

The collapse of the old order: Europe's political crisis and the rise of strategic realignment

May 2026

The geopolitical assumptions that defined the post-Cold War era are rapidly disintegrating. Across Europe, traditional political parties are collapsing under the weight of public frustration, while NATO struggles to adapt to the realities of modern warfare exposed by Ukraine. At the same time, the media environment that once sustained Western consensus politics is fragmenting as public trust in institutions has collapsed.



And a different pattern is emerging among the world's major powers. Donald Trump has now publicly consolidated his position alongside Xi Jinping, having already stabilised relations with Vladimir Putin at the beginning of his term. It is becoming increasingly clear that the superpowers are willing to co-operate where their strategic interests align. The old-world framework of permanent ideological confrontation is now far less relevant than pragmatic coexistence between competing centres of power.

These developments are not isolated. Europe's political fragmentation, NATO's institutional difficulties and the growing popularity of pro-Russian narratives all reflect the same underlying reality, that the old order is losing legitimacy.

Traditional political parties collapsing across Europe

The collapse of Europe's traditional political parties is a fundamental crisis of legitimacy. Across the continent, voters are fed up with establishment parties no longer representing national interests or public concerns. Whether left, right or centre, legacy parties have become associated with a managerial political class that are detached from the economic and cultural realities facing ordinary people.

For years, European populations were told that globalisation, supranational governance and deeper economic integration would produce stability and prosperity. Instead, the majority of citizens have experienced declining living standards, rising energy costs, stagnant wages, housing pressure and increasing social fragmentation. Public dissatisfaction is, of course, intensifying as governments repeatedly dismiss concerns surrounding migration, sovereignty and economic insecurity as either irrational or extremist.

The result is an obvious widening divide between governing elites and the populations they claim to represent. Voters no longer see meaningful distinctions between establishment parties because those parties increasingly support the same institutional structures, economic assumptions and foreign policy priorities. Elections began to feel less like democratic choices and more like rotations within a closed political system.

This crisis also reflects broader geopolitical changes. The Hu Jintao faction within China, for example, which historically favoured closer alignment with the City of London and integration into the Western financial order, has become significantly weakened. Beijing today appears less interested in fitting into the old Atlanticist framework and more focused on securing strategic autonomy within a multipolar world.

As Europe's political class struggles to maintain the assumptions of the previous era, populations are moving in the opposite direction. The visible rightward drift across the continent is therefore not merely ideological. It is a rejection of a political system increasingly viewed as incapable of responding to national realities.

Why NATO is struggling to adapt to modern warfare

The war in Ukraine exposed weaknesses within NATO that the Western institutions had spent decades ignoring. The conflict with Russia has fundamentally challenged assumptions about technological superiority, industrial capacity and the nature of modern warfare itself.

Ukraine demonstrated that relatively inexpensive technologies (drones, electronic warfare systems and mass-produced munitions) can neutralise expensive conventional military hardware at scale. Attritional warfare has, in a sense, returned to Europe, revealing that industrial depth and production sustainability matter as much as advanced weapons platforms. Modern battlefields now operate through real-time surveillance, AI-assisted targeting and electronic disruption in ways that compress operational timelines dramatically.

NATO, however, remains structurally tied to military doctrines shaped during the late twentieth century. The alliance was designed around assumptions of overwhelming technological dominance and short-duration conflicts supported by secure industrial supply chains. The Ukraine/Russian conflict has shattered those assumptions. Western defence industries discovered that decades of outsourcing, financialisation and peacetime optimisation had hollowed out manufacturing resilience.

This has created a growing contradiction inside the alliance. NATO still speaks in the language of military superiority, yet the realities in Ukraine suggest that prolonged high-intensity warfare would strain Western industrial systems far more severely than anticipated. Ammunition stockpiles, production rates and logistical endurance suddenly became strategic vulnerabilities rather than secondary concerns.

Public confidence has also been affected. Told repeatedly that Russia faced imminent collapse, the public have instead witnessed a prolonged grinding conflict that revealed limitations on all sides. When expectations diverge from reality, institutional credibility weakens. NATO's struggle is therefore not simply military; it is psychological and political as well.

Pro-Russian narratives are becoming more popular in parts of the Western media

The growing popularity of pro-Russian narratives across parts of the Western media environment is less about ideological support for Moscow and more about the collapse of public trust in establishment institutions. For years, governments, intelligence agencies and major media organisations presented geopolitical events through highly moralised and absolutist frameworks. Yet, as the Ukraine conflict evolved, many official predictions failed to materialise. Russia has not collapsed economically. Sanctions have failed to produce regime change, and NATO unity has proved more fragile than portrayed. Over time, these contradictions are becoming more and more visible to the public. As confidence in institutional messaging weakens, audiences naturally begin searching for alternative interpretations. The rise of pro-Russian narratives reflects this broader crisis of credibility. Many people are not necessarily becoming aligned with Russia politically, rather they are becoming sceptical of Western narratives that appear more incomplete or inconsistent.

The information environment itself has fundamentally changed. Traditional media organisations no longer hold a monopoly over public perception.

Digital platforms now allow competing narratives to circulate globally in real time, making it impossible for governments or institutions to fully control information flows as they once did. Contradictions are amplified instantly and archived permanently. This transformation creates significant challenges for Western political systems already suffering from declining legitimacy. The more dissenting perspectives are dismissed or censored, the more public suspicion intensifies. Every visible inconsistency further weakens trust in official institutions and strengthens the appeal of alternative viewpoints.

Trump, Xi and Putin: the return of strategic pragmatism

With Trump publicly strengthening ties with Xi Jinping and Vladimir Putin, a broader geopolitical shift is increasingly visible. The world's major powers appear less interested in ideological confrontation and more focused on managing competition, while avoiding systemic collapse. The assumption that the US, China and Russia exist in a state of absolute and permanent hostility no longer matches observable behaviour. Instead, what is emerging resembles selective co-operation within a multipolar framework. Competition continues, but so too does pragmatic co-ordination where interests align.

Conclusion

The above reflects the realities facing all major powers simultaneously. The US faces political fragmentation and industrial strain. China faces demographic and economic pressures. Russia continues to operate under long-term containment efforts. None of the major powers benefit from uncontrolled global escalation. Europe, meanwhile, remains trapped between the collapsing assumptions of the old order and the uncertain realities of the new one. The result is not simply political instability, but the gradual emergence of a new geopolitical era shaped less by ideology and more by strategic pragmatism, fragmented legitimacy and managed competition between power centres.

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