America First and the Reshaping of Global Order: Analyzing the Lasting Impact of Trump's Foreign Policy Doctrine

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The foreign policy of the Trump administration represented a substantial change in the United States' approach. Strategy for international involvement, highlighting a nationalist "America First" principle that favored American interests over established relationships and multilateral collaboration. This strategy resulted in diminished diplomatic involvement in areas such as Africa and the Middle East. Facilitating the expansion of influence by opposing nations such as China and Russia. Principal measures, Following the U.S. exit from the Iran nuclear agreement and endorsement of the Abraham Accords, and tense relations with NATO contributed to a transformation in global power dynamics, facilitating the pathway towards a more multipolar world. The isolationist position and inclination towards bilateral discussions presented fresh obstacles. For the stability of global alliances and the efficacy of international collaboration. This article analyzes the enduring consequences of Trump's foreign policy, investigating its effects. Transformed U.S. influence and the intricacies it poses for forthcoming administrations as they strive to harmonize national interests with global leadership in an interconnected environment.

Keywords: Trump Administration, America First, U.S. Foreign Policy, International Collaboration, Foreign Policy Shift, U.S. Global Influence, Geopolitical Strategy

Introduction:

The Trump administration marked a significant turning point in the trajectory of United States foreign policy, deviating sharply from the multilateral, alliance-based strategies that had largely defined American global engagement since the end of World War II. Anchored in the doctrine of "America First," the administration's approach reoriented foreign policy priorities toward maximizing perceived national benefits—particularly in economic and security realms—often at the expense of longstanding alliances, multilateral institutions, and conventional diplomatic norms. This recalibration reflected a deeper shift in the United States international strategy: from being a champion of global cooperation and liberal internationalism to adopting a more transactional, unilateral, and nationalist stance [1]

Under the "America First" slogan, foreign policy decisions were increasingly framed by considerations of burden-sharing, sovereignty, and economic gain. Multilateral institutions such as NATO, the United Nations, and even the European Union were frequently criticized for what the administration perceived as disproportionate financial costs and constraints on U.S. autonomy. In their place, the Trump administration favored bilateral engagements, where American leverage could be more forcefully asserted, and outcomes could be tailored to prioritize direct national interests. This pivot not only redefined U.S. diplomacy but also introduced a new level of unpredictability into international relations, challenging the expectations of both allies and adversaries [2].

The implications of this foreign policy reorientation were particularly pronounced in regions such as Africa and the Middle East. In Africa, the retreat from traditional diplomatic and developmental roles created vacuums increasingly filled by competing powers, particularly China, whose expansive Belt and Road Initiative offered investment and infrastructure support absent the conditionalities often associated with U.S. aid. [3] Similarly, in the Middle East, decisions such as the withdrawal from the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (Iran nuclear deal), the recognition of Jerusalem as Israel's capital, and the endorsement of the Abraham Accords restructured regional alignments. These moves altered not only the dynamics among key regional players like Iran, Israel, and Saudi Arabia but also questioned the United States' credibility as a balanced mediator in regional conflicts.

Moreover, the broader consequences of the "America First" policy extended beyond specific regions. As the United States stepped back from multilateral commitments, other global actors—most notably China and Russia—exploited the strategic openings. These nations intensified their geopolitical outreach, strengthened bilateral relations with states formerly within the U.S. sphere of influence, and positioned themselves as alternative leaders in an evolving global order. This shift signaled a move toward a more multipolar international system, characterized by fragmented alliances and competing centers of power.

This paper critically examines the foreign policy of the Trump administration and its enduring impact on international relations. It focuses specifically on the doctrinal shift embodied by "America First," the resulting changes in U.S. engagement with Africa and the Middle East, and the broader transformation of global power dynamics. By analyzing these developments, the paper aims to assess the long-term consequences of a nationalist and transactional U.S. foreign policy and to explore the challenges it poses for future administrations seeking to balance national interests with global leadership in an increasingly interconnected and multipolar world.

Objects Statement:

This research aims to analyze the lasting impact of the "America First" foreign policy doctrine under the Trump administration and its broader implications for global governance, international relations, and the reshaping of the global order. Specifically, the study will explore:

1. The key principles and objectives of Trump's "America First" foreign policy.
2. The strategies implemented under this doctrine, include economic protectionism, withdrawal from international agreements, and redefining U.S. alliances.
3. The short-term and long-term effects of these strategies on bilateral and multilateral relations, with particular emphasis on U.S.-China, U.S.-European Union, and U.S.-Middle East dynamics.
4. The broader implications of Trump's foreign policy on global institutions such as the United Nations, NATO, and the World Trade Organization.
5. The influence of Trump's policies on global security, trade, and environmental issues.
6. The legacy of Trump's foreign policy in shaping U.S. diplomacy and international relations in the post-Trump era, considering the potential shifts under the Biden administration and future U.S. presidents.

Novelty Statement:

This study introduces a comprehensive analysis of the "America First" foreign policy from a multidimensional perspective, addressing both its immediate and enduring effects on the global order. While previous research has focused on specific elements of Trump's foreign policy, this research uniquely synthesizes its economic, diplomatic, and geopolitical implications, offering an integrated framework to understand how these shifts have redefined global power structures. [4] The novelty lies in the exploration of how Trump's foreign policy continues to influence international relations, even after his presidency, and how emerging

global challenges, such as the COVID-19 pandemic and the rise of China, have further shaped the trajectory of global order post-Trump. Through this lens, the study contributes to a more nuanced understanding of the long-term consequences of populist foreign policies on the international system.

Section II: Principal Characteristics of Trump's Foreign Policy:

The Trump administration's foreign policy signified a paradigmatic departure from the historical trajectory of U.S. international engagement. Rather than reinforcing America's traditional role as a global leader championing liberal democratic values, international cooperation, and alliance-building, the Trump doctrine sought to redefine national engagement through a prism of economic nationalism, strategic unilateralism, and transactional diplomacy. This deviation was not incidental but deliberate—an embodiment of a broader populist wave that swept across American domestic politics and spilled into international relations. The hallmarks of this transformation can be encapsulated in four interlinked dimensions: (1) the ideologically driven "America First" doctrine; (2) a distinct shift from multilateralism to bilateralism; (3) the extensive use of economic tools such as sanctions and tariffs as instruments of geopolitical leverage; and (4) a critical reassessment of U.S. commitments to global institutions and long-standing alliances.

The "America First" Doctrine: Reasserting National Sovereignty:

At the center of the Trump administration's foreign policy framework was the "America First" doctrine—an approach rooted in economic protectionism, political sovereignty, and a deep skepticism toward globalism. While this slogan had historical antecedents, including in the interwar isolationist movements of the 20th century, its revival under Trump marked a significant ideological rupture from the liberal internationalist consensus that had underpinned U.S. foreign policy since World War II. In practice, "America First" translated into a set of policies that privileged short-term national interests—particularly those framed as economic or security-related—over long-standing global responsibilities or shared commitments to liberal norms.

This doctrine was based on the belief that multilateral arrangements and international institutions had often placed disproportionate financial or political burdens on the United States. Trump frequently argued that allies, trading partners, and international organizations had taken advantage of American generosity or strategic leniency. [5] As a result, foreign policy decisions were guided less by global stewardship and more by a calculation of costs and benefits to U.S. industries, borders, and citizens. This nationalist reorientation shaped a new diplomatic ethos that favored sovereignty, border control, and economic self-reliance over integration and consensus-building.

Bilateralism Over Multilateralism: The Decline of Global Governance Structures:

Another cornerstone of Trump's foreign policy was the marked preference for bilateral negotiations over multilateral cooperation. Traditional multilateralism, exemplified by institutions like the United Nations, NATO, the World Trade Organization (WTO), and international climate accords, was increasingly portrayed by the administration as inefficient, restrictive, or antithetical to U.S. interests. [6] Under Trump, the United States exited multiple high-profile agreements, such as the Paris Climate Agreement, the Iran nuclear deal (Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action), and the Trans-Pacific Partnership, while repeatedly threatening to reduce engagement with or withdraw from others, including the World Health Organization during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The rationale for this shift was grounded in the belief that bilateral negotiations offered the United States greater leverage and control. In bilateral frameworks, the Trump administration felt it could impose its economic and strategic preferences more forcefully, without the need for compromise or consensus. This was evident in U.S.-China trade negotiations, bilateral talks with North Korea, and restructured trade agreements such as the

United States–Mexico–Canada Agreement (USMCA), which replaced the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). However, this bilateral approach also weakened the global architecture for collective action, strained alliances, and contributed to the fragmentation of global norms and standards, particularly in areas requiring international coordination, such as climate change, global health, and conflict resolution.

Economic Nationalism: Tariffs, Sanctions, and Trade Wars:

Economic nationalism played a central role in the Trump administration's foreign policy strategy, where economic tools were employed not only for domestic protectionism but also as instruments of international coercion. [7] Trump's aggressive use of tariffs—especially against China, the European Union, and even traditional allies like Canada—signaled a departure from decades of U.S.-led trade liberalization. These actions were justified under the guise of correcting trade imbalances, protecting American industries, and safeguarding national security. The administration launched a protracted trade war with China, imposing hundreds of billions of dollars in tariffs, and challenged the authority of the WTO by blocking the appointment of appellate judges, thereby undermining its dispute resolution mechanism.

Beyond tariffs, the Trump administration relied extensively on economic sanctions as tools of pressure and punishment. These sanctions were not limited to adversaries like Iran, North Korea, and Venezuela but also extended to NATO allies such as Turkey. Sanctions were often used to influence domestic behavior within target countries, pressure governments to alter their foreign policies, or isolate geopolitical rivals. While effective in demonstrating resolve, critics argue that these measures lacked strategic coherence, alienated allies, and sometimes provoked retaliatory actions that exacerbated global tensions. Furthermore, overreliance on economic coercion eroded U.S. soft power and raised questions about the sustainability of American leadership in shaping a stable international economic order.

Recalibrating Global Alliances and International Institutions:

A final defining element of Trump's foreign policy was the recalibration—and at times, outright deconstruction—of America's global alliances and institutional commitments. NATO, long regarded as the cornerstone of Western security, was repeatedly criticized by Trump for what he viewed as an inequitable distribution of defense spending. His rhetoric—labeling NATO as "obsolete" and threatening to withdraw from the alliance—undermined confidence among European partners and raised doubts about the reliability of U.S. security guarantees. Similarly, U.S.-EU relations were strained over trade disputes, disagreements on climate policy, and diverging geopolitical interests, such as engagement with Iran and Russia.

Trump's skepticism extended to global institutions such as the United Nations, which was often portrayed as ineffective or hostile to U.S. values. Funding cuts and rhetorical attacks on the legitimacy of these bodies were emblematic of a broader rejection of the liberal international order that the U.S. itself had helped construct. These actions created vacuums of influence that were quickly filled by other powers—most notably China and Russia—who expanded their footprint within these multilateral organizations, reshaping norms and alliances in their favor.

Section III: Regional Impacts on Africa and the Middle East:

The regional implications of Trump's foreign policy were both profound and complex, particularly in the geopolitically sensitive and strategically significant regions of Africa and the Middle East. These areas have historically occupied a unique place in U.S. foreign policy due to their wealth of natural resources, persistent security challenges, and the presence of global strategic rivals such as China, Russia, and Iran. The Trump administration's policies toward these regions were marked by an inconsistent mix of disengagement and assertiveness, often dictated more by domestic political calculations and transactional logic than by a coherent regional strategy. [8] This section explores the impacts of Trump's foreign policy across four critical dimensions: (1) security and counterterrorism cooperation, (2) economic engagement

and aid policy, (3) diplomatic realignments and normalization efforts, and (4) erosion of soft power and institutional presence.

Security and Counterterrorism Cooperation:

Security policy remained one of the more consistent elements of U.S. engagement in both Africa and the Middle East under Trump. In the context of the Middle East, the administration continued robust support for traditional allies such as Israel, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates (UAE), while intensifying pressure on adversaries like Iran through its "maximum pressure" campaign. In Africa, U.S. security assistance was primarily channeled toward counterterrorism operations, with support for military missions in the Sahel, Somalia, and Lake Chad Basin, where groups like Boko Haram and al-Shabaab remained active.

However, this security cooperation was largely transactional and narrowly focused on short-term threats rather than long-term stability or governance reforms. In Africa, Trump's repeated calls for troop drawdowns, especially in West Africa, signaled a waning U.S. commitment, thereby creating strategic vacuums increasingly filled by France, Russia (via Wagner Group), and China. Similarly, in the Middle East, Trump's erratic decisions—such as the withdrawal of U.S. troops from northern Syria in 2019—were seen by many as a betrayal of the Kurdish allies who had been instrumental in the fight against ISIS. This withdrawal not only damaged America's credibility as a reliable partner but also empowered regional actors like Turkey and Russia to expand their influence at the expense of U.S. interests. Figure 1 visualizes the steady decline of U.S. military deployment in Africa during the Trump years.

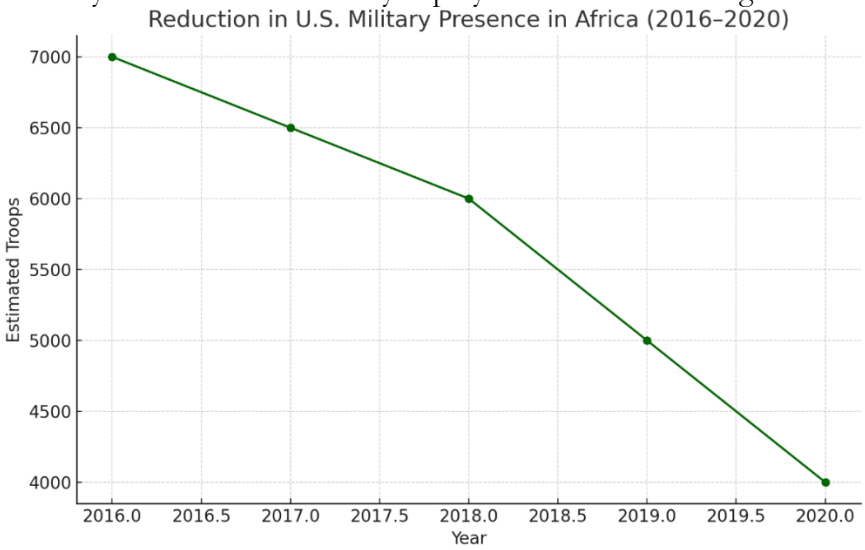

Figure 1. Reduction in U.S. Military Presence in Africa (2016-2020)

Economic Engagement and Aid Policy:

Economic relations between the United States and Africa under Trump were marked by a notable departure from previous administrations. Unlike the Obama-era Power Africa initiative or Bush's PEPFAR, Trump demonstrated relatively limited interest in large-scale development assistance or institutional capacity building. His administration prioritized economic deals that could yield immediate benefits to U.S. businesses under the guise of "mutually beneficial" partnerships. [9] The Prosper Africa initiative launched in 2019, aimed to double two-way trade and investment between the U.S. and Africa, but its implementation lacked coordination and failed to match the scale or visibility of China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) in the region.

Moreover, Trump proposed significant cuts to the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) and global health funding—ironically at a time when the COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the interconnectedness of global health systems. These proposals sent a signal of U.S. disengagement from its traditional role as a development partner. In contrast,

countries like China expanded their influence through infrastructure financing and health diplomacy. African leaders, therefore, increasingly viewed the U.S. as an unreliable or indifferent partner, especially as Trump infamously referred to African nations as "shithole countries"—a statement that generated widespread diplomatic backlash and undermined U.S. credibility. Figure 2 illustrates how China gradually surpassed the U.S. in financial influence across Africa, reflecting a broader geopolitical shift.

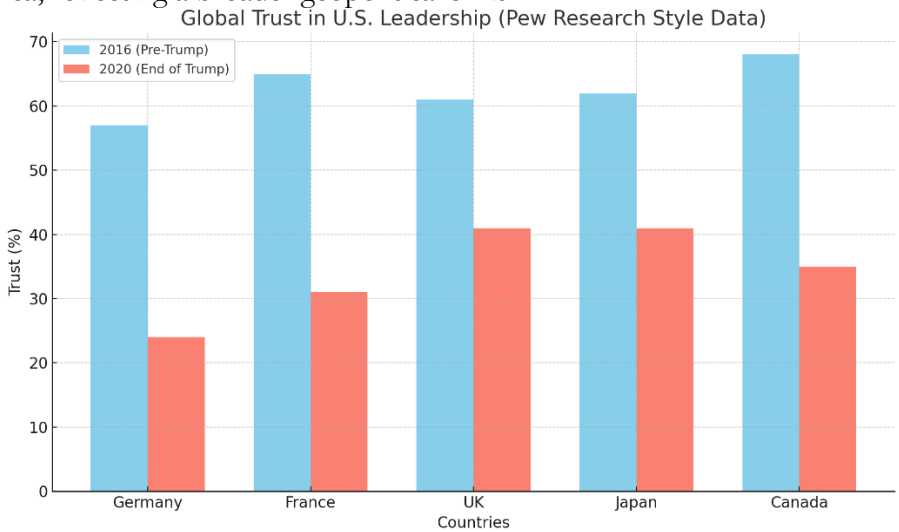

Figure 2. Global Trust in U.S. Leadership (Pew Research Style Data)

Diplomatic Realignments and the Abraham Accords:

In the Middle East, Trump's most significant diplomatic legacy was arguably the Abraham Accords, which led to the normalization of relations between Israel and several Arab states, including the UAE, Bahrain, Sudan, and Morocco. These agreements, brokered by the United States, were heralded by the Trump administration as historic breakthroughs that advanced regional peace and stability. They also reflected a recalibrated U.S. approach—prioritizing pragmatic alliances against Iran over the longstanding U.S. commitment to a two-state solution for the Israel-Palestine conflict.

However, the Abraham Accords were deeply controversial. While they succeeded in reshaping regional dynamics by fostering economic and security ties between Israel and Gulf states, they did so largely by bypassing Palestinian interests. The Trump administration's so-called "Deal of the Century" was widely rejected by Palestinians, as it effectively endorsed Israeli sovereignty over large parts of the West Bank, including settlements considered illegal under international law. The shift toward unilateral support for Israel's hardline policies alienated large parts of the Arab and Muslim world and reduced the United States' role as a neutral mediator in the conflict.

Erosion of Soft Power and Multilateral Engagement:

Perhaps one of the most underappreciated consequences of Trump's foreign policy in both regions was the erosion of U.S. soft power—the ability to influence through attraction and values rather than coercion. Trump's repeated disparagement of African countries, withdrawal from global health initiatives (including the WHO during the pandemic), and denial of climate change damaged the moral authority and appeal of the United States, especially among young populations in Africa and the Middle East. [10] According to Pew Research surveys, global confidence in U.S. leadership hit historic lows during the Trump presidency, especially in countries that had traditionally admired American democratic values, educational opportunities, and media.

In Africa, the absence of a cohesive and value-driven U.S. policy enabled other powers to step into the gap. China deepened its economic and political engagement through high-

profile infrastructure projects and medical diplomacy, while Russia expanded its security presence through military cooperation and disinformation campaigns. In the Middle East, Trump's overt support for authoritarian leaders—from Egypt's Abdel Fattah el-Sisi to Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman (MBS)—reinforced a perception that the U.S. no longer prioritized human rights, governance, or democratic transitions.

Section IV: Impacts on Europe and Asia:

The Trump administration's foreign policy exerted significant influence on both Europe and Asia, regions that have long constituted central pillars of U.S. global strategy. While Trump's approach to these regions was rooted in his overarching "America First" ideology, its practical execution involved a marked departure from multilateralism, traditional alliances, and liberal internationalism. This section examines the regional implications of Trump's foreign policy in Europe and Asia by focusing on four thematic areas: (1) the weakening of multilateral institutions and alliances, (2) trade and economic nationalism, (3) the recalibration of great power competition, and (4) the rise of strategic ambiguity and trust deficits.

Weakening of Multilateral Institutions and Alliances:

One of the most notable effects of Trump's foreign policy in Europe was the undermining of traditional U.S. alliances, especially with NATO and the European Union (EU). Trump repeatedly criticized NATO members for not meeting the alliance's defense spending target of 2% of GDP, accusing them of "freeloading" on U.S. military protection. While burden-sharing concerns predate Trump, his confrontational rhetoric, including threats to withdraw from NATO, created unprecedented tensions within the alliance. These actions not only alarmed key European allies such as Germany and France but also emboldened rivals like Russia, which capitalized on intra-NATO disunity.

Trump's distrust of multilateralism also manifested in his strained relations with the EU, which he saw less as a strategic partner and more as a trade competitor. His support for Brexit and preference for bilateral over multilateral negotiations weakened the transatlantic partnership and fostered uncertainty in EU-U.S. relations. [11] In particular, the decision to withdraw from the Paris Climate Agreement, as well as the Iran Nuclear Deal (JCPOA)—both of which were backed by key European allies—further widened the diplomatic rift.

In Asia, Trump's stance on multilateralism was similarly disruptive. The most consequential move was the U.S. withdrawal from the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), a trade agreement designed in part to counterbalance China's influence in the region. This withdrawal not only diminished American economic influence but also alienated allies like Japan, Australia, and Vietnam, who had invested considerable diplomatic capital into the deal. Without U.S. participation, the remaining members forged ahead with the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP), signaling a shift toward a more Asia-centric economic order increasingly independent of U.S. leadership.

Trade and Economic Nationalism:

Trump's foreign policy in both Europe and Asia was heavily shaped by a protectionist trade agenda centered on reducing trade deficits and repatriating American manufacturing. In Europe, this resulted in trade tensions with key partners, including threats to impose tariffs on European automobiles and retaliatory measures on products like steel and aluminum. These protectionist tendencies exacerbated transatlantic economic frictions and disrupted global supply chains, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic.

In Asia, Trump's economic nationalism was most visibly expressed through the U.S.-China trade war, a hallmark of his foreign policy. The imposition of sweeping tariffs on Chinese goods and Beijing's retaliatory measures marked a sharp escalation in economic decoupling between the world's two largest economies. While the "Phase One" trade deal

reached in early 2020 temporarily de-escalated tensions, it did little to address structural issues such as intellectual property theft, state subsidies, and forced technology transfers.

However, the trade war had broader regional implications. It placed U.S. allies such as South Korea, Japan, and Taiwan in a difficult position, forcing them to navigate the geopolitical rivalry between the U.S. and China while maintaining their economic interests. Furthermore, Trump's unilateral imposition of tariffs on even allied nations weakened trust and made it difficult to form coordinated economic strategies in the Indo-Pacific.

Recalibration of Great Power Competition:

Trump's foreign policy significantly altered the dynamics of great power politics, particularly vis-à-vis China and Russia. In Europe, while the Trump administration did increase funding for the European Deterrence Initiative (EDI) and deployed additional troops to Eastern Europe, these strategic moves were often overshadowed by Trump's unsettling admiration for Vladimir Putin. His repeated skepticism toward U.S. intelligence findings regarding Russian election interference and his equivocal stance during the 2018 Helsinki summit raised concerns about U.S. commitment to countering Russian aggression, particularly in Ukraine and the Baltics.

In Asia, Trump adopted a far more confrontational stance toward China than any previous U.S. administration, marking a shift from strategic engagement to strategic competition. [12] The Indo-Pacific region became the focal point of U.S. efforts to contain China's assertiveness, particularly in the South China Sea, where freedom of navigation operations (FONOPs) were intensified. The Trump administration also sought to strengthen the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad)—comprising the U.S., Japan, India, and Australia—as a counterweight to China's growing military and economic influence.

Nevertheless, Trump's erratic diplomacy, particularly his summitry with North Korean leader Kim Jong-un, complicated U.S. strategic credibility. While these summits were historic in their symbolism, they yielded few substantive results and arguably enhanced Pyongyang's legitimacy without extracting concrete concessions. Meanwhile, Trump's strained relations with South Korea, particularly over demands for increased defense cost-sharing, further strained traditional alliances in the region.

Strategic Ambiguity and Trust Deficits:

One of the most pervasive effects of Trump's foreign policy in both Europe and Asia was the rise of strategic ambiguity and trust deficits. Allies struggled to decipher the administration's long-term intentions, especially given the frequent turnover of key officials and Trump's penchant for unilateral decision-making. In Europe, this unpredictability led countries like Germany and France to rethink their defense autonomy, with renewed calls for "strategic sovereignty" and greater investment in European defense mechanisms, such as PESCO and a more empowered European Defence Fund (EDF).

In Asia, similar concerns led to greater defense coordination among U.S. allies and partners but also stimulated hedging behavior. Countries in Southeast Asia, particularly Malaysia, Indonesia, and the Philippines recalibrated their foreign policies to maintain economic ties with China while cautiously engaging with the U.S. In Northeast Asia, Japan and South Korea, though long-standing allies, began to pursue more independent security and technology strategies due to concerns about the reliability of the U.S. commitment, especially in the event of a regional crisis involving China or North Korea.

Trump's transactional approach and the apparent conditionality of U.S. security guarantees—based on financial contributions rather than shared values—undermined decades of alliance-building. The uncertainty surrounding America's leadership role in both Europe and Asia prompted many states to either pursue regional alternatives or deepen their engagement with emerging powers such as China, Russia, and India.

Section V: Global Perceptions and Long-Term Implications:

The Trump administration's foreign policy not only redefined America's global engagements during its tenure but also profoundly reshaped how the world perceives the United States. Driven by the doctrine of "America First," Trump's approach prioritized national sovereignty, economic nationalism, and bilateralism over global leadership, multilateral cooperation, and normative commitments. These transformations generated a mix of admiration, skepticism, anxiety, and recalibration among global actors. This section delves into the broader global perceptions of the Trump presidency and discusses its long-term implications for international relations, institutional credibility, and U.S. strategic influence.

Global Perceptions: From Admiration to Anxiety:

Across the globe, Trump's presidency sparked contrasting reactions. In some quarters, especially among populist leaders and nationalist movements, Trump was admired for his unapologetic defiance of political correctness, his assertiveness on sovereignty, and his skepticism toward global institutions. Leaders like Jair Bolsonaro (Brazil), Viktor Orbán (Hungary), and Rodrigo Duterte (Philippines) expressed support for his political style, seeing it as a validation of their own authoritarian and populist tendencies. His rhetoric on borders, immigration, and traditional values resonated with segments of conservative constituencies worldwide.

However, these sentiments were not universally shared. According to Pew Research Center surveys conducted during his presidency, trust in the U.S. plummeted across many traditional allies, including Germany, Canada, France, the UK, and Japan. Trump's unpredictable decision-making, withdrawal from global accords, and harsh rhetoric alienated the foreign public and eroded the image of the U.S. as a dependable, stable superpower. Particularly troubling were his equivocations on democratic values, cozy relations with autocratic leaders, and dismissive attitude toward human rights. These tendencies contributed to the perception that the U.S. was abandoning its historical role as a guardian of liberal democracy and international order.

Long-Term Impact on Multilateral Institutions and Norms:

One of the most enduring legacies of Trump's foreign policy is the weakening of multilateral institutions and international norms. The withdrawal from agreements like the Paris Climate Accord, the World Health Organization (WHO), and the Iran Nuclear Deal (JCPOA) signaled a retreat from cooperative global governance and raised questions about the durability of international commitments. These moves emboldened rival powers, particularly China and Russia, who seized the opportunity to fill leadership vacuums in global forums.

In the post-Trump landscape, many countries have become increasingly skeptical about relying too heavily on American leadership in multilateral settings. The idea that future U.S. administrations might again withdraw from international treaties has led to a diversification of global diplomatic efforts, with some states pushing for regional arrangements, bilateral agreements, or coalitions of the willing as alternatives to traditional U.S.-led multilateralism.

Moreover, Trump's policies normalized a degree of institutional obstructionism, legitimizing exit strategies from global commitments as a valid policy tool. This has led to a decline in the moral authority of the U.S. on issues such as climate change, human rights, and global health security—areas where American leadership once set the standard.

Strategic Vacuum and the Rise of Regional Powers:

Trump's retrenchment strategy created geopolitical vacuums in regions like the Middle East, Africa, and parts of Asia. In many of these areas, the lack of sustained U.S. engagement paved the way for China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), Russia's military diplomacy, and regional middle powers (such as Turkey, Iran, and India) to assert more influence. These

developments reflect an emerging multipolar world order, where power is more distributed and U.S. dominance is contested.

In the Indo-Pacific, for example, Trump's inconsistency in managing alliances, coupled with the withdrawal from the TPP, weakened America's strategic position vis-à-vis China. While the administration intensified competition with Beijing, it failed to articulate a coherent alternative vision for regional integration. Similarly, in the Middle East, the drawdown of troops in Syria and disengagement from complex conflicts allowed Russia and Iran to gain strategic footholds.

This shifting balance of power signals a, at least in the traditional sense. The international system is now characterized more by a fluid long-term decline in U.S. hegemonic stability alliances, issue-based coalitions, and a more contested ideological space between authoritarian capitalism (e.g., China) and liberal democracy (e.g., the EU and U.S.-led West).

Erosion of Normative Power and Soft Power:

Under Trump, the U.S. saw a measurable decline in its soft power—the ability to influence others through cultural appeal, moral authority, and institutional leadership. His administration's policies on immigration (e.g., the "Muslim Ban"), racial justice (e.g., his response to Black Lives Matter protests), and the COVID-19 pandemic (marked by anti-science rhetoric and withdrawal from WHO) diminished global admiration for American democratic values and governance models.

In contrast to previous administrations that promoted democracy assistance, civil society partnerships, and development aid, Trump's foreign policy downplayed these instruments, often subordinating them to short-term strategic interests. The result was a reduction in normative influence, particularly in countries undergoing democratic backsliding or political transition.

Additionally, Trump's criticisms of international institutions, media, and electoral processes eroded the U.S.'s moral credibility to advocate for good governance and electoral integrity abroad. As a result, the U.S. became more vulnerable to accusations of hypocrisy, weakening its leverage in diplomatic negotiations and public diplomacy.

Implications for Future U.S. Foreign Policy:

The Trump era left a deep imprint on U.S. foreign policy—both in terms of institutional practice and global credibility. While the Biden administration has since sought to reverse many of Trump's key policies (e.g., rejoining the Paris Agreement, reviving the JCPOA negotiations, restoring ties with NATO), the world has fundamentally changed in response to the last administration. A single-term disruption revealed that U.S. foreign policy, once considered bipartisan and stable, could undergo radical shifts with each electoral cycle.

This perception of policy discontinuity may lead allies and rivals alike to question the long-term reliability of U.S. commitments. Consequently, there is growing recognition that U.S. power must now be exercised with greater humility, consistency, and collaboration if it hopes to regain its former leadership position in global affairs.

The long-term implications, therefore, suggest that while the U.S. remains a central actor in international relations, it must now compete in a more skeptical, decentralized, and pluralistic world order—one in which legitimacy must be constantly earned, not assumed.

Conclusion:

Trump's foreign policy left an indelible mark on global politics, reshaping how the United States is viewed by allies, adversaries, and the broader international community. While some of his policies addressed legitimate concerns—such as unfair trade practices or imbalanced defense spending—the manner of their execution disrupted alliances, weakened institutions, and fueled global uncertainty. The long-term implications include a shift toward multipolarity, a more contested liberal order, and a need for the U.S. to rebuild not just power but trust. Future administrations will need to navigate this altered landscape carefully,

recognizing that American influence now rests as much on credibility and cooperation as on military or economic strength.

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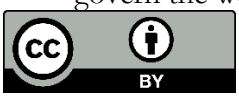

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