



By: Tomorrow's Affairs Staff

G20 without America – The beginning of real fragmentation of the global economy



This month's **G20 summit** in Johannesburg was meant to be historic – the first on the African continent, symbolic proof that global politics is no longer confined to Washington, Brussels and Beijing.

Instead, it became the moment when the world's largest economy chose to boycott the event.

On 7 November, Donald Trump announced that no US official would attend the **G20 summit** in South Africa, arguing that "the host country does not respect basic human rights."

The American president's decision was not sudden, but it is unexpected and rare in terms of its political significance in modern international relations.

Trump accused the South African government of tolerating attacks on white farmers and of implementing discrimination through land reform policies.

That narrative has appeared in right-wing American and European media for years, but it has no basis in fact.

According to South African police, the number of murders and attacks on farmers does not differ from the general rate of violence in the country, and claims of "genocide against whites" have never been confirmed by the United Nations or any relevant international organisation.

A moment of international affirmation

For South Africa, this year's G20 presidency should have been a moment of international affirmation.

President **Cyril Ramaphosa**, a former trade union leader and long-standing member of the African National Congress, viewed the summit in Johannesburg as an opportunity to demonstrate that countries of the global south are no longer mere extras in international

institutions but equal participants in shaping the global economy.

The **key themes** set by his government – solidarity, equal access to markets, and a fairer distribution of the benefits of globalisation – were intended to define the African year of the G20.

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Instead, South Africa faces a US boycott and an open challenge to its ability to lead a multilateral forum that is meant to symbolise **balance** between developed and emerging economies.

Trump's move also has a domestic dimension. The decision to boycott fits into his **political narrative** of "defending American values against false international institutions."

During his first term, he withdrew the US from **UNESCO** and the World Health Organization, boycotted the Paris Agreement, blocked appointments in the World Trade Organization, and repeatedly questioned membership in NATO.

The G20, a forum that emerged after the 2008 financial crisis as a symbol of global economic consensus, is now becoming a new target.

Serious consequences

The message from Washington is clear: if the international forum does not serve American interests, it does not merit **American participation**.

Such an approach has its own domestic political logic, but it carries serious consequences.

Without the United States, the G20 loses real influence. Decisions made in Johannesburg will have limited impact, as the world's largest economy will not support them.

Precisely because the US has shaped the rules of the global financial system for decades and has been the main guarantor of its credibility, its withdrawal does not create balance but a vacuum.

The South African government dismissed the **US accusations** as baseless. President Cyril Ramaphosa stated that there is no persecution of white citizens in the country and that the land reform policy is based on constitutional principles and subject to judicial review.

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The reform, which Trump is using as an argument for the boycott, aims to correct inequalities created during apartheid, when the vast majority of land was owned by a small number of white estates.

The proposal to allow the confiscation of unused land without compensation is still under debate in parliament and applies only to exceptional cases.

The government emphasises that this is not about revenge politics but about completing the process of social transition that has been ongoing since 1994.

From an American perspective, however, it fits into a broader narrative of "hostile globalism."

Trump is reverting to the old pattern of treating national interest as the sole measure of international engagement.

His decision to withdraw American participation entirely from the Johannesburg summit, including Vice President J.D. Vance, who was to lead the delegation, is another episode in his campaign to distance himself

from multilateralism.

Political calculation

Behind this lies political calculation. Trump's alliance with the right in the US, Britain, and Europe has for years been based on the myth of an "**endangered white civilisation**."

South Africa plays a symbolic role in this narrative – a country where whites lost political power and, according to that logic, became victims.

The boycott of the G20, although justified on moral grounds, is actually a message to that constituency.

Other G20 members are now debating for the first time without the presence of the world's largest economy

America's absence from the Johannesburg summit changes its political framework. Other G20 members are now debating for the first time without the presence of the world's largest economy.

China has confirmed its leader's attendance and is using the opportunity to strengthen its role as the main representative of developing countries.

India and Brazil are seeking to present themselves as independent actors not reliant on either Washington or Beijing.

According to a Kremlin statement, Russia will be represented by a high-level delegation, while President Vladimir Putin will remain in Moscow.

The European Union is trying to maintain influence and continuity, aware that without the United States, the G20 loses political power and the ability to make binding decisions.

Can the global economy function without America at its centre?

Since its establishment, the G20 has been a forum where differences between leading countries were resolved through agreement, not demonstrative withdrawals.

The American boycott of this forum carries significance beyond a single summit. It demonstrates that the United States no longer feels compelled to participate in the structures it created, which for decades served as the foundation of international cooperation and economic stability.



It is no longer a world without America, but a world that must begin to get used to making decisions without it

South Africa views this as evidence of double standards. Ramaphosa noted that the US had not boycotted summits hosted by countries with far more serious human rights issues.

His cabinet makes no secret of its belief that the American decision is a political message aimed at the domestic electorate, rather than a genuine concern for the situation in the country.

European governments are observing the American boycott with concern. They still rely on American economic and political support, but confidence in Washington's reliability is diminishing.

The decision to disregard the G20 is seen as a signal that the United States is no longer committed to **long-term participation** in joint global mechanisms.

This raises the question of how the management of global crises will look in the coming years if the most powerful nation abandons the forums it has shaped and if the West loses its united voice towards the rest of the world.

The South African summit now becomes a test: can the global economy function without America at its centre, even symbolically?

The issue extends far beyond local circumstances and the media controversy surrounding Trump's statements.

It reflects a new reality – a world in which the US no longer guarantees the global order but instead deliberately leaves it to others to reshape according to their own rules.

When the summit concludes, the content of the joint communiqué will not be what is remembered.

The key image will be the absence of the American delegation from the meeting, conceived as the main table of the world economy.

For the first time, the G20 was held without the country that has been its driving force and mainstay for decades. It is no longer a world without America, but a world that must begin to get used to making decisions without it.