South Korea, and the EU all received 15 percent trade deals relatively early on during the negotiation process while committing to purchase U.S. energy products in bulk and increase defense spending. Looking forward, African states that agree to policies that curb outward migration, limit the spread of insecurity that could threaten U.S. interests, and agree to attractive energy or mineral deals with U.S. companies are likely to be prioritized in 2026 as opposed to those that make economic or security deals with Russia or China.

## | Other Conflict Zones

Diminished U.S. interest in areas of historic importance will likely lead to greater instability elsewhere. This is particularly the case in countries with historic animosities, particularly in Asia and Africa.

- A key case in point is the on-and-off border disputes between Thailand and Cambodia. With Thailand holding elections in 2026, rhetoric and violence is likely to continue there as well.<sup>41</sup> With the historic Western interest in demarcating and maintaining peace along this border diminished, there is likely less incentive for Thailand to abide by the terms of its border agreement with Cambodia.

## **Southwest Asia**

South Asia saw two major cross-border conflicts in 2025 that are likely to resurface in 2026. In May, India and Pakistan exchanged fire for four days after India struck deep into Pakistani territory in response to a separatist attack in the disputed area of Kashmir. It was the rivals' deadliest conflict since 1971.<sup>42</sup>

The second conflict, between Pakistan and Afghanistan, began in October when Pakistan conducted an airstrike on a building in Afghanistan's capital, Kabul, purportedly targeting the leader of Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), an offshoot of the Afghan Taliban. Pakistan accuses Afghanistan of supporting the TTP, which has a long history of conducting attacks within Pakistan.

<sup>41</sup> <https://www.straitstimes.com/asia/se-asia/thailand-to-hold-elections-on-feb-8-local-media-reports>

<sup>42</sup> ZeroFox Intelligence Flash Report: India-Pakistan Tensions Likely to Escalate, April 29, 2025

Following the airstrike, Afghan and Pakistani forces clashed along their shared border, while bombings took place in the Pakistani cities of Islamabad and Quetta, among other locations.<sup>43</sup>

- Notably, the Kabul airstrike coincided with a high-level meeting between Afghan officials and diplomats from India, Pakistan's chief rival.<sup>44</sup> India and Afghanistan have been drawing closer in recent months, likely triggering concerns from Pakistan that it could soon face hostile forces on both its eastern and western borders.
- As of December 2025, the conflict remains ongoing despite attempts to reach a ceasefire.

Ongoing Afghan-Pakistan clashes will almost certainly spur more terror attacks within Pakistan in 2026. While many attacks will be constrained to the border regions, some will almost certainly target economic centers such as Islamabad and Karachi. There is a roughly even chance that India could be drawn into the conflict, either through actions by Pakistan itself or, more likely, by militant groups India considers aligned with Pakistan's government.

As the May India-Pakistan conflict drew to a close, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi issued a statement appearing to indicate willingness to engage Pakistan in a wider future conflict. Prime Minister Modi listed three policies that he considered paramount to India's security doctrine. Taken together, these policies appear to increase the likelihood that India could be drawn into the Afghan-Pakistan conflict.

- First, any terrorist attack on India would be met with a military response.
- Second, India would not tolerate nuclear threats from Pakistan.
- Third, India would attribute any attack originating from Pakistan to the Pakistani government, even if it was planned and carried out by groups with no identifiable links to the Pakistani government.<sup>45</sup>

Despite Prime Minister Modi's strong stance and lack of ambiguity, India did not retaliate against Pakistan following a November 10 car bomb explosion in the capital, New Delhi, despite evidence that the Kashmiri group responsible received support from at least one Pakistani separatist group.<sup>46</sup> This makes it less clear where India's threshold for response lies, making it only very likely that India will respond to future attacks with large-scale retaliation. Whether the government chooses to engage Pakistan in a full-blown war will likely depend on how much damage any

<sup>43</sup>

[hXXps://www.aljazeera\[.\]com/news/2025/11/13/pakistan-says-islamabad-south-waziristan-bombers-were-afghan-nationals](http://www.aljazeera[.]com/news/2025/11/13/pakistan-says-islamabad-south-waziristan-bombers-were-afghan-nationals)

<sup>44</sup> [hXXps://www.meforum\[.\]org/mef-observer/kabul-airstrikes-reflect-pakistans-decline-in-the-new-regional-order](http://www.meforum[.]org/mef-observer/kabul-airstrikes-reflect-pakistans-decline-in-the-new-regional-order)

<sup>45</sup> [hXXps://www.pib\[.\]gov\[.\]in/PressReleseDetailm.aspx?PRID=2128270](http://www.pib[.]gov[.]in/PressReleseDetailm.aspx?PRID=2128270)

<sup>46</sup>

[hXXps://www.theguardian\[.\]com/world/2025/nov/14/kashmir-is-focus-of-arrests-after-delhi-car-blast-linked-to-t-error-module](http://www.theguardian[.]com/world/2025/nov/14/kashmir-is-focus-of-arrests-after-delhi-car-blast-linked-to-t-error-module)

future attacks cause, their frequency, the perpetrators' level of separation from Pakistan, and the nationalities of those who commit the attacks.

India is likely making its position ambiguous because of certain risks involved in war with Pakistan, some of which became apparent during the May conflict.

- Pakistan's air defenses overperformed India's expectations in May. While official figures cannot be confirmed, it is widely believed that India lost somewhere in the low single digits of fighter jets, at least one of which was an advanced French Rafale. This was considered a humiliation for India and will likely act as a restraint on future Indian attacks on Pakistan.<sup>47</sup>
- The conflict helped weaken Indo-U.S. relations, which Prime Minister Modi is very likely hesitant to repeat. It also reportedly resulted in greater engagement between Pakistan and the United States.<sup>48</sup>

Nevertheless, Prime Minister Modi has staked significant political capital on suppressing terrorism in Kashmir and will very likely face significant political pressure to respond forcefully to future attacks. Further increasing the likelihood of a large-scale conflict between India and Pakistan is the increasing rate of TTP attacks within Pakistan, which has a roughly even chance of causing Pakistan to encourage attacks within India in light of India's growing ties with Afghanistan.<sup>49</sup> Given the likelihood that terror attacks continue in Pakistan, the Pakistani government may be unable or less willing to prevent militant groups from carrying out more attacks in Kashmir or elsewhere in India. If severe enough, these attacks will almost certainly draw India into the conflict.

## Africa

2026 is likely to be a year of worsening insecurity across large areas of Africa, with no major crises likely to be resolved. Despite the signing of a "peace deal" by Rwanda and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) over the long-running conflict in eastern DRC, the underlying incentives for both sides have not changed.<sup>50</sup> In Sudan, the civil war remains ongoing, with intensified fighting between the army and Rapid Support Forces (RSF). States across the Sahel will very likely continue to struggle to contain jihadist violence, which often serves to drive military coups. The key state to watch in this regard is Nigeria, which has the largest population and economy in Africa.

<sup>47</sup> [hXXps://defencesecurityasia\[.\]com/en/pakistan-integrated-kill-chain-india-airpower-vulnerability-us-analyst/](http://defencesecurityasia[.]com/en/pakistan-integrated-kill-chain-india-airpower-vulnerability-us-analyst/)

<sup>48</sup> [hXXps://www.lowyinstitute\[.\]org/the-interpreter/how-pakistan-won-over-us-leadership-after-years-isolation](http://www.lowyinstitute[.]org/the-interpreter/how-pakistan-won-over-us-leadership-after-years-isolation)

<sup>49</sup>

[hXXps://www.reuters\[.\]com/world/asia-pacific/why-are-tensions-flaring-again-between-afghanistan-pakistan-2025-11-25/](http://www.reuters[.]com/world/asia-pacific/why-are-tensions-flaring-again-between-afghanistan-pakistan-2025-11-25/)

<sup>50</sup> [hXXps://www.justsecurity\[.\]org/126910/rwanda-drc-peace-deal-trump/](http://www.justsecurity[.]org/126910/rwanda-drc-peace-deal-trump/)

- The domestic concerns keeping the other leading countries of Kenya, South Africa, Egypt, and Algeria from playing a bigger role in resolving these conflicts also do not appear to be ending, and there is a roughly even chance they will worsen in 2026.

## East Africa

In Sudan, the worsening conflict will likely result in a stalemate between the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and the RSF, as neither is likely to achieve a decisive military victory. There is a roughly even chance of the SAF consolidating control in eastern and northern Sudan, particularly in Red Sea access areas, while the RSF militia consolidates power in Darfur and other western areas. This will very likely result in parallel governing bodies, which will likely prolong the conflict.<sup>51</sup>

- Sudan's civil war places a strain on the neighboring countries of Egypt, Ethiopia, and Kenya due to disrupted trade routes, an influx of refugees, and the need for heightened border security. Further fragmentation of Sudan into conflict zones will only worsen the impact on neighboring states, which already are contending with debt and inflation pressures.<sup>52</sup>

## West Africa

West Africa remains embroiled in socio-religious conflict that has seen jihadist violence spread over a wider territory. The conflict lines between northern Muslim-majority areas and the more affluent southern Christian-majority areas have been steadily moving southward, increasing insecurity.<sup>53</sup> Many of the military coups experienced across West Africa in recent years have been fueled by allegations that civilian leadership was not up to the task of controlling jihadist violence and that military leadership would be more effective.

- This cycle of insecurity has only accelerated since the formation of the Alliance of Sahel States (AES), a union of Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger who all came to power claiming to be better suited at handling the violence. In 2024, these countries sharply broke with the West, instead turning to Russia and each other—leaving them substantially less able to effectively suppress insurgent violence.<sup>5455</sup>
- As a result, jihadist groups have established stronger control over huge swathes of territory within the AES and continue to push their influence into the northern reaches of the littoral

<sup>51</sup> [hXXps://www.bbc\[.\]com/news/articles/cjel2nn22z90](https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cjel2nn22z90)

<sup>52</sup> [hXXps://www.cfr\[.\]org/global-conflict-tracker/conflict/power-struggle-sudan](https://www.cfr[.]org/global-conflict-tracker/conflict/power-struggle-sudan)

<sup>53</sup> [hXXps://adf-magazine\[.\]com/fr/2025/12/leffet-de-domino-des-terroristes-menace-lafrigue-de-louest/](https://adf-magazine[.]com/fr/2025/12/leffet-de-domino-des-terroristes-menace-lafrigue-de-louest/)

<sup>54</sup>

[hXXps://www.aa\[.\]com\[.\]tr/fr/afrique/laes-solicite-laccompagnement-de-la-russie-dans-la-lutte-contre-le-terrorisme-assimi-go%C3%AFta/3616175](https://www.aa[.]com[.]tr/fr/afrique/laes-solicite-laccompagnement-de-la-russie-dans-la-lutte-contre-le-terrorisme-assimi-go%C3%AFta/3616175)

<sup>55</sup>

[hXXps://www.newsweek\[.\]com/advancing-in-ukraine-russia-troops-are-losing-ground-to-al-qaeda-in-africa-11037901](https://www.newsweek[.]com/advancing-in-ukraine-russia-troops-are-losing-ground-to-al-qaeda-in-africa-11037901)

states of West Africa, where valuable diplomatic and commercial interests are located.<sup>56</sup> These groups very likely aim to increase their supply chain access to weapons, food, energy, and illicit smuggling goods, thus making further expansion very likely. It is likely that 2026 will see greater terrorist activity in the region, creating a risk of increased flows of migrants out of the affected countries.

This rising influence in areas previously understood to be outside jihadist operating scope will likely prompt the affected states to counter by seeking out stronger security arrangements amongst themselves and with external actors.

- France's near-total ejection from the region due to public pressure makes it unlikely French forces will return in significant force, while the United States has signaled a diminished willingness to bear the cost of American military presence abroad and is focusing on its military presence closer to home. It is unlikely that the United States would be willing to commit to a substantial intervention in a region that is not critical to American security; the recent "National Security Strategy of the United States of America" issued in November 2025 explicitly states "we must remain wary of resurgent Islamist terrorist activity in parts of Africa while avoiding any long-term American presence or commitments."<sup>57</sup> This vacuum will likely present opportunities for unexpected countries to increase their stakes in the region.

## Nigeria

Nigeria will very likely play the most important role in responding to the security threat in West Africa. The largest country in Africa by population and economic power, Nigeria is the anchor of ECOWAS (the Economic Community of West African States) and the regional hegemon. However the country's split between a Muslim north and a Christian south drives conflict.<sup>58</sup> The Nigerian government has failed to suppress these groups or provide sufficient security to the populace and—despite growing pressure—is very likely incapable of doing so across the wider region.<sup>59</sup>

- This incapacity, along with high inflation and uneven economic growth, means there is a small but meaningful risk of a military coup in Nigeria. While such a development is still very unlikely, instability has played a role in the country's previous military coups. This likely led President Ahmed Bola Tinubu Tinubu to declare a state of emergency in late November

<sup>56</sup> [hXXps://adfd-magazine\[.\]com/fr/2025/12/leffet-de-domino-des-terroristes-menace-lafrique-de-louest/](https://adfd-magazine[.]com/fr/2025/12/leffet-de-domino-des-terroristes-menace-lafrique-de-louest/)

<sup>57</sup> [hXXps://www.whitehouse\[.\]gov/wp-content/uploads/2025/12/2025-National-Security-Strategy.pdf](https://www.whitehouse[.]gov/wp-content/uploads/2025/12/2025-National-Security-Strategy.pdf)

<sup>58</sup>

[hXXps://main.un\[.\]org/securitycouncil/en/sanctions/1267/aq\\_sanctions\\_list/summaries/entity/jama%27atu-ahlis-sunna-lidda%27awati-wal-jihad-%28boko](https://main.un[.]org/securitycouncil/en/sanctions/1267/aq_sanctions_list/summaries/entity/jama%27atu-ahlis-sunna-lidda%27awati-wal-jihad-%28boko)

<sup>59</sup>

[hXXps://www.theguardian\[.\]com/global-development/2024/apr/11/nigeria-chibok-boko-haram-girls-school-abductions-islamist-militants-borno-yobe-katsina-kaduna](https://www.theguardian[.]com/global-development/2024/apr/11/nigeria-chibok-boko-haram-girls-school-abductions-islamist-militants-borno-yobe-katsina-kaduna)



2025 and prompted a meeting of regional governors in December, who pledged significant policy changes and funding to combat the growing terrorist threat.<sup>60</sup> While these efforts have a roughly even chance of improving the situation, it is more likely they will be insufficient.

## Critical Minerals

Continued interest by international actors in Africa's critical minerals is expected in 2026. Trade tensions between the United States and China over these minerals (necessary for rapidly improving technologies such as batteries and computer chips) have resulted in a search for advanced countries to secure their own supplies. There is a strong incentive for the United States and its Western allies to develop new economic partnerships in Africa; the recently released U.S. National Security Strategy states that "the United States should transition from an aid-focused relationship with Africa to a trade- and investment-focused relationship ... An immediate area for U.S. investment in Africa, with prospects for a good return on investment, include [sic] the energy sector and critical mineral development."<sup>61</sup>

The conflict in eastern DRC is explicitly centered on the areas where DRC produces world-leading quantities of critical metals like copper and cobalt.<sup>62</sup> The recently signed "Washington Accords" promoted by President Trump were designed to secure a halt in the fighting between the DRC and supposed Rwandan-backed militias by giving the United States preferential access to mining operations in the region.<sup>63</sup> Fighting quickly resumed following the signing of the accord in December 2025, but the agreement suggests that future U.S. focus in the region will be centered on trading U.S. security guarantees for commercial interests.

- Western states will likely reconsider the safety of their remaining diplomatic and growing commercial interests in Africa, because jihadist violence in particular will expose them to the threat of mass migration and terrorism (threats that were previously seen as diminished).
- Western military engagement is more likely to occur if the African host countries agree to other conditions related to commercial and geopolitical interests, such as countenancing U.S. mining and energy operations or agreeing to limit the role of Russia and China.

<sup>60</sup> [hxxps://punchng\[.\]com/insecurity-north-finally-stirs/](http://hxxps://punchng[.]com/insecurity-north-finally-stirs/)

<sup>61</sup> [hxxps://www.whitehouse\[.\]gov/wp-content/uploads/2025/12/2025-National-Security-Strategy.pdf](http://hxxps://www.whitehouse[.]gov/wp-content/uploads/2025/12/2025-National-Security-Strategy.pdf)

<sup>62</sup>

[hxxps://www.project-syndicate\[.\]org/commentary/africa-critical-mineral-deals-must-not-perpetuate-the-resource-curse-by-kingsley-moghalu-2025-10](http://hxxps://www.project-syndicate[.]org/commentary/africa-critical-mineral-deals-must-not-perpetuate-the-resource-curse-by-kingsley-moghalu-2025-10)

<sup>63</sup>

[hxxps://cd.usembassy\[.\]gov/signing-of-the-washington-accords-for-peace-and-prosperity-between-the-democratic-republic-of-the-congo-and-rwanda/](http://hxxps://cd.usembassy[.]gov/signing-of-the-washington-accords-for-peace-and-prosperity-between-the-democratic-republic-of-the-congo-and-rwanda/)

## Gen Z Protests

In the latter part of 2025, significant youth-led protests occurred across Asia, Africa, and parts of Europe and Latin America. While the protests have several causes and the protesters have different grievances, they are united through the heavy use of social media, which allows groups across the world to amplify their causes under the banner of Generation Z (Gen Z).<sup>64</sup> The new approach to organizing and mobilizing protesters likely had significant implications, bringing down governments in Nepal and Madagascar<sup>65</sup> while also contributing to the ouster of leaders in Peru and Bulgaria.<sup>66</sup> Protesters in Indonesia, the Philippines, and Morocco also demanded resignations but achieved less significant political concessions instead.<sup>67</sup>

- Gen Z protest successes have occurred quickly, likely because of ubiquitous use of social media by protesters and the resulting enhanced visibility of protest movements. In turn, the successes are likely building upon each other, explaining their spread across borders.
- Protesters have adopted the Gen Z flag and associated themselves with the cause.
  - The decentralized and anonymous use of social media allows protesters to operate below the radar of authorities. The protests appear to have more clearly defined outcomes and goals; this is likely due to the protesters' ability to organize effectively over social media and establish a unified platform to discuss and define their demands.
- Taken together, these factors create a more effective escalation of protests, which has very likely led to more clear results and outcomes, such as quick downfalls or reforms in governments unable to manage the changes.

Many countries are undergoing significant change and shifts alongside managing the evolving national security policies of the United States. As a result, further Gen Z protests are very likely in 2026. Expect a continuation of this trend as underresourced governments with less-involved superpowers have difficulty containing social unrest—especially among the hyper-online younger generations.

- Countries with elevated levels of youth unemployment and large Gen Z populations (likely those in Asia and Africa) are at the highest risk of future Gen Z protests.

<sup>64</sup> ZeroFox Intelligence Assessment: Social Media Inspires Gen Z Protests, November 6, 2025

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>66</sup>

[hXXps://www.aljazeera\[.\]com/news/2025/10/17/perus-new-president-refuses-to-resign-after-gen-z-protests-leave-one-dead](http://www.aljazeera[.]com/news/2025/10/17/perus-new-president-refuses-to-resign-after-gen-z-protests-leave-one-dead); [hXXps://theweek\[.\]com/world-news/bulgaria-latest-government-mass-protests](http://theweek[.]com/world-news/bulgaria-latest-government-mass-protests).

<sup>67</sup> ZeroFox Intelligence Assessment: Social Media Inspires Gen Z Protests, November 6, 2025

## Appendix A: Traffic Light Protocol for Information Dissemination

	Red	Amber
WHEN SHOULD IT BE USED?	<b>Sources may use</b> <b>TLP:RED</b> when information cannot be effectively acted upon by additional parties and could lead to impacts on a party's privacy, reputation, or operations if misused.	<b>Sources may use</b> <b>TLP:AMBER</b> when information requires support to be effectively acted upon but carries risks to privacy, reputation, or operations if shared outside of the organizations involved.
HOW MAY IT BE SHARED?	<b>Recipients may NOT share</b> <b>TLP:RED</b> with any parties outside of the specific exchange, meeting, or conversation in which it is originally disclosed.	<b>Recipients may ONLY share</b> <b>TLP:AMBER</b> information with members of their own organization and its clients, but only on a need-to-know basis to protect their organization and its clients and prevent further harm. <b>Note that</b> <b>TLP:AMBER+STRICT</b> restricts sharing to the organization only.
	Green	Clear
WHEN SHOULD IT BE USED?	<b>Sources may use</b> <b>TLP:GREEN</b> when information is useful for the awareness of all participating organizations, as well as with peers within the broader community or sector.	<b>Sources may use</b> <b>TLP:CLEAR</b> when information carries minimal or no risk of misuse in accordance with applicable rules and procedures for public release.
HOW MAY IT BE SHARED?	<b>Recipients may share</b> <b>TLP:GREEN</b> information with peers and partner organizations within their sector or community but not via publicly accessible channels.	<b>Recipients may share</b> <b>TLP:CLEAR</b> information without restriction, subject to copyright controls.



## Appendix B: ZeroFox Intelligence Probability Scale

All ZeroFox intelligence products leverage probabilistic assessment language in analytic judgments. Qualitative statements used in these judgments refer to associated probability ranges, which state the likelihood of occurrence of an event or development. Ranges are used to avoid a false impression of accuracy. This scale is a standard that aligns with how readers should interpret such terms.

Almost No Chance	Very Unlikely	Unlikely	Roughly Even Chance	Likely	Very Likely	Almost Certain
1-5%	5-20%	20-45%	45-55%	55-80%	80-95%	95-99%