



#134 Global Developments Worth Watching

October 15–21, 2026

This week in a brief

This week brought several attempts to contain crises that kept escalating all the same. The diplomatic track on Ukraine is moving again, even as the fighting, and the friction between Washington and Kyiv, have intensified. A broader regional security architecture is taking shape around Saudi Arabia, while the Houthis widen the war inside Yemen and Iran keeps up the pressure in the Strait of Hormuz. China, for its part, is adding technological know-how to its geo-economic toolkit, and across Europe a series of distinct protest movements points to mounting pressure on governments and institutions.



Geopolitical Dynamics

From Oslo to St. Petersburg, Russia agrees to resume trilateral talks: Witkoff met Zelensky and European and NATO representatives in Oslo, then briefed Putin on the outcome in St. Petersburg the following day. The Kremlin said Russia is ready in principle to resume US–Russia–Ukraine talks at the technical level, with the next round expected around November 10, most likely in Abu Dhabi. Moscow wants the agenda to focus from the outset on post-war security arrangements. On the ground, Ukraine resumed strikes on Russian refineries on October 15, accusing Moscow of continuing to target its power grid, and Russia answered with a large-scale drone assault on Ukraine's energy infrastructure.

Iran plays for time with Washington: Indirect contacts between Tehran and Washington continue through Pakistani mediation. Iran is making any return to formal talks conditional on the lifting of sanctions and of the naval blockade of its ports, while bracing for the possibility of renewed strikes. Hegseth made an unannounced visit to the region, where he met US troops and discussed Iran with Netanyahu.

A defence bloc takes shape around Saudi Arabia: Britain announced that its Typhoon jets will help defend Saudi airspace against Houthi missiles and drones, though for now without authority to strike targets in Yemen. Turkey's government, meanwhile, submitted the Mecca Defence Pact with Saudi Arabia and Pakistan to parliament for ratification; under the pact, an attack on one is an attack on all three. In Egypt, a vote on a mandate that would allow President el-Sisi to assist in Saudi Arabia's defence, should Riyadh request it, has been postponed to October 26.



Security and Threats

The Houthis take the war deeper into Yemen: The Houthis fired five ballistic missiles at the presidential palace in Aden, killing five people. Four days later, three missiles struck a training camp in Shabwa province, killing 73 recruits and wounding more than 200. Attacks on Saudi Arabia continue. The key shift is that the Houthis are once again taking the fight to their rivals in southern Yemen, not just to Saudi Arabia and targets linked to the Red Sea.

Iran keeps wearing down shipping in Hormuz: On October 14, a container ship and a bulk carrier sank near the strait after being hit by missiles. Three days later, the IRGC claimed that two tankers had struck mines, though Gulf maritime security sources said there was no evidence to support this. Iran also warned that any vessel switching off its identification and navigation systems would be treated as hostile. Even without a full closure of the strait, the uncertainty continues to drive up risk for regional shipping.

More than 150 killed in a drone strike in Abyei: On October 19, drones struck a market and a fuel depot in Abyei, the area contested by Sudan and South Sudan, killing at least 153 people. Local authorities blamed the Sudanese army, which said it had targeted fuel tankers bound for the Rapid Support Forces. South Sudan summoned Sudan's ambassador in protest.

Bulgaria seeks NATO reinforcements in the Black Sea: Following the attacks on merchant vessels, Sofia requested fighter jets, air-defence missiles and counter-drone systems. NATO said it will step up its presence over the Black Sea with patrol aircraft, radars and drones, but has so far stopped short of committing fighter jets.



Economy, Technology and Trade

China adds technological know-how to its pressure toolkit: Beijing published a draft expanding its list of technologies that are banned or restricted for export. The list covers 40 technologies across AI, solar energy and biomedicine, including large models, AI agents and solar-panel manufacturing. Having already leveraged rare earths, China is now extending its controls from raw materials to know-how and intellectual property. Taiwan, for its part, is tightening restrictions on exports of advanced chips and AI servers to China and broadening criminal liability for unlicensed exports.

Chinese exports surge as growth beats expectations: China's economy grew 4.5% in the third quarter, slightly ahead of forecasts, as September exports jumped 36% year on year. The trade surplus for the first nine months reached roughly \$940 billion. The export boom is propping up the Chinese economy, but it is also adding to pressure in Europe and the United States to expand protection for domestic industries.



Crises and Domestic Politics

Violent protests spread across Europe: In France, protests over the cost of living, fuel prices and the state of the education system escalated into widespread riots on October 17, with more than 2,400 arrests and public buildings set alight. Night-time curfews were imposed in parts of Paris and Lyon. In Italy, the government approved the deployment of 500 troops to Milan after rioting and looting. In Albania, students joined protests against Prime Minister Rama, and in Portugal demonstrators set up protest camps over soaring housing costs. These movements have distinct, local causes and do not amount to a single European wave, but together they reflect growing strain over the cost of living, public services and trust in institutions.

Alberta votes to stay in Canada: In the October 19 referendum, roughly three in four voters in the province backed remaining in Canada, while only about a quarter supported moving toward a binding vote on independence.

“Surely goodness and mercy shall follow” (Psalm 23).

The **Geopolitics Lab** Team