



FUTURE TAKE
SHARP INSIGHT. FUTURE FOCUS

The Middle Power Headway

Cultivating Strategic Autonomy by 2035



Future Take Desk

CSGEF Research Unit

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FUTURE TAKE
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The Middle Power Headway: Cultivating Strategic Autonomy by 2035

CSGEF Research Unit

15 May 2026



PRESENT SIGNAL:

Middle powers are pursuing greater strategic autonomy by strengthening indigenous defense capabilities, diversifying partnerships, and adopting more proactive regional roles. This will be the trajectory by 2035, where strategic autonomy becomes institutionalized, albeit there is evidence that it reaches that earlier.

FUTURE TRAJECTORY & IMPLICATIONS

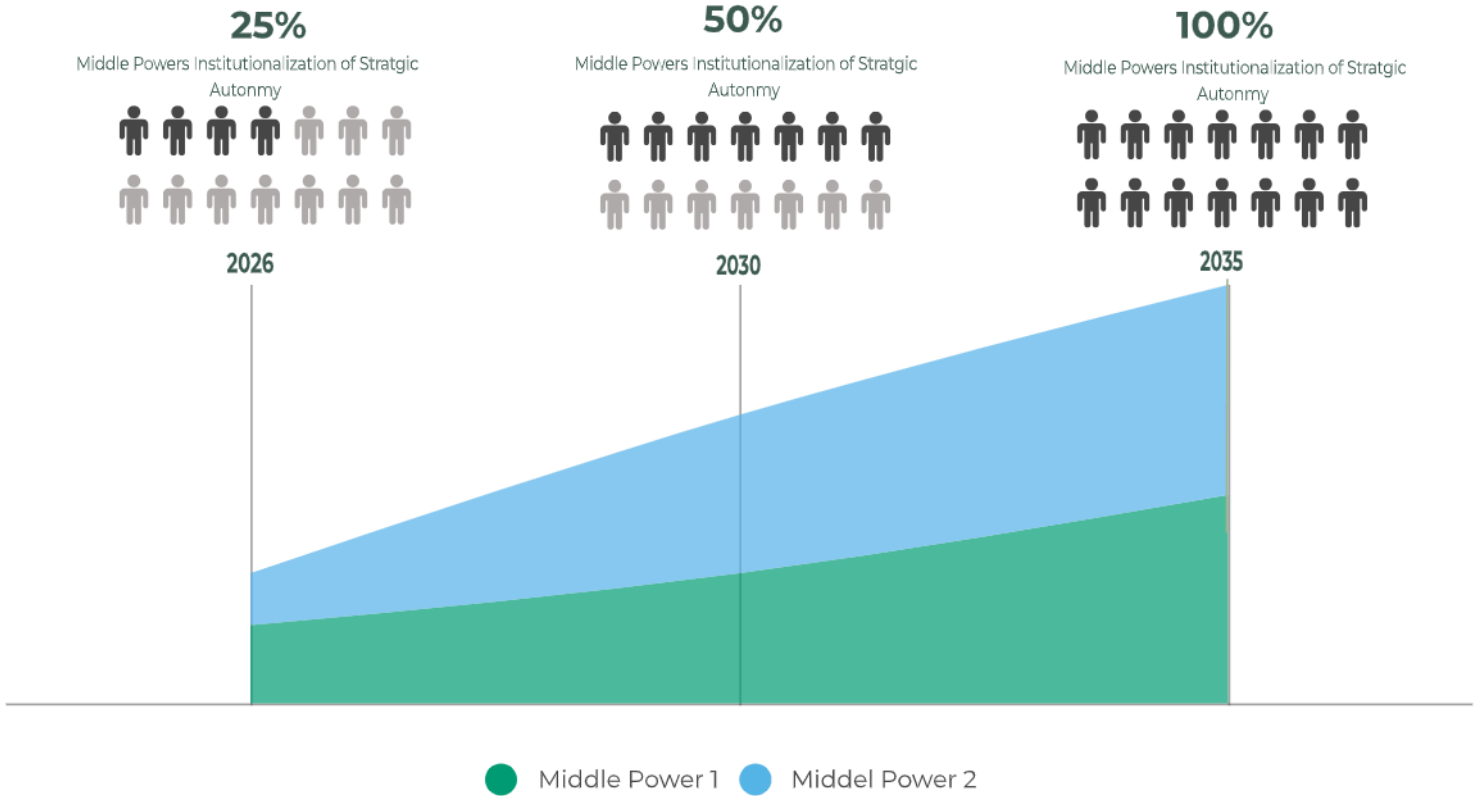
There are four plausible scenarios by 2035 for "internally" institutionalizing strategic autonomy for a middle power.

First, the full institutionalization of strategic autonomy by middle powers. In such a scenario, middle powers fully institutionalize strategic autonomy across all domestic governance layers. The second scenario is defensive institutionalization, in which the middle power institutionalizes strategic autonomy only at the economic and technological levels. The third scenario is Partner Institutionalization, in which middle powers mostly institutionalize strategic autonomy while remaining a supporting partner of a larger/anchoring power. The fourth scenario is that institutionalization becomes a resilient bastion. In such a case, the Middle Power pursues strategic autonomy as a survival strategy rather than a choice, and it is institutionalized across all layers of the Middle Power's government.



The Middle Power Headway (Context & Trajectory)

This will be the trajectory by 2035, where strategic autonomy becomes institutionalized, although there is evidence that it reaches that earlier.

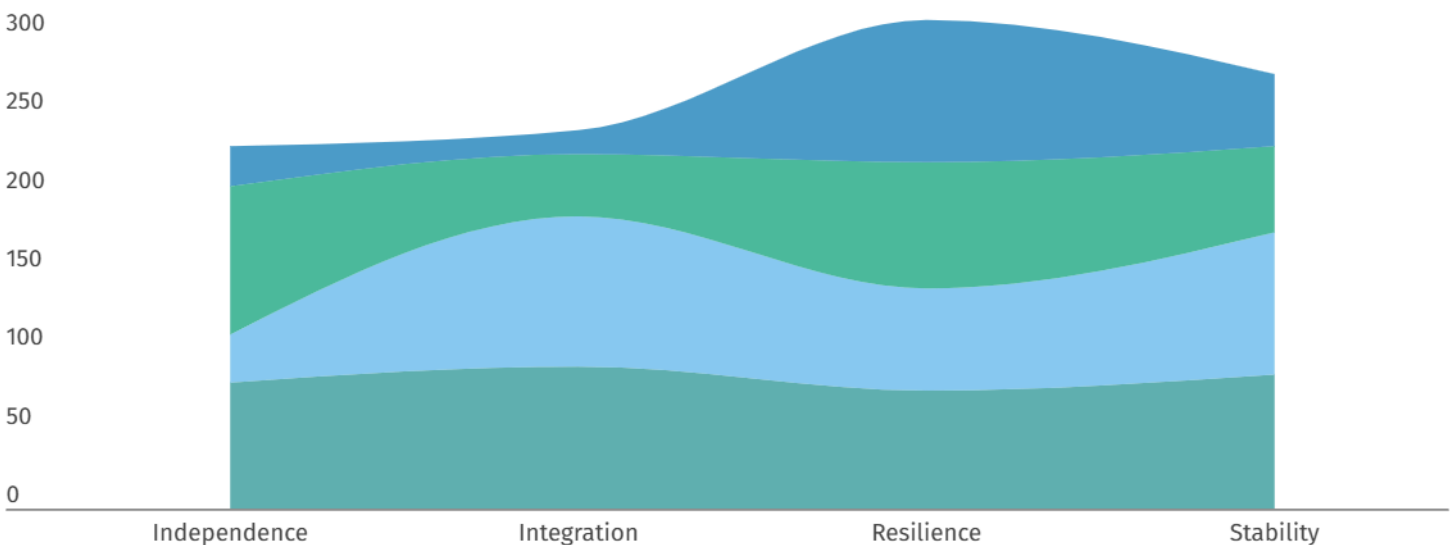


In the hypothetical graph above, middle power 1 and middle power 2 have currently achieved 25% institutionalization of strategic autonomy. By 2030, they will achieve 50%, and by the end of the period, 2035, they will achieve 100% institutionalization of strategic autonomy. This will be the trajectory by 2035, where strategic autonomy becomes institutionalized, although there is evidence that it reaches that earlier.

The Four Futures Matrix

Across Independence, Integration, Resilience, and Stability, Full Institutionalization emerges as the most robust strategic posture, balancing high integration with strong stability

- Full Institutionalization
- Defensive Institutionalization
- Partner Institutionalization
- Resilient Bastion



Defensive institutionalization maximizes Integration (95) and Stability (90). Partner Institutionalization leads in Independence (95). Resilient Bastion prioritizes Resilience (90) but scores lowest elsewhere. Full Institutionalization offers balanced, high performance across all metrics, particularly strong in Integration (90) and Stability (85), representing the most robust overall strategic posture.

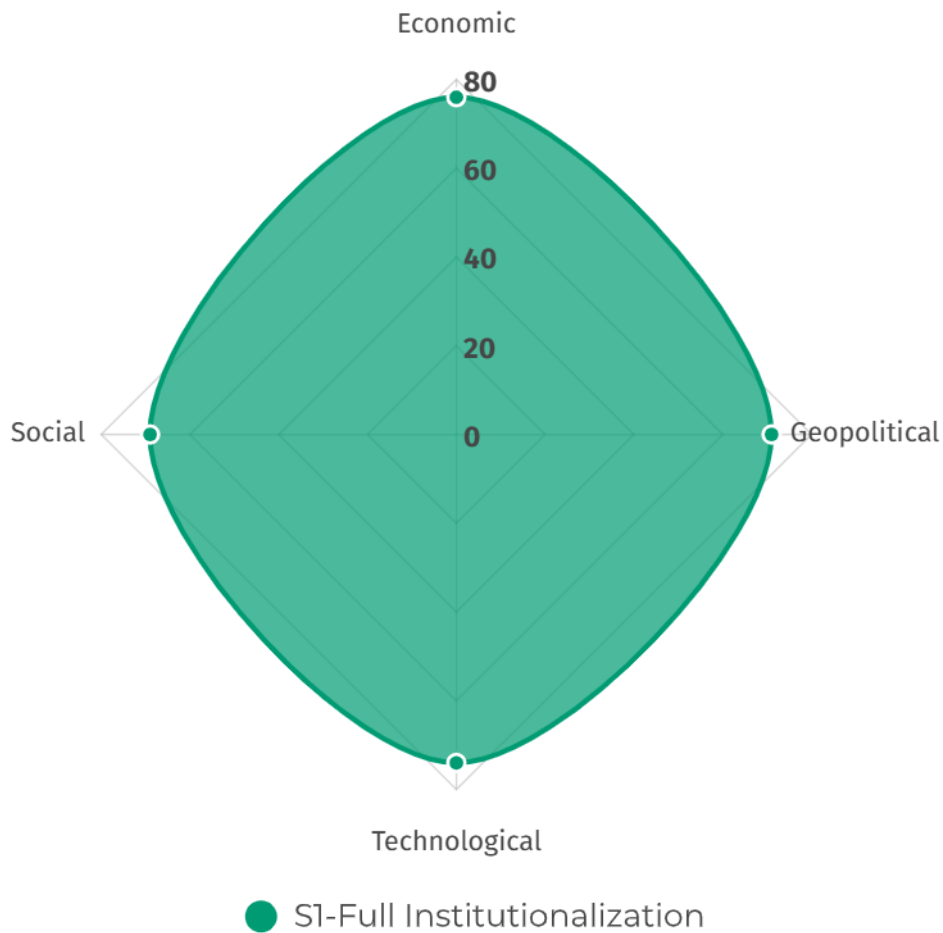


Scenario 1: Middle Power Achieves Full Institutionalization of Strategic Autonomy

In the full institutionalized scenario, the middle powers adopt a strategic autonomous economic policy in fiscal, monetary (reserve, capital accounts), growth, industrial, trade - selective supply chine- domine. The geopolitical implications of scenario 1 are that domestic-oriented geopolitical leverage will strengthen by 2035, but at the expense of increased diplomatic inflexibility and a reduced global network of alliances. By 2035, technological developments will accelerate Middle power resilience and control, but at the expense of innovation and increased interoperability barriers. At the societal level, by 2035, cultural and identity awareness, community cohesion, and locally driven unity will be strengthened at the expense of creativity and minority inclusion.

Scenario 1—Full Autonomy—Institutionalization

Full sovereignty strengthens domestic control for Middle Powers but constrains global alliance flexibility.



Full Institutionalization delivers the most balanced autonomy profile—leading in Economic (76) and Technological (74) domains—by institutionalizing sovereignty across all governance layers, but accepts moderate trade-offs in "Geopolitics Domain" alliance networks (60) and "Social Domain" social pluralism (69 avg).

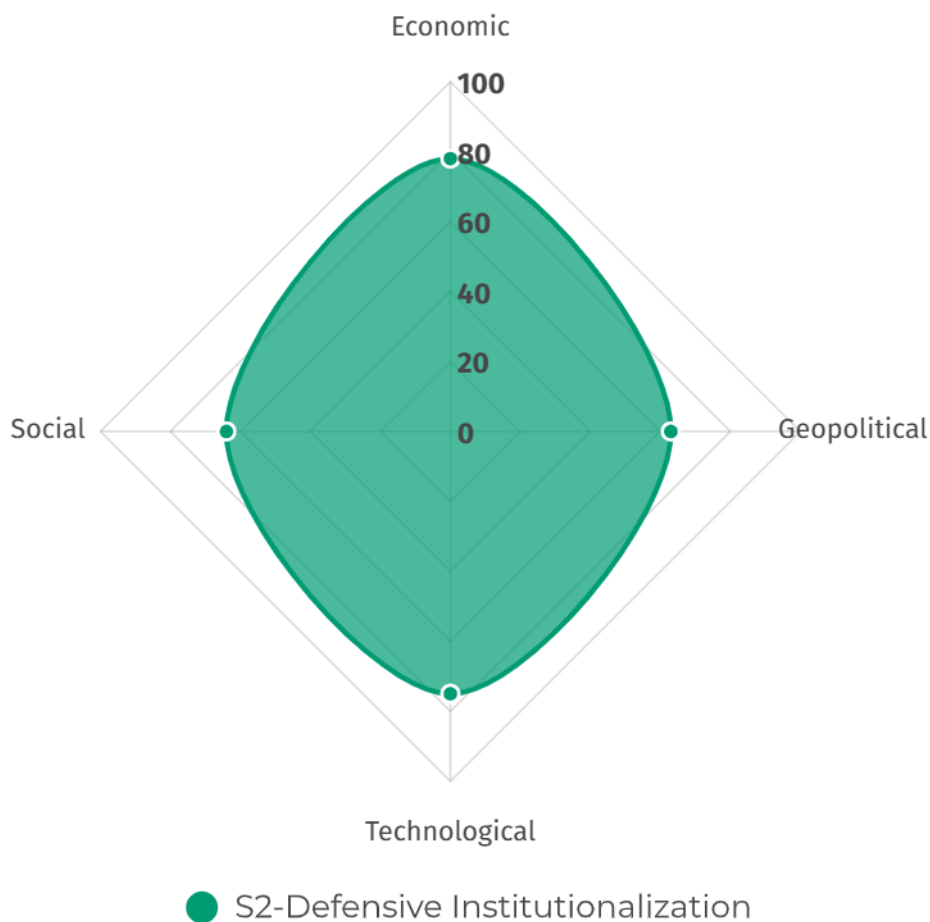


Scenario 2: Middle Power Achieves Defensive Institutionalization of Strategic Autonomy

Economically, by 2035, Defensive Institutionalization enhances supply resilience but raises costs, creates trade friction, limits liquidity, and diverts capital from growth priorities. Geopolitically, there will be a strategic focus on economic and technological geopolitics, in which influence and power will strengthen—due to issue-based coalitions—, but at the same time create conflicting foreign policy crises. From a technological point of view, it is expected that defensive institutional autonomy will increase economic and tech sovereignty by 2035, but it will also increase fragmentation. From a social perspective, it will enhance identity and privacy; however, it will limit social transformation and access to global knowledge

Senario 2: Defensive Institutionalization

Defensive Institutionalization cerat capable yet inward-looking middle power



Defensive Institutionalization achieves the highest Economic score (78) and strong Technological sovereignty (75) through focused protectionism—but pays the price in "Geopolitical Domain" due to geopolitical fragmentation (63) and in the " Social Domain" due to social stagnation (64), creating a capable yet inward-looking middle power".



Scenario 3: Middle Power Achieves Partner Institutionalization of Strategic Autonomy

Economically, market access and stability will be enhanced by the end of the period but contemporarily increasing strategic concessions to anchor power. Geopolitically, security, power, and influence will be boosted at the cost of subordinated national interests. Technologically speaking, technological capabilities will be boosted at the expense of orderly innovation priorities and subordination to the anchor power's Information Technology architecture. From a social perspective, human capital, reach, ties, & understanding, but to the loss of endogenous culture, alignment with anchor power social discourse.

Scenario 3 – Partner Institutionalization

Middle power-aligned partnerships boost capabilities but subordinate national interests to anchor power.



Partner Institutionalization achieves the strongest Geopolitical score (73) and most open Social outcomes (65) by aligning with an anchor power—but subordinates in the "Economic domain" due to fiscal autonomy (65) and in the "Social Domain " i.e. cultural cohesion (60) to partnership priorities, making it a capability-efficient but dependency-risk strategy.

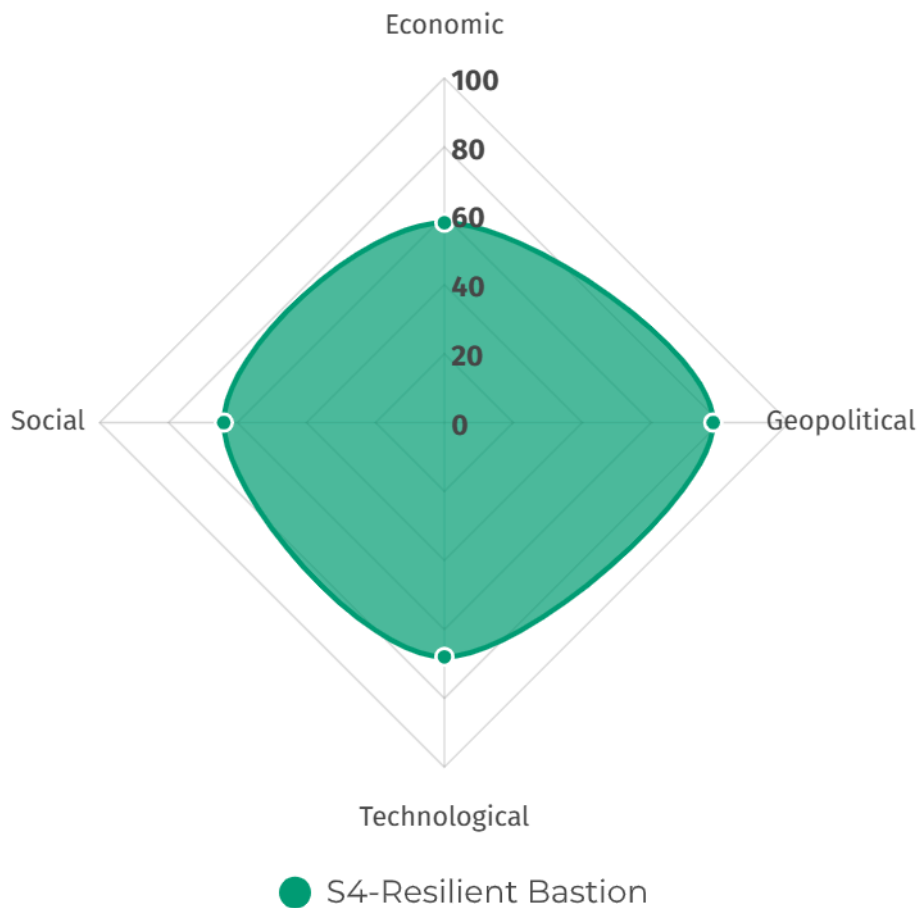


Scenario 4: Middle Power Achieves Resilient Bastion Institutionalization of Strategic Autonomy

Survival strategy is the maxim for the Resilient Bastion scenario. Also, security will be maximized but at the expense of long-term adaptive capacity, openness, and efficiency. On the economic front, the middle power import substitution strategy and capital account management will enhance pliability and resilience, but this will come at the expense of higher input costs, impeding foreign investment, and the establishment of an effective industrial and manufacturing base. In the geopolitical dynamics, the middle power will pursue/ achieve non-alignment "strategic autonomy, but in the meantime, its involvement in any collective security architecture will be restricted as the obligations of institutionalized collective security clash with the foundational purpose of non-alignment. At the technological front, the middle power will achieve a sovereign stake – independent technological infrastructure – and thus reduce foreign dependencies, but it will lag in technological innovation due to limited scale; its technological sphere is constrained by its borders, population, and geography, preventing global spillovers of innovation. On the social obverse, identity will be fortified due to the middle power state-driven unity policy, but, outdoing critical debates, creativity, ingenuity, and innovation

Scenario 4 – Resilient Bastion

Maximum sovereignty ensures middle power strategic survival, but sacrifices long-term adaptive capacity and prosperity.



The resilient bastion, dubbed the survival strategy scenario, has the most extreme shape—dramatic spikes and valleys. Its main strengths are in the "Geopolitical Domain " is geopolitical non-alignment, achieving a sub score of 90, and in the "Social Domain " in the sub-score of social cohesion, 95. The scenario's weaknesses are in the "Economic Domain" Economic efficiency (20) and technological innovation (40) in the "Technological Domain" are severely constrained. Resilient Bastion's strategic posture is "Survival mode - security at all costs."



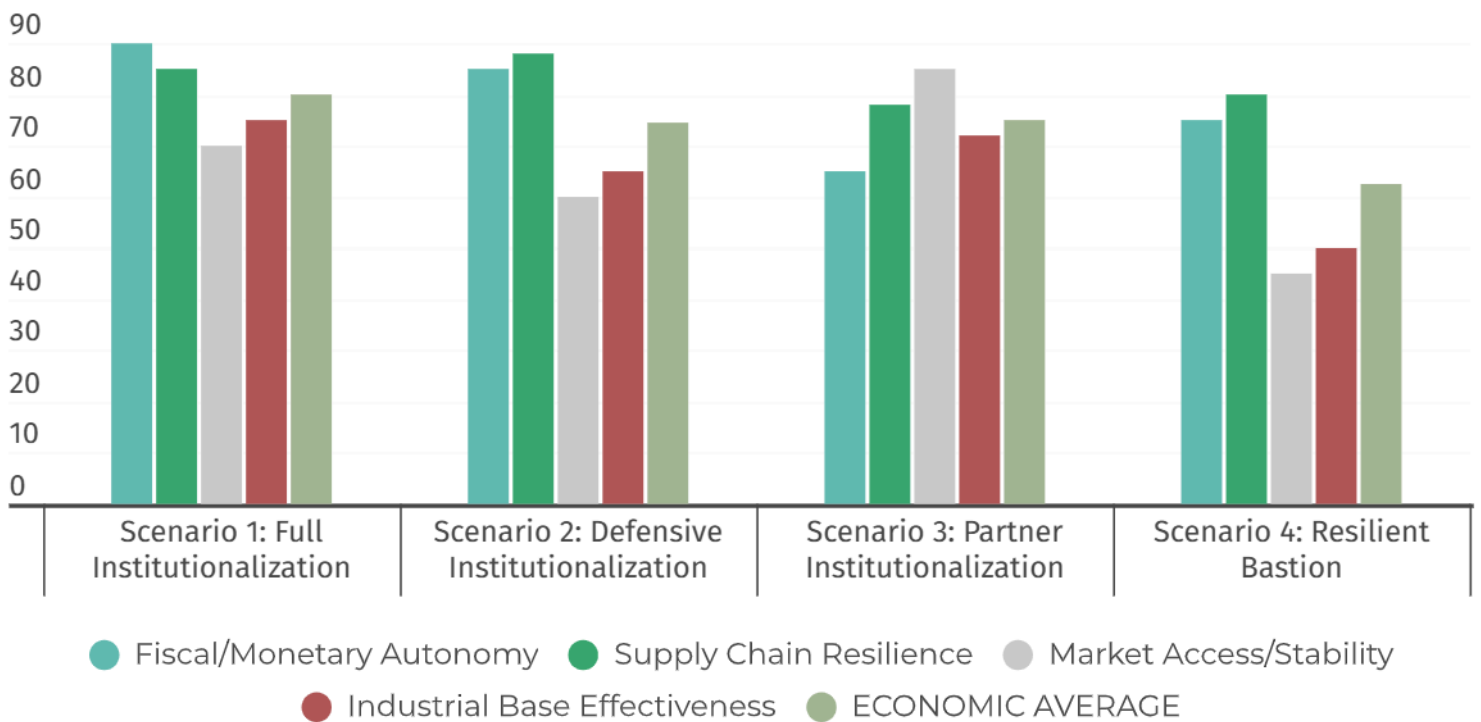
Domain-Based Scenario

Economic Domain

In the economic domain, Full Institutionalization Leads, Resilient Bastion Lags. Scenario 1 Full Institutionalization achieves highly in the economic domain. It is strongest in fiscal/monetary autonomy and supply chain resilience. The trade-off is low market access/stability (70) due to selective supply chains. The runner-up scenario is scenario 3, Partner Institutionalization. Its highest record is in market access/stability through anchor power privileges. Anticipated trade-offs are low fiscal autonomy due to strategic concessions. The weakest economic scenario is 4, Resilient Bastion, due to import substitution, which creates resilience but impairs the effectiveness of the industrial base.

Scenario Economic Performance : Full • Defensive • Partner • Bastion

Full Institutionalization Leads, Resilient Bastion Lags



Scenario 1 Full Institutionalization achieves the highest score of 80 in the economic domain. It is strongest in fiscal/monetary autonomy (90) and supply chain resilience (85). The trade-off is low market access/stability (70) due to selective supply chains. The runner-up scenario is 3 Partner Institutionalization with a Score of 75. Its highest record is in market access/stability (85) through anchor power privileges. Anticipated trade-offs are low fiscal autonomy (65) due to strategic concessions. The weakest economic scenario is 4, Resilient Bastion, with a score of 62. The reason is import substitution creates resilience but impedes industrial base effectiveness (50).

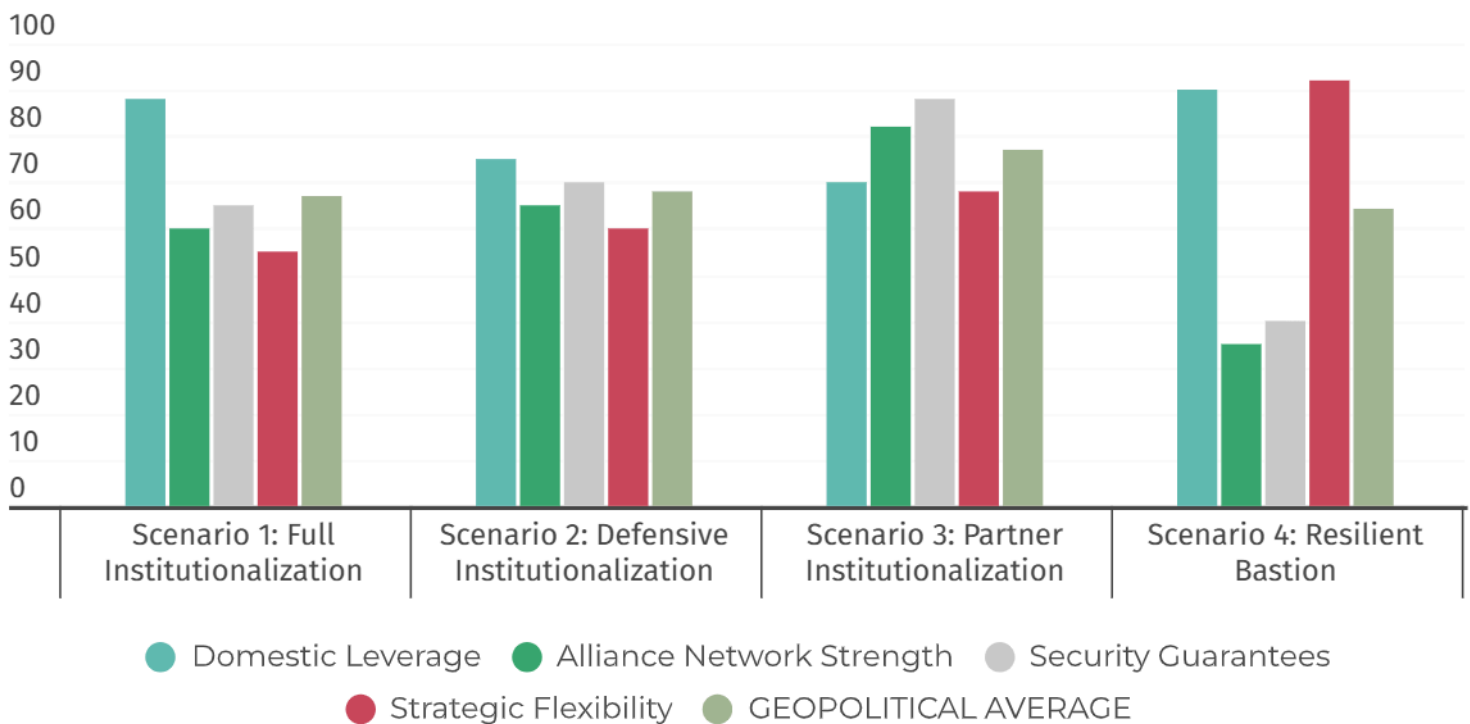


Geopolitical Domain

In the Geopolitical Domain Partner Institutionalization Leads, Resilient Bastion Lags. Scenario 3, Partner Institutionalization is a winner. Its forte lies in a strong alliance network and in security guarantees. The trade-off involves subordinating national interests due to limited strategic flexibility. The runner-up scenario is Scenario 2: Defensive Institutionalization. Its highest record is in Domestic Leverage, particularly balanced issue-based coalition influence. Anticipated trade-offs include conflicting foreign policy crises due to a narrow strategic focus. The weakest economic scenario is 4, Resilient Bastion, caused by non-alignment. Non-alignment maximizes freedom but eliminates collective security benefits. Also, there is extreme polarization and a trade-off, which delivers peak strategic flexibility while producing the weakest alliance network.

Scenario Geopolitical Performance: Full • Defensive • Partner • Bastion

Partner Institutionalization Leads, Resilient Bastion Lags



In the Geopolitical Domain Scenario 3, Partner Institutionalization is a winner with a score of 77. It is strongest in the strongest alliance network (82) and in security guarantees (88). The trade-off involves subordinating national interests because of limited strategic flexibility (68). The runner-up scenario is Scenario 2: Defensive Institutionalization, with a score of 68. Its highest record is in Domestic Leverage (75), i.e., balanced issue-based coalition influence. Anticipated trade-offs include conflicting foreign policy crises due to a narrow strategic focus. The weakest economic scenario is 4, Resilient Bastion, with a score of 64.25. Low scores are due to non-alignment. Non-alignment maximizes freedom but eliminates collective security benefits. Also, there is extreme polarization and trade-off, which delivers peak strategic flexibility (92) while producing the weakest alliance network (35), as well as

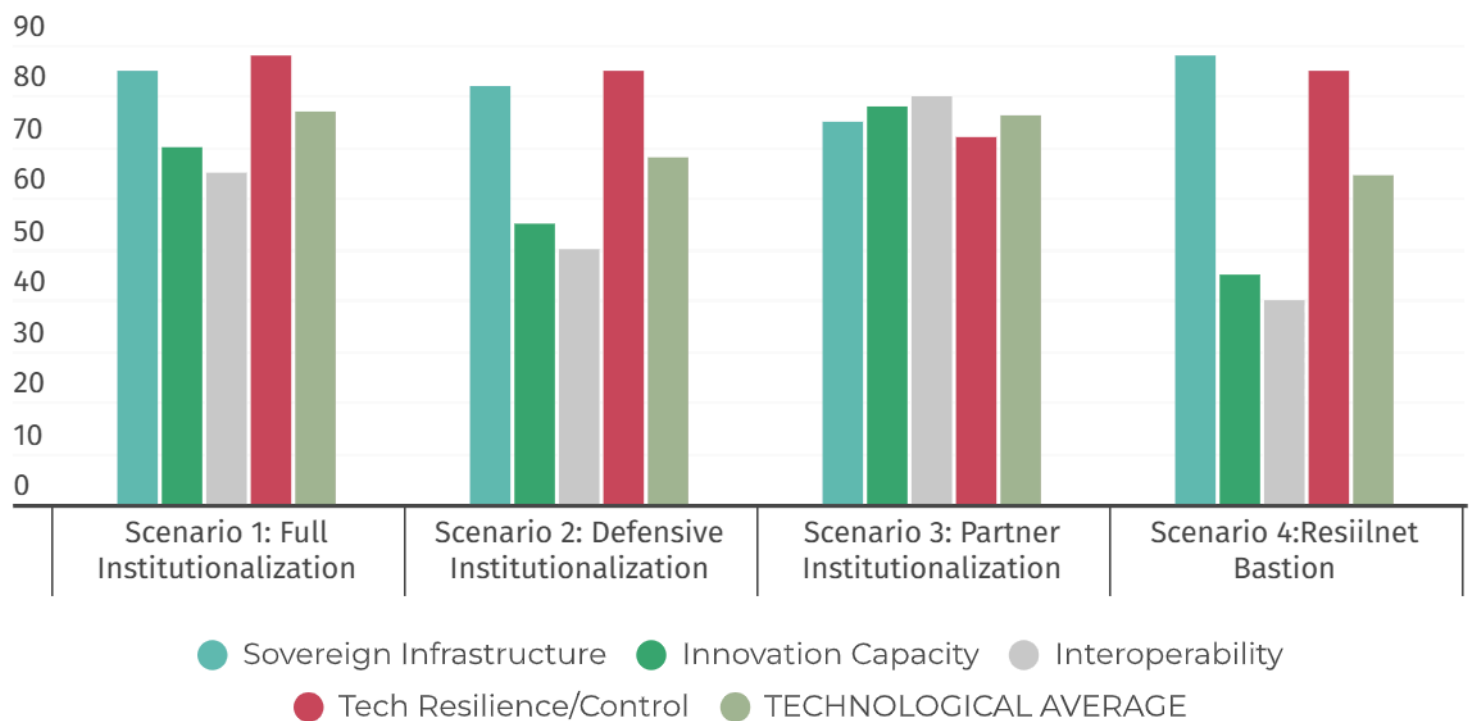


Technological Domain

In the Technological Domain, Full Institutionalization Leads, Resilient Bastion Lags. Scenario 1 Full Institutionalization achieves higher comparative performance in the technological domain. Its strength lies in sovereign infrastructure and tech resilience/control. There is a trade-off between interoperability and the limits of global collaboration. The runner-up scenario is 3 Partner Institutionalization, with its highest scores in interoperability and innovation capacity, achieved through anchor power access. The anticipated trade-offs include subordination to anchor power IT architecture and a loss of endogenous innovation priorities. The weakest technological scenario is 4, Resilient Bastion, due to its low innovation capacity and interoperability.

Scenario Technological Performance: Full • Defensive • Partner • Bastion

Full Institutionalization Leads, Resilient Bastion Lags



Scenario 1 Full Institutionalization achieves the highest score of 77 in the technological domain. It is strongest in sovereign infrastructure (85) and tech resilience/control (88). There is a trade-off in interoperability barriers (65) due to the limit of global collaboration. The runner-up scenario is 3 Partner Institutionalization with a score of 76.25. Its highest scores are in interoperability (80) and innovation capacity (78), achieved through anchor power access. The anticipated trade-offs include subordination to anchor power IT architecture and a loss of endogenous innovation priorities. The weakest technological scenario is 4, Resilient Bastion, with a score of 64.5. The reason is the low innovation capacity (45) and interoperability (40).

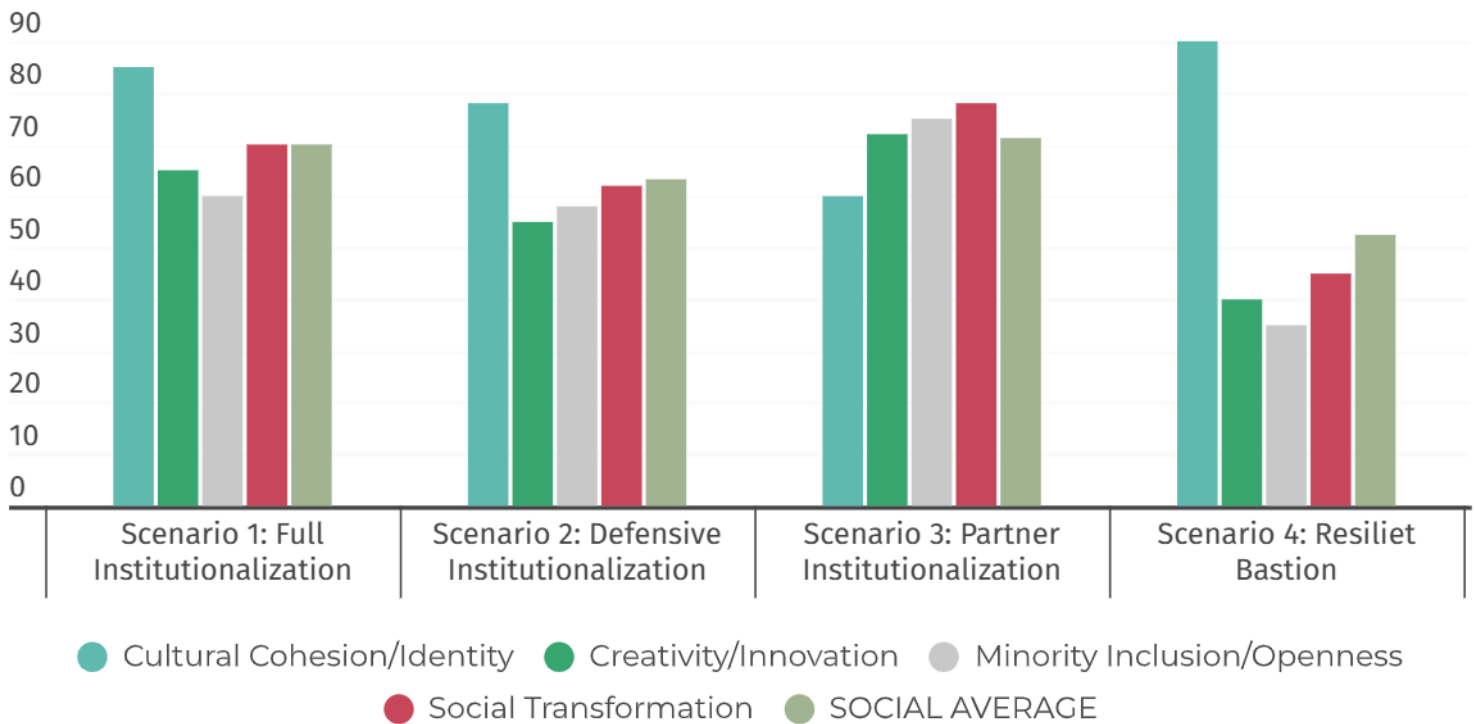


Social Domain

In the Social Domain, Partner Institutionalization Leads, Resilient Bastion Lags. Scenario 3, Partner Institutionalization, achieves the highest in the social domain due to high creativity/innovation, minority inclusion, and social transformation. The trade-off is low cultural cohesion/identity due to endogenous culture erosion. The runner-up scenario is 1 Full Institutionalization, with its strength record is in cultural cohesion/identity and community unity. Anticipated trade-offs are low minority inclusion & creativity due to homogenization pressure. The weakest social scenario is 4, Resilient Bastion, due to its disastrous social costs: lowest creativity, minority inclusion, and social transformation.

Scenario Social Performance: Full • Defensive • Partner • Bastion

Partner Institutionalization Leads, Resilient Bastion Lags



Scenario 3, Partner Institutionalization, achieves the highest score of 71.25 in the social domain. It has its highest scores in creativity/innovation (72), minority inclusion (75), and social transformation (78). The trade-off is low cultural cohesion/identity (60) due to endogenous culture erosion. The runner-up scenario is 1 Full Institutionalization, with a score of 70. Its highest record is in cultural cohesion/identity (85) and community unity (70). Anticipated trade-offs are low minority inclusion (60) & creativity (65) due to homogenization pressure. The weakest social domain scenario is 4, Resilient Bastion, with a score of 52.5. The reasons are the disastrous social costs: Lowest creativity (40), minority inclusion (35), and social transformation (45)



STRATEGIC TAKEAWAY & PROVOCATION

There are four expected scenarios when a middle power pursues strategic autonomy:

- Full Institutionalization of Strategic Autonomy
- Defensive Institutionalization of Strategic Autonomy
- Partner Institutionalization of Strategic Autonomy
- Resilient Bastion Institutionalization of Strategic Autonomy

A middle power must acknowledge that there are no unique scenarios but must choose or prepare for the one that aligns with its historical legacy and national aspirations, recognizing that there are inherent trade-offs in different strategic autonomy futures or sets. Also, Middle Powers must examine their strategic dependencies, capabilities, and governance structures to ensure their readiness for such scenarios.

Strategic Autonomy is a portfolio of options, not a dyadic choice. The question is: which strategic capabilities, core strengths, and partnerships will you choose, and which will you forgo?



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Future Take is the flagship foresight publication of the Center for the Study of Global Economic Future (CSGEF), managed by the Future Take Desk, within CSGEF's Research Unit. We provide leaders with concise, forward-looking insights into rapid global developments, with a firm focus on their long-term implications. As a vital part of CSGEF Publications, we complement extensive research reports with timely, accessible, and highly focused content designed to clarify the future landscape.

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Our analysis focuses on the core forces transforming the future of the international economic order. We provide an ample, yet rigorous examination of the diverse programs undertaken by CSGEF.

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To deliver sharp, actionable intelligence, every Future Take follows a distinct analytical framework. We begin by identifying a **Present Signal**—a critical assessment of a current global trend. Next, we map the **Future Trajectory** and Implications, evaluating how this signal will impact economic and geopolitical environments. We conclude with a **Strategic Takeaway** and **Provocation**, providing you with precise, actionable insights and essential questions to challenge your current strategic planning.



About CSGEF Research Unit

The CSGEF Research Unit operates as a dedicated research arm under the Research & Policy Department at the Center for the Study of Global Economic Future (CSGEF). As part of this globally recognized think tank, the Research Unit focuses on exploring and addressing the economic, geoeconomic, socioeconomic, and systemic forces shaping the future of the global economy. It serves as a hub for intellectual inquiry, policy analysis, and actionable insights, empowering policymakers, academics, and global stakeholders to anatomize the intricacies of an evolving economic landscape. As a vital component of the Research & Policy Department at CSGEF, the Research Unit plays a pivotal role in shaping the organization's mission to understand and influence the future of the global economy. Through its dedication to research excellence and policy impact, the CSGEF Research Unit remains at the forefront of addressing the world's most pressing economic challenges.

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