



By: *Ferry Biedermann*

# Goodbye rollercoaster 2024, hello to a terrifying 2025



In 2025 the world will enter a period of mortal danger, with an increased risk of major conflagration and specific threats to Western-type liberal democracy, a rules-based international order and human rights and liberties in general.

The risks are spread globally, on which more later, but the main one is the new Trump administration in the US that will take over on 20 January. It brings with it promises of radical action both at home and abroad, from the war in Ukraine and trade tariffs to firing thousands of civil servants and initiating mass deportations.

Despite the long line of world leaders and business chiefs making the pilgrimage to Mar-a-Lago to kiss his ring in an effort to stave off the worst, and a stunned paralysis in most of the world, all indications are that Trump's second coming will be much worse than even the first time around.

There are both external and internal reasons for this. It's an indication of the gravity of the situation that it makes sense here to quote Trump's former national security advisor, John Bolton. This inveterate neocon **says** he is worried by Trump's lack of abilities, especially because, "The world is more dangerous than when he was president before."

It doesn't help either that this second administration supposedly has learned the lesson from the first and Trump and his cartoon-villain-like team will this time devise ways not to be blocked by whatever imagined opponents they conjure, be it the blob, the deep state or mere judicial constraint.

## Disunity, chaos and cluelessness

Not that thorough preparation and a well-oiled machine were much in evidence in the presidential transition period. The camp of the incoming criminal-in-chief showed characteristic disunity, chaos and cluelessness on messaging, appointments and organisation.

This could mean a much more dangerous combination of the same lurching and disjointed US government as last time around with an even greater determination to root out its perceived enemies and introduce radical change.

## The first Trump administration's measures regularly faced setbacks in the courts and there's no reason to believe this time will be different

The first Trump administration's measures regularly faced setbacks in the courts and there's no reason to believe this time will be different. What could change is the extra-judicial lengths to which the new administration might be willing to go to circumvent its constraints.

That is possibly the unifying feature of the coalition that Trump has built around himself and that **includes** Elon Musk: they believe that they should be allowed to operate unhindered and be free to carry out whatever scheme they wish, be it political, commercial or otherwise, without having to answer to anyone. Trump mistakenly believes that this is what an electoral mandate means and Musk thinks that it is what his billions mean.

## Might makes right

Apart from the new administration's destabilising ideas on current international questions, from Ukraine to the Middle East, to trade, international organisations and more, the world is bound to feel the consequences of the US being led by people who openly espouse the motto that might makes right. This is also the type of leader that Trump gravitates towards internationally.

The world is not only a more dangerous place during this second Trump presidency, it has also become clear that Western democracy is under attack both from without and within.

And while democracy has proved resilient in many places, this has also shown the ease with which it can be undermined, take two recent cases: Romania and South Korea.

In both cases, democracy could have easily become disrupted, in Romania's case by blatant outside, i.e. Russian, interference. In the case of South Korea by its own internal reactionary elite.

### Romania's case highlights the ongoing campaigns by authoritarian regimes, such as Russia's, to undermine democracies

In Romania, the country's institutions staved off the immediate **challenge** by annulling the results of the first round of presidential elections. In South Korea, both popular and parliamentary resistance saved the day.

Romania's case highlights the ongoing campaigns by authoritarian regimes, such as Russia's, to undermine democracies. It also raises questions about social media and its apparent ability to mass-influence outcomes.

The question is whether the surprise win by Romania's pro-Russian, far-right Calin Georgescu out of nowhere, after a massive last-minute TikTok campaign, is specific to the Romanian electorate or whether this type of influencing is happening, to one degree or another, across the world?

## Internal threats to democracy

While Romania, as a young democracy and with specific economic and societal challenges might be a bit of an outlier, there is no reason to think it's that different from most other democracies at this moment. Such massive intervention might take more subtle forms in other places but is bound to occur. It currently forms one of the main challenges to democratic stability.

The South Korean **near-coup** by the country's president with the aid of his old-boys-network shows what can happen when authoritarian-minded elected rulers attempt a power grab. In many ways, South Korea's Yoon Suk-yeol is not that different from Trump, Hungary's Viktor Orbán or Turkey's Recep Erdoğan.

Such internal threats to democracy, or at least a hollowing out of it, whether in combination with outside interference or not, represents another clear challenge in the coming year and after.

All of this comes at a time when the international order is creaking, possibly tottering, and Europe is in disarray to a degree not seen since the 1960s. Germany might stabilise after elections in February but a nasty surprise from the far-right, Musk-supported AfD should not be entirely ruled out.

### Immigration is likely to remain the main electoral, political and propagandistic field of contention, both in Europe and the US

In any case, France is bound to **remain** in flux to one degree or another, at least until the end of Emmanuel Macron's term in 2027. The UK will remain stubbornly outside the EU and despite a stable Labour majority, is set for a wobbly Starmer rule, unless he and his party manage to radically change the narrative.

Europe might have to make extraordinary offers to support Ukraine if Trump pulls US aid, even partially. It is still not unthinkable that the continent will step up but as it does so, this is bound to exacerbate a whole suite of socio-economic and political tensions.

Immigration is likely to remain the main electoral, political and propagandistic field of contention, both in Europe and the US. Many resources will continue to be wasted on it, and the debate as well as the increasingly draconian measures employed will further damage democracies from within.

## The Palestinian issue will not go away

There's a whole range of other flashpoints around the world that promise not to go away, from Taiwan and the South China Sea to Sudan, competition for resources in Africa and Latin America, plus many others that can all spin even more wildly out of control the coming year.

But most immediately, attention should be focussed on what's happening in the Middle East, a region that has shown time and again that it will throw up globally destabilising developments, especially at times when it seems headed for stability and when world powers would like to disengage.



*The Palestinian issue will not go away and is in fact bound to gravely damage Israel's interests, including through the persistence of accusations of genocide in Gaza - Benjamin Netanyahu*

Any semblance of a new stability through an Israeli-imposed or -steered settlement is bound to be a short-lived illusion. The Palestinian issue will not go away and is in fact bound to gravely damage Israel's interests, including through the persistence of accusations of genocide in Gaza.

But regionally too, and not immediately or even indirectly caused by Israel, there are so many challenges to stability that further upheaval is bound to happen, with all its attendant consequences for migration, oil prices, supply routes etc.

Developments in Syria will play a large part in

determining the future stability of the region, the position of Iran is in flux and the country's response as well as its internal stability can be crucial the coming year. Turkey and Saudi Arabia both pursue their own agendas, but their own stability cannot be taken for granted either. Iraq is still not stable and can be affected by all of this, as can Yemen.

Even further afield, in North Africa, developments in the Middle East can have unforeseen consequences, such as the redeployment of Russian troops from Syria to Libya.

One hundred years ago, in 1925, Mussolini declared himself dictator in Italy and Hitler published Mein Kampf. In 2025 we know what came shortly after. Let's hope that people 100 years from now will not have to say the same.