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China's National Strategy and the Outlook for the International Order

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Chapter 1. Introduction

Today's international order has moved beyond a simple shift in the balance of power among great powers and entered an era of structural competition over who designs the fundamental rules and standards that govern the world. Whereas past conflicts often unfolded separately in military-political and economic domains, the current U.S.–China hegemonic rivalry converges these elements into a complex, integrated struggle. Advanced science and technology, capital flows, global supply chains, and even data sovereignty have all become directly tied to national security, marking the onset of a comprehensive hegemonic confrontation. This rivalry is no longer a temporary clash but has become structurally embedded in the policy systems of major states.

In particular, as the United States has defined advanced technologies themselves as core national security assets and begun using restrictions on China and supply chain controls as primary instruments of competition, tensions have intensified. In response, China has declared technological self-reliance a national priority tied to its destiny and has sought a strategic shift that integrates security and development. This represents not merely an economic growth strategy but an expression of China's ambition—rooted in its civilizational identity—to become a "rule shaper" of a new world order.

Thus, the current U.S.–China conflict should be understood not simply as a power transition but as a geoeconomic securitization in which economic tools become strategic weapons and technological rules become measures of power. These structural transformations

are pushing the international order into unpredictable crises while fostering a hybrid system where bloc formation and multipolarity coexist. Middle powers such as South Korea face unprecedented pressure to choose, alongside demands for strategic flexibility.

This paper proceeds from this awareness. First, it analyzes the ideological and historical foundations of China's national strategy. Second, it examines how "Neo-Sinocentrism" under Xi Jinping translates civilizational-state discourse and security-nationalization strategies into foreign policy. Third, it explores the deepening U.S.–China hegemonic rivalry within the structure of geoeconomic securitization and standards competition. Finally, it derives strategic responses and missionary implications for South Korea in this period of systemic transformation.

Chapter 2. Sinocentrism and China's National Strategy

To understand China's national strategy properly, one must look beyond short-term policy fluctuations and examine the underlying perceptions of order and historical identity. Traditional Chinese worldview centered on the concept of *Tianxia* ("All Under Heaven"). Tianxia was not merely a geographic notion but a hierarchical order arranging center and periphery around a civilizational core. China was regarded as the moral and cultural center, while surrounding regions were subjects of cultural transformation. This worldview long shaped Chinese diplomacy and political thought prior to the modern sovereign-state system.

John Fairbank described the traditional Chinese foreign order as a tributary system, not merely a diplomatic ritual but a structure of hierarchical recognition. Tribute signified political and civilizational acknowledgment of China's central status. This order was legitimized not only by military force but also by cultural authority and symbolic orthodoxy. Sinocentrism thus functioned as a framework for viewing world order, extending beyond ethnic pride.

Zhao Tingyang reinterprets Tianxia as an inclusive alternative to Western sovereignty-centered order. His analysis emphasizes that Tianxia can be understood not as an exclusive concept of sovereignty but as an inclusive concept of order; however, this interpretation still contains the underlying assumption of Chinese centrality.

Modernity brought profound challenges. The First Opium War in 1840 ushered in what China calls the "Century of Humiliation," a psychological driver of contemporary strategy. The slogan "wealthy nation, strong military" (fuqiang) emerged as a call not only for military strength but for restoring civilizational dignity and building a new order. Benjamin A. Elman notes that China's adoption of science and technology was pursued as a national survival strategy rather than mere intellectual borrowing.

China's strategy cannot be reduced to realist power maximization alone; it is a product of civilizational identity and historical survival experience. Xi Jinping's Neo-Sinocentrism stands on this historical continuum. The political rhetoric of the 'civilizational state' discourse and the 'great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation' should be understood as a modern reconfiguration of the Tianxia worldview and the strategy of building a wealthy and powerful nation. If this intellectual foundation is overlooked, there is a risk of reducing China's foreign strategy either to excessive expansionism or, conversely, merely to economic rationality.

Chapter 3. Neo-Sinocentrism and China's National Strategy

1. The Discourse of the Civilizational State in the Xi Jinping Era

Sinocentrism is not merely a cultural self-awareness; it has been an intellectual foundation that has shaped China's perception of order and its national strategy. In the Xi Jinping era, this tradition has been reconstructed in a modern form through the discourse of the "civilizational state." This discourse defines China not simply as a sovereign state but as a civilizational state possessing a long historical continuity and a distinct civilizational system.

The core of the civilizational-state discourse lies in understanding China's path of development not as an imitation of the universal model of Western modernization, but as an independent path based on its own civilizational particularity. In the report to the 20th National Congress of the Communist Party of China in 2022, Xi Jinping placed "Chinese-style modernization" at the center and defined it as a unique mode of development that is distinct from Western-centered models of development. In that report, Chinese-style modernization is presented not merely as an economic growth strategy but as a historical process aimed at

realizing the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation. In other words, modernization is connected not only to technological and industrial development but also to a broader narrative of civilizational restoration.

This civilizational-state discourse can be analyzed in three major dimensions.

First, it emphasizes historical continuity. The Xi Jinping administration does not understand modern China merely as a product created by the socialist state after the founding of the People's Republic in 1949. Rather, it stresses continuity with five thousand years of civilizational history and positions the rule of the Communist Party as both the inheritor and the culmination of Chinese civilization. This can be seen as a strategy that relocates socialist ideology within the broader civilizational framework of China, emphasizing that socialism is not simply the transplantation of a foreign ideology but a system uniquely adapted to Chinese civilization.

Second, it links developmental achievements with regime legitimacy. Within the civilizational-state discourse, economic development is not regarded merely as a material achievement but as a central basis for demonstrating the legitimacy of the political system. Achievements such as poverty alleviation, industrial upgrading, and digital transformation are presented as examples of the efficiency of Communist Party governance and the superiority of its institutional system. In this context, China does not recognize liberal democracy as a universal model; instead, it proposes a pluralistic theory of development in which different civilizations may follow different developmental paths, thereby providing a theoretical foundation for competition over international norms.

Third, it expresses a determination to reshape the international order. The discourse of the civilizational state does not remain merely a declaration of identity. It contains a strategic orientation that China should become not merely a participant but a rule-shaper in the process of forming the rules of the international order. The expression "major-country diplomacy with Chinese characteristics" emphasizes that China does not intend to remain merely a regional great power but seeks to act as a direct participant in shaping the structure of the global order. In particular, it criticizes Western modernization for having been accompanied by colonialism and inequality and proposes the concept of a "community of shared future for mankind" as an alternative. This concept can be understood as a modern

transformation of the traditional Tianxia order, reconstructing the idea of Tianxia not as military subordination but as a discourse emphasizing interdependence and cooperative development.

What is important here is that the discourse of the civilizational state does not remain merely rhetorical; it is directly connected to policy direction and to the strategic timetable of the state. The long-term goals set for 2035 and the centenary of the founding of the People's Republic in 2049 separate national development from short-term political cycles and strengthen the character of China as a long-term strategic state.

Ultimately, the civilizational-state discourse in the Xi Jinping era integrates three elements: the reinterpretation of historical identity, the strengthening of regime legitimacy through developmental achievements, and the strategic intention to participate in the restructuring of the international order. In this sense, it functions not merely as an ideological declaration but as the highest-level discourse that defines the direction of national strategy.

2. Developmentalism and the Security-State Discourse

If the civilizational-state discourse of the Xi Jinping era provides the philosophical foundation for China's national strategy, the key mechanism that translates this discourse into an actual policy system lies in the combination of developmentalism and the security-state discourse. In other words, Neo-Sinocentrism simultaneously treats development as the central resource of regime legitimacy while redefining development itself as a matter of national security. Through this process, the boundary between economic policy and security policy has been structurally disman tled. China's strategy has therefore moved beyond a simple developmental-state model toward an interdependent structure in which development itself becomes security and security becomes the condition for development.

The traditional theory of the developmental state refers to a system in which the state selects strategic industries and mobilizes various resources in order to promote industrial upgrading. In China's case, however, development extends beyond the sphere of industrial policy and is recognized as a strategic variable that determines the survival of the political system in the face of external pressure and international competition. In particular, as the technological competition between the United States and China intensified after 2018, China began to redefine the fields of technology, finance, and supply chains as core strategic

domains that could no longer be left to the autonomous adjustment of the market. This shift in perception became a decisive moment in which developmentalism was combined with security logic.

This transformation appears most clearly in the strategy of scientific and technological self-reliance. Scientific and technological self-reliance is not merely a declaration encouraging innovation; it is a massive national project aimed at eliminating external dependence in core technologies, which are now regarded as a strategic vulnerability. Fields such as semiconductors, artificial intelligence, quantum technology, and advanced manufacturing are defined not only as arenas of market competition but also as key assets of national security. In this context, technology is understood not simply as a factor of economic production but as a foundation of power. Technological development therefore becomes not only a matter of economic growth but also a matter of protecting sovereignty and maintaining regime stability.

At the same time, supply chains are also redefined not as an issue of cost efficiency but as an issue of resilience and controllability. The global division of labor during the era of globalization was designed primarily to maximize efficiency. However, the intensification of strategic competition has transformed supply chains into potential instruments of pressure at any moment. Consequently, China has sought to reduce structural dependence by simultaneously securing stable access to key minerals, energy resources, and strategic components while promoting domestic production. Such policies should be understood as a regime-preservation strategy intended to ensure that essential national functions are not disrupted even in times of crisis.

The combination of developmentalism and the security discourse is also clearly visible in the digital domain. Data is no longer treated merely as a private asset of corporations or as a byproduct of innovation. Rather, it is recognized as a central resource that shapes national competitiveness and governance capacity. The entire system of data flows and data governance is therefore incorporated into the category of national security. Within the expansion of the digital economy, this trend produces a unique structure in which governance technologies and industrial strategies reinforce one another.

As technology, supply chains, and data become integrated into the security discourse, economic policy increasingly takes on the character of geoeconomics. Economic means are

used as tools for achieving strategic objectives. China's industrial policy, strategic investments, and participation in overseas infrastructure projects are therefore not simply forms of economic expansion but are directly connected to the pursuit of influence within the international order. Development strategy is not separated from foreign strategy; instead, domestic industrial structures and international competitive structures operate as a single interconnected system.

What is important in this process is that securitization does not function merely as a passive response to external threats. Rather, it operates as a higher-level framework that legitimizes policy intervention. Once a particular industry or technology is defined as a matter of national security, the state can justify stronger intervention in the market and a more concentrated mobilization of resources. As a result, development strategy moves beyond the logic of market-centered adjustment toward the logic of state-centered control oriented around national goals. In this structure, the market becomes a strategic instrument, while the state positions itself as the strategic designer that controls the market.

Ultimately, the development strategy of Neo-Sinocentrism is structured along three dimensions. Politically, development is defined as the central resource of regime legitimacy. Strategically, development is incorporated into the category of national security. Geopolitically, development is linked to competition over the international order. When these three elements are combined, China's national strategy transforms from a simple economic development model into a system of strategic development. This integrated structure of developmentalism and security will obtain its practical implementation capacity through the institutional characteristics discussed in the following section.

3. Structural Characteristics of China's National Development Strategy

As mentioned earlier, Neo-Sinocentrism reconstructs national strategy by taking the civilizational-state discourse as its overarching framework of legitimacy and by combining developmentalism with a strategy of national security expansion. However, the reason this combination acquires real power lies in the fact that China's state system possesses institutional and organizational conditions that allow such strategies to be pursued consistently over long periods of time.

First, China's development strategy minimizes the gap between goals and implementation through the integrated structure of the party-state. The Chinese Communist Party is not merely a governing group but the supreme institution responsible for strategic design, while the organs of the state function as administrative mechanisms that faithfully implement these strategies. Within this system, strategic objectives do not fluctuate drastically with changes of government. Instead, all national resources are coordinated and allocated according to the long-term goals established by the central leadership. Thanks to this structural integration, China can combine industrial policy, financial policy, science and technology policy, and national security policy within a single overarching framework. As a result, the national development strategy functions not as the simple sum of individual ministerial policies but as an integrated design centered on national goals. This constitutes the first condition for the consistency of China's strategy.

Second, China institutionalizes development strategy not as short-term competition for performance but as a cumulative process aimed at long-term objectives. The long-range goals set for 2035 and 2049 significantly expand the temporal horizon of policy, providing a strategic buffer that absorbs short-term fluctuations in economic indicators within a long-term developmental direction. This long-term temporal structure is particularly evident in the fields of technological and industrial policy. Areas such as semiconductors, artificial intelligence, and quantum technology require extended periods before producing tangible results. The Chinese system therefore does not treat delayed outcomes as policy failure but interprets them as part of a long-term process of capacity accumulation.

Third, the comprehensive expansion of the concept of national security shifts development strategy from the category of economic policy into the category of a survival strategy tied to the fate of the political system. In contemporary China, national security extends far beyond military threats to encompass economic security, technological security, data security, and supply-chain security. Development strategy thus becomes fully integrated with security strategy. Within this structure, scientific and technological self-reliance becomes both an industrial upgrading project and a defensive strategy against external pressure. Similarly, supply-chain stabilization is redefined not simply as a matter of cost optimization but as a top priority for national survival. When development and security become unified in this way, policy choices are governed more strongly by the logic of national strategy than by the logic of the market.

Fourth, China demonstrates a distinctive level of momentum and boldness in the processes of policy integration and resource mobilization. This boldness is a systemic characteristic that prevents ethical debates or institutional resistance arising during policy implementation from delaying the speed of policy execution. Once national goals are established, the system rapidly combines local experimentation with nationwide expansion. This characteristic is particularly visible in controversial areas such as data collection and surveillance technologies. China has justified such policies primarily in terms of social stability and national capacity rather than individual rights. As a result, even policies that generate normative controversy from external perspectives are institutionalized very rapidly within the domestic system under the logic of strengthening state capacity.

Fifth, these structural characteristics are not separate from one another but form strong mutually reinforcing relationships. The party-state integration structure firmly anchors the direction of policy, the long-term temporal framework absorbs external shocks, and the comprehensive concept of national security maximizes the legitimacy of state intervention. When these elements are combined with a high capacity for mobilization, China is able to transform strategic industries and governance technologies into core assets of national power, thereby securing a strong advantage in both domestic and international competition. The national strategy of Neo-Sinocentrism thus operates as an integrated system linking the civilizational-state discourse as its ideological orientation, developmentalism as its objective, securitization as its legitimizing framework, and the mobilization system as its mechanism of execution.

From this perspective, China's national development strategy is not simply a model of high economic growth but the operational mechanism of a carefully designed national strategy. Because of these solid structural characteristics, China's external strategy appears not as a temporary phenomenon but as a long-term pattern. Even if visible conflicts and negotiations continue to alternate within the U.S.–China rivalry, the underlying structure of competition itself is unlikely to be easily resolved.

Chapter 4. The U.S.–China Hegemonic Rivalry and the Geo-economic Turn

1. Theoretical Analytical Framework

Understanding the U.S.–China hegemonic rivalry merely as a clash of power between great powers is insufficient to explain the complexity of today's international order. The competition currently unfolding has expanded beyond the military sphere into a comprehensive structural rivalry encompassing technology, finance, supply chains, and the authority to design international rules. This chapter therefore seeks to analyze the nature of U.S.–China competition through the major theoretical frameworks of international politics.

First, the strategic behavior of the United States largely reflects the structural incentives identified in John J. Mearsheimer's theory of offensive realism. Mearsheimer argues that the international system is characterized by anarchy, and because states can never fully trust the intentions of others, they seek to maximize relative power in order to guarantee survival. Great powers, in this view, are not satisfied with maintaining a balance of power but instead attempt to establish regional hegemony whenever possible. From this perspective, the United States' institutionalization of export controls and investment restrictions in the fields of semiconductors, advanced computing, and artificial intelligence—along with the formation of technological blocs with its allies—cannot be interpreted as merely defensive measures. Rather, these actions can be understood as a classic example of offensive realism: by controlling the key nodes of technological and financial networks, the United States seeks to structurally block the pathways through which competitors might catch up and thereby secure its own structural advantages.

Second, China's strategy can be explained more persuasively through the framework of defensive realism, associated with Kenneth N. Waltz and Stephen M. Walt. These scholars argue that excessive expansion by a state inevitably provokes balancing behavior from other states, ultimately undermining the expanding state's own security. Rational states therefore focus less on blindly maximizing power and more on preserving their position within the existing system while ensuring their security. Walt further emphasizes that alliances are formed not simply in response to the magnitude of power but to perceptions of threat, and that strategies that excessively amplify perceived threats may produce counterproductive outcomes.

From this perspective, China's securitized developmentalism can be interpreted not as a strategy of unlimited expansion but as a strategic design intended to protect regime stability and economic growth. China's dual posture—strongly promoting technological self-reliance and supply-chain stabilization while at the same time carefully avoiding a full-scale military confrontation with the United States—closely corresponds to the logic of defensive realism.

Third, traditional realist approaches alone are insufficient to explain how economic and technological domains have become the primary front lines of strategic competition today. The key concepts that supplement this gap are geo-economics and network power. Henry Farrell and Abraham L. Newman introduced the concept of weaponized interdependence, arguing that when a state controls key hubs or chokepoints within global economic networks, it can employ that position as a powerful instrument of coercion. This concept explains how the United States controls China's access to critical systems by weaponizing the dollar-based financial network, financial regulations, and standards embedded within advanced technological ecosystems. At the same time, China's attempts to introduce the digital yuan and construct independent technological standards and alternative supply chains can also be interpreted as strategic responses designed to overcome the asymmetries of such network power.

Fourth, Rush Doshi argues that China is not attempting to overturn the U.S.-led international order immediately. Rather, China seeks to expand its influence gradually through a long-term and carefully designed strategy. This perspective suggests that China's foreign policy should not simply be interpreted a s aggressive revisionism but rather as a process of strategic patience and incremental expansion. David Shambaugh similarly characterizes China as a "partial revisionist" state, arguing that China does not completely reject the existing international order but instead selectively revises certain elements while simultaneously participating actively in international institutions and regimes. This perspective is useful for understanding the complex strategy of the Xi Jinping administration, which promotes a neo-Sinocentric civilizational discourse while at the same time continuing to participate in existing institutions such as the WTO and the United Nations.

Fifth, within this massive structural confrontation, middle powers such as South Korea cannot simply choose between opposing camps but are compelled to pursue a strategy of hedging. Cheng Chwee Kuik defines hedging as a sophisticated composite strategy that

simultaneously employs cooperation and balancing in order to distribute risk. South Korea is bound to the United States through a deep security alliance, yet its economic structure is characterized by deep interdependence with China. Consequently, South Korea's hedging strategy should not be understood as avoidance or indecision but rather as the most active and strategic response available for maximizing national interests under given structural constraints.

In summary, this chapter analyzes the behavior of the United States through the lens of offensive realism and geo-economic strategies aimed at maintaining structural power; China's behavior through a combination of defensive realism and long-term revisionist strategy; and the responses of middle powers through hedging strategies. Such a multi-dimensional approach provides the most appropriate explanation for understanding the U.S.–China hegemonic rivalry not as a simple military confrontation but as a massive structural transformation centered on economic power, technological competition, and the authority to design international rules.

2. The Expansion of Geo-economics

As discussed in Chapter 3, neo-Sinocentrism has completed a national strategic framework that tightly integrates development and security. This integration extends beyond domestic policy into external strategy, and in this process economic instruments are transformed into the most powerful weapons of strategic competition. At this point the U.S.–China hegemonic rivalry clearly differs from the traditional form of hegemonic competition centered on military confrontation and instead takes on a new character marked by the full-scale emergence of geo-economics.

The concept of geo-economics was systematically theorized by Edward Luttwak, who observed after the end of the Cold War that the center of gravity in international politics was shifting from military competition to economic competition. Luttwak argued that while the use of military force had become constrained by mutual deterrence due to the existence of weapons of mass destruction, economic instruments were emerging as central tools of national strategy without such restrictions. Although this insight temporarily faded into the

background during the height of globalization, it has recently re-emerged as a major analytical framework as U.S.–China strategic rivalry has intensified.

As illustrated by Mearsheimer's theory of offensive realism, hegemonic powers seek to structurally suppress the rise of potential competitors. The export controls on advanced computing and semiconductors implemented by the United States in October 2022 were therefore not simply trade sanctions. Rather, they were strategic measures designed to institutionally delay the development of China's strategic industries by fundamentally blocking China's access to advanced manufacturing processes below the 7-nanometer threshold. When combined with the overseas investment regulations introduced by the U.S. Treasury Department in 2024, the control mechanism expanded beyond trade to include the movement of capital itself as an object of comprehensive security regulation.

This phenomenon can be most effectively understood through the concept of weaponized interdependence proposed by Farrell and Newman. Contrary to the liberal expectation that economic interdependence would guarantee peace in international society, interdependence in practice has instead amplified asymmetries of power and has been transformed into a structure through which states employ coercive instruments against one another. The United States exerts pressure on China by weaponizing the key hubs of global networks, including the dollar-based financial system, irreplaceable semiconductor design software, and advanced lithography equipment. Particularly in the semiconductor sector, the United States has strengthened domestic production capabilities through massive subsidies while restricting corporate investment in China. In doing so, it has overridden the logic of the market in favor of national security objectives and institutionalized a government-led restructuring of the technological ecosystem.

China, however, has not passively accepted this geo-economic pressure. Through its 14th Five-Year Plan, China has designated technological self-reliance and industrial upgrading as matters of national survival and is making comprehensive efforts to reduce external dependence. In particular, the Dual Circulation Strategy represents a structural defensive measure designed to cultivate China's vast domestic market as a buffer capable of absorbing external economic shocks. Moreover, through the Belt and Road Initiative, China seeks to bypass the U.S. containment network by constructing its own infrastructure and financial networks linking Asia, Africa, and Europe. This initiative should therefore be understood not

merely as overseas investment but as a geo-economic expansion aimed at securing future international norms and standards.

Ultimately, the full expansion of geo-economics signifies that the power structure of the international order itself is undergoing fundamental transformation. Whereas traditional power transition theory focused primarily on the aggregate size of economic or military power, power today increasingly derives from structural positions such as control over networks, dominance over technological standards, and command of data flows. Because economic sanctions and technological restrictions can be deployed routinely at far lower cost than military force, the U.S.–China hegemonic rivalry has solidified into a structure characterized by persistent high-intensity tension while still avoiding the catastrophic escalation of full-scale war.

3. The Deepening Politicization of Security

The expansion of geo-economics does not merely signify that economic instruments are being used for security purposes; it also marks the emergence of a broader politicization of security, in which the domains of economics, technology, finance, and even data are incorporated into the category of national security. The politicization of security refers to the process by which a particular issue is declared an existential threat to the survival of the state, thereby justifying extraordinary and powerful state intervention that transcends normal political logic. Once a certain technology or industry is defined as a security issue rather than a market issue, the state acquires the justification to ignore market rules and exercise comprehensive authority.

Recent U.S. actions demonstrate a typical case of such securitization. Export controls on advanced semiconductors and restrictions on overseas investment contradict the principles of free trade and market economics, yet the United States justifies these measures under the higher strategic rationale of protecting national security. This development indicates that the traditional values of economic liberalism have been increasingly subordinated to security logic. China likewise incorporates a wide range of domains—including the economy, technology, data, and supply chains—into the framework of national security under Xi Jinping's concept of comprehensive national security. As a result, policies such as the localization of advanced

technologies or regulatory interventions against platform companies have been elevated from industrial policy to essential security strategies for protecting the political system itself. Ultimately, the securitization of politics has become a generalized geo-economic phenomenon produced by the structural rivalry between the United States and China rather than the exclusive characteristic of any single political system.

This politicization of security is generating three major structural transformations in the international system. First, the traditional boundaries between policy domains are collapsing, and as the integration of economics and security deepens, the criteria guiding policymaking are shifting from maximizing market efficiency to eliminating strategic vulnerabilities and strengthening resilience. Second, exceptional measures are becoming normalized: as state intervention is justified in the name of security, extreme policy instruments such as export controls and investment restrictions are becoming institutionalized as routine tools of governance. Third, international norms themselves are being transformed. Principles such as free trade and openness, once regarded as universal norms, are now reduced to conditional principles that are observed only insofar as they do not undermine national security.

Ultimately, the politicization of security is driving U.S.–China rivalry into a prolonged war of attrition. Although military deterrence may prevent direct armed conflict, economic sanctions and technological blockades conducted in the name of security function as continuous instruments of pressure. Once a particular industry is designated a security issue, middle powers such as South Korea lose the autonomy to pursue economic interests independently and are instead compelled to demonstrate strategic loyalty to a specific bloc. As a result, the space for neutral and pragmatic diplomacy available to middle powers is becoming increasingly constrained.

4. Standard Competition and the Restructuring of Rule-Making Power

The arena in which the expansion of geo-economics and the politicization of security ultimately converge is the competition over the authority to design international rules and standards. Today's U.S.–China hegemonic rivalry goes far beyond quantitative competition in trade volumes or military expenditures; it represents a massive struggle over rule-making

capacity—the authority to determine technological standards and shape the norms that will govern the future international system.

In international political economy, the highest form of structural power enjoyed by a hegemonic state lies precisely in its ability to create rules. Standards governing 5G communication networks, ethical frameworks for artificial intelligence, and regulations governing cross-border data flows are not merely technical matters. Once a state establishes such standards, it can construct an ecosystem centered around its own technologies and generate a powerful lock-in effect, thereby reinforcing barriers to entry for late-comers.

Historically, the United States has monopolized this rule-making power through its overwhelming innovative capacity and its dominance within global institutions. Recently, however, China has openly expanded its influence within international standard-setting organizations such as the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) and has begun to challenge the existing order. In particular, China's Digital Silk Road strategy is a highly sophisticated initiative that goes beyond building telecommunications equipment and infrastructure in developing countries. Through the provision of digital infrastructure, China simultaneously exports its own technological standards and governance norms to emerging economies.

Conflict in the domains of data and digital platforms also increasingly reflects a clash of value systems. The United States advocates the principle of the free flow of data and an open system led by the private sector, whereas China promotes the concept of cyber sovereignty, emphasizing state control over digital networks. This confrontation therefore reflects not merely institutional differences but a fundamental clash of governing philosophies regarding the relationship between the state and the individual.

As conflicts over standards and norms intensify, the global order is likely to move away from a single universal regime of free trade and toward a fragmented and multi-layered "bloc economy", in which competing standards are pursued by different geopolitical groupings.

5. Multi-Layered Conflicts Across Supply Chains, Finance, and Maritime Space

The strategic dynamics of geo-economic pressure, the politicization of security, and standard competition are now evolving into a multi-layered confrontation encompassing both

physical space and invisible networks. The U.S.–China hegemonic rivalry has developed beyond localized disputes within a single domain and now manifests as a complex crisis in which supply chains, financial systems, and key maritime chokepoints interact simultaneously.

First, the maritime domain represents the arena where traditional security concerns and economic interests collide most sharply. In particular, the South China Sea and the Taiwan Strait are not merely territorial dispute zones but crucial nodes of global shipping routes and the advanced semiconductor supply chain. The United States, under its Free and Open Indo-Pacific strategy, is consolidating maritime security networks such as the Quad and AUKUS in order to construct a containment structure around China. In response, China is expanding its naval capabilities and strengthening an Anti-Access/Area-Denial (A2/AD) strategy designed to restrict U.S. military access.

Second, tensions in maritime spaces are accelerating the fragmentation of global supply chains. The United States is attempting to restructure supply chains through friend-shoring, focusing on trusted partners that share similar values. China, in response, is simultaneously pursuing technological self-reliance to reduce dependence on Western technology while utilizing key strategic resources such as rare earth elements as geopolitical leverage.

Third, financial networks have evolved from neutral mechanisms of exchange into critical instruments of state power. The United States exercises powerful financial sanctions through its dominance of the dollar as the global reserve currency and its control over the international payment network SWIFT. China, in response, seeks to reduce dependence on the dollar through the internationalization of the renminbi and the development of its own cross-border payment network, CIPS, thereby pursuing a form of financial decoupling from dollar hegemony.

In conclusion, these three arenas are not independent but are tightly interconnected within a chain structure. Control over maritime trade routes can immediately disrupt global supply chains; dominance in technological standards directly contributes to the advancement of military capabilities; and control over payment networks can fundamentally constrain an opponent's ability to wage war. Within this complex structure of cascading and converging crises—where conflict in one domain quickly spreads to others—the international system has entered a state of permanent high-intensity tension, in which economic sanctions and

technological blockades conducted in the name of security have become normalized despite the absence of large-scale conventional warfare.

Chapter 5. The U.S.–China Hegemonic Rivalry and Prospects for the International Order

1. The Coexistence of Bloc Formation and Multipolar Autonomy

The international order of the twenty-first century is being reorganized into a complex structure in which bloc formation driven by U.S.–China hegemonic rivalry coexists with the multipolar autonomy of individual states, rather than returning to a simple bipolar system like that of the Cold War. While this appears outwardly similar to a new Cold War, in reality it signifies a transition to a far more fluid and multilayered order in which the axes of cooperation and conflict shift depending on specific issues.

First, the security and technological cooperation system centered on the United States is gradually entering a stage of structural institutionalization. The cooperation among South Korea, the United States, and Japan—marked by the 2023 Camp David summit—has evolved beyond simple diplomatic rhetoric into a permanent strategic mechanism encompassing information sharing, the integration of missile warning systems, and coordination of key supply chains. This alignment is forming a multidimensional bloc that encompasses military, technological, and supply-chain cooperation within the broader framework of the U.S. Indo-Pacific strategy.

In response, the strategic rapprochement between China and Russia is also accelerating. Although their relationship does not constitute a traditional military alliance, the two countries have constructed a powerful defensive network to counter Western sanctions through energy cooperation, joint military exercises, and mutual diplomatic support. The addition of North Korea to this alignment—forming a security partnership among China, Russia, and North Korea—has become a variable that structurally intensifies tensions in Northeast Asia. However, this alignment is characterized less by ideological cohesion than by

a highly functional partnership aimed at circumventing sanctions and securing strategic space for survival.

Behind these trends of bloc formation, however, a simultaneous tendency toward multipolarity—emphasizing the autonomy of states—is also emerging. The European Union, while aligning with the United States on security matters, continues to maintain a policy of "de-risking" that manages economic risk rather than pursuing full decoupling from China. The United Kingdom and Canada likewise maintain their security alignment while pursuing economic pragmatism through selective alignment that preserves strategic flexibility. India, in particular, demonstrates a multipolar approach by participating in the Quad security framework while continuing large-scale defense and energy cooperation with Russia.

In conclusion, contemporary international politics lies at the intersection of three competing forces: the pressure for bloc realignment driven by hegemonic rivalry, the high level of interdependence within the global economy, and the pursuit of autonomy by middle powers. As a result, a multilayered order is emerging in which shifting coalitions form and dissolve depending on specific issues. The international system is therefore likely to become a kind of "strategic gray zone," where stable equilibrium and extreme instability coexist.

2. The Normalization of Conflict and the Institutionalization of Uncertainty

The current international order—where bloc formation and multipolarity intersect—has not converged toward a stable equilibrium. Instead, it has entered a stage in which high-intensity power competition becomes institutionalized as a normal condition of conflict. The U.S.–China hegemonic rivalry is no longer a temporary fluctuation tied to specific issues; it is increasingly being structurally embedded in the fundamental national strategies and foreign policy foundations of both countries. This normalization of conflict manifests itself in four main dimensions.

First is the routinization of crisis in the Taiwan Strait. Taiwan stands at the heart of the global advanced semiconductor supply chain and is a strategic chokepoint where geoeconomics and security converge almost perfectly. Recent Chinese military aircraft incursions into Taiwan's Air Defense Identification Zone (ADIZ) and maritime encirclement exercises are no longer one-time demonstrations of force; rather, they have become a

repeated pattern aimed at normalizing the "One China" principle as a political reality. The United States, for its part, has increased arms sales and high-level exchanges with Taiwan, maintaining strategic ambiguity regarding Taiwan's defense while strengthening deterrence. Although full-scale war continues to be deterred, the situation has become entrenched as a condition of structural tension—one in which war has not broken out but genuine peace is also absent.

Second is the institutionalization of deterrence in maritime spaces. The sea lanes of the South China Sea and the East China Sea form the core arteries of the global value chain. The United States conducts regular freedom-of-navigation operations in these waters to demonstrate its commitment to maintaining the existing order, while China is strengthening its anti-access/area-denial (A2/AD) capabilities through the militarization of artificial islands and the expansion of its naval power. What is noteworthy is that these military activities are not merely reactive responses to crises; rather, they represent a constant state of preparedness that assumes the possibility of ongoing confrontation.

Third is the comprehensive securitization of technological and economic policy. U.S. export controls on advanced technologies, strengthened screening of foreign investment, and large-scale industrial subsidies have evolved beyond temporary protectionist measures and have been institutionalized as long-term legal and policy mechanisms designed to structurally constrain China's rise. Conversely, China's "dual circulation" strategy and its policy of scientific and technological self-reliance likewise demonstrate how the politicization of security has moved beyond temporary declarations by a particular administration to become codified as a core principle of state governance. As a result, technology and economic policy have become permanent strategic instruments managed not by market logic but by national security considerations.

Fourth is the normalization of geopolitical uncertainty. Unlike the rigid ideological structure of the Cold War, the contemporary international order is characterized by structural uncertainty in which shifting coalitions among states emerge depending on specific agendas such as technology, finance, or human rights. Private corporations now treat geopolitical risk as a central variable in their management strategies and are reorganizing supply chains accordingly, while states are incorporating strategic industries into the domain of national security governance. In other words, uncertainty is no longer regarded as a condition to be

eliminated; it has become an institutional environment to which both states and markets must constantly adapt and manage.

3. The Global South as a Variable in a Multilayered Order

Despite the ongoing U.S.–China hegemonic rivalry, the decisive factor preventing the international order from reverting to a simple bipolar structure lies in the rise of the Global South. Emerging states that once remained passive objects within great-power politics are now rising as casting voters capable of influencing the direction of global order restructuring, based on strong strategic autonomy.

First is the adoption of complex hedging strategies grounded in strategic autonomy. India participates in the United States' Indo-Pacific strategy while simultaneously continuing energy and defense cooperation with Russia, demonstrating a foreign policy centered on its independent national interests. ASEAN countries likewise maintain security cooperation with the United States while simultaneously sustaining deep economic engagement with China, their largest trading partner. The selective cooperation pursued by these emerging states functions as a structural brake preventing complete bloc division.

Second is the reconfiguration of resource geopolitics during the global energy transition. As the Fourth Industrial Revolution and carbon-neutral transitions progress, the strategic value of resource-rich countries possessing key minerals such as lithium, cobalt, and nickel has risen sharply. In response to China's early dominance of resource supply chains through the Belt and Road Initiative, the United States and Europe have launched large-scale investment initiatives. Resource-rich states are therefore maximizing their bargaining power between major powers by leveraging control over supply chains.

Third is the pluralization of international norms through alternative multilateralism. The Western-centered financial order represented by the Bretton Woods system has begun to experience visible cracks. Institutions such as the China-led Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) and the BRICS-backed New Development Bank (NDB) provide developing countries with alternative financial mechanisms that allow them to circumvent the political conditions often attached to Western financing. This development suggests that rule-making power in the international system is increasingly being dispersed across multiple centers.

In conclusion, the trajectory of the Global South may function either as a structural buffer preventing the catastrophic escalation of U.S.–China rivalry or as a catalyst that accelerates bloc confrontation if these states become absorbed into one camp. The current international order stands at the entrance of a transitional phase in which bloc formation and multipolarity coexist in tension. The ultimate outcome of this transition is likely to be determined by the strategic choices and alignments of the multilayered actors collectively referred to as the Global South.

Chapter 6. Korea's Strategic Response and Missional Response Directions

1. Korea's Response Strategy in a Period of Order Transition

In a transitional international order marked by intensifying strategic rivalry between the United States and China, South Korea is not merely a passive actor that simply accepts the pressure of great powers. South Korea is located on the geopolitical fault line where continental and maritime powers collide, while at the same time functioning as a key node in the global high-tech supply chain and a hub of technological production. As such, it is an active agent capable of exerting tangible influence in the process of restructuring the international order. From the perspective of middle power diplomacy theory, South Korea possesses the strategic potential to buffer systemic shocks and create new spaces for cooperation, and the strategies required to realize this potential are as follows.

First, it must develop an advanced strategy of strategic autonomy that transforms structural constraints into strategic assets. South Korea maintains the irreplaceable security axis of the ROK–U.S. alliance while simultaneously sustaining a highly interdependent economic relationship with China. This dual connectivity should be redefined not as a diplomatic dilemma but as a unique strategic space available to South Korea. Strengthening trilateral cooperation among South Korea, the United States, and Japan while maintaining economic and diplomatic channels with China represents a pragmatic choice that manages the risks of bloc alignment and minimizes potential security vacuums. This approach becomes

fully viable only when South Korea moves beyond passive opportunism and assumes the role of an active mediator that sets agendas on its own initiative.

Second, South Korea must secure leadership in advanced industries and technological governance. In the age of geoeconomics, technology and supply chains themselves constitute core resources of power. South Korea's unrivaled position in sectors such as semiconductors and secondary batteries provides a strong foundation for influential participation in the formation of new technological rules and global standards. South Korea should establish itself as a rule-maker in multilateral forums addressing issues such as AI ethics and data governance. Rather than passively accepting rules created by major powers, it must secure a direct stake in the rule-making process in order to preserve structural autonomy.

Third, South Korea should simultaneously strengthen its security alliances while expanding its diplomatic maneuvering space. The strengthening of the ROK–U.S. alliance should not lead to a reduction of diplomatic autonomy. On the contrary, a robust deterrence posture can broaden the space for diplomatic mediation and connectivity. South Korea should take the initiative in facilitating informal dialogue channels concerning maritime tensions in Northeast Asia and supply-chain bottlenecks, while also acting as a "global crisis manager" that promotes multilateral cooperation on soft issues such as climate change and public health.

Fourth, South Korea must reconstruct multilayered networks with the Global South. The expansion of strategic autonomy among Global South countries provides South Korea with an important diplomatic breakthrough. Partnerships with India, ASEAN, and countries in the Middle East and Africa go beyond mere market diversification; they represent efforts to construct a "strategic rear area" that disperses the pressure of great-power competition. Multilayered middle-power networks cooperating with Global South partners in areas such as supply-chain restructuring and digital infrastructure development can function as a practical buffer that mitigates the bloc-based polarization characteristic of a new Cold War.

In conclusion, South Korea's national strategy in this period of systemic transition must go beyond a simple choice of alignment and advance toward a deeper question: what kind of order should be designed amid this massive process of structural transformation? If South Korea remains satisfied with passive balancing, it risks becoming merely an object swept along by external structural forces. The only viable strategy for both survival and development

in the context of the U.S.–China hegemonic rivalry is the active design of a "structural buffer zone" that balances deterrence and connectivity, and competition and cooperation.

2. Missional Responses to Changes in the International Environment

The U.S.–China hegemonic rivalry and the geoeconomic transformation of the global system are not confined to the power struggles of secular states. These developments are fundamentally reshaping the very structure of the missionary environment by rapidly transforming cross-border human mobility, financial capital flows, information and communication networks, and the legal regulatory systems of states. Therefore, contemporary mission cannot be defined merely as a private or spiritual activity conducted in a vacuum, detached from international political realities.

Just as states must go beyond simple bloc alignment and develop multilayered survival networks with the Global South under great-power pressure, the church must also move beyond the traditional one-directional sending model and establish polycentric survival networks that cooperate with local churches in the face of extreme securitization and bloc formation. In this sense, the geoeconomic shifts in international politics demand a comprehensive redesign of the geospiritual strategy of mission. Specific missional response strategies are as follows.

First, missionary organizations must advance digital security and crisis-management systems in response to the politicization of security in mission fields. As advanced technology becomes a key security asset, surveillance systems in authoritarian states—particularly China—have reached extremely sophisticated levels. Facial recognition technologies, smart-city infrastructure, and the tracking of digital footprints through platforms such as WeChat convert the everyday activities and movements of missionaries into data subject to monitoring and control. Under these structural conditions, the analog security practices of the past—such as using pseudonyms or coded language—have become completely ineffective. Rather than focusing solely on the observable outcome of mission-field closures, mission organizations must analyze and respond to the structural mechanisms by which hostile states perceive missionary networks as security threats. Furthermore, mission administrations should institutionalize IT security training prior to missionary deployment and establish formal exit

strategies and crisis-management manuals to prepare for situations such as visa denial or expulsion.

Second, business as mission (BAM) must undergo structural reconfiguration in response to geoeconomic bloc formation. During the era of globalization based on free trade, small "paper company" models established primarily for the purpose of mission-field entry or visa acquisition possessed a certain degree of effectiveness. However, in the current environment—where global value chains are reorganizing around strategic industries and supply chains are fragmenting under Western de-risking strategies and China's Belt and Road Initiative—such ad hoc approaches are no longer viable. Future business-mission models must evolve toward forms that possess genuine geoeconomic viability, creating real value within newly emerging economic blocks while providing essential services to local communities. For example, rather than relying on traditional mission models centered on small cafés or language schools in countries such as China, mission organizations should develop more sophisticated business models aligned with shifting global value chains—such as IT vocational training centers for local workers or environmentally sustainable agricultural infrastructure enterprises in countries like Vietnam or Indonesia. To support such strategies, cooperative response systems—including information-sharing platforms among mission organizations—are necessary. In addition, serious consideration must be given to diversifying funding routes and strengthening self-supporting mission models to ensure mission sustainability even in cases of extreme financial transfer restrictions.

Third, the rise of the Global South requires a transition toward polycentric mission networks. Geoeconomic transformation is shifting the center of missionary activity away from a Western- and Korea-centric model toward a multipolar configuration. Direct entry by missionaries of specific nationalities into strategic regions such as China, the Middle East, or North Africa is becoming increasingly difficult. Consequently, the traditional centralized direct-sending model must be replaced by a distributed network model that collaborates with local church leadership across Latin America, Africa, and Southeast Asia. Strategic partnerships with missionaries from the Global South—who are relatively less constrained by ideological tensions—should be strengthened, and flexible mission networks should be designed that take advantage of geopolitical flows, for instance by engaging Chinese diaspora workers spreading worldwide along the routes of China's Digital Silk Road as new points of missionary contact.

Fourth, mission must establish resilience and a robust public theology capable of responding to neo-Sinocentrism and digital authoritarianism. As U.S.–China rivalry intensifies, exclusionary nationalism and hostile rhetoric will deepen within both blocs. In China, in particular, the pressure for the Sinicization of Christianity under a neo-Sinocentric order is strengthening as the state attempts to bring Christianity under tighter control. In such circumstances, external missionary actors attempting to "rescue" believers or approaching the issue through Western political frameworks may actually expose local churches to greater danger. The focus of mission should therefore shift toward supporting a theology of suffering and resilience that enables persecuted churches to preserve the essence of the gospel and maintain spiritual vitality amid hardship. At the same time, serious public-theological reflection is required to defend the dignity of human beings as created in the image of God against digital technological hegemonies that reduce human persons to objects of data and control. The gospel transcends political systems, and mission is a sacred calling that plants the reconciliation of the cross in the midst of conflict rather than reproducing the language of hostility.

Fifth, mission must adopt a long-term strategy of structural trust-building that moves beyond short-term performance metrics. The U.S.–China hegemonic rivalry is not a short-term regional conflict but a profound structural transformation that will shape an entire era. In an environment of permanent geopolitical uncertainty, mission strategies focused on visible conversion numbers or short-term project achievements have reached their limits. In times of crisis, the most powerful missionary asset is relational trust. Only communities that remain deeply engaged with local societies and sustain authentic relationships—even amid government surveillance, persecution, or visa cancellation threats—can ensure the long-term influence of the gospel. Accordingly, mission evaluation must also move beyond short-term quantitative indicators and adopt new long-term qualitative assessments centered on trust-based relationships.

In conclusion, even within the macro-structure of international politics defined by U.S.–China hegemonic rivalry, the Missio Dei does not cease. What is required of us today is not fear or defeatism in the face of changes in the international environment, but rather the spiritual and missional geoeconomic insight to discern the movement of the Holy Spirit across the shifting landscape of global politics.

Chapter 7. Conclusion

The U.S.–China hegemonic competition of the twenty-first century is not merely a transition of power between a rising state and an established hegemon. Rather, it represents a structural transformation in which the rules and institutions of the global order are fundamentally reorganized. The assumption of the globalization era—that economic interdependence would guarantee peace—has lost its validity. Instead, a geoeconomic reality in which the logic of security overrides economic and technological cooperation has become the new normal. Within this transitional structure—where bloc formation and multipolarity intersect and conflict and uncertainty become constant—conventional national strategies and traditional missionary paradigms can no longer provide adequate responses.

Standing upon this geoeconomic fault line, South Korea must move beyond the perception that it is merely a passive actor trapped in a strategic dilemma. By leveraging its structural position as a key node within the global high-tech ecosystem, South Korea should transcend binary bloc logic and pursue partnerships with the Global South. Only by securing proactive diplomatic capabilities as an active middle power—one that buffers great-power conflicts and opens new spaces for multilateral cooperation—can the country guarantee both its survival and its autonomy within the present international order.

This massive geoeconomic transformation also demands a fundamental paradigm shift in missionary strategy. Mission does not occur in a vacuum isolated from international politics, and China's data-control regime and the comprehensive securitization measures adopted by many states directly constrain traditional missionary approaches. Accordingly, a new structural awareness is required—one that soberly analyzes the systemic logic operating beneath these phenomena.

Future missionary directions must therefore involve the development of sophisticated digital security systems capable of navigating the control structures of advanced security states, as well as the strategic restructuring of Business as Mission (BAM) models capable of genuine sustainability within a fragmented global economic environment. Mission must also expand beyond unilateral sending models toward polycentric networks that collaborate horizontally with leadership from the Global South. Furthermore, priority must be given to supporting the

resilience of local churches under systemic pressure and to building long-term trust with local communities rather than pursuing short-term measurable results.

Although the geopolitical map of global power changes according to historical circumstances, the Missio Dei never ceases under any structural constraint. What the Korean missionary community requires today is not retreat in the face of a rapidly changing international order, but a renewed geopolitical imagination capable of objectively discerning the emerging landscape of the world and discovering new pathways for the gospel. In an age of uncertainty, what is needed is both the intellectual clarity to discern the signs of the times and the strategic resolve to plant the gospel of reconciliation at the very center of global conflict.

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Characteristics of Traditional Turkish Islam and Its Transformation in the Context of Modernization

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1. Introduction

Türkiye is a democratic republic that constitutionally adopts secularism as the fundamental ideology of the state. The state has taken the separation of politics and religion as a principle and has restricted the direct intervention of religion in the public sphere. Nevertheless, the vast majority of the population is Muslim, and the identity perception of "Turk = Muslim" is widely shared throughout society. This shows that while secularism is emphasized at the institutional level, Islam still functions as a core foundation of identity at the socio-cultural level (Berkes, 1964; Zürcher, 2004).

Meanwhile, Islam in Türkiye developed within historical experiences and social conditions different from those of the Islamic tradition formed in the Arab world, and as a result acquired its own distinct historical and cultural character (Hodgson, 1974).

The purpose of this study is to examine, within a historical context, the background through which Islam in Türkiye came to take its present form. To this end, it first reviews the process by which the Turkic people accepted Islam and its subsequent development, and analyzes the characteristics of traditional Turkish Islam formed during the Ottoman period. It then applies Tamim Ansary's analytical framework of "types of Islamic responses to the modern world" (Ansary, 2011) to consider how Turkish Islam has been reconstructed and transformed within the secularization policies and modernization process after the establishment of the Republic.

In particular, this study seeks to understand the relationship between tradition and modernity from the perspective of continuity rather than rupture, and focuses on how traditional religious elements were transformed and reconstructed under modern conditions. Through this, it aims to conduct an in-depth analysis of how religious characteristics formed through the interaction of tradition and modernity have influenced the collective identity of the Turkish people.

2. The Acceptance of Islam by the Turkic People and Its Historical Development

1) Contact with Islam in Central Asia and Early Conversion

The Turkic tribes of Central Asia, who constitute the roots of present-day Turks, encountered Islam as Arab Muslims advanced into Central Asia. The Battle of Talas in 751, in which the Turkic forces and the Abbasid army defeated the Tang army, expanded political and military contact between the Abbasid power and Turkic groups, and in the gradual exchange process that followed, the Islamization of the Turkic people was promoted (Hodgson, 1974). After this battle, exchanges with the Abbasid Empire increased, and by the mid-9th century several Turkic tribal leaders converted to Islam. However, the majority of Turkic tribes who had no direct contact with the Abbasids were still not significantly influenced by Islam.

The turning point for the spread of Islam throughout Turkic nomadic society can be found in the conversion of the Karakhanid dynasty around the 10th century. The Karakhanid dynasty accepted Islam under the influence of the Persian Islamic Samanid dynasty, which is significant in that it became the first Islamic dynasty among the Turkic peoples.

The Samanid dynasty was established by a Persian noble family that began as provincial governors and gradually became autonomous as the central control of the Abbasid Empire weakened in the course of territorial expansion in the late 9th century. The Karakhanid dynasty, which bordered the Samanids, adopted the relatively flexible Hanafi school of law from them. The adaptive character of Hanafi jurisprudence suited well the Turkic society, which possessed a nomadic tradition and a military state structure, and also aligned with political needs such as state integration and incorporation into the international order. Thus Islam, in Turkic society, began to take root not merely as a system of belief but as a foundation that supported the legitimacy of political and social order.

2) Establishment of Sunni Orthodoxy under the Seljuk Empire and Succession of Caliphal Authority in the Ottoman Period

After the Battle of Dandanaqan in 1040, the Seljuk forces weakened the Ghaznavid dynasty and took political leadership over Iran and Iraq. The growth of the Seljuk Empire became an occasion for the Islamization of Turkic power to spread beyond the elite level to society as a whole, and as a result, by the 14th century most of the Turkic peoples residing in Central Asia had accepted Islam.

By defeating the Byzantine Empire at the Battle of Manzikert in 1071, the Seljuk Empire entered Anatolia in earnest, marking a turning point in which the Turkic forces emerged as a central actor in the Islamic world (Zürcher, 2004). At the same time, this battle aroused a sense of structural crisis in the Byzantine Empire and the Western Christian world, and this sense of

crisis became one of the backgrounds that later triggered the Crusades.

Amid prolonged turmoil in the Islamic world due to the Crusades and the Mongol invasions, Sufi orders played a role in maintaining and rebuilding Islamic faith centered on local communities. On this religious and social foundation, the Ottoman Empire emerged and built a Sunni Islamic empire inheriting the political and religious traditions of the Seljuks. As a result, while the official Islam of the state was based on Sunni Hanafi jurisprudence, a religious structure was formed in which Sufism strongly operated at the grassroots level of society.

The Turkic peoples grew into a core military force in the medieval Islamic world and played an important role in maintaining the caliphal system. The Seljuk Empire functioned as the political patron of the caliph, and by the time of the Ottoman Empire, the title of caliph was officially inherited (Hodgson, 1974). This signified a structural shift in which the political center of the Islamic world moved from Arab to non-Arab powers. In this process, Islam was institutionalized as a universal religion encompassing various peoples and regions, rather than a religion limited to a particular ethnicity. The Islamic traditions of the Seljuk and Ottoman empires were subsequently inherited by the modern Republic of Türkiye.

3. Structural Characteristics of Traditional Turkic Islam

1) Hanafi Jurisprudence and Adaptive Legal Interpretation

Before the introduction of Islam, the religion of the Turkic peoples consisted of shamanism emphasizing practical needs, the worship of the sky god (belief in Tengri), and ancestor worship. These religious traditions possessed characteristics that valued practicality, and this-worldliness influenced the way the Turkic people later accepted Islam.

The strongly adaptive and pragmatic Hanafi school of law was relatively easier for Turkic society, which had strong shamanistic traditions, to accept compared to other legal schools (Hodgson, 1974). Hanafi jurisprudence developed in 8th-century Kufa in Iraq, a multiethnic city where Arabs, Persians, and converted mawali coexisted and where various social problems arose. In such an environment, in a situation where hadith transmission was not yet sufficiently established, Hanafi jurisprudence developed adaptive legal interpretations that actively utilized rational judgment and analogy. By adopting Hanafi jurisprudence, which permits rational judgment and analogy in interpreting the Qur'an, the Seljuk Empire showed a relatively tolerant religious and intellectual attitude compared to Arab states centered on the Shafi'i school, which emphasized scripture, or North African states centered on the Maliki school, which emphasized custom.

While adopting Hanafi jurisprudence in law, the Seljuk Empire adopted the Ash'ari school in theology as the state's official system, thereby institutionalizing Sunni orthodox Islam.

This was a choice to strengthen political and religious integration in response to Shi'i forces and heterodox religious movements. In particular, as Ash'ari theology was systematically taught in Nizamiyya madrasas, the Seljuk Empire established its status as a guardian of the Sunni Islamic world.

2) Maturidi Theology and the Role of Reason

The Ottoman Empire, inheriting the political and religious legacy of the Seljuk Empire, maintained the Hanafi tradition in law while establishing the Maturidi school as its official theology. Maturidi theology more actively recognized the role of reason and suited well the reality of the Ottoman Empire, which had to govern a multiethnic and multireligious empire (Berkes, 1964). Thus, in the Ottoman Empire, a unique Turkic Sunni Islamic structure was formed combining Hanafi jurisprudence, Maturidi theology, and the Sufi tradition.

This religious tradition continued as a socio-cultural heritage in the Republic of Türkiye, which transitioned into a modern state. Although the Republic constitutionally declared itself a secular state, the Hanafi–Maturidi Islamic tradition of the Ottoman period still strongly operates in the foundations of religious education and religious consciousness.

3) The Fusion of Sufism and Folk Religious Elements

Sufism is generally understood as a complementary tendency to legalistic formalism, and as a spiritual pursuit that seeks to experience God directly. Since Muhammad himself is understood to have experienced contact with God through revelatory experience, such mystical elements are to some extent consistent with Islamic tradition, and some scholars suggest that early Sufi practices may have had certain points of contact with the Christian ascetic traditions of the Eastern Mediterranean region.

In the case of Turkic society, elements of ancestor worship and pantheistic traditional religion were reinterpreted and fused in the process of accepting Islam, appearing in Sufi forms. Ahmed-i Yesevi (1093–1167) emphasized divine love and compassion and tolerance toward human beings, and by leaving numerous works in Turkish, he is called the founder of Turkish Sufism. During the period of the Mongol invasions, many Sufi dervishes influenced by the Yesevi order flowed into Anatolia and actively spread Sufi Islam; representative figures include Mevlana and Hacı Bektaş. Various Sufi orders mixed diverse religious elements that had existed prior to the acceptance of Islam with Islamic concepts, and existing traditional religious rituals continued under the name of Islam. This Sufi tradition was widely accepted among the Turkic people, whose religious tendencies were strongly shamanistic and practical. Alevism, which maintains a certain distance from the juridical and doctrinal framework of orthodox Sunni Islam, is a heterodox Islamic tradition that combines Shi'i symbols, Sufi practices, and Turkic indigenous religious elements, and is estimated to account for approximately 10–20% of the population within the Republic of Türkiye (Kim, 2013).

4) A Structure of Coexistence Between Institutional Orthodoxy and Folk Belief

The 11th-century scholar al-Ghazali (1058–1111), an orthodox Sunni scholar, brought together theolog y, jurisprudence, and Sufism, which until then had been separated, and reconstructed orthodox theology on the basis of knowledge grounded in personal and mystical experience. His thought established the status of Sufism within Islam and still occupies an important place in Islamic education in Türkiye today. In this way, Turkic Islam formed a structure in which institutional orthodoxy and folk belief coexist. Whereas in relatively Arab-centered regions there was a stronger tendency to emphasize juridical coherence and systematic interpretation of scripture, in Turkic regions religion was institutionalized more prominently within the political demand for state integration and the maintenance of social order.

4. The Modern Transformation of the Islamic World

The Islamic world, which had continued to expand until the 17th century, fell behind in the face of the rise of the modern West and came to experience repeated military defeats or colonial rule by European powers. Tamim Ansary (2011) summarizes the responsive movements of Islam confronting the modern world into three major currents: Islamism, secular modernism, and Islamic modernism.

1) Islamism: Restoration of Retroactive Orthodoxy

Islamism holds that it is not the doctrine itself but the practice of the Muslim community that has become corrupt. It views the process of reforming, modifying, and elaborating the original doctrine as having led to the corruption of faith, so that no one is practicing true Islam. It calls for blocking Western influence and restoring Islam to its original sacred form.

2) Secular Modernism: A State-Centered Westernization Model

It asserts that the Western model is correct. It argues that Muslims have fallen into the swamp of outdated religious thought and have allowed ignorant clerics to control Islam. It urges that Islam be modernized so that it abandons superstition and mystical thinking and becomes an ethical system compatible with science and secular life.

3) Islamic Modernism: Pursuit of Harmony Between Faith and Reason

It acknowledges that Islam is the true religion but holds that there are things to be learned from the West. Muslims should rediscover and strengthen their own faith, history, and traditions while accepting Western learning in the fields of science and technology. Since

modernization is pursued in a Muslim way, science and Islam are seen as compatible, and modernization does not necessarily mean Westernization.

5. The Modern Transformation of Islam in Türkiye

1) Early Republican Secularism and the State Control Model

Mustafa Kemal, the founder of the Republic of Türkiye, was a thorough modernist who regarded Islam as a potential political force and reorganized it under state control, thereby constructing a form of "modern Islam" that conformed to state policy. He abolished the caliphate, outlawed Sufi orders, and replaced sharia with modern civil law, thereby excluding Islam from the public sphere (Berkes, 1964). The various policies implemented during the establishment of the Republic later became models for modernization in Iran and Afghanistan and were cited as symbolic precedents of the s ecular model in the Islamic world.

In this process, Islam was institutionally separated from state power, yet at the socio-cultural level it was managed as a key element of communal integration, and as a result the social perception that "a Turk is a Muslim" was formed. The historical experience of the Ottoman Empire having inherited the authority of the caliph for about 400 years since the 16th century functioned, even after the Republic, as a background for perceiving Islam not as a severed past but as a continuous civilizational heritage.

The reason Atatürk's radical reforms could succeed can be found, along with his outstanding leadership, in the Tanzimat reforms of the late Ottoman period and, further back, in the process of accepting Islam. In the face of Western growth, the Ottoman Empire pursued Westernization through the Tanzimat, and as a result the power of the ulama had already been greatly weakened, so resistance to modernization in the Republican period was relatively weak (Zürcher, 2004). During the process of accepting Islam, the Turkic ruling elite used Sunni Islam as a resource of political legitimacy and presented themselves as its protectors. This implies that the state stands above religion, and protection also carries the meaning of control (Kuru, 2009). This statist character of Islam continued from the Seljuk Empire to the Ottoman Empire and to the Republic of Türkiye, showing a tendency to be reinterpreted in a direction that prioritizes state interests.

It is noteworthy that whereas in Western societies secularism means the separation of politics and religion, in Türkiye secularism possesses an active character in which the state manages and supervises the religious sphere beyond institutional separation (Kuru, 2009). Islam is understood as a religion that actively intervenes in politics if not controlled, and as a result Western-style secularism is regarded as a model that does not fit Türkiye's historical context.

2) The Social-Movement Development of Islamic Modernism

Under Mustafa Kemal's powerful leadership, secularization proceeded rapidly, and while the urban upper class perceived Islam as backward, Sufi traditions and religious faith remained strong in rural areas. Within this social gap, a tendency to seek alternatives in Islam continued, centered on the urban poor.

Among contemporary Islamic movements in Türkiye, the most influential ideas are those of Said Nursi and the Gülen movement. They developed in a form that combined orthodox Sunni Islam, which emphasizes reason, with Sufi elements. Said Nursi's representative work, Risale-i Nur, presents Qur'anic interpretation within an integration of science and faith and aims at the restoration of belief (Mardin, 1989).

Gülen, who developed this thought into a social movement, spread Islam through education, economic activity, and interfaith dialogue (Yavuz, 2003), and his interpretation of Islam has three core elements. First is the "Islamization of modernity," which actively accepts reason, secular learning, and capitalist economic activity. It is an effort to preserve Islam by renewing it in accordance with modernity. Second is the "Turkification of Islam," which holds that the tolerant Turkic Islam rooted in Ottoman tradition is suitable for modern society. Third is "activist Islam," which aims to expand into a global Islamic movement through voluntary and devoted practice.

This movement, as an Islamic modernist movement seeking to harmonize Islamic faith and reason, presented a moderate model of Islamic revival between extremism and secularism. The current President of Türkiye, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, also grew within this ideological current in his early years but later politically parted ways with it.

3) Islamism and Neo-Ottoman Discourse

Looking at the history of Islam in Türkiye, Islamism occasionally appeared as a reaction to strong secularism, but its influence has been relatively limited (Yavuz, 2003). The "past" to which Islamism refers—arguing that one must return to the ways of the past to reproduce the glory of Islam—is the early Islamic period of Muhammad and the four caliphs who succeeded him. Fundamentalist movements in the Arab world reflect this tendency. However, in Türkiye such a return did not secure broad social support because it was closely associated with Salafi and fundamentalist traditions that developed excessively in the Arab Middle East. Rather, in Türkiye, a return to the past means reproducing the glory of the Ottoman Empire (Zürcher, 2004). Therefore, the reproduction of the past glory of Islam in Türkiye takes the form of Neo-Ottomanism. Since in the Ottoman Empire state authority was positioned above religious institutions, there are structural constraints on Islamism gaining broad social support. This traditional religious structure has functioned as a factor limiting the spread of radical Islamism.

6. Conclusion

Modern Islam has diverse aspects according to regional and historical characteristics, and this study examined Islam in Türkiye through the process of its acceptance and by applying the analytical framework of types of Islamic responses to the modern world.

Contemporary Islam in Türkiye takes secular modernism as its institutional foundation (Berkes, 1964; Kuru, 2009), yet Islamic modernism also receives considerable support (Mardin, 1989; Yavuz, 2003). This can be seen as the result of a modern reinterpretation of the Turkish Islamic tradition, reflecting a tradition that has valued practicality and this-worldliness. By contrast, Islamism has shown relatively limited influence in Turkish society, as Islamic fundamentalism is perceived as having an excessively Arab character.

It is also noteworthy that theological traditions were formed that reinterpreted and systematized elements such as Sufism and ethnic characteristics—elements that differ from orthodox Islam—within the framework of orthodox Islam. This tradition has not only been continuously reproduced within Turkic society but has also shown patterns of international expansion through transnational networks.

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Modern Arab Islamist Theology and a Turning Point: Focusing on the Muslim Brotherhood

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1. Introduction

In the modern Arab world, Islamism is generally defined as "a modern political ideology and movement that seeks to construct a state and society consistent with Sharia by making Islamic beliefs and norms the central principles of political, legal, and social order" (Shepard, 1987; Tibi, 2007). Based on this definition, modern Islamism can be categorized into several types according to two axes—whether it uses violence and whether it participates in institutional politics—such as participatory Islamism, non-political traditionalist currents, radical revolutionary Islamism, and Salafi jihadism (Shepard, 1987; Wilson Center, 2025).

Founded in Egypt in 1928, the Muslim Brotherhood has come to represent a leading model of participatory Islamism within this spectrum (Pew Research Center, 2010). The Muslim Brotherhood possesses the typical characteristics of Islamism in that it understands Islam as a "comprehensive way of life" and rejects the separation of religion, politics, and society. At the same time, however, it is clearly distinguished from Salafi jihadism or armed revolutionary movements because it has focused more on institutional participation—through elections, parliaments, and professional associations—and on building social foundations through welfare, education, and charitable activities rather than violent revolution (Clark, 2014; Schmidt-Feuerheerd, 2023).

As a model of participatory Islamism, the Muslim Brotherhood was for a long time regarded as the most influential modern Islamist organization in the world. However, following the Egyptian military coup in 2013, its institutional base in domestic politics was rapidly weakened. Furthermore, in 2026, when the United States designated certain branches as SDGTs, it faced an unprecedented level of isolation within the international financial and

political ecosystem, leading to a severe crisis (Schanzer & Wahba, 2026; Homeland Security Today, 2026).

This article aims to examine: (1) how the Muslim Brotherhood's model of participatory Islamism came to function as an alternative to the state in Arab societies, and (2) how the 2013 Egyptian coup and the United States' 2026 SDGT designation have reduced both the domestic base and the international ecosystem of this model.

2. Participatory Islamism of the Muslim Brotherhood: Growth as a "State Alternative" in Arab Society

1) Comprehensive Islam: Hasan al-Banna's Ideology and Vision of Institutional Participation

In *Majmu'at al-Rasa'il (Collection of Epistles)*—a compilation of sermons and letters—Hasan al-Banna described Islam not as a religion limited to belief and worship but as a comprehensive system (*Nizam Shamil*) encompassing the state and homeland, government, morality and strength, mercy and justice, culture and law, economy and property, diplomacy and the military (al-Banna, n.d.; Wendell, 1978). For al-Banna, Islam was a holistic worldview that went beyond personal faith to encompass political, legal, social, and economic order, and the modern distinction between religion and politics was unacceptable. He also regarded the Qur'an and the Sunnah as the "foundation of a complete order," repeatedly emphasizing that Islam is a comprehensive worldview that regulates all areas of life, including social norms, government, legislation, and educational systems (Bano, 2013; Woroniecka-Krzyzanska, 2011).

At the same time, al-Banna preferred gradual reform and institutional participation rather than violent revolution. Emphasizing a step-by-step reform (*Islah*) that moves from the individual to the family, society, and the state, he proposed a staged strategy combining missionary work (*dawah*), education, organization, social welfare, and participation in elections and parliaments (Bano, 2021; Clark, 2014). While adhering to the Salafi reformist tradition of returning to the Qur'an, Sunnah, and the model of the early Muslim community, al-Banna also attempted to adopt modern tools such as parliaments, political parties, newspapers, and

modern educational institutions (Bano, 2013). The combination of this understanding of comprehensive Islam and a gradualist strategy later formed the basic model of participatory Islamism encompassing welfare, education, and political party activities.

2) Hakimiyya and Jahiliyya: Sayyid Qutb's Radical Political Theology and Its Tension

Sayyid Qutb, one of the most influential thinkers within the Muslim Brotherhood, added a radical political theology to the organizational foundation established by al-Banna (Khatab, 2002). A key concept in his thought, *hakimiyya*, refers to the principle that "sovereignty belongs entirely to God alone, and legislative authority cannot belong to anyone other than God" (Qutb, n.d.-a; Qutb, n.d.-b). Qutb directly linked this principle to *tawhid* (the oneness of God), viewing any system that follows human laws and authorities rather than God's as *taghut*, that is, illegitimate idolatrous power (Khatab, 2002).

In his book *Maʿalim fi al-tariq (Milestones)*, Qutb stated, "Islam knows only two kinds of societies: the Islamic society and the Jahili society" (Khatab, 2006, p. 85). He understood *jahiliyya* not merely as a particular historical period before Islam but as a social condition that can exist in the present. Even if a society formally acknowledges Islam, if its laws, education, politics, and customs are governed by non-Islamic principles and secular ideologies, he considered it part of a Jahili society. In this understanding, jahiliyya refers to "any condition in which God is not recognized as the supreme legislative and governing authority." This diagnosis provides a theological basis for challenging existing systems and presenting the construction of a new society and state based on Sharia as a religious duty (Khatab, 2006; Cheema, 2008).

Qutb's political theology introduced potential radicalization and tension within the Muslim Brotherhood, which officially advocated institutional participation through elections and parliaments (Khatab, 2002; Khatab, 2006). Jihadist organizations such as al-Qaeda reinterpreted Qutb's concepts, defining modern states as systems of jahiliyya and taghut and using them as theoretical justification for armed struggle (Jamestown Foundation, 2016). In contrast, the mainstream leadership of the Brotherhood attempted to absorb some aspects of Qutb's radicalism while maintaining a path of non-violence and institutional participation

combining elections, parliamentary politics, and social welfare activities (Brown & Hamzawy, 2013).

3) The Politics of Welfare and Education: Formation of a "Parallel Society" and Mass Base

The ideas of al-Banna and Qutb were embodied in the Brotherhood's practices in social welfare and education (Bano, 2021; Clark, 2014). The Brotherhood established and operated extensive networks of mosques, schools, medical clinics, charitable organizations, and vocational training centers. Through these institutions, it built and mobilized networks of members and supporters by replacing or supplementing educational, health, and social security services that the state failed to provide sufficiently (Clark, 2014). Such welfare and education networks are often described as a "state without a state" (Clark, 2014, p. 1). Al-Arian and others analyze that the Brotherhood's welfare institutions came to be perceived as service providers competing directly with the state in areas traditionally considered the state's domain. As a result, the Brotherhood emerged as a de facto alternative power to the Egyptian state and regime (Al-Arian, 2018; Clark, 2014).

3. The 2013 Egyptian Coup: Domestic Collapse of the Institutional Participation Strategy

1) Multiple Conflicts with the Military, Bureaucracy, and Social Forces After Coming to Power

In the 2011–2012 Egyptian parliamentary elections, the Muslim Brotherhood–affiliated Freedom and Justice Party (FJP) secured about 43–47% of the seats, becoming the largest single party. In the 2012 presidential runoff election, candidate Mohamed Morsi won the presidency with 51.7% of the vote. This was considered an important turning point, as it marked the first time the Brotherhood—long a social movement and opposition organization—converted the social base it had accumulated through welfare, educational, and religious networks into institutional political power and reached the center of state governance.

However, as an organization with almost no experience in actually running state institutions suddenly found itself responsible simultaneously for the government, presidency,

and parliament, limitations in policy and administrative capacity quickly became apparent. The Morsi government structurally clashed with the judiciary and military when it significantly expanded presidential powers during the November 2012 constitutional declaration and the constitution-drafting process. At the same time, relations with secular and liberal groups, Coptic Christians, and parts of the urban middle class deteriorated rapidly during reforms perceived as favoring Islamism (Brown, 2013). Combined with fuel and electricity shortages, security instability, and economic stagnation, repeated large-scale anti-government protests emerged (JPIA, 2014). As a result, although the Morsi government succeeded in coming to power through elections, it has been evaluated as a political Islamist government that failed to secure democratic and inclusive governance or broad social support (Brown, 2013).

2) The Coup and the Ban on the Brotherhood: The Failure of Political Islam

On July 3, 2013, the Egyptian military carried out a military coup that removed President Morsi and suspended the constitution, citing massive anti-government protests led by the Tamarod movement and a political deadlock. After Defense Minister Abdel Fattah el-Sisi announced a roadmap in a televised speech, the military detained the president, shut down Islamist-leaning television channels, and arrested Brotherhood leaders and key activists. Subsequently, the Egyptian government and courts designated the Muslim Brotherhood as a terrorist organization, dissolved the Freedom and Justice Party, and froze or confiscated the assets of Brotherhood-linked associations, non-profit organizations, and welfare institutions. Many leaders were put on mass trials for charges such as violations of national security and incitement to violence, receiving long prison sentences or death penalties. The Brotherhood's public organizational structure and legal basis for activity effectively collapsed. As a result, most analyses conclude that the organization was forced to withdraw from open and legal activity and reorganize underground around remaining forces and small overseas exile networks (Brooke, 2019, pp. 185–210).

The short-lived rule and rapid collapse of the Egyptian Brotherhood government have been evaluated as revealing the limitations of participatory Islamism. Critics argue that gaining power through elections did not lead to democratic and inclusive governance but instead triggered social division and military intervention (Brown, 2013). However, other studies emphasize that this failure should not be attributed solely to internal factors within the

Brotherhood but must also be understood in relation to structural factors such as resistance from existing power elites—the military, judiciary, and bureaucracy (Momani, 2014)—as well as accumulated economic and social crises and constraints in the international environment (JPIA, 2014). From this perspective, the 2013 coup can be seen less as the end of political Islam in general than as exposing the specific limitations and vulnerabilities faced by the Brotherhood-style strategy of institutional participation within Arab authoritarian systems (al-Anani, 2012–2013).

3) Changes in Perceptions of the Failure of Political Islam in Arab Society, Especially Among Youth

According to repeated surveys since the mid-2010s, including Arab Barometer and the Arab Youth Survey, many Arab young people have shown sharply declining trust not only in political Islam but also in political parties, governments, and religious institutions in general. The proportion of respondents who say they trust political parties remains in the single digits to around 10 percent, and trust in Islamist movements has also clearly declined compared to the early 2010s. In Egypt in particular, trust in the Muslim Brotherhood fell from 44% in 2011 to 17% in 2018; in Jordan it dropped from 35% to 14%; and in Morocco from 45% to 25% (Arab Barometer, 2019). At the same time, responses indicating that "religion plays too large a role in the Middle East" increased noticeably after 2015. In the 2019 survey, about two-thirds of youth answered that "the influence of religion is excessive," a rise of 16 percentage points from 50% in 2015 (ASDA'A BCW, 2019). This suggests that the failure of political Islam does not necessarily mean the collapse of Islamic faith itself but rather indicates skepticism and attempts to readjust the relationship between religion and politics.

However, at the same time, the perception has strengthened among some young people and activists that participatory Islamism—such as that represented by the Muslim Brotherhood—was thwarted through collusion between the military, Western powers, and domestic elites. As a result, some analyses warn that a small but dangerous trend is emerging in places such as Syria, Iraq, and the Sinai, in which certain individuals lose hope in institutional politics and peaceful reform and instead regard armed struggle as the only alternative.

Therefore, after the failure of Muslim Brotherhood–style political Islam, Arab societies appear to be searching for a new balance within a polarized landscape in which two tendencies coexist: a majority seeking to readjust the relationship between religion and politics, and a minority moving toward more extreme forms of radicalization.

4. The 2026 U.S. SDGT Designation: Isolation Under International Sanctions

1) Targets and Legal-Political Meaning of the SDGT Designation

On January 13, 2026, the U.S. Department of State and the Treasury Department announced that, for the first time, they had incorporated the Muslim Brotherhood branches in Egypt, Jordan, and Lebanon into the terrorism sanctions framework (Homeland Security Today, 2026). The Lebanese Muslim Brotherhood (al-Jamaa al-Islamiyah) was designated both as a Foreign Terrorist Organization (FTO) and as a Specially Designated Global Terrorist (SDGT), while the Egyptian and Jordanian branches were designated solely as SDGTs. The FTO system has been applied to more than 70 organizations since its introduction in 1997, and the SDGT system (E.O. 13224) has been applied to more than 1,0 00 individuals and entities since 2001, functioning as a key instrument of international counter-terrorism sanctions (U.S. Treasury/OFAC, 2026). The U.S. government stated that the basis for this designation was that these branches assisted Hamas with financing, organizational support, and the recruitment of fighters, describing the move as the "first step in ongoing efforts" targeting threats associated with the Brotherhood under President Trump's 2025 executive order (Schanzer & Wahba, 2026). This decision has been interpreted as symbolizing a hardline policy shift by the United States: by incorporating some Brotherhood branches—previously treated as Islamist political movements—into the same global terrorism sanctions system as al-Qaeda and ISIS, the U.S. is treating their alleged terrorist connections themselves as the target of sanctions (Schanzer & Wahba, 2026).

An SDGT designation constitutes a strong financial and legal sanction targeting the funding flows and organizational operations upon which Brotherhood branches depend. Once listed by the U.S. Treasury's Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC), any assets or property interests of the designated individuals or entities within the United States or under U.S.

jurisdiction are automatically frozen, and all transactions between them and U.S. persons or financial institutions are prohibited. In addition, third-country financial institutions that conduct transactions with SDGT-designated entities risk becoming targets of U.S. sanctions themselves, which usually leads international banks to sever relations with them. In this sense, the SDGT designation of the Egyptian, Jordanian, and Lebanese branches is likely to exert pressure that weakens the entire financial and operational ecosystem through which the Brotherhood network has been maintained via overseas donations, charitable organizations, companies, and informal financial networks.

2) Difference from Domestic Repression in the Arab World: From Internal Suppression to External Blockade

Since the 2013 coup, Arab states including Egypt have designated the Brotherhood as a "terrorist organization" and suppressed it through domestic security and criminal measures such as arrests and trials of leaders, death sentences, closure of offices, freezing of assets, and harsh crackdowns on protests (Awad, 2019). However, these measures often remained internal repression within each country, and the Brotherhood was able to maintain some room for activity through overseas branches, exile networks, and international charitable organizations (al-Anani, 2023).

In contrast, the United States' 2026 SDGT designation can be understood as an attempt to block Brotherhood branches and their affiliated networks from outside national borders by using the sanctions authority of the United States, which controls the world's largest settlement currency and financial hub. Therefore, it opens a new phase that significantly narrows the international support upon which the model of participatory Islamism relied.

However, scholars and policy analysts also warn that while SDGT and FTO designations pressure the financial and organizational ecosystem of Brotherhood branches, they may simultaneously reinforce among supporters of political Islam and sympathetic groups the perception that the Western or Christian world is criminalizing Islamism as a whole, potentially increasing feelings of victimization and the risk of radicalization. In this sense, the United States' hardline sanctions not only reduce the Brotherhood's ecosystem but may also contain

the possibility of encouraging some individuals or groups to move in more violent and closed directions.

5. Conclusion: Confusion After Political Islam and the Response of the Global Church

The trajectory of the Muslim Brotherhood encapsulates the possibilities and limitations that modern Arab Islamism has expe rienced. The "comprehensive Islam" envisioned by al-Banna presented a model of participatory Islamism, and the Brotherhood once rose to the point of functioning as a "state alternative" that substituted for the welfare and representative functions of the state. However, the 2013 Egyptian coup revealed that this model failed to resolve structural tensions with existing power elites—such as the military, judiciary, and bureaucracy—and did not sufficiently secure governing capacity or social trust. With the 2026 U.S. SDGT designation incorporating some Brotherhood branches into the global terrorism sanctions system, the movement now faces unprecedented pressure and isolation not only domestically but also within international financial and diplomatic networks. In this context, the political project of comprehensively restructuring the state and society through "comprehensive Islam" appears, at least in the Brotherhood-style model, to have reached serious limits.

However, the crisis of political Islam does not mean the end of Islam itself. Public opinion surveys and field research indicate that many Arab young people are experiencing deep distrust and confusion toward political parties, the state, and religious institutions alike, caught between the failure of political Islam and the return of authoritarianism. At the same time, polarization is occurring: on the one hand, there are demands to readjust the public role of religion; on the other hand, there is movement toward more radical politicization of religion.

In this context, the global church should not triumphantly consume the retreat of political Islam or identify itself with particular regimes or political camps. Rather, it should stand as a community of service that accompanies the many who have been wounded by violence, failed revolutions, and economic crises. It should present a model of non-violent and humble faith between Islamism and secularism, listen to and comfort the anger and questions

produced by the failure of political Islam, and move toward sharing the gospel not as another political project but as a testimony to the presence of God who is with people in their suffering.

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