

On the Coexistence of Legal Deglobalization and Illegal Globalization

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The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic sparked the perception that globalization had reached its limits, and a new era of deglobalization had begun (e.g., El-Erian, 2020). This perception was fueled, in a large part, by the disruption of global supply chains (e.g., Marin, 2021).

The outbreak of war in Ukraine in February 2022, coupled with the introduction of Western economic sanctions against the aggressor, Russia, reinforced the notion of globalization’s “demise” (e.g., Jun, 2022). Today, the study of challenges associated with the deglobalization process has become increasingly relevant (Li, 2026).

It should be acknowledged that the U.S.–China trade conflict, which began during President Donald Trump’s first term and escalated under President Joe Biden, served as an early trigger for such perceptions of deglobalization (Rodrik, 2022b).

In reality, globalization, in its broader sense, cannot in principle be stopped, as evidenced by the persistence of illegal globalization (Papava, 2022b), which relies on modern telecommunications and transport systems. For example, despite coordinated efforts by Interpol and national governments to combat drug trafficking, such illicit networks remain.

This illustrates the enduring nature of illegal globalization, whose persistence lies in the fact that political globalization often lags behind economic globalization (Kołodko, 2022). Consequently, political measures against illegal globalization often fail to achieve their intended outcomes. It is precisely this resilience that creates fertile ground for Moscow to identify and exploit mechanisms to circumvent the economic sanctions imposed by the West (Papava, 2023).

Since economic globalization, including its illegal sector, cannot in principle be fully halted, it follows that so-called “hyperglobalization” (Rodrik, 2022a), as a form of globalization, has effectively ended. In its place, we observe a shift toward “confrontational globalization,” in which economic security assumes growing importance (Papava, 2022a).

Donald Trump’s use of tariffs in international trade serves two purposes: the first is to bring manufacturing industries back to the United States in the context of the MAGA (“Make America Great Again”) agenda, and the second is to penalize countries that resist Washington’s political or economic objectives. However, the theoretical justification for such tariffs is weak (Gindler, 2026), and empirical evidence suggests that they have not reliably achieved their intended goals (Lim, 2026). Nevertheless, despite the failures of Washington’s new tariff policy (Wolff, 2026), a positive outcome is seen in the diversification of US export markets (Zhou, 2026).

The US Supreme Court’s ruling against tariffs imposed under the International Emergency Economic Powers Act (Zirpoli, 2026), and President Trump’s subsequent attacks on the justices, illustrate how Washington may be turning into a source of what some scholars call “geopolitical entropy” (Khalid, 2026). Despite the theoretical goal of inshoring, Trump’s tariff policy does not shield the United States from the challenges posed by illegal globalization (Papava, 2025).

It is clear that Washington’s “tariff war” is leading to the fragmentation of the legal global economy, a process that can be understood as legal deglobalization. While such measures may slightly complicate illicit economic flows through tightened border controls, they are incapable of eradicating them altogether.

Thus, we observe the simultaneous coexistence of legal deglobalization and illegal globalization. These two phenomena constitute the two major “sectors” that make up contemporary confrontational globalization.

In comparing legal deglobalization and illegal globalization, one can confidently state that legal deglobalization is largely an artificially-induced process, driven by policies such as trade tariffs, whereas illegal globalization emerges from natural economic forces, albeit outside the law.

Consequently, illegal globalization is inherently more persistent, while legal deglobalization can be reversed through political decision-making.

In conclusion, the coexistence of legal deglobalization and illegal globalization intensifies the confrontational nature of modern globalization, signaling a more severe and complex stage of confrontational globalization.

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