AFRICAN PERSPECTIVES ON PERSPECTIVES ON TRUMP 2.0:

VOLUME II

UNITED STATES FOREIGN POLICY AND THE NEW WORLD (RE)ORDER

EDITED BY CHRISTOPHER ISIKE & SAMUEL OYEWOLE

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AFRICAN PERSPECTIVES ON TRUMP 2.0: UNITED STATES FOREIGN POLICY AND THE NEW WORLD (RE)ORDER (VOLUME II)

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CHRISTOPHER ISIKE AND SAMUEL OYEWOLE

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UNIVERSITEIT VAN PRETORIA
UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA
YUNIBESITHI YA PRETORIA

African Centre for the Study of the United States
Afrika-sentrum vir Bestudering van die Verenigde State van Amerika
Senthara ya Afrika ya Thuto ya Amerika

Dedication

To Maxi Schoeman, our beloved Emeritus Professor at the Department of Political Sciences, benefactor of the African Centre for the Study of the United States at the University of Pretoria (ACSUS-UP), and leading advocate of African perspectives and narratives in International Relations, who passed away on 14 September 2025.

ENDORSEMENT

African perspective on Trump 2.0: United States Foreign Policy and the New World (Re)Order is the first book of its kind from the African academy. Before the establishment of the University of Pretoria's Centre for the Study of the United States, a scholarly African Institution for the study of America was scarce on the African continent. As such, both the Centre and this inaugural volume set new milestones for the ways Africans understand and engage America. America, Europe and Asia have studied Africa for decades, not only to inform their respective citizens, but to use that knowledge to advance their interests in our continent. This initial volume serves as a valuable countercheck to that agenda. It deals with all the major themes essential for Africans to understand the recasting of America's foreign policy, including, but not limited to foreign policy, immigration, economic nationalism, security and geopolitics. Africans should celebrate this pathbreaking milestone, and it is certain that students, policymakers and citizens will learn from it.

—**Abdi Samatar,** Professor of Geography and Global Studies, University of Minnesota, USA, Extraordinary Professor at the University of Pretoria, South Africa and member of the Pan African Parliament**.**

African voices and perspectives on American politics in general have been relatively thin and negligible. It is as if only American scholars can analyse and evaluate African politics, because Africa has much to learn from the United States of America (US), however, African scholars cannot do the same for America because they have nothing to teach America. Considering the status of the US as a world power and the far-reaching consequences of its foreign policy, especially with President Trump's ongoing efforts at 'Making America Great Again' on the global stage, this slant is patently untenable. This volume represents a bold statement on the

need for a paradigm shift and reconfiguration of the analysis of US politics by African scholars. It not only presents critical African perspectives on various aspects of US foreign policy toward Africa and the Global South under Trump's second presidency, which is increasingly turning global geopolitics upside down, but it also shows why they matter and ought to be taken seriously, not the least because of Africa's rising influence in the evolving new world order. By breaking the boundaries of a putative, but untenable scholarly division of labour that does not reckon much with analyses of American politics and foreign policy by African scholars, this book is a tradition-breaker that should excite scholars, students and practitioners of international relations, US foreign policy and US-Africa relations.

—**Eghosa E. Osaghae**, Professor of Political Science and Director-General, Nigerian Institute of International Affairs (NIIA)

African Perspectives on Trump 2.0: United States Foreign Policy and the New World (Re)Order is a timely and incisive intervention in debates about America's changing role in the world. By foregrounding African scholars' analyses of Trump 2.0's foreign policy—from trade and critical minerals to immigration, aid, security, and geopolitics—this volume powerfully recentres a continent that is too often treated as peripheral to great-power politics.

The chapters illuminate not only how Trump's transactional and nationalist agenda reverberates across Africa, but also how African actors are exercising agency, re-imagining partnerships, and rethinking their place in an emerging multipolar order. This collection makes an important contribution to the decolonisation of International Relations knowledge production and will be essential reading for scholars, students, diplomats, and policymakers seeking to understand what Trump 2.0 means for Africa and for global disorder during the interregnum.

—**W. Andy Knight**, Distinguished Professor of International Relations, University of Alberta, Canada.

FOREWORD

This insightful and timely book from the African Centre for the Study of the United States at the University of Pretoria, South Africa, fulfils one of the major reasons for the creation of African centres to produce knowledge and critically reflect on the United States (US) as a nation and a society. The Centre at the University of Pretoria—now one of more than three and growing on the continent—and the publications they are producing, including this book, fill a gap in knowledge and scholarship by Africans on a major world power that has significant influence on African countries and the continent, as well as the world. The Centre will reverse the status quo where Africans understand America from the perspectives of US and other world scholars.

The publication of the book advances the idea that, from creating knowledge from their own perspectives, Africans should be able to influence African agency, policy directions, policymaking, policymakers and African actions in response to the US. In other words, Africans ought to be able, from the knowledge they create, to develop their own clear foreign policy positions that advance their own interests and contribute to the creation of a new global order that is fair and equitable to all.

The book comes at an important time when Donald Trump (Trump 2.0) has made a remarkable comeback from a previous first tenure 2017–2020, then loss in the election in 2020, as the President of the United States, for a second term. Trump's return has been marked by ongoing, swift and dramatic foreign policy changes and actions not only directed at Africa, but the whole world in all areas from US aid, cultural and social issues, immigration, war and peace, to economics, trade and tariffs, multilateral and bilateral issues and relations in ways that did not happen under previous US administrations. As if to ensure that these changes are visible to everyone, the Trump 2.0 'revolution' is conducted in front of television cameras daily, including sometimes contentious and acrimonious meetings with world leaders. These interactions with world leaders, especially the uncomfortable ones, traditionally happen behind closed doors. A level or some kind of 'transparency' also not seen before

in the conduct of US foreign policy has emerged. The changes have not only been dramatic, but also carried out at an unprecedented speed and in ways that do not follow the norms by which US foreign policy positions have been traditionally developed and implemented. The speed at which the changes are carried out is such that it gives the impression that Trump has been in office for several years, when in fact, he has yet to complete a year in office. The changes and ways in which Trump operates have also had an impact internally in the US and not just on the outside world. Courts at every level, from the federal to the Supreme Court, have never been busier as his opponents mount legal challenges.

This book analyses the changes and actions that have shattered not only expectations of US conduct in the foreign policy space, but also well-established and recognised norms. The support, for example, of US aid for development, including African health challenges like HIV/AIDS, malaria and preferential market access for some goods, has within months been withdrawn or not renewed, leaving African countries scrambling to seek alternatives. In this sense, it has shaken African countries and the continent out of expectations, apparent complacency and presumption in relation to their relationship with the US. This complacency or assumption includes that changes to US policy would be gradual and was a significant vulnerability for Africa and the world. The certainty is gone, and unsettling unpredictability is the new norm. Disruption is the name of the game. This new context is a double whammy for Africa, as the effects of Trump's second-term policies on the rest of the world have a secondary impact on Africa, given not only the world's interconnectedness but also Africa's specific connections with the rest of the world. For example, some countries in Europe with long historic links and relationships with Africa have also tightened their immigration policies and reduced or cut aid in ways similar to US aid cuts to Africa. In this regard, Africa is facing ongoing disruptions that undermine its development agenda and trajectories.

It is, however, an opportunity for Africa to consciously and intentionally craft its own foreign policy relations, engagements, and interactions with the US, rather than relying on the traditional US–

Africa relations. The scholarship coming out of the African Centre for the Study of the US at the University of Pretoria, such as this book, is critical to this endeavour as knowledge creators on the relationship between Africa and the US.

A knowledge-driven understanding of these complexities and complications that have arisen since Trump returned to office is more important and urgent than ever. Publishing this book at this time, within a year of Trump's second term, meets both imperatives. In fact, the book was conceived within three weeks of Trump's second inauguration. It means that the African Centre for the Study of the US at the University of Pretoria recognises the importance of responding intellectually through grounded, critical, and analytical African scholarship, within the timeframe of ongoing changes. This responsiveness to real-time events makes the Centre an actor in the unfolding processes, providing the opportunity for Africans in general and African policymakers specifically to draw upon the critical insights it produces to respond more strategically and hopefully effectively.

The range and breadth of the contributions in the book also reflect the Centre's understanding that Trump's foreign policy directions are not just directed at Africa and African countries, which are not major powers, but at the whole world. African perspectives on US foreign policy must always recognise the larger global context of Africa—US relations. In turn, African foreign policymaking must consider this reality and craft its responses and foreign policy positions accordingly. The book's penultimate chapters are dedicated to African responses to Trump, reinforcing the intellectual and scholarly agenda of the African Centre for the Study of the US at the University of Pretoria to a necessary reverse gaze that asserts African agency, engagement, interaction and responses to a world power, the US and by extension the world, at a time of turbulent change.

This book is an important contribution to the growing literature on African perspectives on the US and Africa–US relations coming out of the Centre for the Study of the US at the University of Pretoria, and provides illuminating scholarly perspectives on how Africans understand the US.

It is a valuable source of knowledge for those crafting strategies on how Africa, as a continent and African countries, should engage, interact and respond to the US.

—**Professor Tawana Kupe**, former Vice Chancellor and Principal of the University of Pretoria, is the Founder of the African Centres of the Study of the United States at the University of Pretoria and the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg in South Africa.

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SECTION I:
INTRODUCTION

CHAPTER 1

Reintroducing African Perspectives on Trump 2.0: United States Foreign Policy and the New World (Re)Order[1]

Christopher Isike and Samuel Oyewole
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Welcome to Trump's 2.0 world

Despite his defeat in the 2020 elections and the subsequent controversies that dogged his political prospects, President Donald Trump staged a historic comeback in American political history when he won the November 2024 elections and returned to the White House in January 2025. The second coming of Donald Trump was premised on his populist, right-wing and nationalist agenda. He mobilised popular support around the slogan 'Make America Great Again' (MAGA), which is closely connected to the ideas, proposals, plans and promises of cutting US government spending and debt, increasing government efficiency, reforming law enforcement and judiciary and ensuring freedom of speech. The list also includes reversing LGBTQ+, climate and energy transition policies, enabling tax cuts for local industries, imposing massive tariffs on importation and deporting illegal immigrants. Other campaign promises include ensuring that NATO allies pay for their defences, preventing trading partners from exploiting Americans via aid and trade agreements, resolving the Russian-Ukraine conflict and preventing World War III, ending the Gaza war and securing the hostages, stepping up the competition with China in high-tech and many more (Blackburn et al. 2024/2025; Farley et al. 2025; Jacobson and McKinney 2024). As has been evident in the weeks and months since Trump assumed office as the 47th US President, he has displayed a remarkable commitment to the implementation and realisation of many of these objectives, with an admixture of success, progress, setback and failure recorded so far (for some scorecards,

see Elliott 2025; Esomonu, Lodhi and Woodward 2025; Sonnier and Shannon 2025).

As a result of some of his actions, US foreign policy has taken a dramatic turn under Trump 2.0, with implications for the world order. On many occasions, Trump has announced the intention of the US to acquire Greenland from Denmark, reclaim the Panama Canal from Panama and buy out the associated Chinese stakes, take over the Israeli-occupied Palestinian territory of Gaza to convert it to a real estate development project and make Canada the 51st state of the federation (Davies and Wendling 2025; The Nation 2025; Walsh 2025). Trump justified the expansionist desire for new territory as being in national security interests, especially in the case of Greenland and the Panama Canal. Accordingly, the US under Trump has used diplomatic and economic pressure and has sometimes even threatened military action to advance its objectives. These inclinations and proposed policy moves have led analysts to compare the US President's actions to the aggressive foreign policies of Russian President Vladimir Putin and Chinese President Xi Jinping, as evident in their policies in Ukraine and the South China Sea. Trump's efforts to reclaim the Panama Canal, buy the Chinese Panama Canal Ports and Greenland, acquire Gaza and absorb Canada have faced resistance from affected governments and peoples of Panama, China, Denmark, Canada and Palestine, with solidarity from many other states in South America, the Middle East and Europe (Isidore and Liu 2025; Steven 2025; Stone and Boymal 2025). Furthermore, his efforts have challenged the rule-based international order as well as the anti-colonial and anti-expansionist position that the US had championed and sometimes defended for decades.

The US trade and other economic dimensions of foreign policy have been indiscriminately used by Trump against friends, allies and (potential) adversaries alike. The US-Canada relations have shifted from one of historical cordiality to unpredictable animosity since the Trump administration imposed 25% per cent tariffs on Canadians imports, a move he also made against Mexico (Peralta and Northam 2025; Steven 2025). The Trump administration increased tariffs on imports from China by ten per cent on 4 February 2025, and by an additional ten per cent on 4 March 2025 (Feingold and Botwright 2025; Robinson et al. 2025). In addition, Trump threatened to impose tariffs on Europe, and declared tariff reciprocity in its trade relations with India. On 2 April 2025, Trump announced the 'Liberation Day' tariff, which amounted to a global declaration of tariff war,

targeting close to 100 countries across Africa, Asia, the Americas and Europe (Mesa 2025; Panetta 2025). This measure was designed to encourage investors to move production to the US and boost employment locally, address trade imbalances, contain the influx of products from China and its proxy investments globally and compel countries to negotiate trade relations bilaterally, based on Washington's terms. Although Trump subsequently postponed the global trade war, it attracted mixed international reactions and responses (Feingold and Botwright 2025; Peralta and Northam 2025; Zurcher 2025). Many countries were compelled to negotiate with the administration on Washington's terms, while some investors promised to relocate or revive production in the US; others resisted what they referred to as trade unilateralism and bullying. For instance, the European Union (EU) threatened retaliation, and Canada and China gained global attention for their resistance to Trump's tariff war. Most notably, after a tit-for-tat trade war between China and the US, which witnessed no fewer than 125% tariffs on both sides and restrictions on exports of some Chinese rare earth minerals to America, both Beijing and Washington realised the need to negotiate (Feingold and Botwright 2025; Robinson et al. 2025; Momoh and Oyewole 2026). Regardless, Trump's tariffs challenged the enduring international economic order that was based on market globalisation, open borders and a multilateral approach to trade regimes, which the US has previously represented and defended.

In a move towards de-globalisation, Trump has withdrawn the US from international climate commitments, a decision that has threatened global policy frameworks for a just energy transition and environmental sustainability (Global Carbon Fund 2025; Marggraff, Schoeman and Oyewole 2025). The new administration suspended all US foreign aid, except for Israel, and moved to end USAID (The White House 2025a). This development has greatly affected some of the poorest countries and peoples, globally (Democracy Now 2025; *The Lancet* 2025). On trade, climate, aid and many other subjects of interest in international relations, the US has become increasingly distanced from its traditional allies, especially Canada and in Europe. While US Vice President JD Vance questioned the democratic credentials of Europe at the Munich Summit in February 2025, a few days later, US Defence Secretary Pete Hegseth reiterated Trump's position at the NATO summit that Europe had to pay for its own defences (Latschan 2025; Lopez 2025; *The Economic Times* 2025). In the absence of Ukraine and Europe,

the US initiated peace talks with Russia in February 2025 at the Saudi Arabian capital, promising to lift sanctions and rationalising the need for Kyiv to concede territory (Pamuk and Magid 2025). Despite Russia's inconsistency in peace talks, Trump has displayed more tolerance for Moscow than for Kyiv. In June 2025, Trump blamed the Ukraine war on the decision of G7 leaders to expel Russia from the group (Verhelst, Taylor-Vaisey and Cancryn 2025). Furthermore, Saudi Arabia has moved from a pariah state status to the new darling of US diplomacy, as Riyadh hosted the first foreign state visit by the 47th President and promised hundreds of billions of dollars in foreign investment to America (Schwartz and England 2024; The White House 2025b). These reflect Trump's transactional and personalised approach to foreign policy and his favourable disposition towards autocratic leaders at the expense of a US record of promoting multilateralism, democracy, human rights and its rule-based order globally.

African perspectives

The field of international relations has been dominated by Euro-American perspectives, often to the detriment of other viewpoints, especially from developing countries and regions of the world, such as Africa (Acharya 2014; Bischoff, Aning and Acharya 2015; Odoom and Andrews 2017; Smith 2009). Given their shared strength, influence and leadership role in technological development, international politics, economy, culture, law and order, the collective West (Europe, North America and Australia[2]) has used its unique position to assume the centre stage of global affairs and attendant knowledge production. Accordingly, most understandings of the new- or old-world order, disorder and reorder have been conceived, shaped and marketed around developments in the West, while others are mostly peripheral and supporting stories (Acharya 2014, 2025; Faleye 2014). Alas, African experiences and perspectives have mostly received limited attention in world affairs. In fact, many of the prevailing African narratives are actually Western or broadly foreign perspectives of the continent's experiences (Abrahamsen 2017; Mazrui 1977; Ogunnubi and Oyewole 2020; Oyewole 2025; Taylor 2010). This has been exacerbated by decades of resources dedicated to African studies being concentrated in Europe and North America, without commensurate academic efforts to study how the African continent navigates world affairs.

Despite some efforts, research and development (R&D) commitment to

understanding African experiences and the continent's relation to global events and the major global players, is limited. This has limited the recognition of African contributions to the conception and understanding of major subjects within international relations.

Notably, Trump 2.0 has become a major disruptive force in international affairs, given its influence on US domestic and foreign policies and the consequences for world order, disorder and reordering (Brands 2025; Cooley and Nexon 2025; Goddard 2025; Kimmage 2025). Therefore, the subject of Trump 2.0 has generated media and policy debates and growing academic interest globally (Oxford Economics 2024; Transatlantic Task Force 2025). Amidst these, there are vastly different media and policymaker perspectives regarding the political, economic and cultural impacts on Africa under Trump 2.0 (Gopaldas 2024; Isike and Oyewole 2024a; Munga 2025). However, beyond policy briefs, media articles and oral presentations, a need remains for more research efforts to produce a concise and coherent body of knowledge from Africa that reflects the diversity of African experiences and their multidimensional perspectives on Trump 2.0, along with its influence on US foreign policy regarding the continent and the entire world.

As evident from the first six months of the new administration, the effects of US foreign policy under Trump 2.0 have outpaced academic responses and knowledge production, especially from Africa and other developing regions of the world. Beyond what is often identified in international debates, Africa has already felt the impacts of Trump 2.0, its influence on US foreign policy and world order. Despite the popularity of and admiration for Trump among the African populations, some of his word choices about the continent have been considered derogatory and dehumanising. In March 2025, for example, Trump remarked that 'nobody has heard of the country' (Ngcobo and Jones 2025), when referring to Lesotho. Trump has also condemned South Africa's Expropriation Act as racist against the white minority, alleging genocide against them, and controversially offered refugee status and relocation to the US (*Fordsburg Independent Community Newspaper* 2025; Friedman 2025; US Mission South Africa 2025). Equally, Trump described the security situation in Nigeria as a religious genocide against Christian and deployed the US military to support the country. Furthermore, Trump's administration has largely stopped aid to the continent, which includes the withdrawal of funding support for the war against HIV/Aids. Moreover, Trump and his team have been less than supportive of South Africa's hosting of

the G20 (Majadibodu 2025). Due to these developments, some critical areas of US-South Africa relations, as well as US relations with the rest of Africa, have suffered.

Thousands of illegal immigrants from across the world are now facing deportation from the US, and many African nationals, notably Nigerians, Ghanaians, Kenyans, Zambians and Zimbabweans, are affected (Ekanem 2025a; Ekpo et al. 2026). In March 2025, many African countries appeared on Trump's visa ban watchlist, including Libya, Somalia and Sudan on the red list (consisting of eleven countries whose citizens are completely banned), Eritrea, Sierra Leone and South Sudan on the orange list (consisting of ten countries whose citizens face additional restrictions) as well as Angola, Benin, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Cape Verde, Chad, Republic of Congo, Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Equatorial Guinea, Gambia, Liberia, Malawi, Mali, Mauritania, São Tomé and Príncipe and Zimbabwe on the yellow list (consisting of 22 countries that have 60 days to address concerns and risks) (Cole 2025; Ferragamo 2025). Moreover, Trump's global trade war has extended tariffs to no fewer than 50 African countries (Mesa 2025; Panetta 2025). Although the tariffs were later postponed, they threatened to override the benefits of the African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA), which was barely extended till 2026. Again, the impacts of US aid cuts and suspensions have been significantly felt in Africa (Cilliers 2025). As earlier suspected, Trump has displayed little or no interest in developing a coherent US-African strategy or in supporting democracy and climate resilience on the continent. Neither has he supported the required reform of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) that would secure permanent seats for the region (Isike and Oyewole 2024a).

Against this background, there is a growing concern about whether Trump 2.0 will improve or undermine US-Africa relations. Despite its numerous inadequacies, Joe Biden's administration developed a US-African strategy, made high-level visits to the continent and supported democracy, climate resilience and socioeconomic development in Africa through trade, aid and investments, as well as UNSC reform for African permanent seats (Isike and Oyewole 2024b, 2024c). While the Trump administration has yet to display sufficient commitment towards these directions, some of its policies have their own considerable merits. Unlike Biden, Trump's foreign policy is culturally indiscriminate on the system of government, thereby offering African democracies and autocratic states similar

opportunities to conduct their relations with the US in a transactional manner (Isike and Oyewole 2024a). Moreover, Trump notably brokered the DRC-Rwanda Peace deal, where many earlier initiatives had failed, thereby contributing to peacebuilding on the continent (Ekanem 2025b; Lawal 2025). However, the DRC-US minerals for peace deal that underscored the Trump-brokered DRC-Rwanda deal revealed the transactional approach of the new administration to US foreign policy, which is a subject of concern to many on the continent and beyond (Carter 2025; Zungu 2025). Nevertheless, many observers, including some contributors to this volume, believe that Trump 2.0 and its associated foreign policies offer rare opportunities for Africans to reduce aid dependency and better manage their resources to cater for human development. They feel that it is the opportune time to boost intra-African trade and local capacity in value-added production to raise the continent's strategic importance in the global value chain and to develop food and economic sovereignty, along with suitable political systems that are efficient, indigenous and popular among the peoples. Some admirers of MAGA believe that Africa needs a Trump-like leader to make the continent great. Consequently, the world is changing fast with the second coming of Trump, and this calls for intellectual interrogations from different perspectives and regions, including in Africa.

About the book

Africans are not blind, deaf or dumb to the world. The continent has always been involved in observing, reacting, reflecting and responding to world affairs. However, the impact and visibility of African contributions to the knowledge, practices and realities of international relations remain open to debate. In response to this challenge, the African Centre for the Study of the United States at the University of Pretoria (ACSUS-UP) initiated this project three weeks after the inauguration of Trump as the 47th President of the US, after observing some of the rapid changes to America's foreign policy positions and its (potential) impact on global order, disorder and reorder from an African point of view. The objective was to offer a concise and timely scholarly reflection that blends conciseness with the diversity of African experiences, to inspire intellectual deliberations, and to inform and impact policy engagements on the continent with US foreign policy in a rapidly changing world order, disorder and reorder.

This book is the outcome of a hybrid workshop organised by ACSUS-UP on the subject of 19 May 2025. As the second volume of this project, the book is divided into eighteen chapters. The last contribution to the two volumes was received in September 2025, while this concluding chapter was completed in November, with some revision thereafter. As an early prognosis of Trump 2.0 and its consequences for US foreign policy and world order, contributors contend with several pros and cons of such early intellectual engagement with evolving issues. Data inadequacy, shortage of materials, time constraint, trend uncertainty and event trajectory unpredictability make a conclusive analysis of increasingly dynamic themes and fast-moving events challenging. Contributors draw from historical data, Trump 1.0 records and early indicators of US foreign policy under the new administration, along with the resultant international reactions and responses, to illuminate paths to understanding the evolving world order and Africa's position in this context.

Beyond this introductory section and the first chapter that reintroduces the book, there are seventeen chapters divided into seven sections. Section II, comprising Chapters 2 to 4, covers the changing US role in world affairs. In Chapter 2, Mariah Faridah Muli examines how the 'America First' doctrine of Trump's 2.0 is reflected in US foreign policy and discusses the implications for global power dynamics in a multipolar world. With the US disengaging from multilateral institutions, suspending foreign aid, withdrawing from climate agreements and participating in a tariff war that is exacerbating global trade tensions, Washington's influence is being challenged by great-power competitors, such as China and Russia. Meanwhile, Trump's pivot to bilateral diplomacy, such as initiating U.S.-Russia peace talks while sidelining NATO, further weakens traditional Western alliances. For Africa, these policies present both risks and opportunities. Trump's tariffs and other pressures on China, India and other countries, and the reduction in US aid and investment across Africa, could push these countries closer. This chapter examines how Trump's foreign policy is accelerating a multipolar world and how it is affecting Africa's geopolitical strategy, economic positioning, and diplomatic alignments.

In Chapter 3, Sky Lukas Mkuti explores the strategic uncertainties created by the US MAGA foreign policy and the implications for Global North-Global South relations. Using alliance and multilateralism from the end of World War II to the post-9/11 era, the US emerged and maintained its position as a

superpower, recognising the perils of isolationism in an increasingly anarchic global landscape. In contrast, the first Trump administration reshaped the dynamics of global diplomacy by disrupting the traditional Liberal International Order (LIO), while his second coming amplifies uncertainties in US global relations, threatening foes and long-standing allies alike across the globe. The chapter argues that Trump's MAGA foreign policy opposes interdependence and global co-operation, as it interrogates the implications for global peace, strategic alliances and the sustainable development aspirations of the Global South.

In Chapter 4, Tony Onazi Oche and Christopher Isike examine the implications of Trump 2.0 for the US global role in AI safety governance. Amid the growing scholarly debate on the actual and potential impacts of Trump 2.0, there is inadequate attention from policy scientists on how the changes in the US will influence AI governance. One of the earliest executive orders by President Trump was to discontinue the AI safety policy, to maintain America's edge in the development of advanced AI models through less regulation. The chapter reviews and compares the AI safety policies under the two Trump administrations with those of the Biden administration. Although Trump is perceived to prefer less regulation of advanced AI development and deployment, this chapter argues that he has not really changed the AI safety governance landscape in comparison to Biden's administration. It contends that 'AI safety governance' is a more useful conceptual tool for studying different approaches to AI concerns instead of the broader AI governance. It also analyses how changes in the US government will impact global AI safety and governance.

Covering Chapters 5 and 7, Section III of this book focuses on the internal-external dynamics in US foreign policy. In Chapter 5, Peterson Waweru reflects on internal-external dynamics in foreign policy analysis, focusing on the decline of the liberal world order and the rise of great men and hero worship. The liberal international order, popularised after World War II and renewed after the Cold War, has increasingly come under pressure from economic crises, democratic backsliding and rising nationalism. As trust in democratic institutions and governance wanes, many countries are turning to authoritarianism with leaders who promise political stability, sovereignty and national revitalisation. This shift has profound consequences for foreign policy, as leader-driven decision making challenges the bureaucratic and institutional frameworks that have long governed international relations. This chapter contrasts the European Union's structured

and bureaucratic foreign policy approach with the emerging transactional and personality-driven strategies of leaders such as Donald Trump, Vladimir Putin and Xi Jinping. It categorises strongmen based on their distinct geopolitical approaches, such as economic dominance, territorial revisionism and ideological nationalism. Drawing theoretical insights from Francis Fukuyama and Karl Mannheim, the chapter analyses the emerging trend of great foreign policy, how it is (re)shaping the evolving global order, and its implications for international diplomacy, particularly in Africa.

In Chapter 6, Samukelo Ndlovu and Ayabulela Mhlahlo examine foreign policy as a genre of colonial power games, as they reflect on the influence of right-wing think tanks, their agenda, such as the 'Project 2025', and their impacts on Trump 2.0 foreign policy. The chapter is premised on the convergence of critical race perspectives in International Relations and Philosophy, as it uses discourse analysis to deconstruct foreign policy as a textual genre of colonial power. Although foreign policy is often discussed in the context of states as sovereign and insulated powers, the chapter also examines how the concept is manipulated by Western imperial powers, such as the United States of America, as a means of asserting colonial power. In Chapter 7, Samukelo Ndlovu examines how the US-based Christian fundamentalist NGOs are transforming sexual politics in Africa and re-configuring the nation-state, as the growing number of African countries passing bills with stringent penalties for homosexuality illustrates. This chapter examines the roles of co-ordinated global campaigns led by US faith-based NGOs, such as Family Watch International (FWI), in the politics of anti-LGBTQIA+ legislation in Africa. It shows how such messaging finds a home in Africa through the open revolving door of ideological influence between the Global North and the Global South.

Section IV of this book covers the changing US-Africa relations in Trump 2.0 from Chapters 8 to 10. In Chapter 8, Levious Chiukira, Tanatsiwa Dambuza, and Ray Masuku focus on MAGA nationalism and the prospect of AGOA renewal after its expiration under Trump 2.0 in 2025. The chapter shows scepticism about the future of 'non-reciprocal' trade frameworks like AGOA, which grants African countries duty-free access to the US market. This scepticism is based on Trump's 'America First' doctrine and MAGA rhetoric, withdrawal from the WHO, negative disposition towards the WTO and NAFTA and preference for transactionalism, nationalism, protectionism, bilateral deals and reciprocity, as

well as his imposition of tariffs against China, Mexico, Canada and many other countries. However, geopolitical competition with China raises the prospect of continuous Washington support for the AGOA under Trump 2.0.

In Chapter 9, Mary Magdalene Sackflame, Ibrahim Akinola Salawu, and Kumi Ansah-Koi examine the critical roles of the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) in managing displaced persons in the Lake Chad Region, and the implications of the Trump 2.0 aid cuts in this conflict zone. In line with its 'America First' agenda, one of the earliest policy moves of the Trump 2.0 administration was to suspend almost all US foreign aid, including humanitarian aid across Africa. Based on the experience of the Lake Chad Region, this chapter shows that sudden USAID funding cuts without adherence to the prescribed exit plan in conflict zones exacerbated vulnerabilities among displaced persons, disrupted local economies and increased reliance on underfunded regional initiatives. The authors recommend diversified funding mechanisms, enhanced regional co-operation and sustainable policy frameworks to ensure the long-term resilience of displaced persons in conflict zones. In Chapter 10, Anton M. Pillay unpacks the diplomatic dispute between South Africa and the United States under Trump 2.0. The disagreements between these regional and global hegemons reflect ideational conflict over who controls the global narrative on race, an extremely important discourse in International Relations.

Section V, Chapters 11 to 13, examines climate change, health diplomacy and global governance. In Chapter 11, Gugulethu Lethu Ngwenya assesses the ripple effect of Trump's Paris Agreement withdrawal on climate adaptation funding for women-led initiatives in Sub-Saharan Africa. Trump 2.0 has sparked global controversy, uncertainty and a seismic change in US foreign policy and global frameworks, as US withdrawal from the Paris Climate Accord threatens global environmental aspirations as contained in Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 13. The effects of the US withdrawal are globally concerning and particularly devastating in Africa, a continent of developing nations struggling to industrialise and achieve economic growth for poverty reduction, while also contending with climate change. Trump's move raises questions about the future of climate financing, particularly for women-led climate change initiatives in Sub-Saharan Africa, such as Kenya's Green Belt Movement and the Green Climate Fund, as the US had been a dominant contributor to these initiatives. This chapter examines the ripple effect of climate change and the withdrawal of funding

on women and how it will exacerbate socioeconomic inequalities through the uneven distribution of resources that hinder gender equality objectives. It proposes a policy that integrates indigenous knowledge systems and scientific knowledge to combat climate change in Africa.

In Chapter 12, Bamidele Olajide and Victor Ojakorotu analyse the impacts of Trump 2.0 on climate governance in Africa and consider the relevance of climate bandwagoning. With the antecedents of his controversial first term and the sceptical start of his second term, climate governance globally as well as in Africa is unlikely to be prioritised under Trump 2.0. Given the disproportionate effects of climate change and the acute resilience deficit of developing countries, the re-withdrawal of the US from multilateral climate commitments, such as the Paris Agreement, will increase the vulnerability of the continent, highlighting the unconscionability of African countries' climate bandwagoning. Climate bandwagoning refers to the alignment of the development quest of developing countries with international climate protocols and processes, a strategy aimed at leveraging climate finance and technical assistance. However, Trump's 2.0 withdrawal of US leadership from global climate governance is a major source of concern in climate financing. The chapter recommends that African countries should reconfigure their climate change-development nexus by adopting alternative models and resilience building, which can foster regional innovation and minimise the effects of volatility caused by Trump 2.0 and future climate-sceptic developments.

In Chapter 13, Chané Nel discusses how the US is disengaging from global health governance with Trump's withdrawal from the World Health Organisation (WHO) and its effects. In line with Trump's campaign to cut foreign aid and his negative opinion about multilateralism and global health governance, one of his earliest executive orders was to withdraw the US from the WHO and defund USAID. Trump's position on the WHO can be traced to his troubled relations with the world body during the COVID-19 pandemic. Considering the US position as one of the leading funders of the WHO and medical aid globally, Trump's disposition towards health diplomacy is bound to have negative consequences for many African and other developing countries that rely heavily on medical aid from Washington.

Section VII, which covers Chapters 14 and 15, focuses on Trump's tariffs and emerging economic questions. In Chapter 14, Opeyemi Aromolaran, Samuel

Oyewole, and Nicholas Ngepah examine Trump's 2.0 tariff policy and its effect on the US domestic economy. The announced and enforced US tariffs on Canada, Mexico and China, as well as on many other countries globally, have generated a series of economic questions. The immediate effects of these policy actions have disrupted both the domestic and international economies, with notable effects on inflation and supply chains in the US and other countries, some of which have retaliated. Using historical data, this chapter examines the costs and benefits of the US tariff policy under Trump, and recommends a cautious and strategic approach to this measure.

Chapter 15, by Abdulrasheed Abdulyakeen, further examines emerging economies and the 2025 US tariff escalation, paying attention to retaliation, supply chains and strategic diplomacy. Beyond its dominant attention on the US-China trade dispute, this chapter also showcases how emerging economies such as South Africa, Brazil and India navigate the competing imperatives of maintaining access to global markets while protecting domestic industries. Using a comparative case study approach with strategic trade theory and neorealism, the chapter analyses retaliatory and adaptive measures, including reciprocal tariffs, trade diversification and supply chain realignment and their broader implications for global trade governance. The chapter provides a Global South perspective on strengthening resilience, preserving market access and enhancing the coherence of global trade governance, through a hybrid strategy that combines deeper regional integration with sustained engagement in multilateral institutions.

In Section VIII, Chapters 16 and 17 explore some strategic options for Africa and responses to Trump 2.0 and the emerging world order. In Chapter 16, Babatunde Oyateru calls for reshaping Africa's international relations in an America First world. The international system has been changing and is evolving rapidly since Trump's re-election. This is evident in the current illiberal trade policy of the US, economic transactionalism, an anti-aid disposition, shifting peace and conflict engagements and declining priority for Africa. Amid these, the chapter advocates for African states to take bold steps by deploying African agency to shape US-Africa and the continent's international relations. Likewise, Chapter 17, written by Nkanyezi Msimango and Neo R. Mofokeng, revisits the debated China-Africa relationship within the context of South Africa's international relations under Trump 2.0. It explores the nature and benefits of South Africa's relations with China, the implications for SA-US relations, and

the consequences of the evolving US-China relations for Pretoria in the broader context of Africa's relations with these superpowers. It is against this background that Chapter 18 provides a concluding reflection on Africa and its repositioning in relation to the US under Trump 2.0 and the emerging world order.

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Endnotes

1 This chapter is a revised version of the Chapter 1 of the first volume of this book project with significant difference in the last section.

2 It is noted that Australia struggles to position itself between its location in the South and its ontological and epistemological orientations towards the North (see Suleiman, Isike and Mickler 2023: 3).

SECTION II:
THE US CHANGING ROLES IN WORLD AFFAIRS

CHAPTER 2

America First in a Multipolar World: How Trump's 2.0 Foreign Policy Reshapes Global Power Dynamics

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Introduction

The return of Donald J. Trump to the White House in 2025 represents a defining moment in the evolution of US foreign policy and the reconfiguration of global power dynamics. Building on the 'America First' doctrine established during his first term (2017–2021), Trump's second presidency, often termed *Trump 2.0,* has intensified the United States' retreat from multilateralism in favour of a transactional, nationalist foreign policy. The early days of Trump's second term have been marked by bold actions, including the suspension of all US foreign aid except to Israel and Egypt, a ten per cent tariff on Chinese imports and proposed reciprocity in trade with India and Europe. These decisions align with a broader trend of economic nationalism that redefines America's engagement with the world (Zhao S 2021; Mearsheimer and Rosato 2023).

Globally, this approach has significant consequences. The US withdrawal from multilateral climate agreements, most notably the Paris Climate Accord, or Paris Agreement, in January 2025, and the closure of numerous USAID offices across Africa, signal a stark disengagement from global governance structures (Sachs 2025). At the same time, China has increased its influence in Africa through infrastructure financing, digital technology exports and trade. According to the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD 2025a, China-Africa trade reached a record US$282.1 billion in 2023, up from US$208 billion in 2019—a 35% increase over four years. In contrast, US direct investment flows to Africa declined by 23% from 2020 to 2024 according to

Bureau of Economic Analysis (BEA 2025a).

These developments have stirred considerable academic debate. Scholars such as Nye (2022) argue that Trump's transactional diplomacy accelerates American decline by eroding soft power, while others like Walt (2021) see it as a strategic recalibration suited to a multipolar international system. Africa, often positioned on the margins of global decision- making, is now forced to recalibrate its diplomatic and economic strategies in response to the shifting global order. The decline in US engagement opens new opportunities for alternative partnerships with China, Russia, India and Gulf states, but also creates uncertainty around trade, aid and security co-operation.

This chapter critically engages Trump's 2.0 foreign policy to examine how it is reshaping global power configurations and reinforcing the emergence of a multipolar world. Using secondary data, the study focuses on the implications for Africa's geopolitical strategy, trade realignment and diplomatic manoeuvring. By situating Trump's approach within broader debates on US hegemony, global reordering and African agency, this chapter argues that Trump's foreign policy is not simply a withdrawal—it is a calculated repositioning that compels other states to adapt, renegotiate alignments and reimagine their global roles.

This study employed a qualitative research design, using secondary data to assess the impact of Trump's 2.0 foreign policy on global power dynamics, with a focus on Africa. Data were sourced from government reports, academic publications and documents from international organisations such as the United Nations (UN), World Trade Organisation (WTO) and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). Through thematic analysis, the study examined patterns in trade, security and diplomacy, ensuring a nuanced understanding of shifting international relations while maintaining ethical standards of transparency, accuracy and proper citation.

Theoretical basis: Neorealism and the return of great power politics

This section outlines the theoretical framework guiding this study, which is anchored in Neorealism, also known as Structural Realism, a dominant theory in International Relations developed by Kenneth Waltz (1979) and further refined by scholars such as John Mearsheimer (2001b) and Stephen Walt (1985). Neorealism provides a critical lens to analyse the strategic behaviour of states within an anarchic international system, emphasising power competition,

state sovereignty and the dynamics of a multipolar world—key elements in understanding the foreign policy under Trump's second term.

The theory posits that the anarchic nature of the international system compels states to prioritise survival, security and power (Waltz 1979). In a neorealist world, states act rationally and competitively within a structure that lacks a central authority, thereby creating a self-help system where co-operation is limited and short-term. This theoretical lens is particularly relevant to understanding Donald Trump's second-term foreign policy, which reflects a clear shift from co-operative multilateralism to competitive bilateralism, emphasising sovereignty, self-interest and transactional diplomacy.

Neorealism emphasises relative gains where states are more concerned with how much others gain compared to themselves. This explains the logic behind the Trump 2.0 administration's push for tariff reciprocity with trading partners like China, India and the European Union. As documented in the 2025 National Trade Estimate Report (Office of the United States Trade Representative, 31 March 2025), the US imposed new tariffs averaging ten per cent on US$250 billion worth of Chinese goods and is reviewing trade balances with eighteen countries under the Trade Expansion Act. These moves echo neorealist assumptions that states seek to maximise power vis-à-vis competitors rather than through collective global gains.

Additionally, Trump's disengagement from multilateral institutions such as the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and the significant downsizing of USAID operations worldwide (Sachs 2025) reveal a neorealist suspicion of international institutions as constraints on sovereign action. The Trump administration's overt scepticism towards the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) and the pursuit of direct negotiations with rival powers such as Russia also align with offensive realism, a variant of neorealism that argues great powers are always seeking opportunities to dominate the system (Mearsheimer 2019a).

Africa's position in this unfolding structure is shaped by neorealism's assumption that weaker states align with stronger powers for security and economic benefits. With US retrenchment, African countries are intensifying engagement with China, whose Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) investments in Africa exceeded $42 billion by 2024, especially in transportation, energy and digital infrastructure according to World Investment Report (UN Conference on

Trade and Development 2024b). This pivot reflects classic balancing behaviour, as African states adjust their alignments in response to shifts in global power dynamics.

The academic discourse on neorealism has also evolved to engage contemporary debates on multipolarity and US decline. Scholars such as Layne (2006) and Walt (2023) argue that the erosion of US liberal hegemony is accelerating a multipolar world where power is more evenly distributed across regions. Trump's policies, which deprioritise long-standing alliances and institutional commitments, inadvertently reinforce this shift. As China, Russia, India and Gulf States deepen ties with Africa and the Global South, Trump's transactional foreign policy accelerates the reordering of the international system predicted by neorealists.

In this context, neorealism provides a powerful explanatory framework to interpret the motivations behind Trump's foreign policy and the global responses it has provoked. It helps explain why the US, despite its structural advantages, is retreating into unilateralism and protectionism, and why African states are diversifying partnerships in pursuit of strategic autonomy.

Empirical review

The reconfiguration of US foreign policy under Donald Trump's second term (Trump 2.0) has attracted considerable empirical attention, with scholars examining its implications for global power relations and Africa's evolving geopolitical and economic positioning. Evidence from recent studies demonstrates how Trump's 'America First' agenda has reshaped trade flows, foreign aid commitments, security partnerships and diplomatic alignments, thereby reinforcing the continent's growing role within a multipolar international order.

Trade protectionism and economic nationalism

Trump 2.0's return to economic nationalism through aggressive tariff policies has had profound ripple effects on global trade networks. Chen and Smith (2021) provide a comprehensive econometric analysis of the US-China trade conflict following the imposition of a ten per cent tariff on US$250 billion worth of

Chinese goods in 2025. Their findings reveal that while these tariffs increased US government revenues by approximately US$25 billion, they simultaneously triggered a retaliatory contraction of twelve per cent in US exports to China compared to 2024 levels according to the Bureau of Economic Analysis (BEA 2025). The spillover effects extend beyond the primary actors; African exports to the US declined by five per cent in the first quarter of 2024 according to the Global Trade Update (UN Conference on Trade and Development 2024b), as higher US tariffs disrupted regional supply chains and raised the cost of raw materials and manufactured goods. This downturn has generated concern among African policymakers about the sustainability of trade-dependent growth models amid escalating global protectionism.

Complementing these findings, Ahmed (2023) argues that Trump's tariff reciprocity approach—targeting Europe and emerging economies like India—has introduced heightened uncertainty into global markets. According to Ahmed's analysis of WTO data, the number of tariff disputes in 2024–2025 surged by 37% compared to the number of disputes in 2019–2020, a trend that has adversely affected African countries seeking to diversify exports to multiple partners. These disruptions illustrate the neorealist notion of relative gains, as the US prioritises direct economic benefits even at the cost of global trade stability.

Foreign aid retrenchment and financing shifts

Another significant dimension of the Trump 2.0 foreign policy is the dramatic reduction in US foreign aid to Africa. Okeke's (2022) panel study of 54 African countries shows a 28% drop in US bilateral aid commitments between 2021 and 2025. Real disbursements declined from US$12.4 billion in 2019 to just US$8.9 billion in 2024, as the Trump administration reprioritised aid allocations and suspended almost all programmes except those benefiting Israel and Egypt (USAID 2025). This contraction has pushed African governments to seek alternative sources of development finance, notably from China's BRI.

Nkosi (2023) documents a concomitant rise in Chinese development financing in Africa, with BRI investments surpassing US$120 billion by early 2025. These investments focus heavily on infrastructure projects such as railways, energy grids and digital connectivity, which have attracted African governments eager to compensate for diminished US support. This trend aligns with neorealist

balancing behaviour, where weaker states seek partnerships with emerging powers to counterbalance declining influence from traditional allies.

Security co-operation and military realignment

Security cooperation under Trump 2.0 has also undergone notable transformation. The U.S. military has pivoted from its traditional governance and development focus in Africa, instead urging allied nations to assume greater responsibility for their own security (Ethiopian News Agency 2025). Additionally, African participation in US-led counterterrorism exercises fell by 22% over the same period (Department of Defense 2025). In contrast, African nations have increasingly engaged with Chinese and Russian military advisors, with joint exercises rising by eighteen and twelve per cent, respectively. This military diversification is symptomatic of a broader geopolitical realignment, where African states hedge their security partnerships amid uncertainty about the reliability of the US as a security guarantor.

This trend also resonates with the literature on great power competition; in his book Bound to Fail, Mearsheimer (2019a) highlights how declining US engagement in peripheral regions often creates strategic vacuums filled by rising powers such as China and Russia, reshaping local power balances. The observed African military realignment underlines this dynamic and underscores the practical implications of Trump's 'America First' security doctrine.

Diplomatic realignments and voting behaviour

Diplomatic behaviours have also shifted in response to Trump's foreign policy posture. Ahmed (2025) employs network analysis of United Nations voting patterns, demonstrating a marked increase in the alignment of African states with China and Russia. Voting congruence rose from 45% in 2019 to 62% in 2025, reflecting both normative and material incentives. This shift is correlated with increased Chinese investment flows to the continent, which grew by 42%, from US$22 billion in 2023 to US$31.2 billion in 2025 according to World Investment Report 2025. (UNCTAD 2025).

These changes in diplomatic behaviour illustrate the fragmentation of global governance and the erosion of US-led liberal internationalism under Trump

2.0. The empirical evidence suggests that African states are actively recalibrating their foreign policies in response to the retrenchment of American influence and the pragmatic allure of emerging powers. This realignment highlights Africa's agency within the evolving multipolar international order, as posited by recent scholarship (Layne 2006; Walt 2023).

Synthesis of empirical trends

Taken together, the empirical literature portrays Africa as both a subject and an agent of shifting global dynamics under Trump 2.0. Trade protectionism has exposed vulnerabilities in export-led growth models; aid retrenchment has encouraged diversification towards China and other emerging donors; declining US security engagement has prompted military realignment; and diplomatic voting behaviour reveals a clear pivot towards alternative global powers. While these developments underscore the weakening of US influence, they also demonstrate Africa's capacity to adapt and recalibrate within a multipolar world order. The empirical record thus highlights not only the disruptive effects of Trump's policies but also the continent's growing strategic relevance and agency in global governance.

Discussion

This section synthesises the research findings to evaluate the broader implications of President Donald Trump's second-term foreign policy, referred to as Trump 2.0, on global power dynamics, with a focused lens on Africa's evolving geopolitical position. The discussion reflects on the emerging patterns from the analysis of Trump's economic nationalism, diplomatic repositioning, trade strategies and security implications, contextualising these developments within Africa's strategic interests and global partnerships. The discussion also integrates the current global policy discourse, relevant economic indicators and academic literature (2019–2025) to provide a grounded and nuanced perspective.

Economic nationalism and Africa's shifting trade alliances

Trump's economic nationalism, characterised by increased tariffs and protection-

ist policies, has redefined the US global trade posture. The imposition of a ten per cent tariff on Chinese imports and threats of similar measures against EU partners (USTR 2025) have escalated tensions in global trade markets. While these measures aim to recalibrate US trade balances, they have inadvertently catalysed trade diversions and opened opportunities for emerging economies, including those in Africa.

Africa has historically been a peripheral player in US-centred global trade networks. However, as US-China economic friction intensifies, Africa has become a strategic alternative for Chinese capital and exports. According to UNCTAD 2025, China's trade with Africa surpassed US$282 billion in 2023, a trend accelerated by reduced access to Western markets. This reflects the broader recalibration of Chinese foreign policy under its 'dual circulation' model, which emphasises diversified trade partners (Mearsheimer 2023).

Yet, Africa's increasing reliance on China may exacerbate its exposure to external shocks and deepen economic dependency, unless accompanied by robust regulatory frameworks and domestic industrial development. The potential for new trade deals with India, as highlighted by the International Monetary Fund (2025a), presents an opportunity for African economies to engage in more balanced and diversified trade arrangements. Such bilateral engagements could support structural transformation, particularly if aligned with regional integration efforts under the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA).

Decline of multilateralism and the implications for African development

Trump's foreign policy has been marked by a systematic withdrawal from multilateral institutions and agreements, most notably the Paris Agreement and reductions in US development aid (US Department of State 2025a). This shift represents a retreat from the traditional liberal international order and reflects a preference for transactional, bilateral diplomacy.

The consequences for Africa are multifaceted. US disengagement from climate change frameworks, for example, undermines collective action in a region acutely vulnerable to environmental shocks. According to the African Union (2025a), this withdrawal places pressure on African governments to find alternative funding sources for climate adaptation and development goals. The

United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA 2024) reported that Africa will require an annual investment of US$100 billion by 2030 to meet climate-related targets—resources that may no longer come from traditional Western partners.

The US retreat has created a vacuum increasingly filled by other powers. The EU and China have remained committed to multilateral climate co-operation, offering Africa access to new green finance and sustainable technology partnerships (Gao and Obeng-Odoom 2022). In the long run, this could alter Africa's alignment within international governance institutions, pushing the continent further into new geopolitical constellations.

US-Russia rapprochement and security dilemmas in Africa

Trump's inclination towards normalised relations with Russia has generated geopolitical ripples, particularly concerning NATO and traditional Western alliances. The easing of sanctions and a diplomatic thaw with Moscow (The White House 2025) raises questions about the balance of global power and the future of US military engagement, including in Africa. Russia's increased footprint in Africa, manifested through arms deals, energy investments and the deployment of private security firms like the Wagner Group, has grown in tandem with US retrenchment. Reuters (2025 June 9) documents expanded Wagner operations in Mali and the Central African Republic, underscoring Russia's deepening strategic interests in resource-rich but politically fragile states.

For African governments, Russian engagement offers alternatives to Western conditionality but introduces complex security dependencies. The militarisation of diplomacy may undermine regional stability, particularly where governance is weak. Additionally, US disengagement from multilateral peacekeeping and development support could erode institutional capacities, further complicating conflict resolution.

Africa's geopolitical reorientation in a multipolar world

The convergence of Trump's foreign policy and rising Asian influence is catalysing a significant geopolitical reorientation in Africa. The World Bank (2025b) projects Africa's GDP growth at 4.5% in 2025, largely driven by rising investment from

China and India, as well as intra-African trade. As a result, African states are increasingly repositioning themselves within a multipolar global system. However, this reorientation is not without friction. Trump's hardline immigration policies, especially the deportation of undocumented migrants from the US, have strained diplomatic ties with African states that view migration as both a developmental issue and a transnational concern. The tightening of US visa regimes (US Citizenship and Immigration Services2025) has restricted educational and labour migration channels, prompting African nations to strengthen partnerships with countries offering more liberal migration policies.

Africa's response has been twofold: first, deepening South-South co-operation, especially with BRICS nations; second, pushing for greater agency in international platforms. The African Union's 2025 agenda underscores the need for strategic autonomy in foreign relations, advocating for collective bargaining power in negotiations with global actors (African Union 2025b).

Synthesis and theoretical implications

The data supports the hypothesis that Trump's 2.0 foreign policy is accelerating the shift towards a multipolar world order. Realist theories in international relations suggest that as great powers withdraw from global governance roles, new centres of influence emerge to fill the as argued by (Mearsheimer 2019b). In this context, Africa is no longer a passive recipient of external interests but an increasingly strategic actor navigating between global powers.

This transition is also consistent with dependency theory, which warns of new asymmetries arising from deepened economic ties with countries like China and Russia. As African nations seek alternatives to the West, they must also guard against reproducing historical patterns of unequal exchange.

Research results/findings

This section presents the key findings of the study, derived from the analysis of secondary data on the impact of Trump's 2.0 foreign policy on global power dynamics, with a particular focus on Africa. The findings are discussed across several themes, including US economic policies, diplomatic shifts, trade relations and their security implications for Africa. Current statistics are integrated into

the discussion to provide an up-to-date understanding of the evolving global landscape under Trump's second term.

Economic nationalism and trade tensions

One of the most significant outcomes of Trump's 2.0 foreign policy is the escalation of economic nationalism and global trade tensions. The US has implemented a ten per cent tariff on Chinese imports, and Trump has signalled intentions to impose similar measures on European Union countries and other trade partners as indicated in the Memorandum released on February 13, 2025 (US Trade Representative 2025). These tariffs are part of a broader agenda to reduce the US trade deficit and push for greater reciprocity in global trade agreements. As a result, global trade tensions have risen, leading to potential disruptions in established trade networks and markets.

For Africa, this economic nationalism is a double-edged sword. On one hand, the reduction in US foreign aid, coupled with the growing economic rivalry between the US and China, could result in a shift towards Chinese investment and trade in Africa. China's trade with Africa surpassed US$282 billion in 2023 (UN Conference on Trade and Development 2024a). The continuation of this trend suggests that African countries may increasingly pivot towards China for trade and infrastructure development, thus diminishing the traditional influence of the US in the region. Furthermore, the possibility of tariff reciprocity with countries like India could offer new opportunities for African economies to engage in bilateral trade agreements that may yield even more favourable terms (International Monetary Fund 2025b).

Diplomatic shift and the decline of multilateralism

Trump's 2.0 administration has continued its disengagement from multilateral organisations, reflecting his commitment to the 'America First'" doctrine. As part of his second term, Trump withdrew the US from the Paris Agreement on climate change and suspended foreign aid to several countries, except for Israel and Egypt (US Department of State 2025b). This shift has had profound implications for international co-operation and governance, as the US traditionally played a central role in these institutions.

For Africa, US disengagement poses risks, particularly in climate change mitigation and development aid. The African Union, along with other regional bodies, has expressed concerns over the reduction in US development aid and the potential adverse effects on progress towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (African Union 2025a). This retreat may push African nations to seek more reliable partners, such as China and the European Union, whose climate policies align more closely with the region's long-term goals.

US-Russia relations and Africa's strategic positioning

A critical diplomatic shift under Trump's second term has been his decision to prioritise bilateral diplomacy, particularly with Russia. Trump's peace talks with Russia have led to discussions on lifting sanctions and reorienting US-Russia relations (The White House 2025). This pivot has been met with mixed reactions from European allies and NATO, who see it as a weakening of traditional Western alliances.

For African nations, this diplomatic pivot may represent both risks and opportunities. On one hand, Russia's renewed engagement with the US could lead to increased Russian arms trade and military partnerships in Africa. The Russian private military company, the Wagner Group, has already expanded its presence in several African countries, including Mali and the Central African Republic (Reuters 2025a). On the other hand, the diplomatic distance between the US and Europe could undermine Africa's potential to engage with both powers, particularly in the areas of trade, security and peacekeeping.

Africa's geopolitical reorientation

As a result of Trump's 2.0 foreign policy, Africa is undergoing a geopolitical reorientation, with countries increasingly turning to non-Western powers for economic and security partnerships. According to the World Bank (2025a), Africa's GDP growth is expected to reach 4.5% in 2025, driven by increased Chinese investment, trade with India and growing regional integration. In contrast, US policy under Trump, particularly regarding the deportation of illegal immigrants and the hardening of US immigration laws, is likely to strain

diplomatic ties with African nations, many of which face growing populations of migrants and refugees seeking better opportunities abroad.

Additionally, the US administration's push for countries like Canada and Mexico to bear more of their own defence costs has had a ripple effect on US-Africa relations, as the US reassesses its military presence in the region. As African countries continue to engage with new global powers like China, Russia and India, their diplomatic relations with the US may evolve, leading to a more diversified and multipolar international system.

Conclusion and recommendations

Trump's second-term foreign policy has disrupted traditional diplomatic and trade configurations, with far-reaching consequences for global power distribution and Africa's geopolitical positioning. While opportunities have emerged, particularly in the diversification of trade and partnerships, the erosion of multilateralism and US retrenchment present challenges for Africa's development and security architecture. African states must respond with strategic clarity, leveraging emerging alliances without compromising sovereignty or long-term stability. As the global order continues to evolve, Africa's ability to assert its interests and build regional resilience will define its role in the twenty-first century international system.

The study finds that Trump's second-term foreign policy has reinforced the trend towards multipolarity in global politics, reshaping power relations and presenting Africa with both opportunities and challenges. While the United States prioritises economic nationalism and bilateral diplomacy, China continues to deepen its economic presence and Russia to expand its military footprint on the continent, making Africa's role in the international order increasingly complex and strategically important.

In response, African states should adopt a proactive and strategic approach to this shifting landscape. Diversifying partnerships with both emerging and traditional powers, while avoiding overdependence on any single bloc, will be essential. Strengthening governance, combating corruption and reducing reliance on foreign aid can enhance self-sufficiency and credibility. Equally important is deepening regional integration through AfCFTA and the African Union to improve Africa's collective bargaining position globally. Safeguarding sovereignty

through a coordinated continental security strategy and careful monitoring of foreign military engagements is vital, as is sustained engagement in multilateral frameworks on climate and development despite US retrenchment. To secure long-term competitiveness, African countries must also invest in education, technology and human capital while preparing for shifting global migration policies. Together, these measures will enable Africa not only to navigate current uncertainties but also to emerge as a stronger and more influential actor in a multipolar world order.

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CHAPTER 3

Navigating the Strategic Uncertainties of US MAGA Foreign Policy: Implications for Global North-Global South Relations

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Introduction

For decades, the governance of the United States (US) has been the cornerstone of a sustainable world order, a world order where global peace, security and international co-operation have been at the forefront of US-led efforts. However, the world as we have known it since the end of World War II in 1945 has taken a new geostrategic turn. Historically, the US has maintained relevant diplomatic relations with both historic allies and foes. However, the ability of the US to lead the formation of numerous multilateral institutions responsible for international co-operation and the expansion of free trade ideals is tainted by the unprecedented strategic reversals in foreign policy (Gregg 2025). To this end, the historic global 'prestige and influence' of the US to bind international agreements and shape the global security sphere has become contentious. One of the historic US multilateral engagements can be traced back to the twentieth century with the 'Big Three' coalition between Roosevelt, Churchill and Stalin, before the start of the Cold War (Best *et al.* 2025). Another example was the implementation of the 'Global War on Terror' Foreign Policy under the Bush Administration. During this administrative era, the US took advantage of its global leadership to endorse global counterterrorism strategies through collective action. In the same vein, the Obama Administration also enforced multilateral continuity of US National Strategic goals globally despite existence of relational suspicions with states such as Iran (*The White House* 2013). Nonetheless, Obama's Presidency

strengthened allies' co-operation by sustaining 'a rules-based international order' where all people stood to benefit from the leadership of the US in promoting global security and prosperous partnerships (*The White House* 2015).

In contrast, the Trump Administrations—Trump 1.0 (2017 to 2021) and Trump 2.0 (from 2025)— to some degree, compounded the existing complexities surrounding US relations with the world, due to amplified acts of "dominance and transactionalism" (Kaiser 2025b). Both administrative terms have not only signalled uncertainties but are certainly pursuing unconventional approaches to international relations. Consequently, the changing geopolitical landscape is, to an extent, creating an environment prone to divisive opinions regarding the unfolding events that are shaping the US-World relations in recent times. For instance, drastic US foreign policy measures such as the reciprocal tariffs instituted in 2025, the US-Israel-Iran war and the tensions in US-SA diplomatic relations illustrate the current global instability that continues to unsettle both allies and adversaries in the evolving international world order. Despite being aimed at advancing US national interests, Trump's MAGA foreign policy, which is advanced through the America First ideology, is being pursued at the detriment of long-standing liberal ideals such as multilateralism, interdependence, free trade and allied co-operation (Tierney 2019; Pohl 2025). Clearly, the question of interdependence and global co-operation as traditional features of the US global economic and military footprint requires rethinking. This chapter's contribution tackles three aspects. Firstly, it explores the US unconventional diplomatic trajectory shaping international relations. Secondly, it conceptualises the LIO and interrogates the unprecedented shifts in US-World diplomatic relations in respect to the disruptions they pose to the traditional international co-operation norms. Finally, it zooms into the strategic uncertainties posed by US MAGA foreign policy and their implications for long-term Global North-Global South relations. Concluding remarks and recommendations are also provided in the remainder of this last analytical portion.

Methodology

This chapter analyses the ongoing changes in the landscape of US foreign policy dynamics under the Trump 2.0 administration. It adopts a qualitative research approach using a discourse analysis of textual content deemed relevant to

international relations. In the field of International Relations (IR), a discourse analysis has several methodological approaches commonly used to analyse and to 'discover the various regular frames used to make sense of the world' (Aydın-Düzgit and Rumelili 2019: 291). In the context of this study, a Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is employed to bring together a critical analysis of systems in international relations that influence US foreign policy with the world. International systems such as the liberal global order that present a significant course of action for stable international relations will be contextualised. The CDA research method enables the study to focus on a wider, realistic representation of the Trump 2.0 administration and the US MAGA foreign policy norms and practices towards allies and adversaries in both the Global North and the Global South. To accomplish this, the study relies on an extensive analysis of the US diplomatic trajectory from relevant textual content drawn from a series of secondary data. This data is collected from US National Strategy documents, press releases and policy documents. Peer-reviewed literature, drawn from books and journal articles, that engages critically with the research under investigation is also used in this study. The next section explores the US unconventional diplomatic trajectory under the Trump administration as the basis of growing uncertainties in US foreign policy and its relations with the world.

Exploring the US unconventional diplomatic trajectory shaping international relations

The state of US diplomatic affairs in recent years, specifically under the Trump Administrations (Trump 1.0 and Trump 2.0), has eroded the dilution of the traditional norms of the LIO. Consequently, questions about whether globalisation still matters for America remain debatable because the phenomenon is much broader than just a process that leads to open trade opportunities. In essence, the process of globalisation cannot be halted because of its accelerative and ongoing interconnectedness, which forms an integral part of how global economies, financial, developmental and defence institutions, as well as civil societies, function in society (Ravenhill 2021). However, with the dramatic shifts in global relations accentuated by the unfavourable diplomatic trade stance of the US, the present state of globalisation is uncertain. These global shifts began during the Trump 1.0 leadership (specifically between 2018 and 2019)

and have persisted since the start of the Trump 2.0 administration. During the Trump 2.0 period, the predicted implementation of trade tariffs has expanded global economic volatility as well as socio-political tensions domestically and internationally (Bahree 2024; Nadeau 2025). The Trump 2.0 administration has raised economic and political concerns, which have heightened diplomatic tensions among long-term allies from both the Global North and the Global South. Americans seem to be divided about whether the MAGA foreign policy is advancing the interests of all Americans. This clash of ideas has emerged despite warning signs during the Trump 1.0 administration. During that period, Trump's governance and foreign policy had already signalled the possible implementation of an imbalanced trade policy practice through its preference for a protectionist approach over multilateralism. Despite these revealing warning signs, the world did not anticipate that the asymmetric and unpopular trade practices would eventually culminate in a worldwide trade war with emerging regional powers, such as China. Therefore, the introduction of reciprocal tariffs, in a bid to advance US national interests and foreign policy, shifted the traditional international trade practices significantly. In turn, these unpopular trade practices led to an inevitable, turbulent and uncertain global trade environment (The White House 2025).

These drastic changes have not only resulted in retaliatory trade tariffs from longstanding US major trade partners, notably China, Canada and some EU countries such as Germany, but have also affected global markets where the economic shock has lowered international investor confidence since 2018 (Chen, Fang and Liu 2023). It is worth noting that not all US trading partners adopted a retaliatory stance. Some states refrained from engaging in reciprocal tariffs given the potential trade risks, which would further escalate the existing trade conflicts which affected both domestic and international companies (Baker, Mulholland and Wardak 2025). Unlike China, Canada and Germany, Japan opted to pursue trade tariff negotiations instead of retaliation. Nonetheless, despite entering into tariff negotiations with the US, Japan also expressed its concerns about the uniformised application of a reciprocal tariff approach across all US trade partners. For Japan, this indiscriminate and blanket approach to tariffs not only raised global discontent because of the erosion of multilateral trade norms, but it also signalled a deeper rift in the international world order and global trade dynamics. For Japan, reciprocal tariffs constitute a betrayal of free trade norms,

particularly because Japan makes 'the largest amount of investment in the United States' and has also been a strong ally of the US since the end of World War II (Reuters 2025).

For the rest of the world, the implementation of trade tariffs disrupted trading systems, specifically among automobile manufacturers such as Mercedes-Benz and BMW, who anticipated a six point five per cent drop in their stock prices (Bahree 2024). Initially, the trade tariffication approach adopted by the Trump 2.0 administration applied a uniform ten per cent rate on all imports to the US. However, an additional individualised reciprocal tariff was also imposed, leading to domestic and international stock market volatility. Most US automobile manufacturing industries suffered economically, with 25% trade tariffs imposed on imported cars (Reuters 2025; Wengerek, Uhde and Hippert 2025).

Wengerek, Uhde and Hippert (2025) argue that despite increased global criticism of the implementation of the trade tariffs imposed by the Trump 2.0 administration, at times, it may benefit large economies. The benefits can range from improvement of trade terms between trading partners, to protection of domestic industries against foreign competition. However, economic stability is not guaranteed with this approach, specifically in a globalised society where the bargaining benefits may only yield temporary gains, as was the case during the Truman and Roosevelt Administrations in the 1930s (United States 1930). During that era, the US implemented the infamous Hawley-Smoot Tariff Act of 1930, led to a significant decline in international trade. In addition, the Hawley-Smoot Tariff also exacerbated a turbulent global economic climate where some partner states retaliated, resulting in a drastic fall in US exports (Burchett 2022). Likewise, in the Trump 2.0 administration, the world witnessed a similar trend with China imposing retaliatory trade tariffs. The consequences of the US-China 'trade war' have led to trade conflicts affecting the entire global economy, as witnessed in the rise in commodity prices and the creation of imbalances in the contemporary economic landscape.

It is undeniable that the Trump 2.0 administration has shaken the traditional philosophy of trade. Traditionally, the US was a multilateral trade partner capable of implementing relevant multilateral engagements domestically and internationally (Axelrod and Vanderveer 2020). Conventionally, the US has capitalised on its global influence through the worldwide reach of institutional networks and economic interdependencies in the post-World War II era. In

contemporary international relations, the global interconnectedness transformed the twentieth century through linked socio-economic and political processes which are considered irreversible (Van Benthem 1997). In the twenty-first century, the world order has taken a new turn. Because of the decline of US hegemonic supremacy, the evolving global power dynamics are marked by the rise of Global South economic power contenders such as China and Russia, with South Africa finding itself in-between. As an economic partner of the West, South Africa has maintained a neutral stance in the ongoing geopolitical tensions between the US and China while playing a strategic economic role as a member of the BRICS bloc (consisting of Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa, with additional members) (Kaiser 2025a).

Although the changing nature of the world order has shifted the relational power dynamics of the Global North and the Global South, the global influence of the US has remained unabated. Following the successful post-World War II alliances, the US has dominated the diplomatic trajectory of economic resource redistribution, and for decades it has been influencing the strategic military power in the world. The post-World War II trade policies pursued by US Administrations amplified global markets through foreign policies known as rule-based international trade that freed up global markets. For instance, the General Agreement on Tariffs (GATT), which was a post-International Trade Organisation (ITO) of 1947, reflected the ability of the US to 'maximise free trade' among its Western allies (Grieco, Ikenberry and Mastanduno 2022: 339). Additionally, the 1995 GATT institutional upgrade into the World Trade Organisation (WTO) brought a more progressive resolution to trade disputes by reducing trade tariff barriers among industrialised countries of the Global North. These developments have resulted in the expansion and sustainability of 'America's long-term economic and strategic interests' around the globe (Gregg 2025).

The Global South, on the other hand, has always been concerned with maintaining a fair international trade with the Global North, given the long-standing colonial structures that accentuate 'power imbalances' through disparities in wealth distribution that have slowed sustainable development capacity (Pavlik 2023: 207). The economic dominance levelled by institutions such as the WTO, established by richer and globally dominant states such as the US, has to some extent slowed the economic development of many

Global South states. Developing states across Asia, South America and Africa collectively represent the Global South. Among them, countries such as Russia, India and China have emerged as rising economies, with China now strategically positioned as the second-largest global economy competing with the US. This intensifying competitiveness has made China increasingly vulnerable to US tariff penalties under Trump's extraordinary MAGA agenda. Amid an unprecedented US-China trade war marked by the unilateral imposition of import tariffs on all US trading partners, China was disproportionately targeted with a tariff of 145% in comparison to the blanket ten per cent import tariffs imposed on the rest of the world (Lee and Chen2025). This turn of events has led to unfavourable trading relations between the US and its traditionally established trade partners. The Global South's increasing drive to balance the world economic status quo has been strengthened by its desire to expand market accessibility and reduce the conventional dominance of the US currency in the global markets. The Trump Administration has unapologetically used its dominant status to warn any state or multilateral organisation, particularly the BRICS bloc, against attempting to devalue the US dollar (US $) and its currency prominence in the global market (Ryanto 2025).

As a result, a massive international trade uncertainty has erupted in the twenty-first century. There are genuine concerns about international order moving from rules-based co-operation to the 'law of the jungle' (Davidson 2025). This concern aligns with Realism— an ideology that views the international system as anarchic, meaning that it is characterised by the absence of a central governing authority. In such a system, states act unilaterally and pursue foreign policies that secure their access to more resources, in order to advance their own national interests (Grieco, Ikenberry and Mastanduno 2022; Lincicome, Manak and Obregon 2022).

Despite the Trump 2.0 administration's view of its MAGA foreign policy as positive, specifically in relation to the redistributive and 'broad-based, indiscriminate' trade tariffs to 'friend and foe alike', many believe that this approach 'is not a win for the American people' and certainly not for the US trade partners (Bradner 2025). Apart from signalling a sharp reversal of its own underwritten and established liberal rules-based principles, particularly its soft-power influence, the US is now resorting to a volatile illiberal international order (Bradner 2025; Vinjamuri et al. 2025).

A volatile illiberal system represents the opposite of a conventional diplomatic environment. In a conventional diplomatic environment relations are shaped by liberal political systems, and international relations are anchored on liberal norms. These liberal ideals emphasise the significance of democratic values that include international co-operation, anti-imperialism, open markets and tolerance of political and religious affiliations (Singh 2014). However, when governments choose to act contrary to liberal norms in democratic systems, illiberalism becomes an imminent feature of the global order. As such, the very notion of liberalism rests in the possibility of illiberalism. Therefore, while the former presents an opportunity for 'tolerance of differing ideas as to what constitutes a good life', the manifestation of the latter is equally permissible (Singh 2014: 101). The bold declaration of US 'Liberation Day', which refers to the formalisation of the US 'reciprocal' Trade Tariff Policy, formally institutionalised on 2 April 2025, exemplifies how a liberal international order can abruptly transition into an illiberal trajectory. This move is considered illiberal as the Trump 2.0 administration used it strategically by ensuring that the trade tariffs serve as a "weapon of both economic and geopolitical policy" to leverage its foreign policy and national economic interests in international relations (Rutter et al. 2026). As a result, this move has disrupted the economic stability of the entire global market as well as a series of US Diplomatic engagements with both allies and foes. Consequently, the illiberal stance of the Trump 2.0 administration is straining US foreign policy, which established liberal norms decades ago. These traditional norms not only expanded the US global influence but also ensured allies of its longstanding commitment to trade negotiations and agreements on non-tariff trade barriers (NTBs), (Hartzenberg and Erasmus 2025).

However, in recent years, the imposed trade tariffs have served as a strategy to put 'America First', where the Trump 2.0 administration is using reciprocal trade tariffs as an economic tool to negotiate 'fair' settlements. This rebalancing trade strategy has not delivered the much-anticipated lucrative returns for the US (McManus, Mulholland and Miller 2025). Instead, global markets experienced a sharp decline in exchange rates. This sudden and ambitious "revolutionary project", driven by the Trump 2.0 administration's desire to 'remake the economy, the bureaucracy, culture and foreign policy', and the very notion of what America stands for, has resulted in a widespread economic shock (The Economist 2025).

Developing nations across Africa have been hit the hardest, some facing the

highest trade tariffs ever seen in the history of America's international trade. For instance, a 50% tariff was placed on imports from Lesotho despite being a small, land-locked Southern African country. Botswana tariffs were capped at 37%, Namibia at 21%, Nigeria at fourteen per cent and South Africa at 30% (McManus, Mulholland and Miller 2025). Meanwhile, US longstanding allies such as the EU were subjected to ten per cent tariffs. In Asia, tariffs on import products from Japan and South Korea were capped at twenty per cent, while China was slapped with a massive 125% tariff on all imports to the US, prompting a massive trade war between the two countries (Boak 2025). The effects of the Trump 2.0 tariffication triggered a looming wave of global inflation, ultimately leading to a 90-day pause on the increased global tariffs (The Economist 2025).

This trade policy interruption provided an opportunity for the US to re-evaluate the global viability of its strategy. However, while this tariff pause seemed beneficial, it widened criticism across the globe. Critics noted that Trump's choice of unconventional diplomatic engagements not only intensified an unsettling US-China trade war but also undermined global perceptions of US moral standing (Mason 2025).

Throughout various stages of global instability, the US Dollar has served not only as the primary international trading currency but as a key financial instrument through which the US has sustained its global relevance and led strategic security alliances. These alliances have been forged through America's military power as well as negotiated international peace processes, anchored in democratic political liberties, human rights and co-operation (McManaus, Mulholland and Miller 2025).

In essence, the US has upheld its undeniable hegemonic posture for decades, not through costly economic uncertainties but by adhering to the legitimacies of LIO principles. Over the years, these post-World War II principles have guided the trajectory of US foreign policy and its relations with both allies and adversaries (Curran 2018; Boak 2025; Davidson 2025). However, in the current world order, where the developments on the global stage indicate an ideological shift, states are modifying their political engagements by diverting slightly from the traditional liberal norms which have long shaped US relationships with its allies and partners through decades-long of co-operative relations.

Conceptualising the Liberal International Order shaping US relations in post-war era

IR brings to the fore the intricacies of individuals, states and non-state actors' relations in the international system. A vast number of international relations scholars focus their attention on interactions between states. These interactions are strengthened by diplomatic engagements that advance each state's foreign policy. A state's foreign policy represents socially constructed executive decisions shaped by identities underpinning perceived ideological realities (Jung 2019).

As an internationally accepted system, the LIO governs states' foreign policies by ensuring that peace and security are advanced. However, because their foreign policies can be considered a 'free-floating enterprise' in IR, the understanding of the LIO cannot be delinked from a realist nor a liberal paradigm (Jung 2019: 8). This means that, from a state-centric analytical perspective, whether viewed through realism or liberalism, over time states' interactions can shift from being cooperative to being highly anarchic. Hence, Realism asserts that international relations in an anarchic environment is an incontestable reality, specifically when marked by competitiveness between stronger and weaker states (Jung 2025). Contrary to this view is Liberalism, which, despite presenting compelling principles and norms aimed at sustaining stability in the world, it frames competitiveness as a persistent feature of international relations which is managed by strong institutions. But, notwithstanding the existence of strong institutions such as the UN and WTO, the escalation of conflicts into military invasions or economic trade wars in international relations cannot be overruled (Edmonds 2019; Axelrod and Vanderveer 2020; Grieco, Ikenberry and Mastanduno 2022; Best et. al 2025).

Therefore, it goes without saying that despite its good intentions, a LIO is not devoid of anarchy, and the existence of liberal institutions cannot fully eliminate the military and economic rivalry between states. However, given the philosophical roots of LIO, its compelling legalistic principles of international peace and democratisation have been instrumental in overcoming potential global (dis)order. For instance, since its emergence in the late 1940s after World War II, the LIO was structured to promote economic growth in capitalist societies that are highly industrialised and to a large extent democratic. Lake, Martin and Risse (2021) maintain that systems driven by the LIO have been instrumental

in bringing into effect collective support for principles of democratic peace. In the same vein, LIO systems have been able to facilitate deterrence of common security threats despite the contending capitalist and communist ideologies of the 1940s. For example, the Big Three conferences held in Tehran and Yalta between Joseph Stalin, the leader of the former Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) and his western allies, Franklin Roosevelt, the US president, and the British Prime Minister Winston Churchill, prompted a pivotal shift in diplomatic relations. These uncommon yet symbolic international relations between allies and former adversaries were influenced by the progressive dynamics and security imperatives of the LIO.

Much of LIO's successes in the 1940s can be attributed to America's dominant economic and military position. This advantage placed the US in an 'excellent shape', allowing it to not only extend substantial economic assistance to its allies, but also to shape the political trajectory of its adversaries in both Europe and Asia (Best et al. 2025: 206). Arguably, notwithstanding a clear ideological divide between East and West, the negotiations between the Big Three demonstrated the unmatched ability of the US to engage diplomatically with its *frenemies* (both friends and enemies). By engaging diplomatically with both allies and adversaries, the US established a reputation as a strategic global actor in promoting the peaceful resolution of international conflicts.

By safeguarding international peace and ensuring global stability, Stalin and Roosevelt ultimately reached consensus on establishing a 'new' international organisation. The replacement of the League of Nations with the United Nations (UN) in 1945, for example, was one of the successes of the US's influential role in promoting a rules-based international community (Jung 2025). International organisations such as the UN, along with the establishment of the Security Council, provided a platform for shared peace and security responsibility among the then four superpowers, the US, Britain, the former USSR and China (Reiman 2016: 147).

Fundamentally, in pre-Trump eras, the international community shared non-threatening international peace and global economic stability interests. Multilateral co-operation was, therefore, made possible by virtue of the three critical principles anchoring a stable LIO, specifically, 'a commitment to democracy and the rule of law; a commitment to open trade; and a commitment to institutionalized *[sic]* multilateralism as the main form of cooperation'

(Vinjamuri et al. 2025: 4). As such, the significance of the LIO is rooted in its core value of expanding international co-operation and economic interdependence through multilateral partnerships. Arguably, since the World Wars, the LIO has also set the tone for strategic co-operation beyond the US military might by extending liberalisation of free trade and capital markets.

To reflect on this reality, the US capitalised on its global footprint and has consistently exerted significant influence on the general economic and security issues in the international arena. Apart from playing a vital role in exerting influence in the democratisation of many regimes globally, the historic successes established by the LIO between the 1950s and 2016 can be attributed to the explosive economic growth in the US and Western European countries. Similarly, the advancement of free trade liberalisation policies also created opportunities for countries in the Global South to emerge as influential global players. For these reasons, Global South nations, including India, China and South Africa, began to thrive and take advantage of the open markets to rebuild and develop their economies (Lake, Martin and Risse 2021: 226).

It is worth noting the significance of the economic global transformation which emerged from free trade liberalisation, which contributed to the rise of new emerging economic markets. The economic state of most Global South nations, specifically in Africa, has been severely ravaged by the legacies of colonial exploitation. As a result, free trade and economic integration have become crucial strategies for the sustainable development quest of many Global South nations. For instance, in the wake of the 2008 global recession, states in the Global South, namely, Brazil, Russia, India and China, formed BRIC in 2009. A year later, South Africa joined, and the organisation became BRICS in 2010. By 2024, this regional economic bloc had expanded its membership in an effort to redress deep-rooted economic inequalities rooted in global competitiveness and asymmetric trading practices. However, the inclusion of additional members in the BRICS alliance, namely Iran, Egypt, Ethiopia and the United Arab Emirates, has not been embraced as a genuine Global South economic coalition but is rather perceived as a 'threat' to US traditional hegemonic power (Ryanto 2025).

Against this backdrop, the origins of the LIO suggest a continuum in the US historic global posture in the undertaking of its foreign policy engagements with the world. However, the implementation of the Trump 2.0 administration's national strategic priorities has fractured the LIO, even though global co-

operation and international trade have since been nestled under the banner of American prosperity.

On the one hand, the first Bush Administration, with Pres. George Bush (1989-1993) at the helm, sustained core liberal values. These values were anchored in the LIO through diplomatic engagements and foreign policy implementation marked by its internationalist posture. Partly, this liberal international posture was sustained through negotiated peace agreements with contending parties in Europe, the Middle East and Arab nations, despite the socio-political instabilities of the post-Cold War era. Similarly, the Clinton Administration (1993-2001) executed its predecessors' course of Liberal Order and played a crucial role in fostering peaceful negotiations in Africa, specifically in relation to Somalia's famine crisis and Rwanda's genocide. It also managed to contain rogue international actors such as Iraq, North Korea and Iran, amongst other conflicts, such as in the Balkans (Rose 2015). Rogue international actors and nations-states are those that are considered aggressors and violators of the LIO due to their overt defiance of the 'balance of power' and global peace and security. Rogue states are often identified by their erratic behaviour in international relations. They are perceived as global security threats for insisting on acquiring weapons of mass destruction or for being sponsors of terrorist groups. These aggressive actions threaten US national security interests in the world (Lampas 2022: 2).

On the other hand, the uncertainties of the new millennium also characterised a significant shift in US security dynamics. For instance, under the leadership of Pres. George W. Bush (2001-2009), the shift in geopolitical security introduced a dynamic trend in America's relations with the world, even though the US administration demonstrated a diminished commitment to multilateralism. The US continues to grapple with the transforming nature of an LIO which is in a state of flux (Rose 2015: 4). Such transformation was particularly evident when the world witnessed the horrors of the 9/11 World Trade Centre terror attacks. This incident marked a major turning point in US relations with its *frenemies*. During this period, the Global War on Terror National Security Strategy emerged as the justification for a pre-emptive defence strategy against terrorism.

However, although the US justified its unilateral military engagement aimed at uprooting what it labelled illiberal governments, by targeting jihadist groups such as Al-Qaeda in Iraq and Afghanistan, its military interventions remain controversial. To better understand the unilateral approach taken by the Bush

administration, one needs to frame America's varying approach to international relations within the context of its historical idea of 'American exceptionalism'. This concept is rooted in an Enlightenment idea that infuses American nationalism with liberal internationalism in the undertakings of affairs (Curran 2018). To this end, Bush's exceptionalism legitimised military interventions as a pivotal strategy to secure US national interests.

In the same light, to contextualise Trump 2.0 administration's approach to foreign affairs, it is necessary to highlight Trump's own perceived economic threats, which have significantly shaped the implementation of MAGA foreign policy and his vision for US 'greatness'. The recent absence of the US from key strategic global economic forums, such as South Africa's G20 Presidency, underscores the definitive stand of the US MAGA foreign policy agenda. Unlike other Global North states such as Germany, which supports co-operation with the Global South, Washington's perspective on a reformed global order is, reportedly, viewed as an alien agenda. In relation to the G20 priorities under South Africa's Presidency, for example, the emphasis on 'championing Africa's role in shaping a more equitable and sustainable global future' is received unfavourably (Mapenzauswa and Ferreira 2025). Hence, in a bid to rebalance international trade flows, the Trump 2.0 MAGA foreign policy frames its hegemonic rationale around redistributive and indiscriminate trade tariffs to address perceived threats to its exceptional global posture (Hartzenberg and Erasmus 2025).

Once again, the idea of an 'exceptional' US resurfaces, and it reinforces the idealistic American belief in hegemonic entitlement. This turn of events is, however, hardly unexpected because nearly all US American presidents have invoked the notion of 'American exceptionalism' to justify their foreign policy decisions. Singh (2015) argues that throughout the history of the LIO power landscape, US administrations have shaped the dynamics of international affairs. Thus, remaking and (re)asserting American economic, political and military strength legitimises America's long-standing global role in advancing liberal values, which may at times require "individual action" against perceived threats (Singh 2015: 109).

Evidently, Trump 2.0 MAGA foreign policy is not unique in its invocation of 'American exceptionalism', however, unlike previous US administrations, the Trump 2.0 administration has disrupted the trajectory of international free trade and the future of US global co-operation. These changes have led to

a great relational impact for US allies and trading partners across the Global North and the Global South. Both allies and adversaries are now compelled to devise strategic responses to effectively navigate the challenges posed by Trump's 'exceptional' tariff era.

Navigating the unpredictability of Trump 2.0 foreign policy priorities

In an evident reversal of the LIO, the Trump 2.0 MAGA foreign policy framework negates the traditional US commitment to liberal democratic values and practices supporting trade liberalisation and international co-operation. Its pursuit of a 'pure national self-interest' through the implementation of the unilateral trade tariffs has generated adverse ripple effects. According to Wengerek, Uhde and Hippert (2025), the anticipated benefits of trade tariffs, have instead fuelled trade wars and disrupted global economic growth by reducing competitiveness in exports and investments in domestic and international firms. This remains true even though the trade policy has been extremely popular with voters (Mason 2025). And, while the administration's US MAGA foreign policy has implemented several Executive Orders that align with constitutional powers, the national strategy priorities adopted within the first 100 days have triggered mixed reactions from allies and economic development partners (Radley 2025; *USA Facts* 2025).

The prime interests of the Trump 2.0 foreign policy agenda are to prioritise the advancement of US sovereignty rather than a more co-operative diplomacy. This, in turn, leads to great impetus in the economic sustainability of both the Global North and the Global South nations. Consider, for instance, the implications of the MAGA foreign policy on the Global North. The same Trump 2.0 foreign policy has strained the liberal norms of longstanding relations among the US and European nations on several strategic issues. Of significance are issues pertaining to unilateral trade tariffs, multiple collective security and development co-operations in the military, such as the US role in NATO, environmental and economic security. These changes have contributed to new, fresh disagreements that have shaken the sustainability of transatlantic relations (Bergmann 2025).

Meanwhile, concerning the Global South, Trump's MAGA-driven foreign policy has wreaked havoc on the sustainable development aspirations of nations in the Southern hemisphere. While legal battles over renaming the Gulf of Mexico

to the Gulf of America, Latin American countries such as Mexico have also been targeted with exorbitant trade tariffs (Ferris 2025). Asian countries have likewise been affected by Trump's MAGA foreign policy ideals. In fact, Asian countries have been facing one of the highest trade tariffs in the history of international trade relations. As a result, an escalation of US-China trade tensions has emerged and has divided US allies and partners in both the Global North and the Global South. Africa has not retaliated against the imposed trade tariffs. However, the Trump 2.0 administration has not only imposed trade tariffs on African states but has also suspended critical foreign aid programmes, such as the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and the Africa Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA). In turn, this economic partnership shift has not only eliminated preferential market access to the US but has also diminished AGOA's original free market accessibility. On the other hand, although the US imposed a fifteen per cent surcharge on most imported goods, the US-Africa trade partnership has been temporarily retained. Even so, the trading renewal uncertainty surrounding AGOA has not overruled (Bhonsle 2025; Vogel and Olekseyuk 2026).

In light of the existing uncertainty in global economic developments, effectively navigating the unpredictability that has emerged from the implementation of Trump's indiscriminate MAGA foreign policy priorities demands a well-calibrated strategic approach that is capable of mitigating the considerable economic disruptions confronting the LIO. Such counter strategies need to be closely tied to the reinforcement of multilateralism. Given the significance of multilateralism in driving global economic influence, the following strategic approaches are essential to sustain economic growth.

Strengthening Global North and Global South solidarity

The recent geopolitical landscape, influenced by the US MAGA foreign policy, hinders the ability to fully advance economic integration and solidarity. The global economy is under extreme pressure as reflected in the disruptive trade flows and the level of international distrust amongst states (Mazzucato 2025). For this reason, member states from the Global North and the Global South sharing common democratic values anchored in the LIO principles should uphold strong diversified economic co-operation to close the gap of the current

geopolitical divide. The MAGA foreign policy priorities overlook the value of international solidarity and the benefits of interdependence and co-operation. The determined national drive of MAGA's foreign policy against immigration and free trade co-operation, for instance, rejects the multilateral partnerships that traditionally serve as essential drivers of collective economic development (Mkuti 2022; Bradlow 2025). Typically, by taking advantage of the vacuum that the US MAGA agenda is creating, both the Global North and the Global South can draw benefits from expanding and strengthening regional and transregional trade co-operation. To an extent, Russia, China and other regional powers have identified the influential power vacuum which the Trump 2.0 administration is creating. Note, for instance, the expansion of the BRICS bloc, which signals a desire to balance global influence through South-to-South relations despite Trump's persistent tariffication threats (Ryanto 2025).

Reforming trading systems to rebalance global economic asymmetries

A balanced global economy advances inclusive economic cooperation. There is no doubt that multilateral economic forums such as the G20 can mitigate the existing trade imbalances and the effects of the sudden suspension of free trade benefits under the principles of non-tariffs trade and open markets. The persistent asymmetry in the multilateral trading systems drives an urgent need for institutional reforms in international financial institutions, specifically the WTO (Bradlow 2025).

For decades, the architecture of international financial institutions has prevented the acceleration and sustainability of the economic development aspirations of the Global South states, particularly on the African continent. However, the leadership of South Africa's G20 Presidency, along with the African Union's permanent seat on the G20 forum, presents significant opportunities to address the existing asymmetries in global governance. The influence of Global South states, especially those in Africa, in international affairs has been at best marginalised. Meanwhile, billions of dollars in 'illegal logging, fishing and trade in wildlife' as well as mineral resources have been extracted by multinational corporations (Mlamboet al. 2021: 35-36).

When reflecting on the first tier of the G20, member states have recognised the need to support underdeveloped nations and Africa's accelerated

industrialisation, a necessity for sustainable developmental growth. The first tier of the G20 refers to one of South Africa's G20 Presidency agendas for inclusive economic growth, industrialisation, employment and inequality reduction (Task Force 1). It is a goal guided by the three thematic principles of Solidarity, Equality and Sustainability on which the success of the global agenda under South Africa's G20 Presidency depends. It also relies on global partners to support its Global South sustainable development and transformative ambitions. To address the growing, overlapping geopolitical crises affecting marginalised groups in the Global South, it is imperative to take this opportune moment to fast-track uneven global developmental practices (Institute for Economic Justice 2025).

It is necessary to rely on global alliances with like-minded economic partners to attain the required structural economic transformation envisioned by the South African G20 Presidency (Mazzucato 2025). These alliances are instrumental in implementing responsive policies that advance collective priorities, aligning with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the UN 2030 Agenda. By virtue of the existing common objective of promoting inclusion of diverse structural transformation strategies, coalition members can re-ignite international co-operation in "fiscal policies, financial policies and Green Industrial strategies" (G20 South Africa 2025). By so doing, the establishment of a model based on a 'trusted-partner' collaboration will reaffirm strong global partnerships with like-minded and 'trusted' countries. This model can potentially enhance a sustainable free trade environment, investor confidence and the security required to sustain the productivity of multilateral corporations (Reinsch 2024). Furthermore, by adopting these trade models, states are more likely to foster an economic partnership that enhances sustainable, continuous co-operation, particularly because free trade relations would be established amongst trusted and established firms. Consequently, trade partnerships would capitalise on a more balanced and free trade environment. In addition, these established trade allies would further enhance the traditional norms of LIO that were practised by multilateral global institutions such as the WTO. The WTO is committed to minimising trade barriers in international relations. As such, a diversified open trade opportunity is more likely to expand economic development momentum despite the US trade tariffs imposed on both the Global North and the Global South countries since the implementation of MAGA foreign policies.

Conclusion and recommendations

In sum, the future of the LIO remains uncertain amid a highly volatile geopolitical landscape. Since the world has embraced trade liberalisation for decades, sudden changes in trade policy create conditions vulnerable to misperceptions, which can undermine diplomatic trust. Furthermore, it raises concerns about the effectiveness of multilateral organisations such as the WTO in advancing trade co-operation. Consequently, it remains to be seen whether multilateral organisations advance co-operation or hinder the seamless integration of sustainable development strategies aimed at addressing foreign policy transformation.

There is, however, a growing concern about the global economic landscape. These concerns have emerged regarding the role of multilateral institutions. The major concern is whether multilateral institutions can effectively tackle the challenges arising from the adverse economic impact of the MAGA foreign policy priorities. Subsequently, these concerns have also prompted the need to reassess the implications of US MAGA foreign policy strategies in a highly interconnected world. The implementation of the 90-day suspension of uniform trade tariffs underscores the continued importance of multilateralism as a vital global co-operation framework. A multilateral framework shapes pragmatic approaches to economic integration in a globalised world. Through the recalibration of international co-operation among asymmetric global powers, economic development can still be sustained despite the uncertainties triggered by unpopular global economic policies, specifically those driven by US MAGA strategies.

Therefore, the findings of this study recommend sustaining collaborative economic integration among like-minded members of the G20 from the Global North and Global South. A sustained partnership in international relations reinforces the effective implementation of responsive economic policies that support the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) outlined in the 2030 Agenda.

It is worth noting that, while the 90-day suspension of global tariffs has averted a premature recession, US socio-political dynamics and mounting tensions with both former allies and adversaries project a negative perception of US MAGA foreign policy. The analytical findings of this study recommend

the implementation of a strategic and co-ordinated approach in which affected countries from both the Global North and Global South safeguard their economic interests. By avoiding retaliatory trade tariffs, policymakers are more likely to reduce the risks of multilateral trade wars. Nonetheless, the shift towards the 'tariffication' focus of US MAGA foreign policy has created an opportunity for affected states to explore mechanisms that strengthen regional trade integration free from tariffs.

Conversely, diverting trade partnerships will have detrimental effects on US local firms and consumers alike, thereby intensifying the pressure on the US to improve its image within the international system. Hopefully, collaborative efforts by like-minded partners in the Global North and Global South will exert pressure and compel the US to end the reciprocal trade tariff policy approach. Nonetheless, it remains uncertain whether the Trump 2.0 administration is likely to respond to any pressures exerted by the international community to reverse its trade tariffs stance.

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CHAPTER 4

Trump 2.0 and the Global Role of the United States in AI Safety Governance

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Introduction

The United States (US) is the global leader in advanced AI development and design. This dominance is due to the high concentration of frontier AI companies and data centres within its territory. Some argue that for the US to sustain this dominance, it is critically important that these AI companies adopt an ethical development approach that incorporates safety protocols (Ramjee and Selinger 2025: 122). Based on recent government policies, one can argue that policymakers in Washington recognise the necessity for AI safety. Over the past five years, through the establishment of executive orders, standards and laws, the US has developed a relatively rule-based AI ecosystem. However, the government also has to consider the national interests of the country as far as AI development is concerned. In addition to these competing interests, safety policy gaps sometimes occur due to the existence of an AI black box (a complex system that 'mysteriously' generates its own intelligence) (Hendrycks 2024:117). Consequently, policymakers grapple with the challenge of regulating a rapidly evolving industry, often lacking clarity regarding the object of regulation. Despite these factors, the pace of AI safety policymaking still significantly depends on governments' commitment to AI safety.

The importance of AI safety requires that AI safety governance is assessed separately from a government's general AI governance agenda. A close analysis of the Biden and Trump administrations exemplifies the significance of executive power in national and global AI safety. Both administrations, although with slightly different viewpoints, have issued Executive Orders (EOs) to advance

American national interests in AI and address safety concerns. However, it is not clear which administration has focused more on AI safety relative to current projected risks (Hine 2024:49). The assessment of a country's performance in AI safety is often problematic due to conceptual issues. This is often as a result of analysts and scholars using the broader 'AI governance' framework to analyse AI safety governance. However, AI governance covers both AI development and AI safety. In contrast, this chapter uses an AI safety governance lens to analyse the policies of the Biden and Trump administrations with the goal of measuring the trajectory of AI safety governance in the US between 2011 and 2025.

The analysis focuses on policies that are directly linked with the administrations; as such, it excludes parliamentary laws and bills. Thus, it focuses on EOs, and the standards and regulations that draw legitimacy from EOs. Two reference points for the analysis are, firstly, the decision of President Donald Trump to discontinue the Biden administration's Executive Order 14110 (Safe, Secure, and Trustworthy Development and Use of Artificial Intelligence) and, secondly, the recent adoption of an AI Action Plan. These executive 'soft laws' aim to foster an AI ecosystem that promotes responsible and safe AI deployment, while also focusing on promoting US dominance in AI development.

This chapter examines how federal AI policies differ between the Trump (both terms) and Biden administrations, while highlighting the significance of AI safety policymaking in the US for global AI safety. It bases its conceptual framework on AI safety governance, drawing from available policies found in databases, industry publications and scholarly materials to examine whether there has been a shift in AI safety governance over the years and, if so, what the implications are for global AI safety governance. The first part of the chapter explains AI safety governance as an analytical tool, while the second part addresses AI safety governance in the US. The third part examines global AI safety. Thereafter AI safety governance under the Trump and Biden administrations is examined., while the final section discusses the global implications of the US AI safety policies.

AI safety governance: A conceptual clarification

The broader field of AI governance has gained traction over the last five years due to the rapid pace of AI development (Roberts et al 2024: 1275). AI governance frameworks aim to support AI development while addressing ethical and safety

questions, much like how the state manages its economic and strategic interests. The safety component of the frameworks focuses on the safe and responsible development and use of advanced AI models. It also attempts to balance national interests with safety regulations when developing AI policies at the local, regional and global levels.

A cursory look at scholarly definitions of AI terms shows that AI governance covers both development and ethical concerns. Reuel et al. (2024: 3) define AI governance as 'the processes and structures through which decisions related to AI are made, implemented, and enforced'. They further identify the need to differentiate Technical AI Governance (TAIG) from AI governance, since the former means 'technical analysis and tools for supporting the effective governance of AI'. This differentiation illustrates the challenges policymakers encounter while formulating AI policies. According to the authors, TAIG creates a methodology that describes the symbiotic relationship between machine learning engineers and policymakers in developing effective policies that are technically and socially relevant. While we share the opinion of Reuel et al. (2024) that policymaking needs to be complemented with technical knowledge in the AI policymaking domain, we further argue that this gap stems from conflating AI governance with AI safety governance.

While TAIG helps policymakers identify priority areas and governable aspects of technical AI, AI safety governance refers to the safety policies that emerge from the application of TAIG methodologies. This conceptualisation helps scholars grasp AI governance priorities. It also defines a unique theme for policymakers: devoting the necessary attention to AI safety issues, while avoiding the temptation to divert attention to other related but slightly different AI governance causes.

Addressing AI safety governance separately ensures a nuanced understanding of AI safety and reduces the tendency to lump safety issues under the broader AI governance framework. As discussed previously, using a general description can reduce focus on AI safety concerns. Thus, this book chapter proposes the adoption of 'AI safety governance' to describe frameworks and controls that are specifically designed to address AI safety concerns under the broader AI governance framework. This conceptualisation helps assess a government's policy commitment to safe and responsible AI more clearly. It also provides a clear pathway to identify and address AI safety policies and gaps, since AI

governance is a broader concept that encompasses all government and corporate policies aimed at encouraging the research, development and deployment of AI (Batool, Zowghi and Bano 2025:2).

The 'AI safety governance' framing supports the argument of Reuel et al. (2024: 24) for a closer relationship between technical and non-technical policymakers. The authors argue that most policymakers lack the technical knowledge to carry out what they refer to as "technical AI governance." To bridge this gap, it is necessary to study AI safety governance first as a distinctive field under AI governance, in order to identify the technical requirements for efficient policies that respond to AI risks. A multidisciplinary understanding of legal, ethical and AI technical knowledge is necessary to design policies that encourage rapid development yet also evaluate risks. However, policymakers fail to recognise the technical requirements involved in developing safety policies for the AI ecosystem. Therefore, in reality, those responsible for AI policymaking often lack a technical understanding of AI, while those with such expertise tend to concentrate on developing actual solutions and products instead of becoming involved in governance.

The AI safety governance framework provides clarity for policymakers by illuminating the unique skillset required to formulate policies that are specific and robust in tackling AI risks. It also provides analysts with the tools to evaluate a government's commitment to AI safety easily.

'AI safety governance' is a concatenation of 'AI safety' and 'governance' to form a standalone concept. It governs how 'practices and principles (AI safety)' are designed to protect vulnerable AI models from misuse and users from risk (Rudner and Toner 2021:1-2; McGrath, Jonker and Clark 2024). The technical requirement of assessing AI safety is challenging for policymakers from a non-technical background. In addition, AI safety standard solutions are adopted from other engineering fields, requiring a high degree of control of systems and their environment (Habli et al. 2025: 2). Buhl et al. (2025: 8) argue that the development of 'safety cases', a framework that explains how developers foresee and mitigate vulnerabilities, can make AI risks clearer to policymakers. In Figure 4.1 below, we illustrate the scope differentials between AI safety governance and AI Governance.

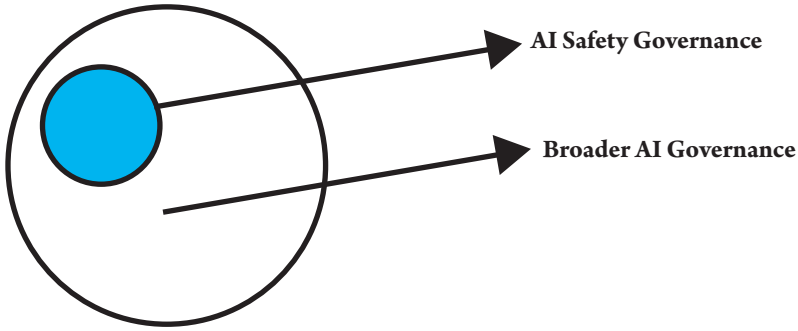


Figure 4.1: Differentials between AI safety governance and AI governance. Source: Developed by the authors.

Artificial Intelligence safety is generally the technical aspect of AI governance, but policymakers lacking technical understanding of AI systems may misappreciate the technical requirements of AI safety, which focuses on using computer science expertise to align AI systems with human values. Thus, conceptualising AI safety governance helps policymakers to appreciate its technical and distinctive characteristics compared to broader AI governance.

In this chapter, we use AI safety governance as a tool to identify and analyse AI safety policies in the US. As argued earlier, the AI safety policies drafted in Washington have a global effect due to US dominance in AI development. In the next session, we discuss the responsibilities and challenges of the US as a global leader in AI development, with reference to the AI safety governance concept.

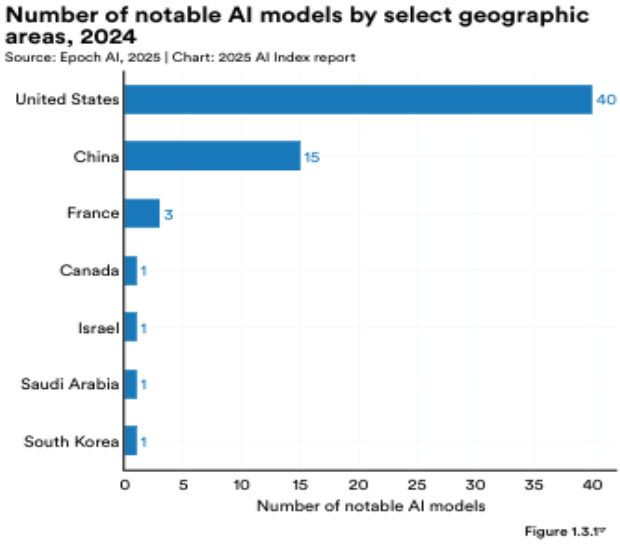
The United States as a global leader in AI development: Responsibilities and Challenges

Several frontier AI companies design and produce their hardware as well as software in the US (*The Stanford University Artificial Intelligence Index Report* 2025; see Figure 4.2). These systems, especially the Large Language Model (LLM) variants, are developed using deep learning techniques. By means of these techniques, the LLMs are trained on a swath of internet data and afterwards fine-tuned through advanced machine learning techniques to provide in-context outputs in response to prompts during deployment (O'Brien, Ee and Williams 2023:12). Large language models, due to their capability to make sense of large swaths of data, could serve as general-purpose technology in the

future, meaning that they can be embedded in other systems to serve a range of purposes (Gruetzemacher and Whittlestone 2022: 3). The projected versatility of advanced AI increases its economic significance. This also makes advanced AI susceptible to risks that require effective governance throughout its entire life cycle.

The emergence of popular advanced AI models has increased the global deployment of LLMs for tasks that require considerable intelligence. Models such as OpenAI's ChatGPT, Google's DeepMind and Meta's Llama provide a range of functions—speech recognition, language generation and mathematical calculations—that help consumers to carry out research in diverse fields. However, because of these advantages, LLMs have also been integrated into military operations to increase efficiency and speed (Szabadföldi 2021: 161; Iqbal et al. 2023: 343). These gains, according to expert projections, could exacerbate human suffering. Some contend that the risks that AI pose could be catastrophic (Hendrycks, Mazeika and Woodside 2023: 6) or even existential.

These issues have inspired global advocacy for AI safety, and, given the position of leadership that the US occupies as evidenced by the compute capacity in Figure 4.2, the AI safety policies drafted in Washington could significantly shape the global landscape of AI safety governance. Furthermore, advanced models such as OpenAI's Operator (AI Agents) are currently only available in the US. Thus, due to their proximity to advanced AI companies and the technical knowledge necessary for developing safety policies for these models, policymakers in Washington have a unique obligation to regulate these advanced AI models before their release to other parts of the world, (Reuel et al. 2024: 1). This does not mitigate the importance of AI safety governance in other regions, but rather acknowledges the importance of creating AI safety policies during the development stage of LLMs.



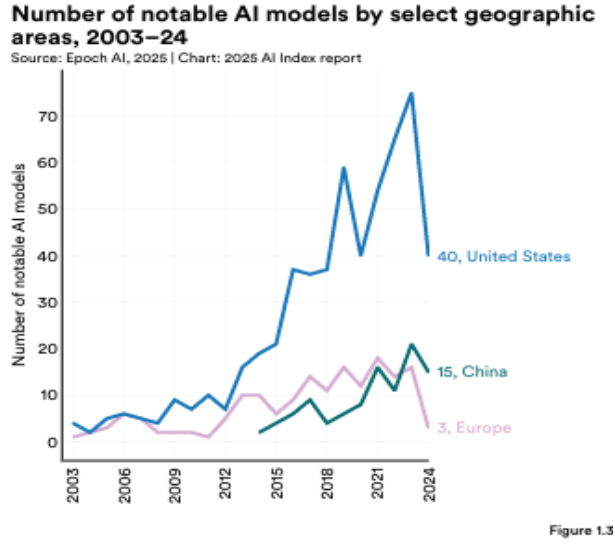


Figure 4.2: Countries with the highest compute capabilities.
Source: *Stanford University Artificial Intelligence Index Report* (2025: 46).

Therefore, the country that hosts a significant portion of frontier AI companies has the foremost duty to regulate these technologies in the development phase. Through regulation of private companies, the implementation of safety standards can be ensured (Heim et al. 2024: 2). Large language models are usually designed to learn during the pretraining stage. Since they are pretrained on internet data, they absorb both desirable and poor-quality data, which are difficult to remove from the memory of AI models (Maini et al. 2025: 2). Thus, pretraining data affects model performance and safety (Longpre 2024: 3245). During the fine-tuning stage, LLMs are trained on more structured and specific data sets that align with the values of the developer; however, as mentioned earlier, information absorbed during the pretraining stage remains in their memories (Hendrycks 2024: 168). This means that malicious users can manipulate models to provide outputs that they were not originally programmed to share with any end user (Shen et al. 2024: 1).

Frontier AI companies, aware of the risks posed by advanced AI models, have adopted safety policies to mitigate such risks. For example, these companies, have installed guardrails in the models to prevent unintended use; however, the guardrails have proven to be vulnerable (Hendrycks 2024: 147). They also often have an alignment and governance department that ensures the adoption of safety protocols during developmental stages. Similarly, government agencies such as the DoD recognise the importance of safety and have promised to adopt ethical practices when integrating AI into military operations (*US Department of State* 2023). Companies such as Palantir Gotham, OpenAI, Google and Meta have all invested in AI safety research (Delaney, Guest and Williams 2024: 2). While these commitments are still significantly inadequate, they indicate a consensus among stakeholders on the significance of safe and responsible AI models. This, therefore, shows the importance of safety policies for the US and other countries with a significant number of users. US dominance over the advanced AI global market means that it occupies a key leadership position in institutionalising AI safety standards for AI development.

Global concerns over AI risks

Since the emergence of LLMs, there has been an increasing awareness of AI risks. The concerns are primarily about ethics and safety. Although traditional machine

learning models might have their associated risks, the AI models discussed here are frontier models, meaning the most advanced models at the time of writing (Salvador 2024: 5). Most concerns about advanced AI stem from its complex nature. While AI engineers combine 'randomness and human tweaking' to produce complex systems, they are unable to explain the internal operations of LLMs. The complexity of advanced AI has led to the emergence of AI alignment research, a field dedicated to elucidating and interpreting how AI systems achieve their intended goals without necessarily adhering to programmers' intended rules (Sabiens 2024). Advanced AI systems are developed by using a deep learning technique, which is the use of a computer program to build systems rather than actually programming systems. Advanced AI systems train neural networks, which are brain-like mathematical models, using a large amount of internet data during the pretraining stage. After that stage, the AI model goes through a training stage, where the model is fine-tuned using structured pieces of data to make predictions (outcome). Cortra (2021) provides an example of the challenge of advanced AI training and learning. According to the author, AI models are not intuitive in that, for example, they are unable to understand nuance in data sets the way humans do. As a result, they might pursue goals that do not align with the developer's values.

Advanced AI models, due to their opaque nature, can potentially pose certain risks. One of the most practical forms of risk could be unethical use by malicious actors (Marchal et al. 2024: 4). To limit the such risks, some experts propose implementing a responsible scaling policy (Hubinger 2025). However, the race to develop advanced models often prioritises corporate interests over safety. Even at the national level, there has been an increasing appetite recently to integrate LLMs into military operations to protect national interests. In the United States, Palantir Gotham (Egbert, Galis and Gundhus 2024: 2333) and Bolt & Bolt-M (Hambling 2024) are at the forefront of AI development for military use. OpenAI and Google have also pledged support for national security (Hambling 2024; Tucker 2025). Other risks could emerge due to competition between AI-leading countries (such as the United States and China).

Table 4.1: AI incidents. Source: AI Incident Database Website (2025).

Incident	Date of Occurrence	Country	AI Model
Open AI's Agent called Operator spends $31 on eggs even though it was simply instructed by its human principal to check out the cheapest eggs on the internet.	07 February 2025	United States	Operator (ChatGPT 4)
Alleged misuse of AI-powered facial recognition technology leading to wrongful arrest	Published in the Washington Post on 13 January 2025	United States	Several AI-powered facial recognition technologies
Brazil's Social Security AI Tool allegedly rejects social claims of Josélia de Brito, a former sugarcane worker.	Reported in	Brazil	Brazil's Meu Inss, a platform built by DataPrev leveraging AI to determine social benefits.

To reduce risks that are already manifest, as evidenced in Table 4.1, international organisations, countries and companies have formulated AI safety policy frameworks. For example, the United States has developed standards, based on EOs, to ensure that AI companies adopt safety practices from the development stages of advanced AI, as we will see in the following sessions. Whether these policies are yielding results is contestable, although the overall aim is to reduce risks. Some AI safety policies aim to curb unethical use, while others concentrate on mitigating the risk of AI systems magnifying societal bias.

AI alignment is today a technical field that seeks to address AI risks in the development and corporate community. In practice, techniques such as fine-tuning, reinforcement learning with human feedback and unlearning are targeted at aligning AI models with the values of the developer (Qi et al. 2024: 8). Machine learning engineers refine a pretrained foundational model after training it on internet data. The overall aim of fine-tuning a model using a specific data set is to

customise it to respond to specific tasks. While this technique protects advanced fine-tunable AI models from responding to malicious prompts, they could nonetheless be susceptible to jailbreaks. Qi et al. (2024: 5) argue that both open-source models (ChatGPT 3.5 Turbo) and closed-source models (ChatGPT 3.5 Turbo) are vulnerable to malicious fine-tuning. Fine-tuning focuses on achieving specific tasks, while unlearning is a technique that seeks to remove harmful data from the memory of neural networks (Łucki et al. 2024: 1).

Despite the challenges of ensuring safe and responsible AI models, policymakers in the US have developed controls, risk assessments and prevention frameworks to guide AI companies and developers on pathways that mitigate AI risks. In this chapter, the focus is on the first and second Trump administrations and the Biden administration. The aim is to analyse the contrast between the two administrations in terms of their commitment to AI safety.

AI safety governance in the Trump and Biden administrations

President Trump formulated AI governance policies during his first tenure, some of which addressed AI safety. In 2019, President Trump signed 'Executive Order 13859: Maintaining American Leadership and a Global Advantage in AI'. The main goal of the EO was to position the US as a global leader in AI to yield scientific discovery, economic growth and protection of national security. In addition, the EO stipulates that stakeholders should uphold technical standards while reducing barriers to safe testing and deployment of AI models, as well as increasing public trust in AI technologies (United States 2019). The National AI Initiative Act of 2021 reiterated the principles in Executive Order 13859. The Act allocates over $6 billion to finance various aspects of Executive Order 13859, among other matters. In 2020, President Trump signed 'Executive Order 13960: Promoting the Use of Trustworthy Artificial Intelligence in the Federal Government', which stipulates that federal agencies shall ensure a safe, secure, reliable and efficient use of AI (United States 2020).

During the Biden administration, many more AI safety policies seem to have been created. This could be due to several factors. The most prominent was the increasing awareness of AI risk and the advocacy from ethicists for a policy response. Additionally, the Biden administration's vision may have been aimed at integrating an ideology of fairness and equality into AI development

and use. One of the most popular AI safety policies of the Biden administration was the Blueprint for an AI Bill of Rights, which was released in October 2022. The framework, through its five principles, provides guidelines for AI companies and developers aimed at reducing risk during the development and deployment stages.

In October 2023, President Biden signed 'Executive Order 14110: Safe, Secure, and Trustworthy Development and Use of AI' into law (United States 2023). The goal of the executive order was to ensure the safe and responsible development and use of AI models to maximise economic gains and minimise risks. Section 4 of the Act stipulates that the Secretary of Commerce, through the Director of the National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST), should establish guidelines and best practices to ensure the safe development and deployment of advanced models. This framework includes the following: 'a. creating a resource to go along with the AI Risk Management Framework, NIST AI 100–1, specifically for generative AI; b. making a resource to work with the Secure Software Development Framework to add secure development practices for generative AI and dual-use foundation models; and c. starting a project to provide guidance and standards for assessing and checking AI abilities, especially in areas where AI could be harmful, like cybersecurity and biosecurity.'

While the Act indicates an awareness of the importance of safety, it creates an exception for national security in its provision for red-teaming testing processes for dual-use models. The NIST, in collaboration with the National AI Safety Institute, developed other notable frameworks during the Biden administration, as shown in the following table:

Table 4.2: NIST Frameworks. Source: NIST Website (2025).

Framework/ Resources	Date of Issue	Focus Point
Four Principles of Explainable AI (Phillips, Hahn, Fontana, Yates, Greene and Przybocki 2021:3)	September 2021	This article states the four principles of explainable AI to include: ‘ 1. Explanation: A system delivers or contains accompanying evidence or reason(s) for outputs and/or processes. 2. Meaningful: A system provides explanations that are understandable to the intended consumer(s). 3. Explanation Accuracy: An explanation correctly reflects the reason for generating the output and/or accurately reflects the system's process. 4. Knowledge Limits: A system only operates under conditions for which it was designed,and when it reaches sufficient confidence in its output.’
Towards a Standard for Identifying and Managing Bias in Artificial Intelligence (Schwartz et al 2022).	16 March 2022	This article addresses bias as a critical AI threat and develops guidance for identifying and managing bias in three categories: systemic, statistical and human. In addition, it identifies the challenges of low-quality datasets, evaluation and human agency. The article also identifies ways of managing bias in advanced AI systems.

Framework/ Resources	Date of Issue	Focus Point
NIST AI Risk Management Framework (Tabassi 2023).	26 January 2023	The Framework is the foundational and leading NIST policy blue book on AI governance. It provides a detailed risk management guide adopting most definitions and practice direction from OECD recommendation on AI:2019; ISO/IEC 22989:2022. It lists characteristics of a trustworthy AI to include 'valid and reliable, safe, secure and resilient, accountable and transparent, explainable and interpretable, privacy-enhanced, and fair with harmful bias managed'.
Reducing Risks Posed by Synthetic Content: An Overview of Technical Approaches to Digital Content Transparency (Chandra, Dunietz Roberts 2024	April 2024	The Framework identifies image, video, voice and text as opportunities as well as threats to stability due to the possibilities of deepfakes and unethical use. It relies on existing practices and frameworks to mitigate the generation of illicit content.
Autio et al. (2024)	24 July 2024	This document derives its powers from Executive Order 14110. It provides insights into risks that are associated with advanced generative AI. It was developed as a supporting document to the AI Risk Management Framework.
Booth et al. (2024)	26 July 2024	This framework adopts Secure Software Development Practices Version 1.1, but narrows down its focus to data, development and integration of models in other software. It does not address cybersecurity risk generally at the deployment stage. As a result, the framework is designed to assist AI model producers, AI system producers and AI system acquirers in mitigating cybersecurity risks at the development stage.

Framework/ Resources	Date of Issue	Focus Point
US AI Safety Institute (2025)	January 2025	This framework aims to provide guidelines for developers of foundational AI models to anticipate, mitigate and manage misuse, as well as comply with cybersecurity best practices to reduce model theft.
Vassilev et al. (2025)	March 2025	This article identifies the difference between generative AI and predictive AI and develops a taxonomy and terminology for attacks that are accustomed to these types of adversarial machine learning.
NIST AI Risk Management Framework Playbook (National Institute of Standards and Technology n.d)	20 March 2023	The playbook is a voluntary document created to provide a guide for companies and organisations on how to achieve the outcomes set out in the AI Risk Management Framework. It focuses on how to govern, map, measure and manage risk.
NIST AI Risk Management Framework (AI RMF 1.0): An Explainer Video	26 January 2023	This video is a 6-minute 31-second video explanation of the NIST AI Risk Management Framework. It focused on methodologies and the content for several stakeholders.

From the above table (table 4.2), it is clear that the Biden administration, in comparison to the Trump administration, adopted significantly more AI safety standards. Some argue that having so many policies can stifle innovation by increasing compliance costs, while having a reasonable number of standards encourage sustainable innovation (Tartaro, Smith and Shaw 2023: 4-7). Others argue that voluntary regulation, coupled with the AI development race, can motivate companies to comply with regulations as a competitive advantage (Han et al. 2022: 2). However, there is no clear evidence to show that safety standards in the Biden administration reduced AI development or innovation. The Trump administration also held the belief that Executive Order 14110 would stifle advanced AI innovation and development in the US, so it revoked the order

in January 2025 through another EO titled 'Removing barriers to American leadership in artificial intelligence'. While this shift will have a short-term effect, Kramer, Leavens and Scarlat (2024: 16) argue that executive orders are often at risk of being revoked by a successive administration. They also argue that one of the weaknesses of the Biden administration's policy was the delegation of implementation to NIST. This weakness can appear to be a strength, as delegation can engender sustainable compliance. In the final analysis, the revocation of Executive Order 14110 is more of a suspension than a revocation. A new administration can either revive it or develop new policies that address AI safety at a high level. Besides, the standards developed from the EOs adopted during the Biden administration are now part of US AI safety culture.

In addition to the 'Removing barriers to American leadership in artificial intelligence' EO, the Trump administration proposed a bill to place a moratorium on AI regulation through the '2025 congressional proposal for a moratorium on State AI regulation.' However, the US Senate voted against the bill. The Trump administration also released the AI Action Plan (*White House* 2025), which includes provisions aimed at promoting AI safety. The Action Plan spells out the government's plans to support initiatives that foster 'AI Interpretability, Control, and Robustness', risk evaluation mechanisms, mitigation and adoption of deepfake standards, promotion of a risk evaluation framework at the global level and adoption of safety standards and protocols to ensure biosecurity (*White House* 2025: 9—11). These policies show the support of the Trump administration for AI development, regardless of the cost of safety; however, a few of these policies, such as the AI Action Plan, for example, simultaneously address both development and safety interests in a single document. Indeed, from the approach of the Trump administration to broader AI governance, one can argue that the administration appears to significantly support development over safety. However, in reality, the EOs of the Biden administration that appear to promote AI safety were implemented through standards and controls under NIST frameworks. As a result, they have become institutionalised, making it difficult to change the safety culture through revocation of EOs during the Trump administration. However, reduced support for AI safety culture can weaken institutional frameworks and cause a decline in the culture of compliance in frontier AI companies.

The importance of US AI safety governance for global leadership

The leadership position of the United States in global AI development makes its governance of AI safety crucial. This is clear from its commitment to the AI Action Plan, which addresses certain international AI concerns. As the leading country in AI development, the US intrinsically bears the responsibility to develop safety standards for AI frontier companies. The development stage is a strategic phase to implement most safety frameworks (Hilton et al. 2025: 2). Moreover, countries producing advanced AI systems often lead the way in deploying them and identifying their weaknesses. Thus, policymakers in the US develop standards and frameworks as part of their AI leadership responsibility. As we saw in the previous section of this chapter, most NIST frameworks target the development stages of advanced AI models. In contrast, countries that deploy rather than produce advanced models lack the capacity and jurisdiction to predict and regulate advanced models.

As a result, AI safety governance in the United States affects the global standard of responsible and safe AI models. Therefore, a decline in AI safety in the United States affects AI safety on a global scale. The United States is faced with a challenging situation in that it must decide between sacrificing safety to promote innovation and maintaining its status as the global AI superpower (Roberts et al. 2024: 1276). In addition, it is often challenging to reach a global consensus on the governance of new technologies, especially since a significant number of advanced models are also built in China. Ultimately, AI safety in the United States will shape, if not entirely determine, global AI safety governance; therefore, the AI safety paradigm in Washington is of global relevance.

However, despite the importance of the United States in AI safety governance, the risk posed by advanced AI models is not restricted to the US, even though most advanced models are built there. As exemplified in Table 1, AI risks can manifest in any part of the world, regardless of a country's capacity to produce advanced AI.

Conclusion

The United States remains central to global AI safety due to its advancement in AI development. Thus, this chapter argued that AI safety policies drafted in

Washington have global relevance, as regulating the development of advanced AI determines the safety and responsible use of advanced models. In addition, the chapter addressed the conceptual problem of using AI governance to analyse AI safety. It argued that 'AI governance' is a broad term, and that 'AI safety governance' is more suitable as a conceptual tool for discussing how a government governs AI development to ensure its safe and responsible use.

The current literature on AI safety tends to muddle AI concerns with unique characteristics under AI governance. The problem with this notion is that it limits our attentiveness to policy shifts that impact the future of advanced AI deployment. Investment in AI research and development is an aspect of AI governance; similarly, developing policies specifically to respond to AI safety issues is another form of AI governance. As a result, AI governance has become too broad a concept to describe, explain and understand policies that are particularly targeted at AI safety, to the advantage of deregulation of the AI sector.

The AI safety governance framework enables one to make sense of the policy shift reflected in Trump's (first and second terms) and Biden's administrations. When analysts focus their analysis on AI safety governance instead of the broader AI governance, government commitment to AI safety becomes clear. The framework also boosts policymakers' understanding of AI safety as a specific field under the broader AI governance framework. AI safety primarily focuses on policies that impact the safe and responsible development, deployment and decommissioning of AI models. The application of the framework enables AI governance professionals to identify their niche and equip themselves with knowledge of technical AI governance as a means of making sense of AI safety governance.

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SECTION III:
INTERNAL-EXTERNAL DYNAMICS

CHAPTER 5

The Declining Liberal World Order and the Rise of 'Great Men' and Hero Worship: A Foreign Policy Analysis

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Introduction

The liberal world order, built generally on principles of democracy, free markets, human rights and international co-operation, has faced increasing challenges in recent years. Once seen as the inevitable trajectory of global politics following the end of the Cold War, it now appears fragile in the face of rising nationalism, authoritarianism and a return to the politics of personality. This chapter explores the decline of the liberal world order and the resurgence of 'great men' and hero worship in global politics, drawing from historical, political and philosophical perspectives, with a focus on foreign policy implications.

The foundation of the current international system is deeply embedded in an ideological framework that seeks to rationalise politics through institutional mechanisms (Cox 1979). Karl Mannheim's *Ideology and Utopia* (1954) provides a critical lens through which we can understand the aspirations and contradictions of the liberal order. Mannheim (1954) argues that political ideologies are not neutral but shaped by historical and social contexts, often rationalising the interests of dominant groups. The liberal order, particularly after World War II, sought to project itself as a rational, universal system based on rules and institutions rather than the whims of individual leaders. Institutions such as the United Nations, North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) and the Bretton Woods financial system were created to impose structure and predictability on international politics.

However, as Mannheim (1954) suggests, any ideological system risks

becoming utopian when it assumes universality while ignoring the inherent power dynamics at play. And just as Mannheim had warned, the post-Cold War belief that liberal democracy was the 'end of history' became a prominent view advanced by political scientists such as Fukuyama (1992), exemplifying this ideological optimism. Yet, as economic disparities, cultural resistance and geopolitical rivalries emerged, cracks in the system became increasingly visible. The attempt to impose liberalism as a rational, inevitable progression of history has faced resistance, leading to a crisis of legitimacy in global governance. This crisis has facilitated the resurgence of strongman politics, where individuals, rather than institutions, shape international relations.

This chapter will examine the origins of the liberal order, its current crisis and the return of the 'great men' paradigm, assessing its implications for global foreign policy. It will contrast bureaucratic, institutional approaches to diplomacy—epitomised by the European Union—with the transactional, leader-driven strategies of figures like Donald Trump and Vladimir Putin. Finally, it will evaluate the broader implications for Africa and other regions navigating this shifting global landscape.

The foundations of the liberal world order

The liberal world order was formed in the aftermath of World War II, with institutions like the United Nations (UN), the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Bank, and later, the European Union (EU) shaping a global system founded on the principles of multilateralism. However, not much has been discussed about how the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 and, in part, the greater strategic containment of Russia and China has further cemented liberalism as the dominant ideological force in most of the world to date.

Championed by scholars like Zbigniew Brzezinski, Robert Kagan and Aaron Friedberg, the United States (US) and much of the West have been actively encouraged to use containment strategies to ensure the 'free', 'democratic' world—interchangeably referred to as the liberal order— maintains its dominance into perpetuity. For instance, Kagan (2008) stated that 'the world has become normal again, and the return of great-power competition means the return of the classic struggle between liberalism and autocracy.'. He automatically equated the West with liberalism, whereas it is increasingly clear today that this is not the case.

In fact, the crisis of liberalism, which will be discussed in the following segment, shows that the liberal world order is facing opposition to its overarching dominance from within the West just as much as it is unpopular in some countries considered to be outside the Western periphery. Its emphasis on globalisation has been blamed for creating economic disparities, its enforcement mechanisms have been deemed inconsistent and its universalist aspirations are often viewed as a form of suppression of cultural and national identities. This is evident from the speech by US Vice President JD Vance at the Munich Security Conference on 14 February 2025 (Lu 2025).

The speech, which was a critique of the liberal international order, particularly globalisation, enforcement inconsistencies and cultural conflict, if anything, marked a significant turning point in the US commitment to maintaining the liberal world order.

Theoretical framework: Fukuyama, Plato and the limits of liberal institutionalism

Francis Fukuyama's *The End of History and the Last Man* (1992) provides a crucial theoretical foundation for understanding the rise and decline of the liberal world order. Fukuyama argues that liberal democracy, as the final form of government, emerged to satisfy fundamental human needs rooted in Plato's tripartite soul: reason (the pursuit of knowledge and order), spirit (the need for recognition and honour) and appetite (material well-being and economic prosperity). The liberal international order, constructed in the aftermath of World War II, was designed to institutionalise these needs through a bureaucratic, rules-based system that manages anarchy and mitigates great-power competition.

However, Fukuyama overlooked a critical gap in his thesis. While he assumed that institutionalism would permanently satisfy human aspirations, he did not account for how this very system, designed to prevent chaos, could become a source of frustration and perceived oppression. The bureaucratic structures of liberal democracy, from supranational governance in the EU to the rules-based international development and economic system, often constrain self-determination and national sovereignty. As these institutions expand their regulatory reach, individuals and states increasingly feel stifled by bureaucratic inefficiencies and elite-driven decision-making.

A recent example of this can be illustrated by critics from both within the U.S. and the developing world, who have called for the dismantling of the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) (Kurbalija 2025). Most critics cite concerns over inefficiency, bureaucratic bloat and lack of transparency, and perhaps more significantly, some developing nations perceive USAID's initiatives as vehicles for US political influence, undermining local sovereignty and fostering dependency rather than sustainable development.

An even clearer example was Brexit, which was in many ways a rejection of the bureaucratic structures of liberal democracy at the supranational level, particularly those of the EU. To be clear, it was not necessarily a wholesale rejection of liberal democracy itself, but rather, it reflected a populist and nationalist backlash against what was perceived as an unaccountable, distant and overly regulatory system of governance (de Búrca 2018).

It is now quite clear that dissatisfaction is not limited to the developing world; even within the West, growing numbers of citizens reject the constraints of liberal institutionalism. Many view the system as catering to technocratic elites while neglecting the spirit (*thymos*) of the people— their desire for national pride, recognition and agency in global affairs. Consequently, the appeal of strongmen and populist leaders grows, as they offer direct, decisive leadership that bypasses the slow-moving bureaucratic processes of liberal democracy.

The resurgence of strongmen such as Donald Trump, Vladimir Putin, Xi Jinping, Ibrahim Traoré and Narendra Modi reflects this global shift. These leaders embody an alternative governance model, one that prioritises national strength, unilateral decision making and symbolic leadership over procedural institutionalism. In doing so, they challenge the legitimacy of the liberal world order, positioning themselves as champions of sovereignty against a system perceived as an overbearing global bureaucracy.

This theoretical framework helps explain why both developing nations and segments of Western populations are turning away from institutionalised liberalism towards charismatic, centralised leadership. Fukuyama's optimism about the permanence of liberal democracy underestimated the enduring human need for identity and recognition, which cannot always be fulfilled within bureaucratic frameworks. As more people seek alternatives to the liberal order, the era of strongmen politics gains further momentum.

The crisis of liberalism: Symptoms and causes

The contemporary crisis of liberalism is multifaceted, encompassing economic instability, political disillusionment and ideological fatigue. Scholars such as Russell Blackford (*Liberalism is in Crisis*), Edward Luce (*The Retreat of Western Liberalism*) and Pankaj Mishra (*Age of Anger: A History of the Present*) have all argued that liberalism's decline stems from its failure to address economic inequalities, its overreach in international interventions and its inability to respond to populist movements. This section will further break down these key issues to understand how they weaken people's faith in institutions and cause a crisis of liberalism.

Economic discontent and inequality

Officially, the liberal ideological dominance saw its long honeymoon end with the 2008 financial crisis, which exposed deep structural weaknesses in the global economic system. Economic globalisation, which liberalism championed, disproportionately benefited multinational corporations and financial elites while leaving working-class citizens in the West and the Global South vulnerable. Luce (2017) notes that the erosion of middle-class jobs in industrial economies has fuelled resentment against liberal economic policies, leading to the rise of populist leaders such as Donald Trump in the United States and Jair Bolsonaro in Brazil.

Consequently, anti-neoliberal movements have spread all over the Western Hemisphere since 2008, with most riding a wave of economic nationalism, as seen in Brexit, Trump's 'America First' policies and Javier Milei's economic revolution in Argentina. They all represent a direct backlash against the liberal economic order. Mishra (2017) has examined how the uneven distribution of globalisation's benefits has led to widespread alienation and political anger, and he has observed that societies organised around individual self-interest have descended into tribalism and violence, with many feeling cheated of modernity's promises. This discontent has fuelled the rise of populist and authoritarian leaders who exploit these sentiments.

The failure of democracy promotion

Another major symptom of liberalism's crisis is the failure of democracy promotion as a foreign policy strategy. The US and its allies invested heavily in exporting democracy after the Cold War, assuming that liberal values were universally desirable. However, interventions in Iraq, Afghanistan and Libya demonstrated the limits of imposing democracy through military force. Texts like Duncan Bell's *Reordering the World: Essays on Liberalism and Empire* (2016) critique the assumption that democracy can be imposed externally without understanding local political cultures.

Thus, not surprisingly, the failure of the Arab Spring further underscored this issue. While initially hailed as a triumph of liberalism, many movements either collapsed into chaos (Libya, Syria) or resulted in the return of authoritarian rule (Egypt). Similarly, scholars like Mearsheimer (2019) observe that the failures in liberal interventionism severely damaged the credibility of the liberal international order:

> "The early successes of the United States and its allies in building a liberal international order notwithstanding, the order contained the seeds of its own ruin. Even if Western policymakers had been wise stewards of that order, they could not have extended its longevity in any meaningful way. It was doomed to fail because it contained three flaws. First, intervening in the politics of countries to turn them into liberal democracies is extremely difficult and attempting such ambitious social engineering on a global scale is virtually guaranteed to backfire and undermine the legitimacy of the enterprise itself."

The rise of authoritarian states

The liberal world order is also being challenged by authoritarian states that promote alternative governance models. China, under Xi Jinping, has successfully combined state-led capitalism with authoritarian rule, offering a viable alternative to liberal democracy. Russia, under Vladimir Putin, has actively undermined democratic institutions abroad while consolidating power at home. Luce argues that these authoritarian-modelled states exploit the weaknesses of liberalism,

positioning themselves as defenders of sovereignty and national identity against Western interference (Luce 2017).

China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) represents a direct challenge to Western economic influence, offering infrastructure and investment without the political conditions attached to Western aid. Similarly, Russia's foreign interventions in Ukraine, Syria and Africa demonstrate its willingness to defy liberal norms and assert geopolitical influence through military means.

One notable instance was during the Valdai Discussion Club in 2022, where Putin rhetorically asked: 'Who agreed to these rules? Who even saw these rules? Who approved them?' (Sputnik International 2024) as part of his broader critique that the so-called rules-based order is arbitrary, selectively applied and primarily serves the interests of the West rather than being a truly global consensus. He instead advocated for a multipolar world order based on state sovereignty and non-interference.

These developments suggest that liberalism is no longer an undisputed global ideology. As Blackford (2023) notes, the decline of liberal hegemony has created a multipolar world where authoritarian regimes feel emboldened to pursue their own interests without fear of Western retaliation. In his subsequent works, he also explores the emerging crisis of how Western liberal democracies have shifted away from traditional liberal principles such as toleration, individual liberty and freedom of speech, which further cement the decline of liberalism.

The return of the 'great man' theory

The decline of the liberal order has coincided with the resurgence of the 'great man' theory, originally articulated by Thomas Carlyle in the 19th century. This theory posits that history is shaped by extraordinary individuals rather than institutions or social forces (Carlyle 1840). While twentieth-century political science largely dismissed this view in favour of structural explanations, recent political developments suggest a renewed focus on individual leaders as drivers of historical change.

Populist strongmen and hero worship

In an era of political uncertainty, many societies have turned to strong leaders

who promise order, national revival and direct action. Leaders such as Donald Trump in the United States, Narendra Modi in India, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan in Turkey and Vladimir Putin in Russia have cultivated cults of personality, portraying themselves as defenders of the people against corrupt elites, globalists or internal enemies.

This trend is not new. Throughout history, charismatic leaders have risen in times of crisis, from Julius Caesar and Napoleon Bonaparte to Franklin D. Roosevelt and Winston Churchill. However, the contemporary resurgence of strongman politics is distinct in its global scale and the weakening of institutional checks and balances that traditionally constrained such figures. In the US, for example, it is hard to find a memorable figure in modern American politics to compare with Donald Trump, largely because of his character, which is unconstrained, charismatic and outright unconventional compared to past American presidents. Unsurprisingly, these qualities have made him a disruptive figure on the global stage.

The media and the cult of personality

The modern media landscape, particularly social media, has accelerated the hero-worship phenomenon. Leaders can now communicate directly with their followers, bypassing traditional gatekeepers. Platforms like X (formerly Twitter), Facebook and TikTok amplify strongman messages and encourage fanaticism, while discouraging nuanced political discourse. The result is politics driven by spectacle, emotion and personal loyalty rather than policy debates and institutional accountability.

Trump vs the EU: A clash of foreign policy philosophies

The discussion in this section is purely academic and serves to contrast the two parties that started as co-stewards of the liberal international order, but have diverged on notable ideological precepts. Whatever one's personal position, it is undeniable that there is a stark difference between Trump's foreign policy approach and that of the EU, which this chapter will investigate, to highlight the deeper ideological rifts and their potential impact.

For instance, the EU's foreign policy is institutional, bureaucratic and rooted

in multilateral agreements (Glencross 2014). In contrast, Trump prefers personal, transactional diplomacy, exemplified by his direct negotiations with leaders like Vladimir Putin and Kim Jong-un. For instance, retired Lt. Gen. Keith Kellogg, the president's special envoy to Ukraine and Russia, highlighted this approach by explaining that 'President Trump approaches diplomacy and engages in a very transactional manner, with economics as the foundation and driving force behind international affairs.' (Madhani 2025).

This perspective underscores Trump's focus on leveraging economic tools and bilateral negotiations to advance US interests, often sidelining traditional diplomatic protocols and multilateral institutions depending on what favours his agenda. The EU views Trump's unpredictability as a threat to stability, particularly regarding Russia. This is because the EU, committed to sanctions and legal mechanisms to pressure Moscow, sees Trump's willingness to engage Putin as a betrayal of Western unity (Batchik and Klain 2025). Fundamentally, Trump's approach, which prioritises pragmatic deal-making over institutional processes, undermines the EU's long-held foreign policy principles of multilateral co-operation, which in turn have upheld the belief in a rules-based order.

The Trump-Russia deal and EU anxiety

Trump's foreign policy towards Russia has always been markedly different from that of the EU. While European leaders have sought to maintain a firm stance against Russian aggression— imposing sanctions after the annexation of Crimea and supporting Ukraine— Trump has often been willing to engage in direct negotiations with Vladimir Putin. His Helsinki summit with Putin in 2018, where he questioned US intelligence findings on Russian election interference, alarmed European allies, who viewed his approach as undermining the transatlantic alliance (Lemire, Colvin and Isachenkov 2018).

The EU, bound by bureaucratic structures and multilateral consensus, has struggled to formulate a coherent and decisive strategy regarding Russia. While European institutions advocate for sanctions and diplomatic containment, individual member states, such as Germany and France, have pursued bilateral negotiations with Moscow and have continued purchasing Russian gas. This has not only been criticised by the Americans but also by some EU member states, notably Poland (Collis 2022). Trump's unilateral and personalistic diplomacy,

by contrast, is seen as unpretentious although it threatens to bypass these institutional frameworks entirely.

Trump's style raises concerns among EU leaders, who fear that a potential Trump-Putin agreement to end the Ukraine war might bypass European interests. If Trump were to negotiate a peace settlement independently, it would expose the inefficiencies of the EU's slow-moving diplomatic apparatus and question the validity of bureaucratic foreign policy. Ultimately, the situation here is that the EU, built on consensus and regulations, struggles to match Trump's rapid, leader-to-leader deal-making style, which, despite its risks, often yields tangible results. This can be particularly exemplified by the ceasefire and hostage-release deal in Gaza, achieved within weeks of Trump's return to office (Ravid 2025), especially when taking into account that this is less about US unilateralism and more about the leader's vision and character.

North Atlantic trade and defence spending clashes

Another contentious aspect of Trump's foreign policy was his stance on NATO defence spending, which exposed deep philosophical rifts between the allies. Trump repeatedly criticised European allies for failing to meet the alliance's two per cent GDP defence spending requirement, even suggesting that the US might not defend countries that did not fulfil their financial obligations (Taylor 2016). His transactional approach, rooted in the belief that alliances should function like contractual agreements where each party pays its fair share, clashed with the EU's commitment to multilateralism and collective security.

European leaders, including former German Chancellor Angela Merkel and French President Emmanuel Macron, rejected Trump's assertions, arguing that NATO's strength depended on political unity rather than financial contributions alone (RFE/RL 2018). However, Trump's rhetoric has emboldened some Eastern European states, such as Poland, to seek direct military agreements with the U.S. (Republic of Poland 2019), reflecting a broader shift towards leader-driven security arrangements rather than institutional frameworks.

This leader-centric approach also extended beyond military affairs and into economic policy, particularly in the trade disputes between the US and the EU. Trump's administration imposed tariffs on European steel and aluminium imports, citing national security concerns, and continues to repeatedly threaten

European automotive exports (Rushe 2025). In response, the EU threatened to join Canada's World Trade Organisation (WTO) case against the US, demonstrating its reliance on institutional mechanisms to mediate disputes (WTO 2025). While the EU favoured multilateral economic governance, Trump preferred direct, bilateral negotiations, often using tariffs as leverage in economic confrontations. The US-EU trade war exemplifies the growing divergence between Trump's transactional, nationalist approach and the EU's rules-based, institutionalist vision of a global economic order.

At its core, the contrast between Trump's foreign policy and the EU's approach reflects a fundamental philosophical divide. Trump's vision of international relations is rooted in hard power, direct bargaining and nationalist self-interest, where military alliances and trade partnerships are only as strong as their immediate material benefits. In contrast, the EU operates—as Fukuyama (2011) explained— within a framework of institutionalism, emphasising the power of treaties, collective action and long-term stability over short-term gains. Nowhere is this divide more evident than in NATO and in defence spending: Trump views NATO as a financial burden to be shared equitably, whereas the EU sees it as an enduring political alliance critical to European security.

In theory, international relations theory has always taught that foreign policy is determined by individual states. However, this fundamental mismatch in worldview underscores the ongoing broader struggle between personalised transactional diplomacy— with singular interests— and the liberal world order version of multilateral governance, in shaping the future considerations of foreign policy formulation and execution.

The divergence among strongmen: A shared paradigm with different goals

Although strongman leaders share a common disdain for liberal bureaucratic governance, their geopolitical approaches and their new world order assertions differ significantly. For this reason, this chapter attempts to categorise them into three main strategic paradigms:

1. **Economic Dominance**: Leaders like Xi Jinping and Donald Trump prioritise economic power as a means of asserting

influence. Xi's Belt and Road Initiative seeks to entrench China's global economic dominance, while Trump's trade wars aim to reshape global economic dependencies in favour of the US.

2. **Territorial Revisionism**: Vladimir Putin and Recep Tayyip Erdoğan fit into this category. Putin's annexation of Crimea and his military interventions in Ukraine reflect a strategy of redrawing borders to assert Russian dominance. Similarly, Erdoğan's military incursions into Syria and Libya demonstrate a neo-Ottoman ambition to expand Turkish influence.

3. **Ideological Nationalism**: Narendra Modi, Ibrahim Traoré and Kim Jong-un exemplify leaders who frame their foreign policy around ideological narratives. Modi's Hindutva-driven nationalism shapes India's global positioning, Traoré's Pan-Africanist and revolutionary image aligns Burkina Faso with countries rejecting Western ties, advocating for self-reliance and regional unity, while Kim's Juche ideology underpins North Korea's isolationist stance and nuclear ambitions.

Nevertheless, they all emerge from the same overarching paradigm—a world where institutions are seen as obstacles, vestiges of neoliberal institutionalist philosophies rather than facilitators of order at the international stage. To these strongmen, decisive leadership takes precedence over bureaucratic processes and foreign policy is increasingly personalised. For better or for worse, the liberal world order's decline has empowered these figures, who, despite their differences, thrive on the erosion of multilateralism and liberal institutional governance.

Conclusion: Africa's future in an era of strongmen

The decline of the liberal world order has ushered in a new era of global politics, one defined by the dominance of strong leaders over traditional institutions. The contrast between Trump's transactional foreign policy and the EU's bureaucratic approach illustrates the tension between these competing models. While the EU continues to champion multilateralism, the resurgence of 'great men' in global

politics, willing to lead populist movements, presents a serious challenge to the viability of institutional governance.

Furthermore, the long-held notions that liberal democracy—where the West leads the world by promoting global norms such as free trade, equality and multilateral co-operation—and liberalism construed to synonymise democracy, have led to great geopolitical miscalculations that have accelerated the decline of the liberal world order. Judging by the West's failed promotion of liberal democracy, especially in the Middle East, the rise of China as an alternative model of governance and the rise of populist movements determined to vote against liberal values in Western democracies, it is clear that the lack of distinction between liberalism and democracy has shaped current international alignments, ideological conflicts and global power struggles.

For Africa, this shifting landscape presents both risks and opportunities. Many African states, particularly those with fragile institutions, may find themselves drawn into direct dealings with strong leaders such as Vladimir Putin, Xi Jinping and Donald Trump. The appeal of such relationships lies in the promise of quick agreements, infrastructure deals and economic investments without the bureaucratic hurdles that characterise Western institutions. However, this model of engagement carries significant risks. Bilateral agreements with strongmen can lead to dependency, where African states become beholden to the interests of powerful global actors rather than pursuing long-term national or regional interests. For example, China's Belt and Road Initiative has resulted in significant infrastructure investments across Africa, but has also raised concerns about debt dependency and sovereignty (Mutai et al. 2024). Similarly, Russia's security partnerships with countries like Mali and the Central African Republic have provided immediate military support but at the cost of increased foreign influence and reduced local governance capacity (Faulkner and Parens 2025).

At the same time, Africa has an opportunity to benefit from this new order by strategically engaging with multiple global actors to secure favourable agreements. Unlike the Cold War era, when African nations were forced to align with either the West or the Soviet bloc, the current multipolar world allows for more nuanced diplomacy. Countries like South Africa, Nigeria and Kenya have demonstrated that maintaining a non-aligned, pragmatic approach—allowing engagement in various international forums as well as pursuing independent foreign policies—can maximise benefits while avoiding over-reliance on any single power.

However, Africa's weaker nations face a particularly precarious situation. If they engage individually with global strongmen, they risk being dominated and losing their sovereignty to external forces. This is why regional co-operation is critical. Strengthening regional bodies such as the African Union (AU) and the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), as well as sub-regional bodies like ECOWAS and the East African Community (EAC), can provide a collective bargaining position, ensuring that African states negotiate from a position of strength rather than as fragmented entities susceptible to external manipulation. A united front can also help mitigate the risks of foreign interference in domestic affairs, ensuring that Africa remains in control of its own political and economic destiny—avoiding a second scramble for and partition of Africa.

Ultimately, while the liberal world order faces an uncertain future, Africa must navigate this period of transformation carefully because it has much to lose. By reinforcing regional integration, promoting self-reliance and engaging strategically with global powers, a united Africa can avoid the pitfalls of great power politics while carving out a strong, independent role in the evolving international system.

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CHAPTER 6

Foreign Policy as a Genre of Colonial Power Games: How Right-Wing Think Tanks, through 'Project 2025', Shaped Trump 2.0 Foreign Policy

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Introduction

The election of Donald Trump in 2016 marked a full-circle moment for global racial imaginaries that the twentieth century had begun with. Not only did the fear-mongering rhetoric based on 'different' and unwanted outsiders—immigrants, homosexuals, Muslims, etc.—influence his popularity among conservative voters, the 'Great Replacement' theories that constantly assumed 'a threat on Western civilization *[sic]* by an encroaching racialized *other [sic]*' were also back and foregrounded how he would envision domestic and foreign policy (Barder 2021: 19). This was not an isolated case, however. Trump had joined a long lineage of American presidents who had built their presidencies on themes like 'war on terror', 'containing Arab nationalism', etc.—concepts that subtly connected with the early twentieth-century 'Yellow Peril' fetish that had racialised Asian communities and in turn legitimised all forms of (racial) carnage, from atomic bombs, aerial bombardments and extrajudicial executions (Bush 2001; Yaqub 2005). Further, the Covid-19 pandemic highlighted the polarising lines in more overt and cunning ways when the virus was infamously labelled as a 'Chinese virus', building a rhetoric of *othering* that extended itself to the hoarding

of vaccinations by the global North countries, which ensured low access for poor countries (Zheng and Zompetti 2023). Trump's rise thus laid bare all the signs of a return to the foundational theme of 'ontological difference' as an ordering line of the global imaginary (Mbembe 2019: 64). The 'global color *[sic]* line', as had been pointed out by Du Bois (1903) at the dawn of the twentieth century, was more evident now than ever. This, as Mbembe (2019: 6) would further emphasise, exhibited 'the desire for apartheid and endogamy that harry our epoch and engulf us in the hallucinatory dream of a "community without strangers"'.

This chapter concerns itself with this continuum. It is arranged in three parts. In the first part, we introduce the interlinkages between international theory and foreign policy, and how this legitimises the colonial power games and codifies the global apartheid paradigm. The second part analyses the *Project 2025* document, which was a blueprint document collectively written by far-right think tanks who were intentional about recrafting conservative ideology and federal policy. According to Wendling (2025), this document laid out 'a set of proposals that would expand presidential power and impose an ultra-conservative social vision'. By reflecting on this document, we demonstrate that the Trump 2.0 foreign policy was not the product of a democratic transition per se, but rather a manifestation of discursive codes which collectively encode the modalities and genres of power that advance colonial power relations. For this paper, we distinguish 'Trump 2.0' as the second tenure of Donald Trump's presidency, which began on 20 January 2025 and is ongoing. The third part of this paper explores what we term the apartheid logics of foreign policy, which we posit as an efficient axis of analysis to make sense of the Trump moment and the global racial imaginaries it reconstituted.

The 'Global Color line', IR and Foreign Policy

In *Souls of Black Folk,* Du Bois (1903: 13) argues, 'the problem of the twentieth century is the problem of the color *[sic]* line, -the relation of the darker to the lighter races of men in Asia and Africa, in America and the islands of the sea'. Suggesting that although decolonisation had made attempts in revolutionising the international order, race and racism continued to rearrange inter- and intra-national relations in ways more profound than previously imagined. Anievas, Manchanda and Shilliam (2014: 2) further emphasise that with this statement, 'Du Bois illuminated the crucial significance of race and racism as

fundamental organizing *[sic]* principles of international politics, axes of hierarchy and oppression structuring the logics of world politics as we know it.' Du Bois' observation at the time was apt. It was a response to the tectonic shifts in global imaginaries sparked by the looming 'race wars', 'race suicide', 'Great Replacement', 'Yellow Peril' and 'native problem' as anticipated by politicians and leaders of the time (Vitalis 2016; Barder 2021). The 'global color line' as a research agenda has grown over the years, owing to scholars of international relations from the Global South attempting to make sense of not only race and racism in the international system but also of its centrality in the discipline of International Relations (IR).

Although questions of race and racism are often overlooked in IR, these are issues central to the birth of the discipline (Vitalis 2016; Acharya 2022). Vitalis (2016: 1) reminds us that 'in the first decades of the twentieth century in the United States, international relations meant race relations'. This is because the emergence of the twentieth-century international order was interlinked with the regrouping of colonial powers, still battling with how they could continue to hold on to the colonies despite the 'blowing winds of change' (Macmillan 1960). According to Anievas, Manchanda and Shilliam (2014: 2), 'IR was founded, in large part, as a policy science designed to solve the dilemmas posed by empire-building and colonial administration facing the white Western powers expanding into and occupying the so-called "waste places of the earth", as the Global South was commonly referred to by contemporaries'. While this marks the beginning of IR—even though the official historiography of the discipline places this behind the veil—Acharya (2022: 23) notes that 'as the United States became both the leading world power and the centre of gravity for IR as a field of study after 1945, race was (and continues to be) swept under the carpet, and racism even legitimized *[sic]*, by mainstream scholarship and policy discourses about international affairs and world order'. To think of IR and foreign policy, then, is to grapple with these linkages.

This interconnection affects not only the practice of international relations but also the teaching and theorising within the discipline, as it shapes conceptions of the 'international' by linking it to narrow Eurocentric perspectives that aim to tell 'the Western story; why it is the best, and why the rest should follow it' (Layug and Hobson 2023). Through this entanglement, even though race is central and foundational to the discipline, IR theory focuses on 'anarchy, great power politics, balance of power, interdependence, and the "objective" analysis of war and how to

resolve it" as its main concerns (Layug and Hobson 2023: 6). Dominant theories and understandings of foreign policy develop from this distortion, where they conceal their focus behind the idea of 'national interests', 'maximising national security', etc. The disjuncture, highlighted by leading IR scholar Waltz (1996), who suggests that international politics is not the same as foreign policy, sheds light on one of the oldest debates in the discipline. Within this debate, foreign policy is regarded as a 'governmental product' and thus subject to a theory that 'takes the performance of governments as its object of explanation in order to be called a theory of foreign policy' (Waltz 1996: 55). The Trump 2.0 moment, however, prompts us to reconsider foreign policy not just as a governmental output, as proposed, but as an extension of colonial power relations. In this way, we can observe how Trump's foreign policy defies the traditional logic to American foreign policy, while equally inverting the game to embolden a new colonial power play that highlights the global colour line.

Clarke and Rickets (2017: 370) suggest that the 2016 presidential elections were in many ways 'a contest between liberal internationalism and national isolationism'. This distinction from 2016 has similarly characterised the 2025 Trump 2.0 moment, which was fought on 'America First' rhetoric that sought to undo the multilateral system, in pursuit of a myopic nationalistic approach that projects and dictates terms to smaller countries. Grounded accounts of the impact and symbolism of these shifts in foreign policy have been lagging. Wright (2017) posits that 'Trump is the first post-war president to oppose the liberal order as he seeks the "America First" policy'. This analysis, which has been echoed by many, is part of the 'traditions of American foreign policy', which, according to Mead (2000, cited in Clarke and Rickets [2017: 366]) is divided into four distinct evolutions: 'the Hamiltonian (promotion of an "open door" world), Jeffersonian (maintenance of a democratic system), Jacksonian (populist values, military strength), and the Wilsonian (moral principle)'. These accounts, however, generally fail to provide grounded and persuasive analyses of the Trump turn in foreign policy—particularly in how it frames race and racism as central mechanisms in foreign policy and statecraft—thereby undermining ideals of equality and sovereignty. This also owes to the fact that foreign policy analysis is 'actor specific', and thus locates decision-making in nation-states and their interests (Hudson 2005). In this paper, we argue that the Trump 2.0 foreign policy is a morphology of how the genre recodifies and reconfigures

global modalities of colonial power relations. We go beyond the 'actor-specific' approach to examine the *Project 2025* document, which shows how significant the right-wing think tanks and ideology are in Trump 2.0 foreign policy.

Discursive games in Trump's foreign policy: How *Project 2025* blueprints USAID policy

In this portion of the essay, we will demonstrate how Trump 2.0 foreign policy is blueprinted by the *Mandate for Leadership: Project 2025* document, which was collectively written by 'hundreds of volunteers' under the mandate of The Heritage Foundation. This institution is intentional about recrafting conservative ideology and federal policy through a refurbished discursive blueprint. *Project 2025* is the ninth book in the *Mandate for Leadership* book series, which is compiled and published by The Heritage Foundation. This series of books is categorised in the genre of 'presidential mandates' directed by, and sourced from, non-political actors. Dahl (1990: 356) argues that the genre of the 'presidential mandate' text was created by Andrew Jackson to forward the claim 'not only that the president is uniquely representative of all the people, but that his election confers on him a mandate from the people in support of his policy'. Dahl furthermore asserts that 'Jackson's claim was a fateful step in the democratization *[sic]* of the constitutional system of the United States – or rather what I prefer to call the pseudodemocratization *[sic]* of the presidency" (Dahl 1990: 356). The Heritage Foundation's status as an influential think tank within elite conservative circles is an example of what Dahl means by the pseudo-democratic production of presidential mandates. It is listed as the third most influential think tank in public policy research in the United States by the University of Pennsylvania's Library Guides. The fact that the presidential mandate is produced within the elite think tank industry is an important demonstration that a seemingly democratising text of the *Mandate's* nature is, in fact, privately authored to direct the conservative administration's policy decisions. In this sense, the *Mandate* is meant to serve as a blueprint document for the incumbent conservative administration's public policy documents, including its foreign policies. In the case of Trump's second term as president, *Project 2025* was compiled and published as a precursory or blueprint document for the incoming Trump 2.0 public policy paradigm.

In this chapter, we classify the *Project 2025 Mandate* as a blueprint for the

Trump 2.0 public policy paradigm. This conceptual and ideological blueprint not only serves as the bedrock for the crafting and direction of policy, but it also serves as the sort of discursive game that sets up political relations both within the federal government and the gameplay in foreign relations. The argument is that 'foreign policy' is not only a document that details the strategies of how any given government should position itself in relation to others in the global scene of politics, but it is in fact a text that is constituted by a variety of discursive codes which collectively encode the modalities and genres of power a state must reproduce to retain— and perhaps expand— the internal logics of its existence and power. Thus, when we deconstruct 'foreign policy' as a text, we see that it is, firstly, a discursive document, and secondly, completely constituted by codes that reproduce the power logics produced by the given state to reconstitute the discursive field, or 'gamefield', that undergirds its politics. This is to say that a state is always undergirded by a structure of relations that are in fact constituted and reproduced by means of a game. Since the game is discursive, it is entrenched in both the realms of language and action. For our argument, we will only highlight the political game at play in *Project 2025*, how it redefines modes of relation within the US federal government and how the US, under Trump's second turn, positions itself in the global scene of politics.

In his seminal paper 'Encoding/Decoding', Hall (1980) uncovers the various structures in which a code is produced and transmitted in basic models of any kind of discursive field. He is particularly interested in how this process enfolds in the discursive fields of the media. However, I will demonstrate that his reading of these structures unravels the basic model of all discursive fields qua systems, including the market regime of racial capitalism. Hall argues that the 'code' is a kind of sign as it is imbued with the meaning structure of the system that produces it. However, unlike the conventional linguistic signs which are primarily represented in written and spoken language, the 'code' can be represented and transmitted through objectual reality. Hall asserts that objectual reality is itself a discursive field. Therefore, there is no true bifurcation between objectual reality and the semiological dimension. The former is merely a reified expression of the latter, while the latter is the representational field of the former. Hall asserts that 'Reality exists outside language, but is constantly mediated by and through language: and what we can know and say has to be produced in and through discourse' (Hall 1930: 55). In this sense, language and reality are not only co-constitutive, but

they are also co-producing, such that codes are produced to transmit various particles of the meaning order to these different systems. It is only our positivist theories that bifurcate these two terrains, but when we assess the movement and production of codes, we quickly notice that 'reality' and 'language' are two kinds of correlative discursive systems. Thus, language and political reality converge in foreign policy and its blueprint documents like *Project 2025*.

When we read a text like *Project 2025* as a blueprint document for the policies that are produced by an administration, it becomes clear that the policy— and in our case, the foreign policy document— is constantly referencing and expanding the internal logic that is prescribed by the blueprint. Thus, codes of power games are transferred from the blueprint to the policy document by the various authors and actors involved in the construction of the document. Therefore, we see that foreign policy is not merely constructed in a democratic process. When Trump's entire policy-making infrastructure is designed according to a blueprint like *Project 2025*, every policy produced by this sort of administration draws its codes and rhetorical tools from the blueprint, which, in turn, adopts codes of power and domination from a larger field of 'power production'. This larger field of 'power production' is what Quijano and Ennis (2000) call the 'coloniality of power'. For Quijano and Ennis (2000: 540), the coloniality of power is produced from three degrees of geopolitical and geocultural power extraction that defines our contemporary scene of global politics:

> "The colonizers *[sic]* exercised diverse operations that brought about the configuration of a new universe of intersubjective relations of domination between Europe and the Europeans and the rest of the regions and peoples of the world, to whom new geocultural identities were being attributed in that process. In the first place, they expropriated the cultural discoveries of the colonized *[sic]* peoples most apt for the development of capitalism to the profit of the European centre. Second, they repressed as much as possible the colonized *[sic]* forms of knowledge production, the models of the production of meaning, their symbolic universe, the model of expression and of objectification and subjectivity… Third, in different ways in each case, they forced the colonized *[sic]* to learn the dominant culture in any way that would be useful to the reproduction of domination, whether in the field of technology and material activity or subjectivity."

The codes that are produced from the core of the coloniality of power are pulled and reappropriated to frame and construct blueprint texts like *Project 2025*. These codes form the central logics of these texts, which enable authors and policymakers to reproduce and reify codes of colonial power. Let us assess closely how this process unfolds in a blueprint text like *Project 2025*. In the preamble of the *Mandate for Leadership: Project 2025* document, the authors state that the gamefield of national and international politics has radically 'changed' since the 80s (Dans and Groves 2023: xiv). They state that they have constructed the document as a 'playbook' for the conservative political practitioner who participates in this differently constructed game. For them, the 'game has changed', because a new age in domestic and international politics has dawned, thus the adherents of the playbook must be ahead of their competitors to reconstruct the terms of a new game. The game that has been replaced is 'the long march of cultural Marxism [that has pervaded] our institutions' (Dans and Groves 2023: xiv). The political game outlined in this text resembles the model of game theory in economic structures. McCarthy and Meirowitz (2007: 5) state that 'political game theory is the idea that individuals rationally pursue goals subject to constraints imposed by physical resources as well as the behaviour of other actors' (McCarthy and Meirowitz 2007: 5). According to this theory, actors make and play political games on the basis of two principles of utility or producing outcomes that satisfy their individual and group interests: '1. Confronted with any two options, which we might denote x and y, an individual can determine whether he does not prefer option x to option y or whether he does not prefer y to x, or both. When preferences satisfy this property, we say they are complete; 2. Confronted with three options x, y, and z, if an individual does not prefer y to x and does not prefer z to y, then it must be the case that she does not prefer z to x. Preferences satisfying this property are transitive" (McCarthy and Meirowitz 2007: 5). McCarthy and Meirowitz (2007) assume that the game at play is naturalised in the field on which we construct and reproduce political relations of any kind. However, it is evident in texts like *Project 2025* that the game at play as well as its conditions are constantly being constructed by the social actors within the given gamefield. Thus, the game-maker—like the policymaker— uses discursive items like policies (that is, foreign policy) and blueprints to set up a political and discursive gamefield that directs actors to reconstruct modes of social relations according to the conditions outlined by the text itself. So, the policymaker or

blueprinter who models the logic of their text in accord with game theory does so to get other actors to reproduce certain structural conditions and behavioural patterns that are utility-based. In *Project 2025*, the discursive game that is set up by the authors and blueprinters is one that positions social actors in a field that forces them to reproduce the conditions of possibility that make conservative governance a dominant social and political model.

In the *Project 2025* introduction, Dans and Groves (2023) suggest that a new game must be built to replace the 'dying' game of the old regime of federal thought and action in the United States. This alone discounts the required condition of 'certainty' in classical game theory. McCarthy and Meirowitz (2007: 6) state that classical game theory builds its principles of rationality and utility on the grounds of certainty. For them, certainty means 'that the agent has sufficient information about the choice environment that she can perfectly predict the consequences of each of her actions. Thus, certainty means only that there is no analytic difference between assuming that political actors choose actions based on the desired outcomes which result from those actions, or that they choose those outcomes directly'. Blueprints like *Project 2025* demonstrate that certainty is a fiction constructed by game-makers themselves. The grounds of the coloniality of power produce the sort of dynamics that disables the possibility of constructing even playing-fields where agents can fairly produce individually determined outcomes. If anything, game-makers manipulate fictions like 'certain grounds' to lure other social agents to reproduce the conditions of their game. This is evident in how contributors of *Project 2025* must first insist that there was something defunct in preceding models qua 'dead games'. This 'dead' game, for Dans and Groves (2023: xiv) and contributors of *Project 2025*, had turned the 'federal government [into a] behemoth, [which is] weaponized *[sic]* against American citizens and conservative values, with freedom and liberty under siege as never before'. Thus, to turn a new leaf, and exceed their competitors in reconstructing a new game for the next age of federal politics, the conservative gameplayer bears the 'task' of 'reversing this tide and restoring our Republic to its original moorings'. The authors of the document state that, as this task is too great for one gameplayer to carry out by himself, the task 'requires the collective action of our movement … to prepare and seize the day' (Dans and Groves 2023: xiv). The key axiom qua principle of the document is '"the personnel is policy", and we need a new generation of Americans to answer the call and come to serve'. Thus,

the authors aim to 'assemble an army of aligned, vetted, trained, and prepared conservatives to go to work on Day One to deconstruct the Administrative State' (Dans and Groves 2023: xiv).

The 'deconstruction of the Administrative State' will be achieved through four pivotal pillars. We find 'Pillar I' and 'Pillar IV' to be the most notable for the purposes of this paper. According to Dans and Groves (2023), Pillar I "puts in one place a consensus view of how major federal agencies must be governed and where disagreement exists brackets out these differences for the next President to choose a path." Pillar IV, called 'the Playbook', stipulates how adherents will be "forming agency teams and drafting transition plans to move out upon the President's utterance of 'so help me God'" (Dans and Groves 2023: xiv). As it is clear that the authors of *Project 2025* are setting up a new sort of political gamefield to entrench their order of governance and trap their political opponents to engage in politics through the authors' terms, we need to assess how these 'pillars'— which are first and foremost discursive items— are discursive strategies to cement the new game and naturalise it in the field of politics. Pillar I is clearly a mapping of the political gamefield as it stands, or at least as it is perceived, by the authors of *Project 2025*. The field, to them, is populated by an array of 'major federal agencies'. The strategy of the conservative game-maker is to deconstruct the current order of governing these agencies, so that their own order of governance takes hold. This order of governance will draw out different 'pathways', that is, different processes and mechanisms, for the President (who is the central gameplayer) to imprint the agencies with the new order of governance. Pillar IV will outline how the different segments of the civilian and political 'army' called upon will take the reins of these 'major agencies' in order to institute the new order of governance. The logical steps for the *Project 2025* game-play are:

1. Identify and assess the major agencies of the American federal government;
2. Observe that, from 1980 to the present, these agencies have been governed through a common order;
3. Be aware that this common order, known as Marxism, seeks to champion the interests and wellbeing of the public while also upholding the interests of the private sector;
4. Deconstruct this order of governance in key public agencies, so that

'deconstructing the Administrative State' is achieved;

5. Shift the mandate of governance from a bureaucratic order so that the Administrative State is dissolved into a different kind of state;
6. Institute a reconstruction of the order of governance in key public agencies that replaces the bureaucratic order of the Administrative State;
7. Therefore, set up a new mode of playing the political gamefield, which will:
8. Impel all opposition and adherents to play through the same mode, as this mode will have a coherent set of rules and normative prescriptions;
9. Naturalise the new game to appear as the new age of politics proper;
10. Lock in all gameplayers to reproduce the logics, modes, rules and standards of this new game.

It is now imperative to closely analyse how the logics of Pillar I and Pillar IV—and all the logical steps that follow from these pillars—undergird the document's foreign policy vision. In the ninth chapter of *Project 2025*, titled 'Agency for International Development', Primorac (2023) follows these steps to uncover the governance that is currently entrenched in the operations of the US Agency for International Development (USAID). By merely mentioning USAID as the subject of his chapter, Primorac (2023) succeeds in the first step of constructing a new gamefield. He has identified the USAID as a 'major agency' of the American federal government. He must now complete the second part of step one, which is to assess this 'major agency'. In his assessment, he writes:

> "The U.S. Agency for International Development leads the U.S. government's international development and disaster assistance programs. USAID helps communities to lead their own development journeys by reducing the impact of conflict; preventing hunger and the spread of pandemic disease; and counteracting the drivers of violence, instability, transnational crime, and other threats. In alignment with U.S. national security interests, the agency promotes American prosperity through initiative that markets for U.S. exports; encourage innovation; create a level playing field for U.S. businesses; and support more stable, resilient, and democratic societies that are less likely to act against American interests

> and more likely to respect family, life, and religious liberty (Primorac 2023: 253)."

He continues his assessment as follows:

> "USAID was established during the presidency of John F. Kennedy pursuant to the Foreign Assistance Act of 1961 to promote the foreign policy, security, and national interests of the United States. At the height of the Cold War with the Soviet Union, it sought to halt the spread of Communism by assisting peoples in the developing world in their efforts to advance economically, socially, and politically (Primorac 2023: 253)."

Primorac (2023: 253) then follows the sixth reconstruction of the 'Playbook' by insisting that the Biden administration's use of USAID to 'support for the global left' should be discontinued so that:

> "The next conservative Administration should scale back USAID's global footprint by, at a minimum, returning to the agency's 2019 pre-COVID-19 pandemic budget level. It should deradicalize *[sic]* USAID's programs and structures and build on the conservative reforms instituted by the Trump Administration. This will require working closely with the U.S. Congress to make deep cuts in the international affairs '150 Account' while granting USAID greater flexibility in spending its appropriated funds to achieve better development outcomes."

Consequently, the most useful way to think about the sort of political games introduced through, and encoded in, foreign policies are not through political game theory, but the logics of colonial governmentality. Derous and De Roeck (2019: 247) write that:

> "Governmentality firstly understands government as a plurality of activities aimed at shaping, directing, and improving the conduct of others and ultimately capable of inducing self-control. By structuring the field of possible action of the governed, there is no need for coercion or violence to exercise power over the individual. If a government is able to define

the boundaries in which this individual perceives his or her own possible actions or behavior, he/she will very likely behave in ways that fit the overarching mentality (supra). Governmentality is thus about the indirect exercise of power through determining the 'box' within which individuals believe to have the freedom to think and act. Hence, governmentality echoes the Foucauldian conception of power that is diffuse and produces rather than represses. It is diffuse because it is widely shared by different societal actors. It is productive because it is constitutive to truth and to knowledge, which are the basis of our day-to-day functioning. Hence, the Foucauldian notion of power is a departure from the more intuitive, liberal conception of power, stating that power is 'possessed' by an actor and exerted over another, with or without this actor's consent."

Apartheid logics of foreign policy

As stated earlier, the Trump turn in foreign policy is not an isolated moment. It is connected to a longer lineage of American statecraft approaches that projected internal social and political contexts onto the international. This can be understood more clearly through the Du Boisian 'global color *[sic]* line' thesis, which, building from the early twentieth century domestic American experiences with democracy and imperialism, suggested that race was a central schema in structuring modes of governance, both in domestic and global spheres. Hall (1980: 59) points out that 'racism is always historically specific'. Even though it might draw 'from cultural traces deposited by previous historical phases'—as we can see with the present Trump turn—it is always specific and it arises out of present conditions. Hall (1980: 59) further emphasises that racism effects are 'specific to the present organization *[sic]* of society, to the present unfolding of its dynamic political and cultural processes—not simply its repressed past'. Trump's 'America First' policy is an embodiment of this flux. Even though it builds on the Ronald Reagan years (1981—1989) where the original *Project 2025* document can be traced, then named *The Mandate for Leadership*. It has a specific characterisation of the present unfolding societal dynamics and we want to suggest that this can be termed the apartheid logics of foreign policy.

Apartheid has often been theorised from a South African perspective. Rightfully so, since it is in South Africa where we can observe the crude ingenuity

of twentieth-century state-building processes that centralised race as a technology of governance[1]. Wolpe (1972), Legassick (1972) and Arrighi et al. (2010) present conceptualisations of apartheid that depart from British segregation laws, but make a disjuncture that allows us to observe the nexus between race, labour and primitive accumulation and what that means for the continuation of colonial power relations through imperialism. These conceptualisations aptly show the centrality of primitive accumulation in worldmaking, and how it co-opts race to sustain itself. Magubane (1979: 1) emphasises that apartheid in 'the South African social formation itself represents a stage in the evolution of the world capitalist system.' This analysis by Magubane locates apartheid at the centre of the global imperial project and colonial power relations in a similar way to Du Bois' analysis of the American socio-politico-economic process in *Souls of Black Folk* (1903) and later in *Black Reconstruction* (1935). The 'America First', 'Make America Great Again', 'controlling American borders' policies, etc. are all symptoms of a world capitalist system regrouping, and thus haphazardly redrawing the lines and terms of engagement. For example, according to Edwards (2018: 184), 'Trump argued his vision for trade policy would reinvigorate American exceptionalism'. Edwards (2018: 184) further states that this "'exceptionalism' characteristic of American foreign policy is a result of protectionist trade policies of Lincoln and Washington, which helped create the prominence of the United States." The isolationist and nationalist approach of these policies during the Trump years represent specific political and societal dynamics where we are seeing a return to 'apart-hood' and 'separateness', as Mbembe (2019) reminded us earlier. Lastly, this play with geography and distance, or spatialisation, manifesting through the desire to 'empty' America of the immigrant, presented as bad for the American body politic, is what makes us conclude this as a moment of apartheid logics in statecraft. This "hallucinatory dream of a community without strangers", or, in the crudest sense, a community without the unwanted *other,* is what has inspired the isolation of the US, the mass deportation of migrants, the cutting of aid to needy countries, the reversal of 'Diversity, Equality and Inclusion' programmes and the withdrawal from climate deals (Mbembe 2020: 6). Processes that have been the hallmark of the Trump turn in foreign policy.

Conclusion

The Donald Trump 2.0 moment has serious consequences for world re/order and foreign policy. Nevertheless, it is still too early to know its long-term impact. But if history is anything to go by, then 2016, as a benchmark, allows us to conclude that the Trump turn in foreign policy proposes a return to ideas of apartheid and separateness that were internal to colonial power relations. This chapter attempted to unpack the significance of the Trump 2.0 moment in reinforcing the global racial imaginaries with which the previous century had begun. It revisited Du Bois (1903) and the 'global color *[sic]* line' to demonstrate the complex entanglement of the practice of international relations, and the teaching of it with international theories tethered to colonial logics of power and sensemaking. To demonstrate how the Trump foreign policy formulation was encoded with colonial power games, this chapter critically examined the *Project 2025* document, which served as a blueprint for his government's domestic and international ordering. The chapter gave an ideological and practical blueprint for how Trump 2.0 foreign relations will be practised, laying a track for a New World (Re)Order, or rather, new visions of the world that exhibit a desire for isolation, apart-hood and separateness.

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Endnotes

1 We draw from Michel Foucault (1926-1984) who uses the phrase "technologies of power" to refer to methods and procedures for governing human beings (Behrent 2013). We deploy this concept as an attempt to also think of apartheid beyond its 'segregation' ethic, to explore its ability to control, supervise and manipulate populations and individuals.

CHAPTER 7

Trump's Crooked Cross: How US-based Christian Fundamentalist NGOs are Transforming Sexual Politics in Africa and Re-configuring the Nation-State

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Introduction

In May 2023, Uganda passed into law one of the most vicious Anti-Homosexuality Acts on the continent, launching a severe crackdown on gays, lesbians and everyone suspected of homosexuality.[1] In July 2023, Ghana followed suit and approved a bill in the government increasing the penalty and scope of offence for LGBTQIA+ people (Coleman, Ako, and Kyerematen 2023). Maunganidze and Cohen (2023), writing for the Institute for Security Studies, report that, in 2023 alone, at least six African countries (Kenya, Ghana, Namibia, Niger, Tanzania and Uganda) 'had taken steps to tighten their anti-homosexuality laws, and others could follow suit'. This signifies a major regression from the progressive sexual and human rights politics Africa had seemed to be adopting over the past few decades. This chapter concerns itself with this regression. It argues that the re-emergence of anti-homosexual politics on the continent is a response induced by the political shifts in line with the populist resurgence in Euro-America (Lotter and Fourie 2020). It advances this argument by building on Christian fundamentalist ethics that have undergirded the NGO industrial complex in Africa. Through deploying homopopulism and homonationalism, as developed by Puar (2007), the paper not only interrogates the making of homophobic nation-states in Africa, but also the role of international (family-centred) NGOs in transforming sexual politics on the continent, and how this transformation refashions sexual politics into tools of statecraft, shaping ideas of 'nation', rights and citizenship.

Banerjea (2023: 14) explains that initially, the concept of homonationalism encouraged us to 'understand how queer is complicit with an imperial nation state and then, later on, to see how the US nation-state uses acceptance and tolerance of LGBTQIA+ rights as a meter to test and assess degrees of national sovereignty'. Since then, however, the concept has been redeployed numerously to interrogate various interconnections between 'activism for LGBTQIA+ civil rights, the emergence of the global queer subject, pink-washing, and imperial politics' (Schotten 2016, as cited in Banerjea 2023: 15). So, in essence, its main contribution is to think critically about the linkages between queer subjects and the nation-state in a transversal mode of shifting global political ideas. By combining homosexual politics and nationalism, its thick yet simple framework allows us to investigate terms of 'inclusivity and exclusivity' of LGBQTIA+ bodies in a nation-state, or rather, in the re-making of a nation-state in the current populist-nationalist political age. It uses terms of '"acceptance" and "tolerance" for gay and lesbian subjects as the barometer by which the legitimacy of, and capacity for, national sovereignty is evaluated' (Puar 2013: 24).

Lotter and Fourie (2020: 177) build on this idea by developing the concept of homopopulism, not only to ground homonationalism as a framework for understanding queer mobility in Africa, but also to expand it in order to explain how 'queer logic underpins the rise of populist nationalism across Europe and North America'. By deploying Queer International Relations (IR) theory alongside Puar's homopopulism, they demonstrate how queer subjects in Euro-America are co-opted in right-wing national-populist politics to reject queer subjects from the global South through the invocation of 'fear-based patriotism' (Lotter and Fourie 2020). It is this invocation of fear, or rather, what they term 'politics of fear' and 'politics of queer', that forms the central focus of this chapter's debate (Lotter and Fourie 2020). This chapter re-imagines this 'fear-based patriotism' within recent African national-populist politics, positing that, firstly, the 'politics of fear' is used to construct a universal 'other' who is deemed not to fit the traditional definition of a citizen and therefore poses a threat to the fabric and survival of a nation. Secondly, it recreates 'fearful sovereign subjects' who, as the Ugandan Anti-Homosexual Bill 2023 stipulates, have 'a duty to report homosexual activities' or face up to six months in jail for their unpatriotic behaviour[2] (Banerjea 2023: 18). The politics of fear, therefore, not only mobilises citizens into supporting the government's creation of a 'homophobic country'

but also employs sexual politics as a tool of statecraft (Nyanzi 2023).

The paper comprises three parts. Firstly, I tie together the rise of national-populist politics in America with the legitimation of Christian fundamentalist ethics in contemporary politics. I argue that not only has this given way to interest groups that can lobby governments in a particular direction, but it has also given rise to the powerful NGO industrial complex whose reach and influence extend far beyond the United States. Secondly, to tease out the NGO industrial complex, I turn my attention to an American NGO, Family Watch International, which has been at the forefront of lobbying against homosexual rights and sexual education in the United Nations (UN), while actively funding and campaigning for the adoption of these policies in African governments like Uganda, Namibia and South Africa. Finally, I link the influence of this NGO on African governments with the rise of Anti-Homosexual Bills not only to explain how Christian fundamentalists are transforming sexual politics in Africa and re-configuring the nation-state, but also how the re-emergence of these homophobic bills is in line with the populist-nationalist resurgence in Euro-America.

The resurgence of national-populist politics in America

Though the early twentieth century European wars were fought on fascist and racist ideologies, the re-emergence of these ideas and their influence in global North politics in the last century can be attributed to the Euro-American fatigue with the globalisation upheld in the post-Cold War neoliberal order (Worth 2019). This does not mean the far-right nationalist-populist politicians in Northern countries are in opposition to neoliberalism per se, as they, in fact, benefit from and embrace the capitalist ethic embedded within the neoliberal order. Rather, as Worth (2019) further argues, what they resent are the ideals and perceived excesses that this order seems to foster, such as multiculturalism, race and gender equity, freedom, global integration and migration. The argument these populists usually make is that these ideals have fractured the 'family' and thus subverted 'national culture', and are therefore the unwanted social consequences of the neoliberal order (Worth 2019).

The 2007/8 financial crisis was an embodiment of this contradictory structural meltdown brought about, in many ways, by the limits of capitalism as enshrined in this neoliberal order (Worth 2019). The response to this

breakdown was rather startling. Firstly, the global North, led by a capital driven Euro-American order implemented 'a succession of policies linked to forms of austerity utilised as an attempt to maintain the principles of the prevailing [neoliberal] order and subsequently, of continuing the presiding governing logic of neoliberalism" (Worth 2019: 1). Though this effort, in many ways, turned the tide, it failed to address the systemic limitations that had led to the crisis in the first place; rather, it ensured seamless transfer and continuity of such operations in the immediate post-crisis phase.

A second development worth noting is that a decade on from the crisis, efforts to ensure sustained continuity of this order were met with 'the emergence of new political movements that [were seeking] to contest the management of the manner in which such continuity might progress' (Worth 2019: 2). This means that there was lingering widespread discontent in America, not over the crisis itself, but also in how the crisis and its aftermath were being handled. As a result, a new politics emerged with radical ideas of how this could be achieved. Although a lot has been reported about the number of civic and hate groups, political parties and politicians that emerged at this moment[3], both in the global North and South (Worth 2019: 1), it was Donald Trump's emergence in 2016 that tipped the scales and really woke the sleeping dogs. He ascended through a campaign littered with populist themes such as anti-immigration, anti-government, White nationalism, 'rule of law', etc. (Worth 2019: 2). He mobilised right-wing networks on ideas dangerous not only for their overt hatred and for intolerance of vulnerable groups, but also for their push towards extreme right politics, which often operates on antiquated racist philosophies and vigilantism.

The Trump 1.0 moment (2016—2021), therefore, arriving immediately after the post-neoliberal crisis, as pseudo-opposition to the neoliberal order, is symbolic not only for shifting political discourse and praxis towards the radical populist right, but also for globalising intolerance and hatred of vulnerable groups, fostered by the legitimation of fundamentalist narratives and arguments in mainstream politics. This continuum has equally characterised the ongoing Trump 2.0 period, which began in January 2025.

Although one might argue that this ideological shift was primarily a phenomenon of global North politics, its effects have not been limited to those regions. Instead, the introduction of radical right ideas into international politics has influenced the political climate of the global South as well[4]. This has contributed

to a new kind of North–South dualism in the international order, where ideas originating in the North shape domestic politics in the South. As a result, there has been a resurgence of radical right populism in several African countries, a trend that often encourages intolerance and hostility towards vulnerable groups, such as queer communities. This ideological transfer is embedded in the North-South dialectic and upheld in institutional relations between these two regions. These political and ideological shifts in the North enabled a convergence of far-right discourses and rhetoric that were once marginal but have increasingly moved into the mainstream (Worth 2019: 173).

Trump's crooked cross: The return of Christian fundamentalists

The Trump 1.0 and later 2.0 moments opened a broad church in politics where, for the first time in some time, all right-wingers found themselves in one room, praying to one God. From neo-Nazis to the Ku-Klux Klan, from white nationalists to anti-government groups, from anti-Islamic, racist, fascist and homophobic groups to Christian fundamentalists, all had finally found a common ground and a unifying devil to prey on: the social consequences of neoliberalism. According to these groups, neoliberalism had not only wreaked havoc on the economy but had also done far worse for the family and the nation (Luscombe 2020). As a result, renewal and restoration politics emerged, embodied in the 'Make America Great Again' slogan, which, interpreted otherwise, was a spiritual moment of revival for Christian fundamentalists. This was confirmed by Trump's faith advisor, Pastor Paula White Cain, who stated: 'I do believe that President Trump was God's answer to so much prayer… and he was appointed [by God] to lead America' (Luscombe 2020; Jaffe-Hoffman 2023). Whether this belief is true or imagined, it galvanised a mass mobilisation that delivered not only the Trump 1.0 administration, but also the Trump effect, ethic and style in contemporary politics.

'Christofascists' and the Trump presidency

Although Trump has at times declared himself to be 'the chosen one', thereby normalising his populist antics as a moral crusader, it is the Christian fundamentalists who have legitimised his position and influence in the larger Christian fraternity (McCarthy 2019). Not only have they manufactured the idea that the United

States is somehow specially favoured by God and his angels, but they have also created the notion of 'God-fearing' politicians, and weaponised religion as a political instrument (McLaren and Jandrić 2019: 306). This notion of 'God' in politics and the Presidency has its complications and relies on a pseudo-spiritual basis, which this chapter will not engage with fully because of space limitations. However, it would be fair to mention that, though the United States Presidency is usually contested over brutal ideological and policy clashes, its central and unifying contract lies in the upholding of white power and supremacy.

But how exactly do you slip that through into modern politics? How do you normalise the antiquarian philosophies upon which that belief is founded? The real answer is r*eligion*. You use *religion* to evoke the notion of white supremacy and logic, with all its racist, homophobic and hateful vitriol, as God-ordained will. An organisation that has for decades acted as a vehicle for this ideological girding in United States politics is known as 'The Fellowship' or, rather famously, 'The Family' (McLaren and Jandrić 2019). Its work is usually in the shadows and unknown to the public. McLaren and Jandrić (2019: 306) refer to it as 'a "Christomonist" or "Christofascist" network of evangelical Christians [which, though it] is based in the USA, has worldwide reach and is designed to convert world leaders to Christianity'. In the US, however, another of its functions has been to deliver presidencies and colonise administrations through Christian fundamentalist ideals.

Organised interest groups in the church, family and nation tripartite

The legitimation of Trump by the Christian fundamentalists played a huge role in normalising the hatred, homophobia and racism he represented and perpetrated. This is not only because of the complex ties between the Church and the State, which are subtly pronounced in the United States, but mostly because of the contested tripartite between the Church, Family and Nation (Laycock 2006). This has been used to frame national ethics, morality and collective identity in nation building across the world. While England and Russia, among others, have state churches—the Church of England and the Russian Orthodox Church respectively—the United States has Christianity as an undergirding religion in national identity, in the form of thousands of variant practices of the Christian ideology. This notion of 'religious liberty' has opened the door to many contested

debates about religion and its place in society (Laycock 2006: 519). It has also facilitated the rise of 'organised interest groups' who, though springing from Christian traditions supported by churches, advance their views through political influence and litigation if necessary (Laycock 2006).

Laycock (2006: 514), argues, the evangelicals and their 'organised interest groups' emerge from this gap, which, in many ways, was instituted in the United States Constitution through a 'separation of the Church and the State' to prevent the possibility of the government using its 'coercive power to support or oppose religion, either on its own initiative or at the request of a church'. But has there been a separation? Have the lines been clearly drawn? Wolfe (2017), mentions how in the same year that Christian affiliation became a norm in American presidential hopefuls like Jimmy Carter in 1976, a religious right leader, Jerry Falwell, claimed that 'the notion that religion and politics should be kept apart was invented by the Devil to keep Christians from running their own country' (Falwell 1976, cited in Wolfe 2017). As a result, the legitimation of Christianity and Christian ideology within politics and the presidency became normalised. Simultaneously, the rise of evangelicals and their interest groups enabled them to have access to the levers of the State, consistently influencing and lobbying for their policy interests while policing national morality and ethics. Ultimately, the Church, the family and the nation became interconnected, all orbiting the same space linked by the power and influence of 'organized *[sic]* interest groups'.

FWI is one of the groups that has emerged from this gap. It began as an interest group focused on promoting and protecting the family and family values, but has since grown into an influential NGO that lobbies the government in support of conservative and homophobic legislation in the United States. Their affiliation with The Church of Jesus Christ of the Latter-Day Saints (LDS), also known as the Mormon Church, has shaped their ideological foundation and policy interests, which are firmly rooted in Christian fundamentalist ideologies such as anti-LGBTQIA+, anti-feminism and anti-Comprehensive Sexual Education (CSE) (Ipas and Empower 2023; Kaoma 2012; Cullinan, Geloo and Haidula 2020). The rise of this organisation was centred on their 'concern for the family and family values against emerging threats' (Ipas and Empower 2023; Kaoma 2012). The weaponising of 'values under threat' has served a very important function in creating a universal 'other' to galvanise global support around the politics of fear and the politics of queer, as Lotter and Fourie (2020)

argue. The organisation has consistently opposed and influenced any policy that tries to humanise homosexuality and CSE. While they hold some influence in the United States, shared with other Christian right-wing interest groups, it is at the UN where they have waged their frontal assault against the 'global sexual rights' regime. Furthermore, they have extended their influence and lobbying efforts to Africa, where they have access to high-ranking officials through both the UN and African Union (AU) (Kaoma 2012).

The UN, as a global governance institution tying together the global North and global South, has become a battlefield for conservative versus progressive ideas. It is no surprise, therefore, that the political shifts in line with the populist resurgence in Euro-America play themselves out fully in this institution. Organised interest groups and NGOs, which often operate under conservative ethics, have turned their full attention to its operations and various caucus negotiations to promote specific ethical values globally. This is effected by casting the UN as a devious platform advancing 'Western' 'human rights talk' and a 'global sexual rights' regime, which are seen as threats to the traditional family structure (Marshall 2011). The next section of this paper investigates the workings of the FWI in the UN and Africa to influence anti-homosexual bills, block funding for CSE programmes and influence language on gender, sexual freedom and rights.

Family Watch International: Standing for family values worldwide

On its website, the Arizona- based NPO FWI has as its slogan 'Standing for the Family Worldwide…Working in countries around the world promoting policies and programs *[sic]* that strengthen the family, protect the interests of children, and provide the best outcomes for women and men'[5]. This statement highlights the ostensibly noble mission the organisation claims to advance. On closer inspection, however, one starts to see how the material misleads. In addition to the website—which is littered with 'FWI's Powerful Education Tools', policy briefs, resources from the experts on family issues and short clip documentaries covering topics like 'The Porn Pandemic', 'War Against Sexuality Education Agenda' and 'Understanding Same-Sex Attraction'[6]—the NPO also has a Facebook page boasting at least 4000 likes and 4300 followers who passionately engage with its posts and page content.

Founded in 1999 by the long-time anti-LGBTQIA+ and anti-choice

activist, Sharon Slater, the NPO describes itself as an 'international educational organization *[sic]* in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations"[7]. It further states it is 'a critical and exciting worldwide movement to preserve and promote the family, traditional marriage, life, parental rights and religious freedom' (Marshall 2011). What seems to make this organisation distinct, though, is its focus not only on the UN, but also on developing countries where it actively funds and lobbies for policy change on issues of LGBTQIA+ rights, children's rights and sexual and reproductive rights, while grooming upcoming politicians and diplomats on how to negotiate the UN (Marshall 2011). On its website, it claims to have members and supporters in 170 countries[8]. Furthermore, one of its main goals is to demonstrate 'how the UN system is being manipulated to influence national laws that promote abortion, prostitution, homosexuality, promiscuity and the sexualisation of children' (Marshall 2011).

Sharon Slater, whose ideological tutelage seems to guide the direction of this organisation, is not only a Mormon with deep Christian fundamentalist beliefs[9], but also an influential negotiator and leader in the NGO and policy arena. She has positioned the organisation to operate both in domestic policy and international outreach, 'with an intense focus on Africa and the UN' (Marshall 2011). Her constant attacks on LGBTQIA+ individuals, whom she insists are 'prone to disease', 'significantly more promiscuous' and 'more likely to engage in paedophilia', have become keystones in policy positions in the countries where the organisation has members and supporters. Equally, these unqualified assumptions have become solid arguments in populist anti-queer messaging (on the continent) under the guise of protecting children from being indoctrinated into the 'sinister global rights revolution' that seeks to undermine the traditional family, weaken religious values and sow gender confusion UN' (Marshall 2011). The convenient invocation of a 'sinister global rights revolution' has also legitimised this organisation's poisoned lobbying at the UN where its promoters easily 'cast advocates of women's and gay rights as villains', while advancing the debate on the 'evils' of U.N. "human rights talk" and "hidden agendas" behind various proposed actions [on topics of gender, sex, and homosexuality]' (Marshall 2011).

In response to this 'global rights revolution'—which in many ways bastardises sexual rights and basic human rights for homosexuals—this organisation has

waged a frontal assault, not only on the UN system regarding human rights, sexual freedoms, gender and family, but also on national laws, policies and policing across the developing world regarding homosexuality, gender and comprehensive sexual education. This has led to a significant regression in the progressive steps Africa had taken on these issues since the post-colonial era.

The modus operandi of the NGO and its advocates is clear. They have focused on coaching and grooming high-ranking African politicians and diplomats who become their mouthpieces and foot soldiers, doing the heavy lifting in society and governments. Cullinan, Geloo and Haidula (2020) report that 'For at least a decade, African ambassadors to the UN have been invited to FWI's annual training programme in the US. The focus of the training is on opposing both LGBTQIA+ rights and CSE, which the UN defines as "the education of children and young people about sexual health, well-being and dignity"' (Cullinan, Geloo and Haidula 2020). These training programmes, they further opine, include 'practical sessions on how to negotiate at the UN' (Cullinan, Geloo and Haidula 2020). While much can be said about the training and summits—usually hosted over a weekend in the US—particularly regarding how, for the duration, delegates are paired with a 'genuine traditional family' to give them an experience of the family model the institution proposes, it is the training content that raises the most concern (Marshall 2011).

This because the content is littered with 'scientific and clinical evidence that proves homosexuality is not genetically determined and fixed like skin colour or race and that in many cases, individuals who experience same-sex attraction can be helped by therapy' (Marshall 2011). It is not surprising, therefore, that by the time these politicians are back in their home countries and UN posts, they are solid mouthpieces and evangelists for this organisation, not only ready to push these policies through government but also prepared to start their own organisations as regional chapters, if necessary. An executive director for a Kenyan NGO, Trust for Indigenous Culture and Health, Jedidah Maina, reported that 'between 2010 and 2015, the anti-LGBT movement in Africa was largely white evangelicals from the United States, such as Family Watch International and the World Congress of Families' (as cited in Cullinan, Geloo and Haidula 2020). The anti-queer movement, she argues, has changed: 'It is morphing with new African actors. The conversation is the same, but the actors have changed. These organisations are all fronted by Africans, but the messaging is the same, especially in regard

to CSE, which they claim sexualises children, encourages them to have sex and turns them gay' (as cited in Cullinan, Geloo and Haidula 2020). This has been the FWI's biggest success in infiltrating national governments and parliaments.

The organisation is well represented at the executive level through its observer status at the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), where it has heavy input on funding linked to educational projects (Cullinan, Geloo and Haidula 2020). It is also influential at the UN Family Rights Caucus, where Slater is a co-founder and chair (Cullinana *et al.* 2020). While these positions enable the organisation to wield considerable influence both internationally and regionally, its true strength lies in its long list of high-ranking African politicians and diplomats who serve as its primary arsenal and often do the heavy lifting. These individuals are instrumental in advancing the organisation's agenda, both within their own governments and on the international stage. Moreover, the organisation's funding has been increasing over the years, and it has spent more than $54million in Africa since 2007 (Namubiru and Wepukhulu 2020). The organisation has increased its representation at the AU parliament where it not only has observer status, but also a permanent representative, Seyoum Antonios, a well-known anti-LGBTQIA+ activist who is mostly known for his claims that 'homosexuality is an abomination and Africa will be the graveyard for homosexuals'[10].

The re-emergence of anti-homosexual bills, intolerance and violent policing on the continent can be traced directly to the influence of this Christian fundamentalist NGO, which uses its access to high-ranking officials to persuade policy-making structures. While the hostile anti-homosexual bills have a long history in Uganda dating back to 1950[11], their recent passing into law has ignited the anti-queer debate anew. The FWI's fingerprints can be seen on every word in that bill. This cannot be a coincidence. A look at the programme for the 10th Annual Global Family Policy Forum[12], held in Arizona, United States, in 2019, reveals that senior African politicians and diplomats top the list of attendees. The former Zambian ambassador to the AU, Emmanuel Mwamba, the first keynote speaker, gave a speech titled 'Strengthening and Protecting the Family—an African Union Perspective'.[13] Mwamba not only participated in the conference but also returned home to become a vocal opponent of CSE in Zambia (Cullinana *et al.* 2020). Netumbo Nandi-Ndaitwah, then Minister of International Relations and Co-operation, and now President of Namibia, is another high-ranking politician who attended FWI training and afterwards returned home with anti-queer and anti-CSE messaging.[14]

FWI can therefore be seen as an important influence behind the re-emergence of state-led homophobia on the African continent recently. Its activities, particularly in this light, unmask the benign façade of Christian NGOs promoting 'family values', while in essence reproducing the heteronormative conceptions of family, where a father and mother with their biological children is the only legitimate family structure (Arias 2004, as cited in Morrison, Gallardo and Fuster 2023). The contribution of the FWI, particularly in its invocation of heteronormative logics in family making and thus the creation of acceptable and unacceptable citizenry, has united the religious actors with political sectors. It has tied to the hip the role of family making and its contested values with the project of 'nation-state building', which gives oxygen to nationalist populist politics.

Though heteronormativity and heteronormative logics as an analytical framework has been used extensively in scholarly work on geographies of sexuality to capture 'the imposition of certain beliefs about sexuality through social and spatial organization *[sic]*, as well as to make visible the processes that privilege heterosexual attractions and relationships as the default, normal, and superior form of sexuality' (Mkhize and Mthembu 2023: 377). The development of heteronormativity as a theory invited us to think critically about the 'social processes through which heterosexuality is treated as normal whilst treating those that fall outside this standard as abnormal and of lesser value' (Warner 1991, as cited in Mkhize and Mthembu 2023: 377). In other words, it illuminates for us the social tools and procedures on which sexual 'othering' takes place. Demonstrating the normalisation of particular sexualities, while illegitimising others.

This section has sought to map the practical and deliberate interventions of this NGO in reshaping sexual politics in Africa. Having identified the key pragmatic threads of the re-emergence of radical right ideologies, the analysis now turns to its explanation within the nexus of nationalist, Christian fundamentalist and family politics. By deploying homopopulism and homonationalism as analytical frameworks, the following discussion will not only hypothesise that this re-emergence is a response to Euro-American nationalist-populist political shifts, but will also examine the usefulness of the concepts of 'politics of fear' and 'politics of queer' in contemporary statecraft.

Sexual politics in African statecraft: Global North in the Global South

The argument this paper is making is a simple one, although its impact could be far-reaching and demand further engagement with theories other than 'queer', focusing more on statecraft and world-making in the age of nationalist-populist politics. The Global South, within which Africa is categorised, exists in a dialectical relationship with its Global North, meaning the two spheres, while not true geographic antipodes, function as direct theoretical and structural opposites (Mbembe 2012). Mignolo (2011: 166) argues that "The 'Global South' is not simply the land below the equator. It is an ideological concept highlighting the economic, political, and *epistemic dependency* and unequal relations in the global world order, from a subaltern perspective." This implies that, regardless of the different meanings we can attach to the concept, its complex metaphorical nature opens the revolving door of political, economic, religious and other ideologies, where there is constantly a 'North' in the 'South', an 'East' in the 'South', or a 'South' in the 'North', and vice versa.

This revolving door is at the centre of this chapter's argument that the re-emergence of anti-homosexual bills in Africa is in line with the populist-nationalist ideological shifts in Euro-America. The Christian fundamentalist-inspired NGOs from Euro-America are the foot soldiers of Western Christian cosmology. In this work of transforming sexual politics in Africa, they marry politics and theology to reaffirm, firstly, the heteronormative idea of a 'traditional family' being the sole proxy of national ethics and therefore national culture. Secondly, the colonial matrix of power juxtaposes 'gender and sexuality' and 'man and humanity' to imply masculinity as a norm and man as the model of human, qualifying for citizenship and rights (Mignolo 2011:179). Thus, it posits anything opposite as an anomaly that is not deserving of human rights (Mignolo 2011: 179). In this way, they ensure a continuation of Christian influence in nation-making in Africa's post-colonial period.

The article proposes that this revolving door is in many ways suggestive of transatlantic political influence. The theoretical frameworks of Homonationalism and Homopopulism are best placed to nuance this phenomenon not only because they engage Queer International Relations, and thus juxtapose extensive tools of statecraft with sexual politics, but also because they get us to think critically about the invocation of the 'politics of fear' in creating the concept of undeserving

bodies, remaking sovereign subjects and producing homophobic countries.

The creation of the concept of undeserving bodies

The modus operandi in nationalist-populist politics is to create a universal 'other' through which to mobilise collective anger and outrage that recreate and dehumanise these 'others'. Weber (2016 cited in Lotter and Fourie 2020: 181) notes that 'the Trump 1.0 campaign presented the "radical Islamic terrorist" as a universal threat to US citizens whilst also building upon traditional constructions of racial, sexual and gendered biases in order to figure "the underdeveloped", "the un-developable"', "the unwanted im/migrant", "the terrorist", and some "LGBTQs" as dangerous perversions of and threats to "the real America"'. Weber (2016 cited in Lotter and Fourie 2020: 182) further suggests that the wide support Trump received from right-wing radicals not only delivered his Presidency but 'mobilized them towards creating a coalition of fear-based, misogynistic, Christian, patriotic whiteness'. The Christian evangelicals attributed America's social ills to these undeserving bodies and called for national prayers to protect 'family values', which suggests an indirect moral purge of 'others', and in essence legitimising fascism, racism, xenophobia and homophobia (McLaren and Jandrić 2019). The creation of the concept of undeserving bodies in a nation is therefore both a political and religious project that draws a clear line between the model of a citizen and an opposite undeserving body who is a threat to 'family values' and thus to the national fabric.

Though Lotter and Fourie (2020: 177) developed homopopulism to investigate 'how members of the LGBTQIA+ community in Euro-America are implicated in rejecting queer asylum seekers from Africa by supporting and/or endorsing (colluding with) populist-nationalist (right-wing) entities and rhetoric in the EU and its member states', their approach primarily examines the co-option of queer subjects in the recreation of subjectivities and the construction of the 'other'. In this chapter, I deploy homopopulism similarly to interrogate how African nationalist-populist politicians create undeserving bodies and mobilise the other 'others' through blind and fear-based patriotism. These other 'others' are conditioned into homophobia by framing the nation as gendered—specifically, a heteronormative entity—and thus viewing anyone who diverges from this norm as anomalous within the national fabric. Homopopulism,

therefore, not only illuminates the co-option of queer subjects in rejecting queer asylum seekers in North American nationalist-populist contexts, a process with clear geopolitical implications, but it also helps us understand how citizens are co-opted domestically through patriotism to construct universal 'others' and undeserving bodies.

The creation of a national 'other' is directly connected to the creation of a fearful sovereign subject who, through blind patriotism, has a duty to hate this undeserving and unwanted body. In Uganda, for example, Article 14 of the Anti-Homosexual bill enacted in May 2023 stipulates how citizens have a 'duty to report acts of homosexuality' or face up to six months in jail.[15] It further lays out how landlords cannot even rent rooms to homosexuals, an offence with a conviction not exceeding seven years.[16] Though the creation of fearful sovereign subjects is itself sexualised and gendered to allow for a construction and ordering of the nation in a particular way, its real contributions are mobilising citizens—regardless of class, religion, race and gender—towards a homophobic nation-state where the citizens are in the employ of the state in violating the human rights of homosexuals, in return for admission as 'good' citizenship/patriots (Weber 2016 cited in Lotter and Fourie 2020: 180). The politics of fear, as conceptualised by Lotter and Fourie (2020), therefore alerts us to sexed, gendered and sexualised sovereign subjects who themselves have to perform political 'othering'.

Homopopulism (Weber 2016, cited in Lotter and Fourie 2020) also demonstrates how populist nationalist discourse both in Africa and Euro-America instils notions of who a citizen is, who is undeserving, who must be feared and distrusted, while at the same time authorising the presidency and administration of a fearful sovereign who has a 'duty' to the nation. In these homophobic countries in Africa, the fearful sovereign is male, born in that country, indigenous, heteronormative, able-bodied and a 'God-fearing' Christian. Even women engage in sovereignty and citizenship in these nations as 'mothers of a nation', a gendered and peripheralised position where their role is to give birth to the 'ideal' citizen, while they themselves are not fully citizenised (McClintock 1991).

The weaponisation of sexual rights

The recreation of populist-nationalist ethics in Africa has had its contradictions and has therefore revealed salient fault lines in the neoliberal order. Even though

its adoption owes its seamless transfer from the Global North to the revolving door that ensures unmitigated Western cultural and political influence. To localise these ethics in Africa, populist politicians often need to reframe progressive politics as an enemy of the nation. Worth (2019: 113) argues that the NGOs at the forefront of transforming sexual politics in Africa usually 'present the recognition and advancement of LGBTQIA+ rights as part of a neocolonization *[sic]* project'. This weaponises sexual rights and often leads to homosexuality being cast as a 'Western import', a media-driven trend contrary to the religious and cultural backbone of the country (Agyeman 2019, as cited in Martínez, Duarte and Rojas 2021). This connects the populist project to debates on 'un-Africanness' not only of homosexuality but also of gender and sexual diversity and comprehensive sexual education (CSE).

The Founder of FWI, Sharon Slater, often invokes 'politics of fear' to marshal African politicians towards an anti-homosexual stance at the UN and in training the NGO hosts. In her addresses, she asks questions like: 'Did you know that UN agencies including UNICEF, UN WOMEN, UNAIDS, UNFPA and UNESCO and even the World Health Organization *[sic]* have been hijacked by Western donor countries and have a hidden sexual rights agenda to sexualize African children, to legalize and destigmatize abortion and to mainstream homosexuality and transgender ideology into the laws, policies, and programs of every African country?' (Ipas and Empower 2023), positing progressive policies and movements as a threat to Africanness and therefore to be rejected. In this way, she bastardises sexual rights and sexual education into an anti-African concept.

Homonationalism, therefore, is an intervention not only in queer identity but also in the convergence of sexual politics, racial capitalism and nation-state formations across homophobic and gay-friendly countries (Lotter and Fourie 2020). From the weaponisation of sexual rights, the creation of undesirable bodies, the installation of fearful sovereign subjects, to the creation of state-led homophobia, countries like Uganda, Ghana, Namibia and Kenya are seemingly responding to nationalist-populist shifts happening in Euro-America that find their way to the continent through the influence of Christian fundamentalist NGOs like FWI. This has transformed sexual politics—the politics of fear—into tools of statecraft that can be used to create undesirable bodies, weaponise sexual and human rights, create fearful sovereign subjects who become the state's foot soldiers and, most importantly, create homophobic countries.

Conclusion

This chapter has argued that the re-emergence of anti-homosexual bills in Africa, as epitomised by Uganda's May 2023 legislation and the six nations that have since followed, has been induced by broader political shifts in line with the nationalist-populist resurgence in Euro-America. To explain this phenomenon, the chapter revisited Donald Trump's nationalist-populist rhetoric and its role in bolstering homophobic Christian fundamentalism within contemporary politics. It further examined the workings of FWI, the Christian fundamentalist, 'family-based', NGO, whose operations in Africa and at the UN have weaponised sexual rights, human rights and sexual education as 'un-African' concepts. The analysis concluded by exploring the impact of these developments on the transformation of sexual politics in Africa, using Homonationalism and Homopopulism as theoretical frameworks to illuminate the dynamics of fear and 'othering' at play.

The conclusions reached in this chapter hold serious implications for the role of sexual politics in worldmaking in the age of transatlantic nationalist-populism, as represented by the Donald Trump 1.0 and 2.0 presidencies. The chapter proposes that if Africa is to move towards emancipatory futures, it will need to embrace deep and progressive democratic practices that are multicultural, feminist, ecological, anti-homophobic and anti-xenophobic, ideals that are not new to Africa. Ultimately, the chapter contends that there is nothing 'un-African' about homosexuality and sexual rights; rather, it is homophobia and misogyny that are 'un-African'.

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Endnotes

1 See the Uganda anti-homosexual bill signed 26 May 2023 with an extended scope of charges and offences which include "Duty to report acts of homosexuality"

2 See Article 14 of the Uganda Anti-Homosexual Bill 2023

3 For an extensive debate on these movements, see the works of Bailey et al. 2017; Seymour 2014; Bieler 2014; della Porta 2015 cited Worth 2019 (page, 1)

4 For a longer discussion on this ideological exchange between North/South, see Worth (2019, page, 66)

5 See FamilyWatch; *https://familywatch.org/*

6 See FamilyWatch; *https://familywatch.org/other-websites-3/*

7 See SPLC (n.d.). *https://www.splcenter.org/resources/extremist-files/family-watch-international/*

8 See FamilyWatch; *https://familywatch.org/*

9 See https://www.splcenter.org/fighting-hate/extremist-files/group/family-watch-international

10 See Cullinana *et al.* 2020. In addition, Seyoum Antonios makes these claims on a YouTube video, Wilson, B. (2013). *Africa says No to Homosexuality, by Dr Seyoum Antonios*.

11 See the Uganda Anti-Gay Timeline compiled by the 'Gay & Lesbian Advocates & Defenders' – GLAD

12 See DRAFT Program Outline 2020 Global Family Policy Forum. (2019). Available at: https://gandramartins.adv.br/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/global-family-policy-program-2020-1.pdf

13 Ibid

14 Ibid

15 See Article 14 of the Uganda Anti-Homosexual Bill 202316

SECTION IV:
THE CHANGING US-AFRICA RELATIONS

CHAPTER 8

MAGA Nationalism and AGOA's Future: Assessing Survival Risks Under a Trump 2.0 Administration

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Background

The African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA) has been a central pillar of US trade policy with sub-Saharan African countries since its enactment in 2000. It was designed to drive economic development in the region as it provides eligible African countries with duty-free access to the US market for several products. This operates in conjunction with the Generalized System of Preferences (GSP), which benefits over 5 000 products by lowering trade barriers and encouraging American investment (United States Trade Representative 2020). AGOA has facilitated market access, promoted regional integration and motivated political and economic reforms in Africa. As governments adopted market-oriented policies and poverty-reduction measures, AGOA further supported globalisation and greater economic stability (Britz, Olekseyuk and Vogel 2025).

The Act was in effect from October 2000 to September 2008, and legislative amendments in 2004 extended its duration until 2015 (Liser 2018). It has since been extended to December 2026. There are legislative initiatives in the US House of Representatives that propose further support for AGOA with the

AGOA Extension and Enhancement Act of 2024, introduced by Rep. John James (a Republican member of Congress from Michigan), intended to extend the programme for an additional twelve years to 30 September 2037. This proposal, currently under review by the US House Ways and Means Committee, reflects ongoing debates over the Act's future and underscores its strategic importance, particularly in a context where its non-reciprocal benefits are being critically re-examined.

Theoretical foundation

To effectively analyse AGOA's prospects under a Trump 2.0 administration, it is important to adopt Trade Policy and Power Asymmetry Theory. This perspective emphasises that trade agreements are not merely economic arrangements but also tools for geopolitical influence, especially when asymmetries in bargaining power exist (Sorsa 2023). African nations reliant on external trade preferences encounter structural imbalances that affect their ability to negotiate terms effectively and respond to evolving US policy changes. The theory suggests that shifts towards reciprocal trade demands and unilateralism, which are part of Trump's policies, are likely to increase these imbalances by potentially undermining non-reciprocal programmes like AGOA (Davies 2023). Recognising the interplay between power, sovereignty and economic development helps explain why AGOA's future may hinge on broader geopolitical strategies, domestic political will and the ability to diversify and strengthen intra-continental trade.

Trump's 'America First' doctrine: Core tenets of his economic nationalism

The economic policy of President Trump underwent a significant transformation with the adoption of the 'America First' doctrine. This policy framework places priority on supporting American workers and industries, aiming to address perceived trade imbalances by focusing on reciprocal trade relationships. Additionally, a notable aspect of the Trump administration's strategy is a clear preference for bilateral over multilateral agreements, exemplified by the renegotiation of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) into the United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement (USMCA), which sought to secure

concrete advantages for the United States (The White House 2025). The Trump administration sees large and persistent trade deficits as a threat to their national economic interests and responds with aggressive tariff hike measures against key trading partners such as China, Mexico and Canada (Haggard 2020; Williams 2024).

The adopted approach to trade policy is driven by the belief that protecting domestic industries and achieving fairer trade terms requires firstly dismantling traditional multilateral trade frameworks. Such a perspective has had significant implications for non-reciprocal trade programmes like AGOA. The administration's emphasis on bilateral agreements and initiatives to adjust trade balances via direct tariffs illustrates the doctrinal shift towards protectionism and economic nationalism, which are key considerations in this paper's analysis of AGOA's prospects under a second Trump administration. Trump's first term was marked by embracing MAGA nationalism with a series of protectionist and unilateral trade actions that redefined US economic engagements. The administration implemented a range of policies, including the introduction of comprehensive tariffs and the strategic withdrawal from multilateral organisations such as the World Health Organisation (WHO). It also pursued a revised approach to the World Trade Organisation (WTO), reflecting a deliberate scepticism regarding global trade governance (Adu-Quaye and Mavroidis 2026). Furthermore, the Trump administration questioned the structure of non-reciprocal agreements like AGOA, which have traditionally provided duty-free market access without requiring reciprocal commitments from participating countries. However, some critics have argued that these unilateral measures may destabilise existing trade relationships and also risk sacrificing long-term strategic benefits, especially in countering geopolitical challenges such as China's growing influence on the African continent (Eko-Raphaels and Mojekwu 2025).

AGOA's strategic value in US-Africa relations

Since 2001, trade flows between the United States and Africa have exhibited significant volatility. US imports from Africa rose from US$34 billion in 2003 to nearly US$117 billion in 2008. However, after 2011 these imports declined sharply to approximately US$26 billion in 2015, before stabilising below the US$50 billion threshold. In 2022, US imports from Africa were valued at around

US$43 billion (Kassa, Edjigu and Hakobyan 2025). AGOA remains instrumental in this process as it enables the export of value-added goods that generate hundreds of thousands of jobs and encourages the emergence of new sectors across the continent (Gopaldas 2024). The preferential trade framework has allowed African countries to move from relying heavily on primary commodities to a more diversified export base. Notably, some countries have used AGOA particularly efficiently. For example, according to Stender et al. (2025), African countries such as Lesotho, increased their share of duty-free exports to the United States, driven largely by growth in the textile and apparel industry. Furthermore, countries with more diversified economies such as South Africa, Kenya and Ethiopia have benefited from exceptionally high duty-free export rates during recent years.

In the context of China's escalating economic engagement in Africa, AGOA offers an alternative model for trade and development. However, unlike China's approach, which normally involves state-backed large-scale infrastructure investments and resource extraction deals, AGOA provides duty-free access to the large and diverse US market, based on adherence to certain stipulated governance standards or principles. This encourages African states to adopt more transparent economic practices and sustainable policy reforms to reduce their vulnerability to debt patterns and concentrated external influence. Furthermore, by broadening external trade partnerships, AGOA serves as one of the strategically viable tactics to challenge the Chinese economic model, as it allows African countries to diversify their export markets and fortify their economic resilience (Naisho 2025).

In addition to its direct economic advantages, AGOA serves as an important instrument within the broader framework of US geopolitical strategy, particularly in responding to other significant global economic actors (Ayanda, Bonang, Lesedi and Wegayehu 2024). The Act has enabled sustained diplomatic engagement by fostering political and economic reforms that align with democratic values and market-oriented principles. In the context of shifting global power dynamics, such engagement remains essential for preserving US influence in a region of strategic significance. Nonetheless, tensions persist between AGOA's unilateral, non-reciprocal framework and domestic advocacy for bilateral trade agreements that yield immediate, mutual benefits. This divergence highlights an ongoing policy debate within US trade strategy regarding the balance between long-term

goals, such as economic development and the promotion of democracy, and the growing expectation for more balanced trade relationships (Kassa, Edjigu and Hakobyan 2025). Consequently, as US policymakers continue to refine their foreign economic agenda, the trajectory of AGOA will likely be determined by its ability to address both strategic priorities and pressing domestic concerns.

Trump's first-term trade policy record: Precedents for AGOA

Trump's trade policies have represented a major, dramatic departure from the old multilateral and reciprocal trade frameworks by setting robust precedents that may reshape established preferential arrangements like AGOA. In addition, from the beginning of his administration, Trump sought to redefine America's trade policy by transforming longstanding agreements and implementing new aggressive tariff measures. According to Nagy and Navarro (2025), this approach can be seen in the rapid US withdrawal from the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) and the renegotiation of NAFTA into USMCA. Trump's decision to withdraw from TPP was a clear rejection of multilateral trade agreements that are seen as disadvantageous to US interests. According to Nagy and Navarro (2025), Trump called NAFTA 'the worst trade deal ever made' and called for negotiations that included reciprocal gains from US trade partners. Furthermore, throughout the negotiating period, the Trump administration relied heavily on the threat of imposing severe tariff hikes and strict deadlines, which resulted in a trade deal focused on concessions in labour standards, environmental protections, digital trade, intellectual property rights and specific rules of origin, especially in the automotive sector (Nagy and Navarro 2025). The transformation from a broadly based multilateral agreement to a deal forged on bilateral, transactional terms clashes with AGOA's historical structure. Davies (2023) is of the view that if the future US trade policy continues to favour such bilateral arrangements, non-reciprocal programmes like AGOA may come under intense pressure to deliver direct benefits, thereby challenging its original development-oriented objectives.

During the first Trump administration, the United States adopted an assertive tariff policy targeting major trading partners, including China, Mexico and Canada. The application of tariffs on essential manufactured goods such as steel, aluminium and various other products formed a central component of this

protectionist strategy, aimed at addressing perceived unfair trade practices and supporting domestic manufacturing sectors (Christensen 2025). These tariffs functioned both as punitive measures and as strategic tools in negotiations to secure more favourable terms intended to reduce the US trade deficit. While designed to strengthen domestic production and create a more equitable trading environment, these policies also resulted in higher costs for exporters from developing regions. Sub-Saharan African economies that are significantly dependent on exports of commodities like textiles and manufactured goods have thus faced increased production costs and diminished competitiveness within the US market due to such tariff measures (Kohnert 2025). Additionally, as protectionist policies become more entrenched, the historically non-reciprocal duty-free access provided by AGOA faces new challenges. Davies (2023) notes that rising tariffs may prompt US policymakers to reassess the viability of preferential arrangements like AGOA, potentially leading to their restructuring to include reciprocal benefits or gradually replacing them with more balanced bilateral trade agreements.

Moreover, beyond renegotiating trade deals and imposing tariffs, Trump's first term approach displayed hostility towards multilateral institutions, particularly the WTO. The Trump administration's deliberate efforts to undermine the WTO's dispute settlement system included blocking appointments to the Appellate Body, thereby effectively paralysing its capacity to resolve trade disputes (Foster 2025). This reflected a broader scepticism of multilateral trade governance which favours unilateral and bilateral measures. Such actions threaten the stability of non-reciprocal agreements like AGOA which depend heavily on a rules-based international trade order (Brown 2022). Dantata (2025) is of the view that this rejection and withdrawal strategy became a default policy action as Trump's first administration frequently expressed dissatisfaction with multilateral decision-making and instead opted for unilateral and bilateral measures. Moreover, this major shift from multilateral co-operation dismantles the co-operative framework that supports diverse international trade agreements and also poses significant risks to programmes like AGOA, which have thrived within a stable multilateral context. The undermined effectiveness of institutions like the WTO creates an environment of uncertainty in which the long-standing non-reciprocal benefits of AGOA could be perceived as less than advantageous when measured against a rising trend in protectionist reciprocal trade policies (Foster 2025).

Therefore, Trump's first-term trade policy record—marked by the transformation of NAFTA into USMCA, the aggressive imposition of tariffs on major economies and the deliberate undermining of the WTO's dispute settlement system— provides several precedents with direct implications for the future of AGOA. Kim (2025) further highlights that the shift from multilateral to bilateral trade negotiations sets a challenging standard for preferential programmes that have traditionally offered one-way access to the US market. According to Foster (2025) and Brown (2022), the unilateral weakening of multilateral institutions like the WTO signals a broader trend that may undermine the stability required for non-reciprocal arrangements such as AGOA. Therefore, as the global trade landscape continues to change under an 'America First' policy, these precedents cast serious doubt on whether AGOA can sustain its legacy of promoting economic development and integration in Africa without adapting to a more reciprocal model.

MAGA nationalism and 'reciprocal' trade expectations

Since Donald Trump returned to the US presidency, there has been an increased focus on nationalist rhetoric and trade policies that aims to put the United States at the centre of negotiations. The campaign slogan 'Make America Great Again' has been used to convey a commitment to restoring US economic sovereignty (Nagy and Navarro 2025). This approach is linked to a preference for bilateral agreements and reciprocal trade deals, rather than multilateral arrangements such as the TPP. The administration prioritises renegotiating existing agreements individually, advocating for trade arrangements that directly benefit American industry and workers. For example, in the renegotiation of NAFTA into the United States–Mexico–Canada Agreement, the administration highlighted enforceable provisions related to labour standards, environmental protection, digital trade, and intellectual property rights (Nagy and Navarro 2025;). Chryssogelos and Brusenbauch Meislová (2025) note that Trump's statements and policies frame free trade deals as instruments that could challenge US sovereignty. He often calls for trade deals involving reciprocal concessions from partners, which marks a departure from previous arrangements, where the United States offered market access without demanding direct returns.

This reciprocity principle therefore raises significant concerns for long-

established preferential programmes such as AGOA. AGOA was created with the objective of improving economic development in sub-Saharan African countries through providing duty-free entry to the US market for a number of products. In addition, as part of a broader trade framework that includes benefits under the GSP, AGOA has helped several African countries to diversify their exports and move away from being reliant on primary commodities to more value-added products (Liser 2018). Statistics show that many African nations, including South Africa, Kenya and Ethiopia have effectively utilised AGOA. In some cases, these countries achieved duty-free rates exceeding 95% for their exports between 2019 and 2021 (Gopaldas 2024; UNCTAD 2023). However, in an environment dominated by an 'America First' trade philosophy of bilateralism, there is growing pressure to reconfigure AGOA into a conditional trade programme. Furthermore, policy proposals and legislative debates suggest that the United States might move towards changing AGOA into a reciprocal agreement that requires African countries trading with the US to provide equivalent market access or undertake additional economic reforms (Kohnert 2025). Dantata (2025) notes that such a transformation could undermine the developmental objectives of the programme as African governments might be forced to adopt policies which are in line with short-term US interests rather than pursuing interests for long-term economic diversification and industrialisation. These changes can dramatically change the non-reciprocal character of AGOA that has supported reform across sub-Saharan Africa for over two decades.

Trump'**s** trade policy also reflects a broader hostility towards one-sided trade benefits that he sees as contributing to persistent US trade deficits. His administration has consistently argued that unbalanced trade deals have severely affected the American manufacturing industry and eroded national prosperity. This conviction has led to the imposition of high tariffs on imports from major trading partners (Christensen 2025). For example, the administration introduced tariffs on steel, aluminium and a range of manufactured goods in an effort to force China, Mexico and Canada into renegotiating deals on more reciprocal grounds. The US Trade Policy Agenda for 2025 clearly states that the United States will pursue bilateral or sector-specific agreements to counter unfair practices and open new markets for US exports (The White House 2025). Mohanty et al (2025) notes that the Trump 2.0 policy agenda support domestic industries by addressing trade imbalances and withdrawing financial support from economies

that do not deliver reciprocal benefits to the US. For example, a sweeping tariff of 25% was imposed on all goods exported by Canada and Mexico, a measure later temporarily postponed when both nations agreed to bolster border security (Mo 2021). Furthermore, the International Trade Union Confederation reported on flat-rate tariffs of up to 25% on key exports from certain African countries such as Lesotho, South Africa, Nigeria and Kenya (ITUC-Africa 2025).

The situation in South Africa highlights the challenges posed by these policies, as prior to these new tariffs, South African manufactured exports—automobiles, refined aluminium and jewellery—entered the U.S. duty-free under AGOA. However, a tariff of 30% was then imposed on South African manufactured goods, a rate six times higher than the weighted average tariff applied to US imports. Moreover, while the tariff exempts raw materials like platinum and titanium, which account for a substantial portion of South Africa's exports (and its trade surplus with the United States), it falls heavily on higher value-added manufactured goods. Analysts at TIPS (2025) argue that such tariff impositions are structured to block industrialisation pathways for countries in the Global South. This antagonistic stance towards one-sided trade deals, as reflected in Trump's aggressive tariff measures, further shows his belief that trade agreements must yield balanced benefits for US industries and workers (Hart 2026; Menezes, Mariano and Contrera 2022).

Trump's approach under the MAGA banner is based on a move away from multilateral trade norms, focusing instead on bilateral, reciprocal agreements (Bhukuth 2026). His administration has revised several major trade deals and implemented tariffs with the aim of securing direct benefits for the United States. These policy shifts have implications for established programmes such as AGOA, which function as non-reciprocal mechanisms designed to support economic development in sub-Saharan Africa. Additionally, as the United States emphasises reciprocal arrangements, there is potential for the modification or discontinuation of preferential programmes that have historically supported long-term growth and diversification of trade in emerging economies. This change prompts important considerations regarding the future direction of US trade policy and its effects on global economic structures (Foster 2025).

Potential scenarios for AGOA under a second Trump administration

AGOA is set to expire at the end of December 2026, a looming deadline that has intensified debates over its future in US-Africa trade relations under a second Trump administration. Its extension in 2015 through the Trade Preferences Extension Act became the longest renewal in AGOA's history. The Act has enabled several sub-Saharan African countries to export multiple products duty-free to the United States, a measure that has contributed significantly to economic reform and diversification in the region. However, rising US economic nationalism and heightened concerns have led to trade imbalances which are exemplified by a US$13.2 billion US trade deficit with AGOA countries in 2023 (Hendrix 2020). Moreover, along with his contentious stance towards non-reciprocal trade benefits, Trump's strategic focus on US-China competition further complicates this trade situation.

The first scenario, then, is the complete cancellation of AGOA. Under this scenario, the act would be terminated when it expires on 31 December 2026, thereby stripping African exporters of the preferential access that has long underpinned their ability to compete in the US market. This could lead to immediate economic disruptions, especially in sectors which heavily rely on US markets for growth (Gopaldas 2024). Fluctuations in US imports from African countries and the heavy reliance of certain sectors on AGOA's benefits suggest a significant vulnerability to abrupt policy shifts (Kassa, Edjigu and Hakobyan 2025). African economies that have integrated AGOA's benefits into their export strategies, especially in sectors like textiles and apparel, would face immediate risk of severe economic disruptions. Therefore, the full cancellation could trigger abrupt revenue losses, job cuts and a retraction from developmental reforms that the act helped facilitate over the past two decades. Such an outcome would damage bilateral trade relations and might also signal a broader retreat from US commitments to development in Africa, potentially eroding investor confidence and deterring longer-term economic engagements (Gopaldas 2024).

A second scenario envisages the conditional renewal of AGOA, with the act being extended beyond 2026, subject to the implementation of reciprocal trade obligations. Under this framework, the United States might prolong AGOA's provisions but require beneficiary African nations to grant market access or implement reforms consistent with US interests. This approach would mark a

significant departure from AGOA's original non-reciprocal model, which could potentially undermine its developmental objectives (Kohnert 2025; Dantata 2025). Such conditions are increasingly being considered within legislative discussions; for example, a bipartisan bill introduced by US Senators James Risch and Chris Coons proposes a sixteen-year extension until 2041, while US Representative John James suggests a twelve-year renewal (Schneidman 2024). Kulu and Bentum-Ennin (2023) assert that African countries may not currently possess the leverage needed to negotiate effectively with the United States, describing the dynamic as similar to engaging with a more powerful partner, which constrains bargaining capacity. Many analysts contend that prevailing power asymmetries significantly limit Africa's negotiating position in trade discussions with the US. Consequently, the imposition of reciprocal obligations could pressure African states into adopting measures primarily advancing US interests, thus diminishing AGOA's intended developmental benefits (Kohnert 2025; Dantata 2025).

A third scenario situates AGOA as a strategic tool against China, albeit within an altered framework. China poses a competitive threat as it achieved bilateral trade volumes with Africa in 2023 that were more than four times higher than those of the United States (Schneidman 2024). Moreover, in recognising China's dominance in Africa, the US could maintain AGOA but with stricter eligibility criteria by linking benefits to governance reforms aimed at reducing Chinese influence on the continent. However, preserving the trade preference primarily to curtail Chinese influence could risk transforming AGOA into a strategic tool rather than a development instrument (Foster 2025). Several African countries such as South Africa, Kenya and Ethiopia have excelled under AGOA, registering high duty-free export rates that exceed 95% in certain sectors, between 2019 and 2021 (Gopaldas 2024). However, while this scenario preserves the act's foundational benefits, it also risks shifting the focus from its original intent by promoting long-term economic modernisation in order to achieve short-term strategic outcomes that cater to US geopolitical interests (Foster 2025). In addition, such a recalibration could temper developmental gains already made if the programme's stringent new standards limit the flexibility and resilience of African export sectors.

The future of AGOA hangs in the balance under a second Trump administration as it approaches its expiration in December 2026. A full cancellation could

lead to immediate economic shocks on African exporters while, on the other hand, a conditional renewal requiring reciprocal concessions might undermine the reformative spirit of the original act, particularly given Africa's limited bargaining power (Gopaldas 2024). Alternatively, a changed framework aimed at countering Chinese influence would preserve AGOA's preferential access, yet risk repurposing its developmental objectives. The final determination will mostly depend on the interplay of domestic political constraints, evolving global economic dynamics and the persistent 'America First' principles that continue to redefine US trade policy.

Policy responses and stakeholder strategies

The uncertainty over AGOA's renewal has provoked diverse responses from key stakeholders, prompting African governments and regional trade blocs to reassess their current strategies. Many countries in sub-Saharan Africa have relied heavily on the duty-free market access provided by AGOA to stimulate export growth and economic reforms. In response to possible changes, national governments may increase their diplomatic engagement with US authorities, seeking assurances or modifications that preserve existing benefits. Furthermore, states are likely to pursue collective action through established regional institutions such as the African Union (AU) and emerging frameworks like the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA). These regional economic organisations offer a platform for co-ordinating trade policy and consolidating negotiating power. In recognising that intra-African trade currently remains below twenty per cent of overall trade volume, leaders must intensify efforts to harmonise trade regulations and resolve infrastructural challenges that hinder cross-border trade. Increased regional integration is seen as essential not only to protect existing export sectors but also to reduce the vulnerability produced by over-reliance on external preferential programmes. Governments are anticipated to invest more in domestic industrialisation and supply chain improvements while forging new bilateral and plurilateral partnerships. Such proactive measures will be critical if the nonreciprocal benefits of AGOA undergo a revision that introduces conditionality or if the programme is terminated altogether.

In the US, the legislature is aiming to extend AGOA with proposals now emphasising its strategic importance in countering Chinese influence on

the African continent (Schneidman 2024). Moreover, stakeholders such as business groups and advocacy organisations are lobbying for the preservation of the programme by citing its role in diplomatic engagement and economic development. Lawmakers in the US have historically recognised the strategic value of AGOA in maintaining US-Africa ties and countering China's growing influence on the continent. The recent legislative bipartisan proposals introduced by Representative John James and Senators James Risch and Chris Coons have suggested extending AGOA's tenure while also ensuring it continues to serve broader US strategic interests. Business groups with particular investments in Africa and strong supply chain interests are also actively lobbying for AGOA's preservation. Policy advocates emphasise that beyond mere trade volumes, AGOA represents an important diplomatic tool that underpins US influence in Africa. They stress that any changes to the programme could disrupt economic ties as well as the geopolitical balance in a region increasingly contested by major global powers.

In light of these debates, African countries, regional bodies and US policymakers are already strategising around AGOA's potential cancellation or transformation when it expires in December 2026. African countries are encouraged to improve intra-African trade by diversifying markets and strengthening regional integration through trade frameworks like AfCFTA. These measures reduce over-reliance on the US and also build resilience against global policy volatility (Kansaye 2025). In addition, African countries should actively pursue new trade partnerships with emerging markets in Asia, Latin America and Europe and further promote domestic industrial upgrading. Diversification of trade relations will mitigate vulnerability to shifts in US trade policy and also create long-term economic resilience and greater global competitiveness.

Conclusion

The future of AGOA remains uncertain, largely as a result of recent protectionist policies that prompted a move away from multilateral trade agreements. Certain scenarios suggest the possibility of AGOA's reduction or dissolution, while others propose its continued adaptation as a strategic instrument within an evolving geopolitical environment. To safeguard the developmental progress achieved thus far, it is imperative for African nations to diversify their export portfolios,

foster deeper regional integration and promote policies that align strategic interests with sustainable economic resilience. The coming period will be pivotal in determining whether AGOA persists as a hallmark of partnership and development or transitions into a broader, more reciprocal US trade framework. The trajectory of AGOA will hold significant implications for both intra-African trade and US-Africa commercial relations.

Should AGOA continue, even with potential modifications, African exporters are likely to retain preferential, duty-free access to the US market—an advantage that has facilitated export diversification and industrial growth across the continent over the past two decades. Sustained support through AGOA would help uphold economic progress and reinforce diplomatic ties between the United States and sub-Saharan Africa. Conversely, if AGOA is not renewed after its expiration in December 2026, many African exporters may lose critical market access. Such a development could result in reduced export revenues, employment declines and setbacks in economic diversification efforts, while also potentially signalling diminished US commitment to Africa's economic development and undermining investor confidence in the region.

These outcomes indicate that reliance on a single trade preference programme can increase exposure to external policy changes for African nations. Policymakers in Africa have considered developing a more diversified system of trade that does not depend solely on US market access. Regional trade efforts, such as AfCFTA, are seen as important steps. African countries are also exploring partnerships with markets in Asia, Latin America and Europe. Expanding trade relations and investing in domestic industries may contribute to a more stable economic future. The stability of US-Africa trade relations is likely to be influenced by African responses to changes in AGOA. Diversifying trade through regional integration and broader global partnerships is seen as one way to reduce dependence on any single external preference programme and potentially strengthen long-term economic resilience.

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CHAPTER 9

United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and the Management of Displaced Persons in the Lake Chad Region

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Introduction

Internal displacement and forced migration have become defining features of contemporary humanitarian crises. As of 2025, over 305 million people globally require urgent humanitarian assistance and protection due to the escalation of conflicts, climate-induced disasters and economic instability (OCHA 2025b). These complex emergencies have placed enormous strain on vulnerable populations and exposed the limitations of existing humanitarian systems.

Among the most severely affected areas is the Lake Chad Region (LCR), comprising northeastern Nigeria, Cameroon's Far North Region, western Chad and southeastern Niger. This region has emerged as one of Africa's major displacement hotspots, primarily due to the protracted insurgency led by Boko Haram that began in northeast Nigeria in 2009 and subsequently spread to neighbouring countries. In addition to armed conflict, the region's displacement crisis is exacerbated by a confluence of climate change, socio-political instability, environmental degradation and weak state capacity (OCHA 2025c; International Organisation for Migration 2025).

As of February 2025, the LCR hosts an estimated 6.1 million crisis-affected individuals. This figure includes 3.2 million Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs), 2.4 million returnees (including both former IDPs and returnees from abroad) and nearly 500 000 refugees both within and outside camps. These populations face critical levels of food insecurity, exposure to gender-based violence and limited access to essential services such as healthcare, education and clean water. Thus, host communities are similarly placed under pressure, straining already limited resources and infrastructure (International Organisation for Migration 2025).

In this fragile context, humanitarian assistance is not only essential for the immediate survival of displaced persons but also for supporting early recovery, resilience and the eventual stabilisation of affected communities. Interventions in water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH), food security, shelter, healthcare and education remain paramount. Financial, security and technical support from both national governments and international donors have been instrumental in delivering life-saving humanitarian interventions to displaced persons across the region (Roy 2025).

Among the key donors, the United States (US) is the largest provider of humanitarian assistance globally, through the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) since its inception in 1961 (DeSilver 2025). USAID has enabled the US to play a significant role in supporting emergency relief efforts in Africa and the LCR through various programmes, spanning agriculture, health, education, democracy promotion and emergency response. In the LCR, USAID has implemented multi-sectoral programmes targeting displaced populations, provided funding for food, aid, shelter, health services, protection of vulnerable populations, security of the region against insurgent activities and WASH programmes since 2014, often in collaboration with United Nations (UN) agencies, local governments and Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) (Cillers 2025a; USAID Office of Inspector General 2020; Cole et al. 2017). In partnership with international NGOs, UN agencies such as the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) and local civil society organisations have all contributed to both immediate relief and medium-term development goals (USAID Office of Inspector General 2020).

However, recent policy shifts threaten to undermine these gains. In January 2025, upon returning to office, US President Donald Trump signed an executive

order significantly reducing USAID funding. While this move is justified on the grounds of combating corruption and preventing aid diversion to terrorist groups, it is likely to have serious implications for humanitarian operations in the region, limiting the resources available for displaced populations and increasing the risk of regional destabilisation (Cillers 2025b; USAID Office of Inspector General 2020).

It should be kept in mind that humanitarian projects undertaken by donor agencies or states are generally temporary interventions designed to respond to the immediate needs of people in crisis and are therefore expected to come to an end at some point (Pal et al. 2019). To facilitate this transition, such projects typically have exit strategies, although the nature and implementation of these strategies may vary across organisations and states (Tull 2020; Ahmed, Dillan and Robinson 2018). The manner in which humanitarian interventions are brought to an end is therefore critical, particularly where abrupt withdrawal may disrupt essential services or leave vulnerable populations without adequate support. In this regard, President Trump's sudden withdrawal from USAID did not appear to follow the established USAID exit guidance, raising concerns about the implications of an unplanned disengagement. At the same time, the question of when and whether humanitarian actors should withdraw is complicated by the possibility that aid itself may sometimes produce unintended or negative consequences. This raises an important dilemma for humanitarian agencies: should they withdraw their services when their interventions may be causing harm, and can foreign aid always be assumed to benefit its intended recipients? (Van Laeken 2021).

While existing literature has explored the role of foreign aid in conflict zones (Maqbool 2022; Bywater 2021), its use as a humanitarian alibi (Bywater 2021), the ethical dilemmas it poses (Van Laeken 2021) and its tensions with military assistance (Sauter 2022), as well as the implications of US withdrawal from international bodies like the World Health Organization (Ogieuhi et al. 2025), few studies have specifically examined how shifts in US foreign aid policy affect displaced populations in the LCR. This research fills that gap by employing a realist theoretical framework and a qualitative approach to analyse displacement trends, aid allocation and socio-economic outcomes and consequences in the LCR. It provides a contextualised analysis of how humanitarian assistance intersects with US geopolitical interests, offering a novel contribution to the

literature on foreign aid, displacement and regional security in West and Central Africa.

This chapter is structured into eight sections. The first section introduces the thrust of the research, followed by the research methodology. Sections three and four examine the theoretical framework and provide an empirical review of the research theme, respectively. The fifth section, 'Humanitarian Crisis and Needs Overview', contextualises the scale and complexity of displacement in the LCR. The sixth section analyses USAID's Humanitarian Engagement in the LCR, focusing on its strategic role and historical interventions. The seventh section explores the 'Effects of USAID Funding Reduction on Displaced Populations', assessing the implications for aid delivery and socio-economic conditions in the region. The last section offers the findings, concluding remarks and policy recommendations.

Research methodology

This research seeks to evaluate the effectiveness, impact and limitations of USAID interventions in managing humanitarian needs in the LCR and assesses the potential consequences of the funding withdrawal. To achieve this, the research adopts a qualitative research design using descriptive methods to examine the effects of the withdrawal on the displaced populations in the region. The qualitative method allows for an in-depth understanding of the effects of this withdrawal, giving an accurate picture of its aftermath.

The research focuses on the four countries that make up the LCR, which include Cameroon, Chad, Niger and Nigeria, their displacement trends and the intervention they receive from USAID. It interrogates data from various sources, including USAID, the United Nations Office for the Co-ordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA) and Armed Conflict Location and Event Data (ACLED). The data derived from these sources include aid disbursement figures, displacement trends and socio-economic indicators. Quantitative data derived from ACLED were visualised using Tableau.

Theoretical framework: Realist theory

This study is anchored in the realist theory of international relations, which provides a foundational lens for understanding how states behave in an anarchic international system. Realism posits that states are the principal actors in an anarchic international system where no central authority exists above the state. Within this framework, states are viewed as rational, self-interested entities that prioritise survival, power and national interest in their foreign policy decisions (Waltz 1979). The theory concerns itself primarily with these pursuits in the international system. It assumes the primacy of states, motivated by self-interest. Thus, it views issues such as humanitarian aid, international co-operation and foreign policies as strategic tools to attaining these goals (Morgenthau 1959).

The two major schools of thought within realism have differing views about the nature of power in international relations. One school, represented by realist figures such as Otto von Bismarck of the nineteenth century and Richard Nixon of the twentieth century, defines power primarily in terms of military capability. In this view, weapons, strategic dominance and defence capacity form the core of a state's international influence. Thus, states and their representatives always ensure that they maintain a balance of military power favourable to the state. The other school, while still grounded in realist assumptions, acknowledges the utility of intangible tools such as human rights, humanitarian aid, economic influence and soft power as means to achieve strategic goals. Historical figures like Woodrow Wilson and V.I. Lenin exemplify the use of these tools in pursuit of national interests, often cloaked in ideological or humanitarian rhetoric. In the last century, the foreign policies of states in the global system have largely been shaped around finding a middle ground between these schools of thought (Miskel 2002).

Classical realism, as articulated by Hans Morgenthau (1959), views the international system as governed by objective laws rooted in human nature. From this perspective, states are inherently self-interested and act to secure power, often using foreign policy tools, including military force and diplomacy, to achieve strategic dominance. Morgenthau emphasised that the national interest, defined in terms of power, should guide all foreign policy decisions.

Neorealism, or structural realism, advanced by Kenneth Waltz (1979), builds on these foundations by focusing on the anarchic structure of the international

system as the primary constraint on state behaviour to seek power and security, often at the expense of moral considerations. In this view, the absence of a global governing authority compels states to prioritise survival, leading them to adopt policies that strengthen their relative power, even at the expense of ethical or humanitarian concerns. These theoretical principles offer a useful lens for analysing US foreign aid policies across the world and in the LCR, especially where strategic interests intersect with humanitarian objectives.

In the context of this research, realist theory offers a robust framework for understanding the motivations behind USAID interventions in the LCR and the US decision to withdraw humanitarian aid from the region. While humanitarian aid is often presented as altruistic, realist scholars argue that such assistance frequently serves broader geopolitical purposes. Scholars such as Mearsheimer (2001) and Nye (2004) have emphasised how US foreign aid functions as a strategic instrument to promote geopolitical stability, counter extremism and maintain influence in fragile states and regions. The LCR, characterised by transnational insurgency, weak state institutions and persistent humanitarian crises, presents a case in point where humanitarian aid aligns with broader US national security interests.

Since 2014, USAID's humanitarian engagement in the region can thus be interpreted as a realist manoeuvre to secure US strategic interests in West and Central Africa. By providing humanitarian assistance, particularly in areas of food security, WASH and the protection of vulnerable populations, the US government has addressed human suffering while also containing the influence of violent extremist organisations such as Boko Haram and the Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP) (Cole et al 2017). Through USAID, the US has also worked to foster regional stability, limit forced migration and prevent the spillover effects of insecurity into Europe and the US (Kishi and Raleigh 2020). Thus, realist theory illuminates the dual purpose of US humanitarian assistance in the LCR, both as a response to human suffering and as a calculated effort to secure national interests.

Empirical review

The United States has historically played a significant role in delivering humanitarian assistance globally, particularly in countries affected by epidemics,

natural disasters and armed conflicts (Ogieuhi et al. 2025). Over the decades, the US government, primarily through USAID, has allocated hundreds of billions of dollars to humanitarian aid across more than 100 countries. In 2023 alone, USAID disbursed nearly US$44 billion in aid to 160 countries, using multilateral platforms such as the World Health Organisation (WHO) and various international NGOs (Roy 2025). USAID has served not only as a humanitarian instrument but also as a vehicle for advancing US foreign policy objectives through soft power.

The literature is replete with examples of US humanitarian engagement in conflict-affected countries such as Sudan, Afghanistan and Bosnia-Herzegovina (CARE International 2002; Blanchard 2016; Bywater 2021; Maqbool 2022). Between 2001 and 2009, the US allocated approximately US$38 billion in humanitarian assistance in Afghanistan, despite internal criticisms regarding the effectiveness and intent of the assistance (Maqbool 2022). Notably, in the early years of intervention, particularly in 2003, military operations accounted for the vast majority of US expenditure in Afghanistan, with only nine per cent allocated to humanitarian assistance (CARE International 2002). A similar trend was observed in Sudan during the Darfur crisis, where US foreign aid reached unprecedented levels in response to the humanitarian emergency (Blanchard 2016). In the case of Bosnia, the United States has been criticised for employing a 'humanitarian alibi' to legitimise its political and military engagement (Bywater 2021). Some analysts argue that interventions in Bosnia and Kosovo were driven more by geopolitical strategy than by purely altruistic motives, with humanitarian rhetoric used to justify military actions (Rieff 2002). While humanitarianism in Bosnia served as a pretext for avoiding direct intervention by the great powers, the opposite occurred in Kosovo, where it was used to support military involvement. These examples underscore a realist interpretation of US foreign policy, where humanitarian assistance is often intertwined with strategic and security foreign policy interests (US State Department 2000).

Humanitarian aid is typically designed as a short- to medium-term intervention, intended to stabilise crises and enable recipient countries or regions to build resilience and then transition towards self-reliance. Accordingly, most donor governments and agencies often implement structured exit strategies that emphasise sustainability and the continuation of impact after aid is withdrawn (Tull 2020). However, even where aid has been phased out gradually,

unanticipated challenges, such as political instability or renewed conflict, can undermine earlier gains and disrupt developmental progress (Slob and Jerve 2008).

The Trump administration's executive decision in January 2025 to reduce USAID funding illustrates a realist recalibration of US foreign policy priorities. Rooted in realist theory, such decisions are driven by a cost-benefit assessment of foreign engagements, especially when national interests appear threatened. When the perceived benefits of aid diminish, due to concerns over corruption, aid diversion or rising domestic political pressures, realist logic suggests that states are likely to reduce or withdraw their involvement (Cilliers 2025). President Trump's opinion that USAID funds were being mismanaged or diverted to terrorist groups mirrors this rationale, signifying a strategic pivot from humanitarian leadership to domestic political consolidation and resource protection (USAID Office of Inspector General 2020). While the decision to exit an aid programme is inherently political, made solely by the donor state, best practices in development co-operation recommend that such withdrawals be guided by developmental benchmarks and undertaken through inclusive consultations with local and international stakeholders to ensure sustainability and mitigate unintended consequences (Slob and Jerve 2008).

Realism reveals the inherent tension between the ideals of needs-based or peacekeeping responses to humanitarian situations and strategic calculations by the powerful donor states. In countries like the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), South Sudan, Mali and the Central African Republic (CAR), the peacekeeping budget has been found to outweigh the humanitarian budget, illustrating the prioritisation of security over aid. For instance, in Mali, the peacekeeping budget reportedly reached US$2 billion compared to only US$160 million for humanitarian assistance, raising concerns about the militarisation of aid (Refugees International 2019). Thus, humanitarian appeals in these contexts remain chronically underfunded, prompting calls from the UN Secretary-General for stronger donor commitments (Sauter 2022).

The reduction in USAID funding further exacerbates the vulnerability of humanitarian operations that rely heavily on the goodwill of powerful states, but are also susceptible to their shifting political priorities, such as in the case of the present Trump administration. The impact of the cutback has been compounded by the Trump administration's decision to halt funding to the WHO, a key global

health actor. Between 2022 and 2023, the US contributed US$1.284 billion to the WHO's total budget, approximately twenty per cent of its total budget, surpassing other funders like the European Union and Gates Foundation. The US funding withdrawal significantly disrupted disease response programmes in vulnerable regions, particularly in Africa (Ogieuhi et al. 2025). US contributions were pivotal in combating diseases such as Ebola, HIV/AIDS and polio, especially in West Africa (Fuster et al. 2017).

Meanwhile, due to the changing nature of war and conflicts, humanitarian actors increasingly face ethical dilemmas, causing them to question the ethics of their aids. Some of these dilemmas have to do with aid benefiting armies, killers or militias who terrorise the civilian populations or embezzle funds. In some cases, the system of government practised by some states has prevented the judicious use of humanitarian aid, particularly under despotic rulers (Sachs et al. 2004; Van Laeken 2021). This implies that humanitarian aid does not always have unimpeachable outcomes and may even be responsible for prolonging suffering or conflict. Although humanitarian agencies try to be impartial in their activities, the impact of their aid has political consequences regardless of their motives. This is because humanitarian emergencies are a product of political and economic upheaval, benefiting certain elites at the expense of the broader population (Vayrynen 1999).

In African states, foreign aid is sometimes perceived as 'easy money' to be squandered for personal gain by corrupt political leaders (Kalu 2018), reinforcing cycles of corruption, dependency and weak governance (Kalu 2018; Moyo 2009). Despite receiving billions of dollars in aid, many African countries continue to experience rising poverty rates, calling into question the long-term effectiveness of such interventions. This has sparked an ongoing scholarly debate about whether aid should be continued or curtailed. While proponents like Sachs et al. (2004) argue that aid is essential to lift countries out of poverty traps, critics (Moyo 2009) contend that aid fosters dependency and undermines domestic initiative.

Conditional aid has been suggested as a compromise to improve effectiveness. However, historical cases like Kenya under President Daniel arap Moi show that while conditions were attached to World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF) funding, they were often ignored or manipulated. Nonetheless, some analysts argue that these conditions produced positive outcomes in the long

run, contributing to Kenya's democratic evolution (The Economist 1998; Sachs et al. 2004). Ultimately, decisions around aid provision rest with donors, who also bear responsibility for monitoring its use and ensuring it aligns with stated development goals.

Humanitarian crisis and needs overview: The LCR

The LCR, encompassing northeastern Nigeria, the Far North of Cameroon, western Chad and southeastern Niger, is facing a severe, long-standing crisis driven by armed conflict, violent extremism, climate shocks, economic stagnation and weak governance systems. Since the emergence in 2009 of Boko Haram in Maiduguri, Nigeria, the group and its affiliates, most notably ISWAP (see Figure 9.1), have expanded their operations across borders into Chad, Cameroon and Niger (USAID Office of Inspector General 2020). The US government designated Boko Haram a foreign terrorist organisation in 2013 (Attoh 2018; Thurston 2016), a move that acknowledged the growing transnational threat it posed. The group and its affiliates continue to carry out attacks in the region, with 1,198 events perpetrated by Boko Haram recorded in the first quarter of 2025, the highest since its emergence, as shown in Figure 9.1.

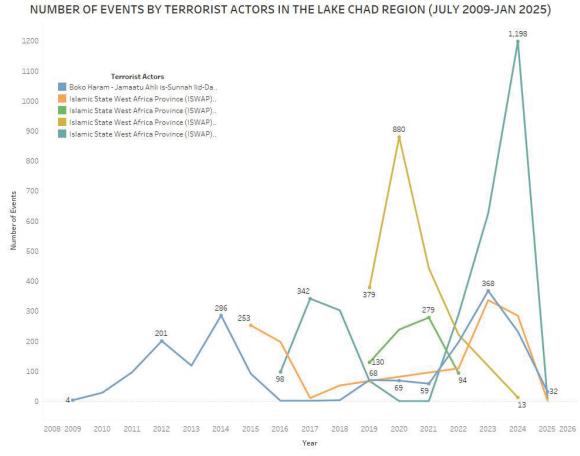

Figure 9.1: Number of events by terrorist actors in the LCR (July 2009-January 2025). Source: By author(s) from ACLED dataset.

The continuous attacks by Boko Haram, ISWAP and other non-state armed groups have led to an acute humanitarian crisis, displacing millions, destroying critical infrastructure, disrupting livelihoods and restricting humanitarian assistance (OCHA 2025b; Oriola, Onuoha and Oyewole 2022). As shown in Figure 9.2, the number of fatalities caused by terrorist violence in the Lake Chad Basin peaked in 2016 when 5322 deaths were recorded, the deadliest year since the start of the crisis. This was followed by smaller, though still alarming, spikes in 2015 (1257) and 2020 (1976). Nigeria has consistently recorded the highest number of fatalities in the region over the years, while Chad, Niger, and Cameroon have experienced intermittent but devastating surges in violence. Notably, 2025 is already on track to surpass previous years, indicating an escalation of hostilities in the region, as shown in Figure 9.2.

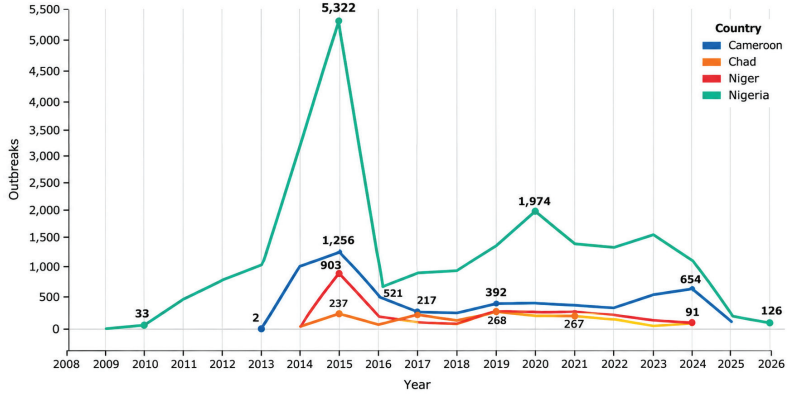

Figure 9.2: Number of fatalities in the Lake Chad countries (July 2009-January 2025). Source: By author(s) from ACLED dataset.

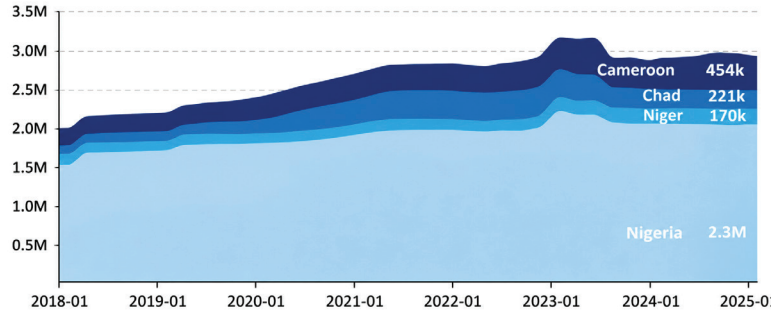

Figure 9.3: Monthly internal displacement trend in the LCR. Source: OCHA (2025c).

Figure 9.3 traces the internal displacement dynamics within the Lake Chad Basin; Nigeria remains the epicenter, with about 2.3 million IDPs as of January 2025, consistently accounting for the largest share throughout the period. Cameroon follows with 454 000 IDPs, showing gradual increases linked to persistent insecurity in the Far North. Chad hosts 221 000 IDPs, with displacement trends reflecting cross-border spillovers from Boko Haram and ISWAP activity. Niger has 170 000 IDPs, mostly concentrated in the Diffa region, with relatively small fluctuations compared to other countries. The spike in 2023 suggests intensified terrorist activities or climate shocks that aggravated vulnerabilities, with levels remaining high into 2025, indicating no significant recovery (OCHA 2025c).

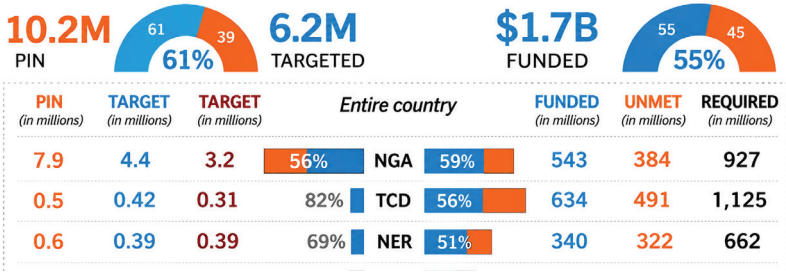

Figure 9.4: People in need and funding requirements. Source: OCHA (2025c).

As shown in Figure 9.4, across the four Lake Chad countries, 10.2 million people

are in need of humanitarian assistance in 2025, but only 6.2 million (61%) are currently targeted for aid delivery, due to financial and logistical constraints. Nigeria bears the brunt with 7.9 million people in need, yet with only 3.2 million people targeted. The country's humanitarian response plan requires US$927 million, of which only US$543 million (59%) has been funded, leaving a gap of US$384 million. Similarly, Chad needs US$1.125 billion to support 0.5 million IDPs, but has a US$491 million funding gap. Niger has received just over half (51%) of its US$662 million requirement. Cameroon faces the most severe shortfall, with only 45% of its US$371 million humanitarian needs funded. This represents a collective US$1.7 billion funding shortfall across the four countries (OCHA 2025c). In the context of shrinking external resources and limited local and regional capacities, the collective goal of saving lives, restoring dignity and reducing vulnerability is becoming increasingly difficult to achieve.

USAID's humanitarian engagement in the LCR

The US government's intervention in the LCR began in 2011, driven by dual objectives that include countering terrorism and addressing the region's deepening humanitarian crisis. In the same year, the US urged Nigeria to address poor governance, corruption and human rights abuses by both the government and security forces (Campbell 2014). By late 2014 and early 2015, four Lake Chad Basin countries, Nigeria, Chad, Niger and Cameroon, along with Benin, established the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF), committing over 8 000 troops to joint operations (International Crisis Group 2020). However, assessments of the MNJTF revealed limited success in combating terrorism, hindered by an unclear mandate, underestimation of Boko Haram's capabilities, political complexities, slow adaptation to evolving threats and ambiguous roles for vigilante groups (Ajala 2021).

To strengthen regional response, the US applied the '3Ds' framework (Defense, Development and Diplomacy) to support LCR governments in combating Boko Haram while addressing underlying vulnerabilities. This 3Ds approach delivered humanitarian assistance to IDPs and refugees, supported community resistance to Boko Haram and advised and built the capacity of partner security forces. US support was instrumental in enabling LCR forces to collectively clear and hold territory comparable in size to Belgium (USAID

Office of Inspector General 2020; Cole et al 2017).

Subsequently, through the Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance (BHA), USAID provided life-saving aid and strengthened resilience in crisis-affected communities, funding interventions in food aid, shelter, water and sanitation, health services and protection for vulnerable groups (Cole et al 2017). By 2013, the United States had begun providing humanitarian assistance to refugees and some IDPs in the LCR, as shown in Figure 9.5. Assistance levels increased from virtually nothing in fiscal year (FY) 2012 to US$42.25 million and US$67.77 million in FY 2013 in Chad and Niger, respectively. Humanitarian aid was expanded to Cameroon in 2014 and to Nigeria in 2015. The US provided US$13.7 million to Nigeria in 2015 and US$11.4 million in 2016, as Nigeria's leadership became more open to external assistance. Assistance to displaced populations in northern Cameroon also dramatically increased from less than US$1 million in 2013 to US$8.5 million in 2014 and US$23 million in 2015. This assistance, provided by USAID's Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance and Food for Peace, as well as by the State's Bureau of Population, Refugees and Migration, was channeled through the UN (Cole et al 2017).

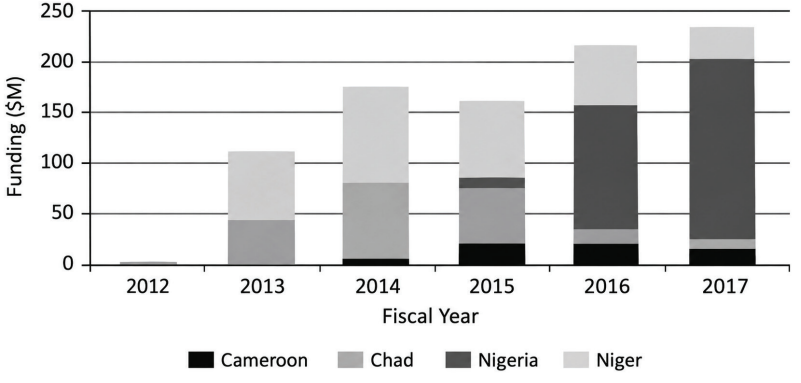

Figure 9.5: Humanitarian assistance to Lake Chad basin. Source: Cole et al (2017).

Since 2014, USAID has been the largest bilateral humanitarian donor in Cameroon, providing emergency food aid to over 1.4 million people and supporting health, security, environmental co-operation and trade promotion

(US Embassy in Cameroon 2024). In Nigeria, funding rose dramatically in mid-2015, from US$17 million in June to US$94 million by September. In November 2016, a Disaster Assistance Response Team (DART) was deployed to lead the US humanitarian response. In 2021, over US$700 million was allocated to Nigeria and the wider Lake Chad Basin (USAID Office of Inspector General 2020; Cole et al. 2017).

In 2022, USAID provided US$2.5 million for flood response in Lac province and N'Djamena, Chad, as well as US$73.6 million for food, relief and WASH support (United States Embassy Ndjamena 2022). In Niger, US foreign assistance played a critical role in improving food security, building counterterrorism and peacekeeping capacity, sustaining security sector reform, supporting productive agricultural enterprises, promoting democracy and good governance, supporting justice sector reform, improving health and education and strengthening security sector education and training (U.S. Embassy in Niger 2022). USAID Niger was elevated to a full mission in August 2020, and became a Feed the Future target country under the Global Food Security Strategy, as well as a President's Malaria Initiative country. A US$437 million Millennium Challenge Corporation compact, came into force in January 2018, aiming to strengthen Niger's agricultural and livestock sectors by improving water availability through investments in large- and small-scale irrigation systems, rehabilitating 300 kilometers of important market access roads, restoring some 50 000 hectares of pasturelands and modernising public livestock marketing infrastructure and veterinary services. Niger is one of six countries participating in the Security Governance Initiative and has been identified as a Counterterrorism Partnership Fund partner nation (U.S. Embassy in Niger 2022).

In 2023, all African countries except Eritrea received aid from the US, as shown in Figure 9.6. Ethiopia was the largest recipient of USAID funds, receiving more than US$1.7 billion. Other large recipients of economic development support from USAID were Somalia, DRC, Nigeria, Kenya, South Sudan, Uganda, Mozambique, Tanzania, South Africa, Zambia and Malawi, each of which received more than US$400 million (Cillers 2025a; OECD Data Explorer 2023).

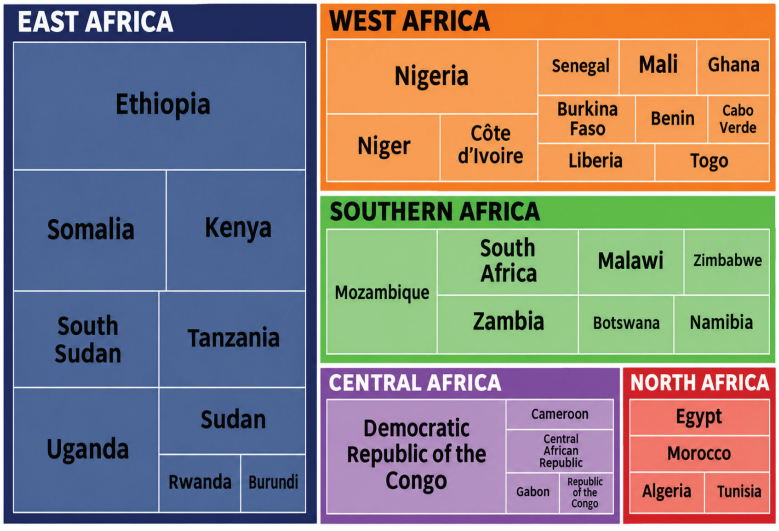

Figure 9.6: US aid flows to Africa in millions of dollars in 2023. Source: Cillers (2025a) and OECD Data Explorer (2023).

To prevent the diversion of aid to terrorists, USAID established requirements and implemented a due diligence process for activities with certain identified risks. One risk mitigation measure taken by USAID implementers operating in the LCR was to follow up on the distribution and use of USAID-funded commodities. In addition, USAID incorporated a provision on preventing terrorist financing into the list of standard provisions for all Agency awards. This provision states that a recipient of USAID funds cannot engage in transactions with or provide resources to people and organisations associated with terrorism. However, USAID had limited involvement in verifying that implementers followed up on the distribution and use of commodities because it did not require implementers to provide post-distribution monitoring reports to USAID for its review. USAID also has limited staff overseeing its operations, and the security situation of the LCR limited their monitoring and access efforts to remote areas (USAID Office of Inspector General 2020). These inadequacies create opportunities for fraud and diversion of large amounts of aid and US-funded commodities, aimed at humanitarian crises, to terrorists in the LCR.

Effects of USAID funding reduction on displaced populations in the LCR

During Donald Trump's first term as president (2017–2021), US foreign assistance policy faced significant pressure from the administration's America First approach, which was accompanied by scepticism towards multilateralism and proposals for substantial reductions in foreign assistance. The administration's proposed 2018 budget, for example, included a 28 per cent reduction in funding for the State Department and USAID and a 13 per cent reduction in Africa-related programmes (Coulibaly 2018). These proposed cuts, alongside delays and uncertainty in the US foreign-aid budget process, created concerns about disruptions to aid programmes and the implementation of development projects (Ingram 2018). The administration's emphasis on security interests also raised questions about the extent to which US engagement with Africa would increasingly be shaped by strategic and counterterrorism priorities (Coulibaly 2018).

When returning to the presidency in January 2025, President Donald Trump signed an executive order that significantly reduced USAID funding. Justified on the grounds of combating corruption and preventing aid diversion to terrorist groups, this decision is expected to have profound consequences for humanitarian operations in the LCR, limiting the resources available for displaced populations and increasing the risk of regional destabilisation (USAID Office of Inspector General 2020; Cillers 2025b). Moreover, the US withdrawal from such engagements could undermine its use of humanitarian assistance as a strategic tool for advancing broader global objectives.

The impact of this executive order on Africa, and particularly the LCR, is wide ranging. Health programmes, especially those focused on HIV/AIDS prevention and treatment, which constitute the largest share of US aid to Africa, will be among the most affected. Other critical initiatives funded by the US, including those aimed at enhancing agricultural productivity, fostering economic growth, strengthening security, promoting democracy, protecting human rights and improving governance, as well as expanding access to quality education and social services, will now require alternative donor support. A shortfall in humanitarian funding will leave millions in highly vulnerable positions, threatening both their survival and dignity. In the LCR, inadequate resourcing of the humanitarian

response plan could result in millions being deprived of essential food assistance (USAID Office of Inspector General 2020).

The U.S. is not alone in reducing aid, however. Domestic fiscal pressures have prompted other major donors to follow suit. Germany, the second-largest provider of Official Development Assistance (ODA), has reduced its development and humanitarian funding by more than €4.8 billion (US$5.3 billion) between 2022 and 2025 in absolute terms, with further reductions anticipated (Cillers 2025a). France has lowered its 2024–2025 ODA budget by over US$1 billion, while the United Kingdom has slashed more than US$900 million, partly due to the diversion of nearly £1 billion (US$1.28 billion) to cover domestic asylum-seeker housing costs (Cillers 2025a; Green 2024; Bollag 2024). Nevertheless, the scale and pace of US cuts in aid are unprecedented.

Findings, conclusion and recommendations

Humanitarian aid in the LCR remains significant but highly susceptible to US domestic politics and donor strategic interests. USAID's engagement, while impactful, has been shaped by realist foreign policy shifts, leading to funding volatility that undermines both immediate relief and long-term recovery. This evidence shows that over-reliance on a few major donors increases vulnerability to geopolitical changes. Furthermore, the political sensitivity of aid flows creates instability in humanitarian programming and limits sustainability.

The US funding reductions, though detrimental, present an opportunity to spur innovation, improve efficiency and strengthen transparency and accountability in humanitarian operations. The intersection between politics and aid underscores the need for models of assistance that are less dependent on single donors and more resilient to geopolitical fluctuations. A transition towards locally led, flexible and diversified humanitarian systems is essential to protecting displaced populations and maintaining regional stability in the LCR.

This research recommends reducing transaction costs by directly funding local implementers and expanding cash and voucher assistance, strengthening collaboration with development actors and governments to address structural vulnerabilities, shifting from reactive to proactive responses through anticipatory action, and diversifying resource mobilisation beyond traditional donor models.

These reforms are essential to sustain humanitarian delivery amid shrinking resources (Nigeria Humanitarian Needs and Response Plan 2025).

Finally, there is a need for stronger African-led responses to humanitarian crises. Enhancing co-ordination through ECOWAS and the African Union, improving domestic revenue collection, diversifying economies and building partnerships with emerging donors can reduce dependency on volatile foreign aid. Empowering displaced persons through livelihood creation, skills training and participatory governance will foster recovery and resilience. Strengthening accountability systems, including mandatory post-distribution monitoring, will also address concerns over aid diversion and ensure transparency. Future research should examine China's humanitarian role in Africa and explore gendered dimensions of displacement in the LCR.

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CHAPTER 10

Hegemonic discord? Unpacking the diplomatic dispute between South Africa and the United States

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Introduction

The diplomatic dispute instigated by Trump 2.0 against South Africa was a long-awaited showdown between two once-stalwart allies. Since about 2010 and more especially during the Biden administration, Pretoria's foreign policy (FP) has frustrated and angered the United States (US). This annoyance is a result of Pretoria's non-alignment with US foreign policy, which is often described as conflict-laden and unilateral (Griffiths 2004; Maynes 1999, Holloway 2000). Several incidents over the past few years, such as the *Lady R* saga, South Africa's stance on the Russia-Ukraine conflict and South Africa's genocide case against a staunch US ally, Israel, have set the two nations on a collision course. President Trump's setting his sights on South Africa during his first week in office underlines the country's significant role in international affairs and underscores the 'heavyweight status' of the challenging relations.

The ensuing diplomatic dispute revealed several dynamics, international actors and global interplays at work, which stress the idea that this is not a normal conflict, but rather hegemonic discord. Hegemonic conflict occurs when there is a shift in the distribution of power between states (Gilpin 1981; Mearsheimer 2001). It is a conflict that threatens to transform the structure of the international system and is a combination of ideological and geopolitical war games.

To dissect this hegemonic discord, this chapter is split into three sections. The first section provides a background for President Trump's attack, where a brief history of the US-South African relationship is given, leading up to what the author describes as three seismic shifts that derailed the otherwise cordial relationship. This is followed by a comparative political analysis of the US-South

African relationship, which evaluates how similar both hegemons are. Lastly, the dispute is then unpacked from the perspective of hegemonic conflict.

The chapter takes on a realist approach to international relations, which revolves around the idea that states are the main actors in international affairs and that they act according to their own national interests and power. Realism describes the world as violent and aggressive and assumes that unco-operative human nature and an anarchical international system encourage leaders to act in a manner framed around suspicion and force (Mathebula and Sibizo 2024). In a way, realism allows for the personification of states, an important tool especially in the comparative analysis of states and their leaders.

Overall, this chapter aims to reveal that the conflict is essentially a hegemonic conflict over ideas, the prominent idea being race, or more specifically, who controls the global narrative on it.

Background to the diplomatic dispute: Three structural causes and three triggers

South Africa and the US share a long history of friendship, co-operation and mutual respect. It is a relationship so intertwined it might be considered an alliance. To McCoy (2011), the relationship is 'a long and intimate one'. If one statement summarises this US-South African relationship, it would be that the US helped to sustain apartheid but was also key in defeating it.

Prior to majority rule, the US viewed South Africa as a strategic ally thanks to its rich mineral resources, geo-strategic location and willingness to bow to US hegemony. In the early 1950s, the US began to arm South Africa as well as supply technologies like the IBM system, which helped to denationalise and register populations into racial categories. Like a true best friend, South Africa's enemies were America's enemies. For example, the FBI was involved in surveilling Mandela, as became clear after the 2018 declassification of thousands of surveillance documents on him. Furthermore, the CIA supplied the intelligence that led to the capture of a young Nelson Mandela at a farm in Rivonia. The US-South African relationship developed so well that by 1979, when South Africa tested a nuclear bomb in the Indian Ocean, the US made a nuclear agreement with the nation. Like true best friends, not only were enemies shared, but friends as well: South Africa consequently developed close ties with Taiwan and Israel.

South Africa's subservience to the US was reciprocated by the US in the form of its UN veto power, which it used to block numerous resolutions condemning apartheid (Thomson 2008). The US also resisted repeated calls for sanctions against South Africa and continued to supply the country with weapons even after the violent suppression of the 1976 student uprising. Where the friendship blossomed the most, though, was in Cold War dynamics, where Pretoria acted as a proxy in America's global fight against communism. Because South Africa acted as a linchpin in anti-communist action in Africa, a special bond formed between the two countries, most especially under President Ronald Reagan (1981-1989). Certainly, Pretoria's right-wing values aligned well with Reagan's own conservative Republican worldview. Reagan staunchly opposed economic sanctions and also made it clear that friendly relations between the US and South Africa did not depend on the National Party seeking talks with the African National Congress (ANC) (CFA 1984).

The defeat of the Soviet Union and the release of Nelson Mandela from Robben Island saw the US jump ship and switch loyalties to the ANC government-in-waiting. In the post-1994 arena, President Mandela and President Bill Clinton enjoyed a special relationship defined by their charismatic leadership styles. Though the US did not approve of South Africa's friendship with its adversaries like Cuba, Libya and Iran, the two countries remained on cordial terms. Indeed, the US viewed South Africa as the poster child of African democracy, a model for imitation and a beacon of hope in comparison to fragile continental governance. The US-South African relationship was so close that South Africa was periodically accused of being a lackey of the West or even 'un-African' (Adebajo, Adedeji and Landsberg 2007; Tjemolane 2011).

In conflict, there are structural (root) and proximate (triggers) causes, the former referring to underlying problems and the latter to the triggering factors (Moller 2003). Fully-fledged conflicts do not burst into the open without a combination of these two factors. In the current US-South African conflict, there are three root causes and three triggers.

The aftermath of the September 11 attacks was the first root cause of the strained US-South African relations. Following the 2001 invasion of Afghanistan and the 2003 invasion of Iraq, a small but significant rift began to grow between the two countries. To Pretoria, the 'war on terrorism' encouraged American unilateralism at a time when South Africa was at the peak of its multilateral agenda-

setting, having just played an instrumental role in transforming the Organization of African Unity (OAU) into the African Union (AU) (Landsberg 2010). The complete disregard of international law by the US, and the use of political trickery to falsify a 'Weapons of Mass Destruction' charade further exasperated the South African government, whose FP stressed conflict resolution, peacekeeping and multilateral efforts in diplomacy (Sidiripoulous 2014). South Africa's contempt for these actions was highlighted when President George W. Bush visited the country in 2003, and the retired President Mandela refused a meeting.

The period between December 2010 and April 2011 created the second root cause in the US-South African relationship decline. In December 2010, South Africa joined the anti-US Dollar group BRICS, which officially identified South Africa as moving away from the US sphere of influence. In aligning itself with US opponents like Russia and China, it marked a new era in South Africa's international affairs. The NATO-instigated removals of two key South African allies, Muammar Gaddafi of Libya and Laurent Gbagbo of Côte d'Ivoire in March and April 2011 were adjudged by South Africa as neo-imperialism (Pillay 2017). To make matters worse, the invasions were a great embarrassment to South Africa, whose Presidents, namely Zuma and Mbeki, had been tasked with mediation in both conflicts. This outright dismissal of South Africa's peacekeeping efforts and the removal of African leaders not in tune with the West posed a significant setback to South Africa's multilateral agenda. Furthermore, the use of Western forces to remove Gbagbo and Gaddafi was a disparagement of South Africa's stature in global affairs.

Despite seeking new friends in the international arena and making seemingly futile attempts at countering US imperialism in Africa, South Africa and the US remained on good terms thanks to *Obama-mania,* which had co-opted Africa with superficial slogans like 'Hope', 'Yes we can' and 'Trade not Aid'. The Obama administration emphasised the importance of international institutions, summarised in Obama's declaration that 'Africa does not need strong men, but strong institutions.' This international worldview corresponded well with South Africa's own institutional approach towards FP. South Africa's election to the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) for 2007/08 and 2011/12 is evidence of this narrative (Mbete 2018).

The arrival of President Trump in 2016 neither hampered nor strengthened the US-South African alliance. Trump's MAGA policy and severe polarising

presence in the US resulted in Africa taking a metaphorical backseat in terms of US FP priorities. Trump's first term was also heavily overshadowed by the COVID-19 pandemic, which saw most states focus on their domestic agenda. During the pandemic, South Africa largely followed America's lead on the virus in terms of scientific outlook, research and vaccination, with the country buying 99% of its vaccines from American companies (*Nature* 2022; Cowling 2023).

The disputed 2020 US elections that brought Biden to power instead of giving Trump a second term is the third structural cause in the deterioration of US-South African relations (See Figure 10.1 below). Trump and his supporters made repeated claims that the election was rigged and stolen (Bordeleau 2026). Refusing to concede the election, he insisted that fraud, mail-in ballots and systemic irregularities had cost him victory (Reilly 2026). His legal team would file over 60 lawsuits to no effect. Feeling cheated of victory and watching President Joe Biden's tenure from the sidelines, there was no limit to Trump's exasperation. Trump's moniker for Biden, 'Sleepy Joe,' helps to frame the argument that Trump became extremely frustrated with what he perceived to be a weak US government and ineffective hegemon. South Africa's FP actions during Biden's tenure might possibly have exacerbated Trump's anger.



Figure 10.1: The 45th, '46th' and 47th President. Source: Megan Varner/ Getty Images 2024.

Three events or 'triggers' during Biden's tenure formed the first three metaphorical 'dominoes' that set the 2025 diplomatic dispute in motion. The first was the *Lady R* scandal of 2022, in which a Russian cargo tanker was loaded in a South African harbour. Then American Ambassador to South Africa Ruben Bridgety claimed South Africa was arming the Russian war in Ukraine, an allegation he would later retract (Fihlani and Moloney 2023). In the uproar that followed, the Rand plunged to a record low against the Dollar, wiping billions off South Africa's bonds. Though the type of cargo stowed on the *Lady R* was never determined, the incident was a bold move by the South African government, as not many countries were willing to dock or load a Russian cargo ship.

The second trigger, related to the first, was South Africa's neutrality in the Russian-Ukrainian conflict. At the UN, South Africa abstained from two resolutions to condemn Russia, a stance that frustrated the Americans, who expected South Africa to lead an African consensus on the matter. South Africa also refused to say that it would abide by the ICC arrest warrant for President Putin, who was expected to attend the 2023 BRICS summit in South Africa. In a way, by trying to rationalise its stance on refuting an international arrest warrant, South Africa was encroaching on the US's self-declared role of sole international policeman.

The third trigger was South Africa's case against Israel at the International Court of Justice (ICJ). The audacity of the South African government to initiate proceedings against US ally Israel was seen as a direct interference in the de facto United States policy of arranging the Middle East to its own benefit. By taking Israel to court, South Africa gained global ideational leverage over the US in its defence of Palestine.

These three events led to Trump, within days of assuming office, issuing an executive order (EO) that designated South African FP as a national security threat to the US and its allies. Titled 'Addressing Egregious Actions of the Republic of South Africa', the EO noted the aggressive positions South Africa had taken towards the US and its allies, including accusing Israel of genocide in the ICJ. The EO also accused South Africa of reinvigorating its relations with Iran to develop commercial, military and nuclear alliances. The EO further voiced its disapproval of South Africa's Expropriation Act, which allows the state to acquire private property without compensation. Expropriation in South Africa is a highly politicised subject most often construed over racial lines. The

greater narrative on land expropriation without compensation is that the black population continues to be oppressed without land, and that white privilege and wealth are connected with land ownership.

The EO had severe repercussions. US aid to South Africa was cut off within weeks, and the threat of possible further sanctions in the form of ending South Africa's participation in the African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA) gained momentum. US Secretary of State Marco Rubio declined to attend the G20 Foreign Ministers summit in Johannesburg in February 2025 as a response to the EO. In an escalation of tensions, the US expelled its South African ambassador in March 2025 and later retracted military support for the South African army.

The Trump-instigated dispute caused the US-South African friendship to plummet to its lowest point ever, turning strong allies into adversaries,

From brothers in arms to sibling rivalry

This setback in otherwise cordial relations obscures the fact that the US and South Africa are in fact remarkably alike. The extraordinary similarities between the two states set the scene for a comparative analysis.

To begin, they have similar state identities, which could be due to their shared settler-colonial origins. The Pilgrims landed at Plymouth Rock in 1620, and Jan Van Riebeeck landed in Cape Town in 1652; both brought the old world and its culture, values and ethos into new worlds. Both the Puritan Settlers and Dutch Calvinists were fleeing persecution in Europe and sought to create a new world with their respective selves as rulers. From the very moment of disembarking, both had similar if not equal ideologies in the form of a 'manifest destiny' or the 'right of conquest', assumptions based on the entitlement of settlers to be overlords over all others (Magubane 1996: 32; Hallett 1974: 677). Both groups are classic examples of what Mamdani (2020) calls 'settler intellectuals'—groups that can empathise with the native but never believe them to be capable of self-consciousness.

In *othering* the natives as savages, inferiors and backward, settlerism rapidly developed into colonialism. From colonialism sprang the economic system of capitalism, which, when intensified, resulted in imperialism, a chain of events that applied to both the US and South Africa. Democracy emerged in tandem

with the growth of capitalism, and both states are now often seen as ideal modern democracies. Thus, capitalism and democracy are the shared foundations on which both states were built.

Though capitalism has its benefits, by critiquing it, it is impossible to avoid terms like exploitation, unsustainability and inequality, terms often used when describing the history of both states. Both states confiscated land from native populations and imposed racial restrictions across their societies. Jim Crow segregation and Apartheid (separateness) are the same ideologies in that they both sought to create an inferior second-class citizen whose sole purpose was to serve the economic machine of the state. Both ideologies have entrenched coloniality by perpetuating long-standing patterns of power. Though segregation and apartheid were defeated politically, their legacy continues in that both states have ideologically valorised Eurocentrism as superior, progressive and universal, though it really represents white supremacy, capitalist profitability, destruction of the planet and Euro-American self- universalisation (Kwet 2018).

Though both states have dark histories, they have been able to reinvent themselves in similar ways. The concept of freedom is heavily entrenched in the state machinery of both America, being 'the land of the free', and South Africa, being a 'cry freedom' country, both creating constitutional democracies with freedom being a founding principle. Freedom and human rights are often interchangeable concepts, and both states have incorporated (valorised) this into their normative frameworks. America has justified the invasion of other states for having poor human rights records. Operation Just Cause (Panama in 1989), Operation Restore Hope (Somalia in 1993), Operation Uphold Democracy (Haiti in 1994) and Operation Iraqi Freedom (Iraq in 2003) are a few examples where the US has cited human rights abuses as an excuse to intervene and remove governments that did not comply with these norms. Likewise, South Africa, thanks to its history, experience and efforts in state-manufactured reconciliation, has largely written the book on state-led human rights enforcement (Dugard 1997; Alden, le Pere and Lawrence 2003). In the Ukraine-Russia conflict, for example, both sides recognised the potential of South Africa to serve as a conflict negotiator/mediator.

Socio-economically, the similarities are striking. Both countries have diverse and multicultural populations with diverse ethnic, racial and linguistic groups. Furthermore, the English language and Christian religion dominate

both countries. Both states rank illegal immigration as a source of tension and a major domestic agenda item. In fact, in his first tenure, President Trump pushed for the building of 'the wall,', which supported America's anti-brown and black philosophy. In South Africa, xenophobia and Afro-phobia are rife, with the worldview of a large number of South Africans being that foreigners represent everything that is wrong with the country. The importance of this issue can be seen in the number of deportations per year, with the US ranking at number one and South Africa at number eight.

Both states see themselves as exceptional. American exceptionalism is the belief that Americans are generally better off, more advanced, more cultured and living better lives than other nations and states (Pillay and Madzimure 2021). Likewise, South African exceptionalism views itself as better than other African states and other nations, given its high degree of development, infrastructure and ability to hold free and fair elections timeously (Pillay 2016). Indeed, exceptionalism is intertwined with their respective hegemonies.

In addition, both states are hegemons, even though American hegemony operates globally, while South African hegemony primarily operates in Africa. Both countries impose their hegemony through hard power (military, economy and finance) and soft power (culture and ideas) (Sidiropoulos 2014). Interestingly, South African hegemony excels the most in its ability to act as a faucet for American hegemony. That is, South Africa successfully imports the US worldview and cosmopolitanism to Africa because of its ability to imitate the American hegemon so well.

Two examples speak to this 'faucet' metaphor. Firstly, both states are superpowers in their use of the media when we consider the scale of their propaganda and cultural exports. The media can be considered a 'quiet domination' in that it stimulates audiences to the worldview of the disseminator. Here, fact and fiction blur to create propaganda, to control culture, to shape what people see as normal, and to influence and direct behaviour. South Africa has Africa's biggest media platform, Multichoice, which operates in 50 African countries. The majority of its channels are simply American entertainment. In 2025, Mnet, a premier channel of Multichoice, announced a 'Straight from the US' option, which allows viewers to view American content within 24 hours of its release in America. The purpose of this initiative is to make South Africans, and Africans as a whole, more in tune with American culture.

A second example of the 'faucet' metaphor is culinary tastes. American fast-food companies are very popular in South Africa, with KFC, McDonald's, Burger King, Krispy Kreme and Pizza Hut representing the export of the American cultural palette. KFC has continuously ranked as South Africa's number one fast food chain, while McDonald's is very popular throughout the country. Similarly, South African fast-food companies like Debonairs, Steers, Hungry Lion and Fish Aways can be found across Southern Africa, West Africa and East Africa, operating in the same manner in Africa as the desire for the American palette operates in South Africa.

Overall, the similarities between the hegemons are most likely due to the great extent of cultural transferability shared between both states. That is, their cultures are sought after globally and often imitated. A great example of this cultural transferability is seen in the Hollywood production of Invictus. It is surreal how an American director can direct a movie about rugby and capture South Africa so poignantly. However, the problem arises when two similar hegemons try to exist in the same arena. Conflict is inevitable when one hegemon is in decline, and another seeks to usurp its unravelling powers.

US-South African diplomatic dispute as a hegemonic conflict

Powerful states cannot always directly engage in battle as the costs are too high. Therefore, the majority of their attacks and counter-attacks happen at the ideational level (Wang 2000; Koskenniemi 2011). In hegemonic conflict, ideas represent 'ammunition' as hegemons battle over leadership in the global arena and the right to enforce rules at international institutions (Pillay 2024). Orford (2010) refers to this institutional leadership battle as part of the 'managerialism of global governance'.

Pre-eminent hegemon scholars like Nye (2008) and Prys (2008) argue that economic and military muscle is only one part of hegemony. Hegemons must provide the norms and standards for operating in the world, or in other words, 'the rules of the game'. In setting the agenda, it must persuade and convince states to reach a favourable consensus. Often referred to as 'soft power', it is the influence that enables a state to achieve desirable outcomes not through coercion or rewards but through attractiveness. Nye (2008) argues that a hegemon's soft power in some cases could outweigh their military or economic weight. This

understanding of hegemony means that countries like South Africa, for example, which might not have as strong an economy or military as India, Brazil or Germany, can use soft power to make up for whatever hard power it lacks. This explains how a 'middle power' like South Africa can go toe-to-toe with a global heavyweight like the US.

In the soft power battle between the US and South Africa, the central idea being fought over is ownership of race relations. Race relations are extremely important as the social, historical and political implications of race remain deeply embedded in the structure of global affairs. Global challenges—such as the legacy of colonialism, global inequality and economic exploitation, migration and refugees, human rights, security and terrorism, international aid and development finance—are all key issues on the global stage, often viewed through the prism of race. According to Mbete (2018), International Relations as a discipline has racial origins, hierarchies and views that continue to propagate the idea of a Western world vs the rest. Therefore, whoever controls the global narrative on race will exercise a great amount of power. That country would be able to determine who is the oppressor and who the oppressed, an extremely influential paradigm in geo-political relations.

Since 2008, race has played a prominent role in US elections. Though Obama's eight years in office were seen as a sign of progress in racial equality, there was significant backlash to his double election. Obama's presidency triggered a reactionary response by many Americans uncomfortable with a black president. Previously silent segments of the population became emboldened, with several key narratives being that Obama's presidency symbolised everything wrong with America. A popular critic during the Obama years was Donald Trump, who gained political popularity by criticising Obama's championing of progressive policies, a campaign that was gladly accepted amongst conservative white voters. Trump's vision to 'Make America Great Again' was a direct challenge that America had declined under its first Black president.

It was not only Trump who prioritised race in his electoral campaign. To beat Trump in 2019, Joe Biden based his entire campaign on a Black Lives Matter ticket, a movement that had castigated Trump during his entire first-term presidency (2016—2019). Biden's election website was headed by a BLM poster, a clear statement on where the Democratic Party stood. Biden's affiliation with the movement was so great that a *Washington Post* article described the

BLM movement as a 'coalition that vaulted him to the Presidency' (Olorunnipa, Clement and Guskin 2023). In return, he called the BLM riots a 'historic movement for justice'. In the run-up to the 2024 election, Biden would call white supremacy the greatest terrorist threat to the US, which again reveals the prominence of race in that US election.

While there is no shortage of global critics who argue that President Trump represents far-right conservative values, he has been more open to associating with this demographic in his second tenure as President. Elon Musk's 'Roman salute' at Trump's inauguration made it clear how far along the spectrum the administration stands. When far-right-wing French Politician Marine Le Pen was handed a guilty verdict in March 2025, President Trump, Vice-President J.D. Vance, Elon Musk and Donald Trump Jr rushed to Le Pen's defence. The Le Pen dynasty is associated with anachronic racist discourses, islamophobia and ethnicism (Seitz 2024). Some argue that right-wing values run deep in the US government. For example, remarking on the Bush era, Roberts (2005) has the following to say:

> "The United States is starting to acquire the image of Nazi Germany. Knowledgeable people should have no trouble drawing up their own list of elements common to both the Bush and Hitler regimes: the use of extraordinary lies to justify military aggression; reliance on coercion and threats in place of diplomacy; total belief in the virtue and righteousness of one's cause; the equating of factual objections or reality based analysis to treason; the redirection of patriotism from country to leader; the belief that defeat resides in debate and a weakening of will."

In effect, America represents a right-wing government who is trying to control the narrative on race globally. The biggest obstacle to this pursuit is South Africa, which is run like a communist state. The ruling ANC, a socialist organisation, is in an alliance with the South African Communist Party (SACP) and the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU). The country has had two presidents, namely Mandela and Zuma, who were members of the SACP. An economy pillared on state-run corporations and industries, constant supply shortages, decades-old infrastructure and a militant workforce are just a few reminders of how Stalinist the country has become. Besides the ANC, the broader political

landscape also largely subscribes to socialist ideology. Opposition parties like the Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF), Mhkonto WeSizwe (MK), the African Christian Democratic Party (ACDP), Congress of the People (COPE), Azanian Peoples Organization (AZAPO) and the United Democratic Movement (UDM) all subscribe to different levels of socialism. In addition, the South African workforce is quite militant in that trade unions are very powerful. The biggest trade union, COSATU, affiliates itself with class-struggle politics. At the international level, South Africa's diplomatic affinity for states like Russia, China, Brazil, Venezuela and Cuba speaks volumes about its socialist ideology.

Indeed, South Africa's greatest soft power is in controlling the global narrative on race. South Africa, given its history, has a great deal of leverage in saying who the oppressor is and who the oppressed. This is a powerful narrative for the one who controls it. South Africa's G20 theme of 'Solidarity, Equality and Sustainability' angered the US, who perceived it to be an attack on the America First Policy. Marco Rubio, the US Secretary of State, declared that the theme was a play on 'Diversity, Equity and Inclusion', a policy banned within 48 hours of Trump's swearing in. Similarly, in Israel's war on Palestine (2023), South Africa and the US have two completely different interpretations of who the victim is and who the aggressor. South Africa's push to change Sandton Drive to Leila Khaled Drive speaks directly to this. The proposed change is a homage to a Palestinian freedom fighter. The US embassy, which resides on Sandton Drive, opposes the renaming, with possible Trump appointee Joel Pollack saying that if the renaming goes through, the US embassy will be permanently closed (Business Tech 2025).

The ANC for long deployed race to deflect unwanted attention from its own actions. When attacked, it can deploy race to flip the script and turn any issue into an anti-colonial or anti-imperial attack against it. Its use of this type of attack is so powerful that even opposition parties have at times found themselves rushing to defend the ruling party when matters of race, imperialism or colonialism have been stirred up.

Table 10.1 captures this debate, illustrating how the two states attempt to outmanoeuvre each other on race issues.

Table 10.1: Country comparison of states outmanoeuvring each other on race issues.

USA	What they are saying		RSA
Trump	• South Africa is racist. Farm attacks constitute white genocide	• Trump is racist.	ANC
AfriForum	• Farm attacks constitute white genocide.	• Treason, lies, fraudulent misconception • Crime stats related to farm murders disputed • Arrest AfriForum for treason. • AfriForum is white supremacy.	MK John Hlophe, Police Minister Senzo Mchunu, EFF Carl Niehaus, Kim Heller (author), ATM Vuyo Zungula
Marco Rubio	• Discrimination against the white minority	Ramaphosa Slams Rubio's remarks, warns against a new colonialism.	President Ramaphosa
Marco Rubio	• US opposes 'Diversity, Equality, and Inclusion' framework.	• G20 Theme 'Solidarity, Equality, and Sustainability' • The erosion of multilateralism presents a threat to global growth and stability	ANC, President Ramaphosa
AfriForum	• Impose sanctions against leaders of the ANC.	• Foreign Aid has always been a tool for colonial control. • 'AfriForum is an anti-transformation programme driven by the hope that apartheid will return.'	EFF Julius Malema, Minister Gwede Mantashe

USA	What they are saying		RSA
AfriForum	• South Africa has racist policies • Reverse apartheid.	• AfriForum is racist.	ANC
AfriForum	• Land expropriation without compensation (DRDLR 2017) •	• January 2025 Act to make it easier for the state to expropriate land in the public interest	ANC
Elon Musk	• South Africa of enforcing 'openly racist ownership laws'. • Starlink is not allowed to operate in South Africa because I'm not black.	• Elon Musk is racist. • 'If a leading business figure like Elon Musk harbours the kind of unprogressive, racist views that we've witnessed and the peddling of lies …' • Published 'Regulations in respect of the Limitations of Control and Equity Ownership by Historically Disadvantaged Groups and the Application of the ICT sector code' • This is not an issue of skin colour or race; Starlink is welcome to operate in South Africa. • BEE Policies necessary to uplift the black population	ANC, RSA Presidential Spokesman Vincent Magwenya, Independent Communications Authority of South Africa (ICASA), South African Head of Public Diplomacy Clayson Monyela South African Government
Marco Rubio	• Land expropriation is racist.	• Redressing historical injustice	ANC

USA	What they are saying		RSA
Marco Rubio	• Ebrahim Rasool is a 'race-baiting politician who hates America and hates POTUS'.	• Trump is leading a white supremacist movement. • 'South Africa can be a moral superpower…. What our people died for on the 21st of March is what we stand for.'	RSA-US Ambassador Ebrahim Rasool
AfriForum CEO Kallie Kriel	• 'Ironic… It is he who refused to condemn slogans such as "Kill the Boer"'.	• AfriForum is sowing division in SA.	President Ramaphosa
Marco Rubio, Elon Musk	• "'Kill the Boer' is a chant that incites violence. South Africa's leaders and politicians must take action to protect Afrikaner and other disfavoured minorities." • The song is genocidal.	• Kill the Boer (Sang on March 21st) • The Song is not hate speech.	EFF leader Julius Malema, The Equality Court (Aug 2022)
The World Bank	• South Africa must relax its BEE drives as they are spurring corruption and inefficiency in public administration.	• BEE is a core constitutional mandate to fix past economic inequalities from apartheid	RSA Government

USA	What they are saying		RSA
		• President Trump's 7 Feb order halts critical financial aid under the pretence of protecting Afrikaners from 'government-sponsored race-based discrimination'.	Open letter from 100 parliamentarians from across the world

Conclusion

The diplomatic dispute between South Africa and the US under President Trump 2.0 is more than a clash of foreign policy preferences, but a deeper hegemonic conflict over ideological dominance. Control over the global narrative on race appears to be the core conflict issue, and to a lesser extent, control over the international order. South Africa has made bold attempts since 2020 to assert itself on the global stage, attempts which have struck at the very heart of America's hegemonic authority. Though a middle power, it leverages its soft power to contest 'toe-to-toe' with the American heavyweight.

Ideational politics remain a powerful tool in international relations. Trump's 'America First' doctrine has sought to reassert its dominance through coercive measures (sanctions, aid cuts, diplomatic isolation), while South Africa, emboldened by its BRICS alignment and historical legitimacy, has positioned itself as a counter-hegemonic force advocating for a multipolar world. The ideological battleground—centred on race, land reform and anti-imperialism—reveals how both states weaponise narratives to delegitimise the other. For the US, framing South Africa as 'racist' against white minorities (via AfriForum and Elon Musk's critiques) has been an attempt to undermine its moral standing. Conversely, South Africa's ANC government has dismissed these accusations as neocolonial interference, reinforcing its anti-Western posture, and positioning itself as judge, jury and executioner of what constitutes racism.

To conclude, the options for a resolution to the US-South Africa diplomatic dispute are either sustained confrontation or a recalibration of relations. Given their shared history and friendship, there is a possibility for the latter. However, as both states navigate and push their competing visions of a world order in the

face of geopolitical fragmentation, the battle for ideational supremacy is probably far from over.

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SECTION V: CLIMATE CHANGE, HEALTH DIPLOMACY AND GLOBAL GOVERNANCE

CHAPTER 11

The Ripple Effect of Trump's Paris Agreement Withdrawal on Climate Adaptation Funding for Women-Led Initiatives in Sub-Saharan Africa

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Introduction

President Donald Trump has signed an executive order to withdraw the United States (US) from the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change Paris Agreement in his second term in office. This did not come as a surprise, as President Trump had taken the same step in 2017, at the beginning of his first term in office. Unlike the previous exit, which lasted only 107 days before Former President Biden rejoined the agreement in 2021, there is now a reasonable time for significant harm to global action efforts' (Naidoo 2025). The decision to withdraw from the Paris Agreement underscores the Trump administration's broader pattern of dramatic departures from established international organisations, leading to shifting global power dynamics.

The global climate crisis is exacerbated by the rapid industrialisation of developing nations seeking to meet their development targets. Therefore, an emerging energy crisis is compounded by the escalating risks of greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions, which contribute significantly to intensifying climate change.

All countries are vulnerable to environmental degradation. International co-operation becomes essential to addressing these problems as they are transnational and cannot be dealt with unilaterally. The US withdrawal from the Paris Agreement as well as the halt in USAID funding for Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) initiatives will undoubtedly disrupt global climate actions and have a ripple effect on women-led climate change initiatives on the African

continent (Horsfield 2025). USAID has long been a pillar of America's soft power in the international realm. However, these abrupt decisions and geopolitical shifts pose questions about climate leadership and how, potentially, the African continent can rise to be victors rather than defeated victims.

Against this background, this paper argues that a new strategy of continental autonomy could emerge if African countries seize this opportunity to shift global power dynamics and take centre stage in global climate action. Mokgonyana (cited in Madegwa 2026) postulates that, amid Trump's withdrawal from the global initiative, African nations could double down on initiatives such as the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) to create economies of scale for renewable energy investments. Mokgonyana further describes the mechanism as discriminatory, applying tariffs without accounting for historical responsibility or capacity to decarbonise (Madegwa 2026). Ensuring that women are central to these debates would also help place gender equality aspirations at the forefront of economic development. The bitter truth is that Western nations have never had the interest of African nations at heart. Monetary investments that exploit Africa's resources are disguised as goodwill investments. Similarly, 'global climate policy and mechanisms reflect Western priorities, not those of the Global South' (Ramachandran 2025).

Using postcolonial theory, the paper argues that reintroducing Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS) to tackle climate change in Africa is essential. IKS offers sustainable, local solutions to climate adaptation and thus should be integrated within the broader geopolitical discourse. This will reinforce the fundamental nature of spiritual beliefs that were defining features of pre-colonial Africa but suppressed by Western colonisers. It is important that climate action not only be centred around states but extend beyond the state apparatuses and multilateral institutions to meaningfully integrate women's discourse in the debate. To this end, the essay will begin by conceptualising climate change in the context of the African continent.

This paper contends that although the environmental crisis is a transnational discourse and cannot be regarded unilaterally, its consequences are experienced differently by different states around the world. Therefore, conceptualisation is fundamental to underscore the ripple effect of Trump's withdrawal from the climate agreement in the global discourse. The first part of the essay will examine the shifting geopolitical order and what this could mean for Africa. It will then

provide context by using a case study, namely Kenya's Green Belt Movement, to analyse women's impact in climate action and how the withdrawal from the agreement and the freezing of USAID investments could potentially slow down their progress. The essay will then proceed to introduce the fundamental aspects of IKS and how the continent could use these systems in conjunction with modern science to tackle climate action, ultimately assuming strategic autonomy and shifting away from dependency on developed nations like the United States. The paper will then conclude by providing recommendations for how IKS and modern science can offer medium- to long-term solutions to the environmental crisis.

Shifting geopolitical order

Climate diplomacy is a global and co-operative initiative that addresses the effects of climate change. Through the Paris Agreement, states were legally bound to:

> ..."set long-term goals to guide all nations to substantially reduce global greenhouse gas emissions to hold global temperature increase to well below 2°C above pre-industrial levels and pursue efforts to limit it to 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels, recognizing *[sic]* that this would significantly reduce the risks and impacts of climate change, periodically assess the collective progress towards achieving the purpose of this agreement and its long-term goals, provide financing to developing countries to mitigate climate change, strengthen resilience and enhance abilities to adapt to climate impacts" (United Nations 2021).

US disengagement in climate diplomacy (that is, the Paris agreement) results in a seismic change in geopolitical order within the climate action realm and will have implications for climate financing as the United States was the major contributor to climate action initiatives. It is deeply ironic that the United States, the world's second-largest emitter of CO_2, due to its reliance on fossil fuels (Markey-Towler 2025; Le Roux and Cilliers 2025: 12) after China, chose to withdraw from a major global climate initiative. Such a decision, if taken by an African or other Global South nation, would likely have been framed as a defiant act undermining the legitimacy of international institutions. This double standard highlights the

asymmetries and hypocrisy in global governance, where actions by powerful nations are justified, while similar moves by less powerful states are often met with criticism and political consequences, such as the infamous economic sanctions imposed on, for example, Sudan, Zimbabwe and Libya.

Western hypocrisy can also be seen in climate governance. For example, Ramachandrum (2025) asserts that, 'impoverished African countries that cumulatively account for 0.55 per cent of global emissions have been told that they cannot exploit their natural gas reserves; instead, they must spend valuable resources preparing net-zero targets'. However, at the same time, ExxonMobil (a private US oil and gas company) is involved in the Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG) project in Mozambique, estimated to be worth US$60 billion (Neethling 2021). To justify this action, energy experts assert that transporting LNG is low on carbon emissions; however, during the process of extraction and liquefaction, there is a release of carbon emissions (CO_2) that will have an environmental impact in the long run (Halsey et al. 2023: 5), thus contributing to environmental degradation in Africa. Furthermore, Trump's 'Drill baby, drill' mantra undermines the goals and aspirations set in the Paris Accord, which the US was central in formulating. This underscores the exploitative nature of neocolonial policies, which are often disguised under the rhetoric of free market systems and liberal economic frameworks.

The Paris Agreement 'emphasised equitable climate action, with developed nations committing to providing $100 billion annually to support mitigation and adaptation in developing countries' (Madegwa 2026). It is therefore worth noting that 'many nations in the African continent have long been reliant on foreign aid, including U.S. assistance, to sustain vital health, education, and climate adaptation projects' (Horsfield 2025). For instance, the Green Climate Fund (GCF) serves as a key source of funding for developing nations in the global fight against climate change, especially in areas where women are at the forefront. Consequently, Trump's withdrawal of USAID in Africa 'is likely to rescind US$ 3 billion commitment pledge to the GCF at COP28' (Horsfield 2025). The GCF was a critical source of financing for gender-responsive projects. It helped women's groups access training, tools and climate-resilient infrastructure. Without that support, women-led climate efforts stall (Horsfield 2025).

Africa's increasing vulnerability to climate change, along with the withdrawal of the US from key climate agreements, carries significant long-term global

implications. In distancing itself from international climate commitments and criticising the Paris Agreement as a one-sided deal (as suggested by President Trump) (Markey-Towler 2025) and indulging in 'climate denialism', the US risks diminishing its global influence. Moreover, the US withdrawal may not necessarily be detrimental for Africa. Instead, it might allow Global South countries to exercise control over their own concerns without Trump's corrosive influence (Markey-Towler 2025). In fact, these developments present an opportunity for Africa to assume a more prominent leadership role in climate action.

While such a withdrawal may therefore be perceived as a strategic move by the US to undermine the autonomy of African states, it may, in effect, attenuate Africa's dependency on US support. This shift is not limited to environmental governance. It opens broader avenues for Africa to assert itself in global economic and political arenas. The weakening of US influence may encourage African states, along with global powers such as China, to adopt more independent geoeconomic strategies, including but not limited to indigenous knowledges, and to position themselves as active players in institutions such as the World Trade Organisation (WTO) through AfCFTA. As noted by Chin and Bartos (2024: 127), one reason for Africa's heightened importance is the use that China and Russia are making of the region 'to challenge the rules-based international order. In addition, the strategy notes growing economic interests, with AfCFTA set to make Africa one of the largest free trade areas in the world (and make Africa the fifth largest economy in the world)'. Consequently, these geopolitical shifts may open an avenue for Africa to reshape its international role and advocate for more equitable global partnerships rooted in regional empowerment, collaboration and the spirit of Pan Africanism.

Climate change in Africa

Climate change is a global phenomenon and requires global attention and solutions. Many have argued that climate change, stemming from rapid globalisation, is one of the most catastrophic events to ever hit planet Earth (Smillie 2023). The argument put forward by Wapmuk and Tar (2016) is that because globalisation is accelerating, the African continent is doubly exposed to the impact of climate change as well as globalisation. The unprecedented flow of goods within the African continent is bringing about development to some

extent but is also increasing the risk of exposure to climate change. According to the United Nations (2021) website, 'climate change refers to long-term shifts in the temperature and weather patterns' and that 'such shifts can be natural due to changes in the sun's activity or large volcanic eruptions'. On the other hand, the IPCC (United Nations 2021) points out that 'climate change is a result of man-made emissions of greenhouse gases'. This impact is mainly due to the burning of fossil fuels, which produces greenhouse gas emissions including carbon dioxide (CO_2), nitrous oxides, chlorofluorocarbons, hydrocarbons such as methane, ozone and water vapour (Wapmuk and Tar 2016). The definition provided by the IPCC clearly illustrates the interconnectedness between climate change and globalisation. This view tends to sideline concerns for justice and equity, particularly for women on the African continent. As highlighted by the IPCC, climate change is anthropogenic, and primarily motivated by economic objectives within a capitalist, industrialised world. These activities, which facilitate globalisation, often occur with insufficient attention paid to their environmental and social consequences.

However, it should also be noted that climate change cannot be solely regarded as a consequence of globalisation, even though it plays a significant role, particularly through its integration into the political economy. Nevertheless, it is not the only factor contributing to climate change. For example, migration can be considered a contributing factor, and 'the World Bank estimates that climate change could cause more than 86 million people to migrate within Africa by 2050' (Amadi and Vundamina 2023: 35). The movement of people, whether fleeing conflict zones or poverty, among other things, often involves the use of motor vehicles, which emit significant amounts of carbon dioxide (CO_2) due to their fuel consumption (*Dekra* 2024). Moreover, 'vehicle emissions can harm ecosystems by contaminating soil and water, affecting plant and animal life' (*Dekra* 2024). Consequently, this has a direct impact on communities, especially women who depend on livestock for socioeconomic survival.

Gendered impact of climate change

Conceptualising climate change in Africa should not be solely about the impact it has on economic and political aspects. Rather, the social aspects should also be prioritised to determine how vulnerable various referent objects are. As alluded

to by Egeru et al. (2016), 'vulnerability is a function of the degree of exposures, sensitivity, and adaptive capacity of a given natural or social system'. To this end, it is fundamental to question the degree of exposure for women as a consequence of climate change because they are often more susceptible to such effects. Shifting the focus to understanding the ripple effects that environmental degradation has on women will ultimately lead to influencing 'strategic development discourses, actions of governments, communities and development actors' (Egeru et al. 2016). It is also important to analyse the impact of climate change from a gender perspective because women and men experience the effects of climate change differently. Furthermore, now that the major contributor to climate financing (being the United States) has withdrawn from the Paris Agreement and halted USAID funding, the women of Africa are sure to suffer.

Women in many parts of the world are relegated to the periphery, treated as an afterthought in the political discourse. In addition to this, women are sidelined from decision-making platforms and regarded as objects rather than human beings. According to Perkins (2018), women's exclusion has extended beyond representation in scientific research, negotiations and law-making processes. Women have been excluded from scientific research into the climate change phenomenon, as well as how climate change programmes can be integrated within the African context. However, women's participation is fundamental not only for a gendered perspective on climate action, but also because women are mainly employed in the agricultural sector in sub-Saharan Africa, accounting for about 74% of working women, in contrast to 61% for working men (UN Women n.d; ILO 2015). For instance, 'gender specific patterns show in general that the polluter is a man, whether poor or rich, but women feel the most effects' (Arora-Jonsson 2011: 755). Often, women are reliant on men for financial assistance as climate change affects agricultural productivity and the ability of female farmers to earn a livelihood (Adeola, Evans and Ngare 2014: 36). This vulnerability is compounded by the interconnected nature of climate change effects with broader challenges such as food security and water access.

The United Nations Development Programme argues that "climate change actions need to be based on consultation with women, to build and incorporate their skills and knowledge as this would result in more environmental and productivity gains and would create mutual benefits and greater returns" (Habtezion 2016: 6). This is a sensible approach, if the many women-

centred initiates in Africa, such as the Green Belt Movement—a response to environmental degradation in postcolonial Kenya—are taken into consideration (Hunt 2014: 236). The Green Belt Movement was notable for its empowering approach, as it was structured to work primarily with poor, rural women mobilised around environmental and civic engagement campaigns (Hunt 2014: 235). Failing to address climate issues that affect women can have long-term consequences. Without gender-sensitive climate policies, gender-based violence against women in sub-Saharan Africa is projected to triple by 2060, according to Hunt (2014) and Muzenda (2024). Climate change will also exacerbate the income gap between men and women and impact land ownership and resource allocation (Muzenda 2024). For instance, COP29 fails to address gender-based justice within climate change despite gender being on the agenda. Furthermore,

> "The COP29 Presidency did not initially include any women in the 28-person Organising Committee and only included 12 women in the panel after social outcries. At the summit itself, only eight of the 78 heads of state and government were women, with women making up 34% of national delegates" (Muzenda 2024).

This significantly highlights the gender imbalance in leadership and decision-making platforms on climate action. The inclusion of '12 women in the panel after social outcries' suggests a patronising attitude towards women and a reactive approach rather than a proactive approach to the inclusion of women. This ultimately contradicts the principles of gender inclusivity (Sustainable Development Goal 5: Gender Equality). (United Nations South Africa 2026). Moreover, meaningful discussions on gender issues require the active participation of those directly affected. Without adequate representation of women, these conversations risk lacking authenticity and depth. While policies and international institutions can play a supportive role, genuine advocacy for women's rights must centre the voices and lived experiences of women themselves. In addition, 'the growth of farmers' knowledge, expertise and ability in relation to climate-smart technologies and related services can be facilitated through local institutions like churches, traditional leadership, schools, and other organizations *[sic]*, which can improve climate change management' (Adeola, Evans and Ngare 2024: 175). The case of Kenya's women-led initiative

highlights women's expertise in this field, necessitating stronger support for political stakeholders' participation and funding. Thus, this argument brings to the discourse an understanding of the intricate relationship between gender and climate change, and how the withdrawal of the US from the Paris Agreement will affect mostly women in communities that heavily rely on agricultural livestock and fisheries for survival.

Case study: Kenya's Green Belt Movement

Guided by a feminist agenda and embedded in the spirit of resilience and empowerment, the Green Belt Movement (GBM) initiative was founded by Wangari Muta Maathai as a response to environmental degradation. Kenya experienced widespread demonstrations from 1977 to 1993, advocating for tree-planting initiatives to combat environmental degradation (Hunt 2014). This was indeed a period of environmental and political injustice as Kenya experienced extreme deforestation, soil erosion, malnutrition and political corruption (Hunt 2014: 236). Therefore, the purpose of GBM 'was to establish greenbelts and fuel wood plots by local people, particularly women' (Muthuki 2006: 85). This initiative was guided by an ecofeminist[1] agenda, which stresses the importance of women's empowerment in decision-making processes. Maaithai argues that the capitalist systems continue to undermine women's worth and value. This is most prevalent among indigenous women, who are constantly marginalised and reduced to economic dependence. This is reinforced through foreign investments through the capitalist mode of production and resource exploitation, often leading to environmental degradation and impoverishment (Muthuki 2006: 87). Often these foreign investments do not benefit local people, and women are often left to deal with the consequences of climate change. GBM places its efforts in indigenous knowledges passed down from generation to generation. To put it in context, when the colonial project was initiated, deforestation increased rapidly as a result of the demands to meet the capitalist mode of production through industrial factories (Njagi 2022). At the same time, because of the devaluation of cultural and traditional beliefs and practices that would have allowed for the natural conservation of the forest, rivers dried, and there was a lack of rain and a shortage of indigenous foods and medicine (Njagi 2022: 68).

Notably, it can be argued that to be one with nature requires a shift in

consciousness, and thus GBM sought to be indigenous in its nature in order to reconstruct how Africans can use their own cultural and spiritual ties for the preservation of the environment. In practice, the GBM 'preserved indigenous knowledges by maintaining sacred forests, groves, trees, reverence for totemic animals and limiting entrance in some parts of the Mount Kenya forest' (Njagi 2022: 70). This allowed community members to embrace their cultural heritage and dismantle the colonial ideological conquest (which is the root cause of the deforestation in Mount Kenya). Importantly, this woman-led initiative wanted to 'decolonize *[sic]* the anthropogenic, profit-making attitudes towards the natural world' (Rush 2020: 4). In contrast to the post-colonial approach, GBM sought to empower women and embark on a de-patriarchal project to challenge patriarchal norms of domination over women and their relationship with the environment. Further, this movement recognised that African women should not be seen as monolithic compared to Western women.

Essentially, it is important to understand how colonialism shaped and changed the relationship between humans and the environment, particularly in the African context (Nkomo 2021; Stoddard 2022; Rush 2020). As alluded to by Rush (2020: 2), prior to colonialism, indigenous people in Kenya made use of forest resources through a system of traditional rules and rights. However, Stoddard (2022) notes that the prevailing narrative of international experts was that 'in order to save nature, African states must evict those living within the national parks'. Indigenous people living in the forests were therefore displaced, which eroded people's ability to be in tune with the environment.

Following the aftermath of conquest by colonial masters, the relationship between humankind and the environment changed dramatically as land was now utilised as an economic resource for profit-making by these new masters. This was enforced by forcefully seizing land from indigenous people and handing it to white settlers for the purpose of producing profitable commodities such as food. Further, as claimed by Nkomo (2021), 'the so-called protection of wildlife and nature was the primary tool in the disenfranchisement of tribes of people and the forced displacement of many groups from important ancestral lands central to their ways of life'. As a result, this eroded the indigenous heritage and history of these sacred places. For instance, 'indigenous groups in central Kenya like the Kikuyu used land for more purposes like ceremonial sacrifices for rain and bountiful harvest' (Rush 2020: 3). However, colonialism led to major

deforestation, which impacted rural women in agricultural settings in particular.

However, in light of Trump's dramatic departure from the Paris Agreement and the withdrawal of USAID in Africa, critical questions emerge regarding the implications for women-led initiatives and the broader consequences for gender equality objectives, considering that the US was one of the partners of GBM[2]. Undoubtedly, there might be financial setbacks that might contribute to the existing patriarchal norms that disempower women. Conversely, the exit of the US undermines the very international institutions they created for global order (Naidoo 2025). Therefore, the world can expect to witness more African nations pivoting to alternative financial sources, such as China (the biggest rival of the US) and Russia. From a postcolonial view, it is evident that indigenous systems were utilised to adapt to environmental changes long before the colonial masters invaded Africa. Therefore, it is reasonable to assume that although Trump's withdrawal will hit Africa badly financially, this may reinforce the rethinking of IKS might be re-established as an African-based climate agenda, centred around gender equality.

Role of IKS in climate adaptation: Africa's ideological shift

Climate change is not a new phenomenon in Africa. Indigenous cultures have been managing and adapting to the changes of the environment for the longest time, with original knowledge passed down from generation to generation through the "characteristics of informal education as a contact for individuals to have a variety of environmental influences that result from day-to-day learning" (Seroto 2011: 79). The author is of the view that the use of the term "indigenous" is derogatory and perpetuates the marginalisation or subaltern of African philosophical and cultural thinking. However, for the purpose of the paper within the academic discourse, the term will be applied because it is not within the scope of the paper to critique the usage of terms and concepts but to apply them to the central argument.

IKS refer to the 'institutionalised local knowledge that has been developed and handed down from one generation to the next, typically by word of mouth' (Adeola, Evans and Ngare 2024: 170). Africa's IKS is rooted in spiritual, philosophical and cultural worldviews of how African people lived in the pre-colonial era, guiding them in their long-existing relationship with the environment. In contrast to

science knowledge, 'IKS is non-formal and orally transmitted, not typically codified and closely linked to the survival and subsistence of particular local and cultural group' (Apraku, Morton and Gyampoh 2020: 3). Many of the climate and gender problems were 'generated from Western conceptions of oppression, gender, and equality and as a result represents a subtle form of cultural imperialism when applied to non-Western contexts' (Hunt 2014: 237). Practically:

> "African women's participation in industry and services has increased since 2010, they are still most often employed in the agricultural sector. In fact, in 2019, about half of all female workers in sub-Saharan Africa were still employed in agriculture". In most African states, economies are predominantly agrarian, with a significant proportion of women engaged in agricultural labour. This contrasts with patterns in many developed countries, where women are more frequently employed in lower-tier industrial or manufacturing sectors" (Ordu 2022: 60).

Thus, movements such as the GBM recognised that women should not be treated as monolithic when compared to Western women (Hunt 2014; Oyěwùmí 1997). In the African context, women, who are central to food production, water collection and local environmental stewardship, are frequently excluded from policy design and resource allocation in climate change action. Furthermore, 'this also puts added pressure on girls, who sometimes have to leave school to help their mothers manage the increased burden' (UN Women 2025). As a result, the withdrawal of funds from the US will cause disruptions in funding flow for initiatives that empower women and young girls, thus exacerbating gender inequalities and reinforcing neocolonial tendencies of inequality.

Rooted in the critique of colonialism, 'postcolonialism acknowledges that politics is not limited to one area or region and that it is vital to include the voices of individuals from other parts of the world' (Gold and McGlinchey 2022: 51). Further, 'the philosophy underlying this is not one of declaring war on the past, but declaring war against the present realities which, implicitly or explicitly, are consequences of that past' (Rukundwa and van Aarder 2016: 75). This manifests itself in the exclusion of African cultural experiences and, most notably, the interactions of man and the environment within the African context (particularly in the context of women). Consequently, the lack of recognition for indigenous

knowledges, has perpetuated a homogenised approach to climate action. Postcolonial theory contends that Western epistemology has delegitimised African philosophies and cultural ways of thinking, and thus the indigenous knowledges are often sidelined and ostracised as subaltern (Rukundwa and van Aarde 2007). Notably, this epistemological injustice manifests since Western scientific knowledge dominates popular discourse. This is seen in language and framing of terms like 'capacity building' or 'aid' to African nations. This phrasing makes it appear as though Africans are lacking and thus should be dependent on the West, to be rescued from the shackles of poverty exacerbated by climate change effects. This ignores the fact that communities in Africa have been using IKS to adapt to environmental degradation, mostly led by women's initiatives. Notably, movements such as GBM have extended their purposes beyond just planting trees to deal with deforestation. It has reinforced their image of themselves as giving people, particularly women, and has provided a reason to stand up for their rights through cultural sovereignty orchestrated through IKS (Hunt 2014: 241; Merton and Darter 2008).

Africa's heightened vulnerability to climate change, coupled with the US withdrawal from key climate commitments, presents long-term global implications (Mina 2025). However, these challenges also create an opportunity for the emergence of new leadership in climate action, potentially led by Africa through the African Union and other regional economic communities, which will reinforce women's position in climate action initiatives. This leadership could elevate the relevance of IKS, which have historically guided sustainable environmental practices (Muthuki 2006: 89). While the integration of such systems alone will not resolve the continent's climate crisis, it presents a critical step towards asserting African sovereignty and addressing environmental issues through context-specific, localised solutions (related to decolonial approaches) (Rush 2011). Although environmental degradation is a global concern, its causes and effects vary significantly across regions. In Africa, for instance, women often disproportionately bear the brunt of climate-related hardships. Unlike in industrialised regions, Africa's environmental issues are not primarily driven by industrialisation but are instead rooted in complex socioeconomic challenges. One example is climate-related migration, often linked to conflict and instability. These interconnected challenges demand context-specific solutions and can amplify the agency for African-led climate strategies that prioritise equity,

resilience and sustainable development.

Consequently, intertwining indigenous knowledge with contemporary scientific approaches may facilitate not only more effective climate adaptation strategies but also promote strategic autonomy. Notably, 'fusing indigenous knowledge with scientific methods and expertise can provide usefulness and viability may be substantially increased' (Basdew, Jiri and Mafongoya 2017). Such steps can open avenues for further exploration of indigenous ecological practices through policy and academic research, offering insights that have long been overlooked or undervalued in mainstream environmental discourse. Despite being historically marginalised, IKS can offer rich, localised insights that can complement and enrich formal scientific understanding. Moreover, sometimes IKS, at least for weather prediction, might be limited by a lack of access to science-based weather information or time-delayed dissemination of such forecasts (Filho et al. 2022: 8). Emphasising this synergy may help shift dominant paradigms towards more inclusive and sustainable models, while also reclaiming and affirming African intellectual and cultural heritage in the face of global environmental challenges.

Conclusion and recommendations

The withdrawal of the United States from the Paris Agreement under President Trump's leadership marks a critical point in global climate governance and exposes longstanding inequalities in international relations. This is witnessed through the sudden withdrawal of the financial assistance normally provided by the United States. Furthermore, despite African countries cumulatively accounting for only 0.55% of global emissions, they are often pressured not to exploit their natural gas reserves; instead, they are forced to spend valuable resources preparing for net-zero targets. Meanwhile, Western corporations like ExxonMobil continue to exploit African resources, as seen in their involvement in the Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG) project in Mozambique. This further reflects a broader neocolonial exploitative pattern disguised under international treaties and agreements. Further, this disengagement, coupled with halted funding to gender-responsive initiatives like USAID, disproportionately affects vulnerable communities, especially women-led climate action initiatives in Africa. However, this crisis also presents a unique opportunity for African nations to assert strategic

autonomy in the climate change agenda. By embracing IKS and aligning them with contemporary scientific practices, African countries can develop localised, sustainable and culturally grounded climate adaptation strategies. Initiatives like Kenya's Green Belt Movement, started by Wangari Maathai, exemplify how IKS can drive environmental and gender empowerment. These shifts signal a potential ideological realignment away from a dependency culture on Western aid and towards Pan-African collaboration and self-reliance. From a postcolonial lens, this moment challenges the dominance of Western epistemologies and underscores the importance of decolonising environmental governance. To ensure lasting impact, African leadership must prioritise inclusive frameworks that centre around women and youth and integrate traditional ecological knowledge with modern science. This dual approach not only reclaims Africa's historical environmental agency but also offers a viable path for equitable climate action and long-term resilience in the face of global environmental uncertainty.

Based on the arguments presented above, the following recommendations aim to highlight the significant intersection of gender, climate change and IKS in the African context amidst the shifting geopolitical order in climate action. African states need to calibrate on:

- Integrating IKS into academic discourse and promoting education that reflects local cultural and environmental contexts.
- Encouraging further research on how IKS can complement modern science, particularly in areas such as weather prediction and sustainable agricultural practices. This will contribute to the broader agenda of decolonising climate action knowledge and strategies.
- Accelerating the implementation of AfCFTA to boost regional revenue streams that can support climate action initiatives.
- Fostering government partnerships with local communities, traditional leaders and Indigenous groups to gather grassroots knowledge on historical survival strategies and exploring their relevance in contemporary climate adaptation.
- Increasing government investment in women-led climate initiatives, such as Kenya's Green Belt Movement, to empower women's leadership and advance sustainable environmental solutions.

The implementation of these strategies will have a significant impact on the creation of an equitable, sustainable and inclusive climate action strategy in Africa.

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Endnotes

1 Ecofeminism is of the view that domination over women leads to domination over nature. This is a radical ecology shift in advocating for a revolutionary change in sustainability. It further postulates that men are the enemy of nature, and this is reinforced through the capitalist system (Heywood 2011: 390).

2 http://greenbeltmovement.org/get-involved/partners#:~:text

CHAPTER 12

An Analysis of the Impacts of Trump 2.0 on Climate Governance in Africa: Is Climate Bandwagoning Still Relevant?

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Introduction

The emergence of Donald Trump in 2016 and his re-emergence in 2024 have caused tremendous disruptions to international politics and norms. During these two terms, Trump has demonstrated an inward-looking approach to governance, which has affected US foreign policy. His ultra-pro-American stance and rhetoric have redefined America's foreign policy, favouring isolationism and retreating from multilateralism, a principle it has championed since World War II (Harper 2025). Of particular importance is Trump's aversion to international norms and culture, pulling the US out of many established memberships and active participation in multilateral and bilateral relations. He, at will, chooses to dishonour international values and practices, withdrawing the US from alliances, agreements and international treaties, thereby disavowing the respected international law dictum *pacta sunt servanda,* which means all agreements must be respected and fulfilled in international relations (Kelsen [1952] 2003).

A particularly significant example is the withdrawal of the US from the Paris Agreement; an internationally binding instrument entered into in 2015 to save the world from the impending catastrophe of global warming and climate change (Bodansky 2021). Before the emergence of Trump in 2016 and after his loss in 2020, the US offered climate governance leadership and was a major funder of climate change response in the world (United Nations Economic Commission for Africa 2025). Thus, the period between his two terms can be seen as a respite,

with his re-emergence placing US foreign policy back in the spotlight. This is because his second-term rhetoric and actions on climate and environment show no departure from the Trump Way. Hence, with the commencement of Trump 2.0, he re-withdraws the US from the Paris Agreement and is undermining national climate and energy laws and regulations in an apparent disregard for climate change, the science that undergirds it and its international governance (De Pryck and Gemenne 2017).

Climate change has emerged as the world's most consequential problem in recent decades, with Africa bearing the brunt of the phenomenon's disproportionate impacts. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), in its Sixth Annual Review, notes with high confidence that climate change is already having serious multi-sectoral impacts across Africa (Pörtner et al. 2023). There is an observed worsening of climate change effects such as high temperatures and heat waves, droughts, floods, land degradation, food security pressures, melting glaciers, climate change-related health challenges, forced migration and disruption of economies and livelihoods (Pörtner et al. 2023). With these staggering climate challenges, it is not out of place for African countries to be eager to negotiate climate change mitigation, adaptation and financial support to address the root cause(s) of the crisis. However, the global process is under strain because of the Trump 2.0 withdrawal from the Paris Agreement, the key mechanism for addressing climate change causes and impacts. This also hampers African countries' climate bandwagoning, namely, to strategically integrate their development exigencies and imperatives into the climate process.

The aim of this paper is to analyse and interrogate the impact of Trump 2.0 on Africa's climate governance and to raise the critical question of whether climate bandwagoning is still relevant after the re-withdrawal from the Paris Agreement, as well as the unsavoury domestic anti-climate actions of the Trump administration. This discussion is critical because the global climate process will suffer from withdrawal. Furthermore, this exit will negatively impact the effectiveness of Africa's climate change response. African countries have linked their development goals to the global climate process (Olajide 2022a); however, the volatility of the international system seriously challenges the logic of bandwagoning as a means to secure financial support, capacity enhancement and technological assistance.

Climate governance and bandwagoning: Conceptual and theoretical overview

Climate change has emerged as the world's most existential and pressing issue as the twenty-first century unfolds. Such is the threat that it poses that world leaders and other climate stakeholders have realised that a business-as-usual outlook is insufficient to avert irreversible catastrophe in the coming decades (Radunsky and Cadman 2021). For this reason, global climate governance was brought into being, starting with the commissioning of the Brundtland Commission Report in 1987, followed by the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED), otherwise known as the Earth Conference, in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, in 1992 (Olajide 2022a). The World Meteorological Organisation (WMO) and the United Nations Environmental Programme (UNEP) formed the IPCC in 1998 to anchor the scientific evidence for climate change (IPCC 2019). This further led to the development of the United Nations Framework Convention for Climate Change (UNFCCC) in 1995, which has been the organising body of the annual Conference of the Parties (COPs), the main multilateral forum for climate governance in the world.

Climate governance is a multi-stakeholder affair (Olajide 2022b). This is because many multilevel actors, including national and subnational governments, international organisations, civil society and the private sector, among others, play important roles in climate negotiations (Olajide 2022b). As a result, important diplomatic breakthroughs have ensued from climate governance over the years. This includes the Kyoto Protocol of 1997 and the Paris Agreement of 2015. The Paris Agreement is the most binding of climate diplomatic efforts since its inception. It sets up protocols to monitor climate change responses, the most important of these being the Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs), by which state parties are expected to detail their intended contributions in terms of mitigation, adaptation and climate financing (Thidzumba, Olajide and Ojakorotu 2020).

African countries have been a part of the climate governance process since its inception. They have shown commitment to the process by being signatories to it and by ratifying many climate agreements over the years. Olajide (2022a) argues that the commitment of African countries to international climate governance is akin to climate bandwagoning. This means that they have attached

their potential for development to this process and are looking to maximally leverage the opportunities inherent in it. Nicholson and Chong (2011: 122) hold that 'bandwagoning is a process whereby a weaker social movement borrows resources, activities, and discourses from a stronger movement to gain advantages from it'. Thus, climate bandwagoning is the strategic linkage of nations' development imperatives to the climate change governance process. Jinnah (2011: 3) agrees with the definition by asserting that climate bandwagoning is a 'recent phenomenon of political actors strategically linking their issues to climate change politics for a variety of reasons'. This is a type of formative bandwagoning, in those African countries, along with other developing nations, strategically link their development goals to the climate change crisis.

African countries, among which are some of the world's poorest nations, view climate change as inherently full of development opportunities. The continent entered the twenty-first century with a serious development deficit, partly motivating the international community to adopt development frameworks, such as the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and the Sustainable Development Goals (McArthur 2014). Hence, African climate governance structures arising from the African Ministerial Conference on Environment in 1985, such as the African Group of Negotiators (AGN), Common African Position and the Conference of African Heads of State on Climate Change (CAHOSCC) have all worked in unison in promoting climate bandwagoning on the continent (Olajide 2022a). This is why Jinnah notes that climate bandwagoning is a 'purposive, agent-based linkage of political actors to affect the whole essence of the climate change regime as a result of their agenda' (Olajide 2022a: 608).

Consequently, African countries have shown an uncommon commitment to climate governance through the AGN and other actors and have been a part of the most momentous developments of the process, such as the Kyoto Protocol and the Paris Agreement, and paying their NDCs to the UNFCCC in the process (Thidzumba, Olajide and Ojakorotu 2019; Olajide 2022a). This explains the AGN's strong support for the principle of Common but Differentiated Responsibilities (CBDR), a key principle of global climate governance that apportions responsibilities based on historical culpability in greenhouse gas emissions. CBDR contains protocols including the distribution of climate financial support, technological transfers and technical know-how accordingly.

It also demonstrates why every negotiation is important to the African group, the operationalisation of the Loss and Damage Fund at COP 28, with US$400 billion in pledges, being a case in point (Olajide 2023).

Theoretical framework

This paper is theoretically grounded in contrasting the assumptions of realism and constructivism as theories of international politics. Realism is the premier theory of international politics, speaking to the primacy of the state as the main actor in the international system. Realists view the international political system as anarchical because it is the platform for egoistic and self-serving states to interact in the advancement of their national interests, security and self-preservation without an overarching authority to mediate these interactions. Thus, realism takes international relations to be a competition and struggle among states, a situation that inevitably leads to conflict among states. Korab-Karpowicz (2023) notes that while national politics goes on with the purview of well-defined laws, supervised and often enforced by a nationally recognised authority, international politics does not enjoy such affordances because inter-state politics is bound by no law or morality. It also lacks recognised authority capable of mediating intra-state relations. Hence, because of the anarchic nature of the international system, states take seriously the need to improve their national power.

The foregoing is the reason why realists believe that strife, conflicts and competition between and among states in the international system cannot be avoided, and that the struggle for dominance and survival is a strong driving force for global politics. In his work *Politics among Nations*, Morgenthau (1948) stated that realism in international relations focuses on the actions of states in pursuit of their self-interest. He believed that states would do almost anything to protect their territory and advance their self-interest. For Morgenthau, realism entails examining the motives and intentions of states to be able to understand and predict their actions in the international system. Realism claims to explain the truth about world politics and views the nature of state relations from the perspective of human selfishness—fighting for their own survival. The idea of power is fundamental to realism. Realistic thinking inevitably acknowledges the existence of conflicts resulting from rivalry for resources, power and safety. Self-serving states maneuver strategically and occasionally come into confrontation with one another.

Constructivism in international relations is a departure from the mainstream theories. It holds that the dynamics of the international system are socially constructed through shared meanings, rather than being determined solely by the material power and fixed interests of state actors. According to Finnemore and Sikkink (2001), social constructivism holds that '(a) human interaction is not shaped by material factors, but primarily by ideational; (b) the most significant ideational factors in this context are "inter-subjective" beliefs as shared collective understanding; and (c) these beliefs construct the actors' identities and interests' (Jung 2019: 2). The theory attempts to analyse the effects of ideas and beliefs on international politics. Social constructs are products of human consciousness, and they actively shape the international system (Ruggie 1998). This entails that the international environment and its dynamics are products of actors negotiating shared ideas that shape the system.

The social constructivist theory is in contrast to the realist theory of international relations. Realist theory is based on the material power or endowment of the state. Due to the relativity of state power calculated in material terms, states compete for scarce resources or even go to war against one another (Barkin 2009). On the other hand, constructivism is based on ideas that speak to the social basis of state behaviour and interaction in the international system. It is a reaction to the failure of realist theory to account for the ideational, social and cultural determinants of state behaviour in international politics (Wendt 1999). The social constructivist theory contends that the structure of the international system cannot be explained in material terms alone; rather, the interpretations and constructions of states as to their identity, interests and norms provide necessary details for understanding.

These theories speak to the reality of Trump 2.0 and its impacts on climate governance in Africa. While realism speaks to the assertion of pro-American rhetoric by Trump and his government, constructivism speaks to the reconceptualisation of American national interest through a narrower, inward-looking lens. For Africa, realism speaks to the need for countries to reassess their national interests during the Trump 2.0 period, with the possibility of engendering new alignments to achieve their climate goals. Similarly, constructivism speaks to African countries' need for normative and ideational shifts in their climate diplomacy to engender innovative alignments and creative frameworks to achieve their climate goals, through bandwagoning or otherwise.

Climate change and its impacts in Africa

As the 21st century unfolds, climate change can clearly be seen as one of Africa's most debilitating challenges. As one of the least developed regions of the world, climate change impacts are disproportionally felt on the continent, relative to other regions of the world. This fact was first noted by the Africa Progress Panel in 2015 when it asserted that, although the continent is arguably complicit in terms of historical emissions that cause climate change, it is also more affected by its impacts than other regions of the world (Africa Progress Panel 2015). Olajide (2022a) notes that climate change means more than an environmental problem for Africa. This is because it has complex secondary social, economic and political impacts that affect how people live and earn a livelihood. Furthermore, climate change, as a threat multiplier, makes existing social, economic and political issues and challenges more serious in incidence and therefore more difficult to address.

Despite Africa being the lowest greenhouse gas emitter globally, it faces serious climate change effects. The IPCC notes that the continent is experiencing observed impacts of the phenomenon (Pörtner et al. 2023). This corroborates the African Development Bank report that climate change has serious effects on Africa despite it being the region with the least greenhouse gas contribution in the world (African Development Bank 2019). The African Union Climate Change and Resilient Development Strategy and Action Plan 2022-2032 notes that the continent is already being affected by observed impacts such as rising temperature, high precipitation, increased West African Monsoon, increased wind and storms and increased coastal and ocean-related hazards (African Union 2023). It is instructive to note that these impacts are expected to become more intense as climate scenarios unfold.

These impacts, while framed in environmental terms, have deeper roots on the continent. This reality coincides with the position of Okereke and Massaqoui (2017) that climate change has development implications for the world and the developing nations in particular. Thus, climate change causes or worsens problems such as food insecurity, drought, floods and erosion, water scarcity, health crises, extreme weather events, migration (forced migration has now become common), resource conflicts and ecosystem and biodiversity loss (Fonjong, Matose and Sonnenfeld 2024). The impacts have now become common in incidence and greater in magnitude, and are already reversing and stifling development on the

continent. This is demonstrated by the high number of climate events and the consequent staggering human and material costs.

Since 2023, Africa has experienced grave climate change impacts. For example, the World Meteorological Organisation (WMO) notes that the year was the warmest in the past 124 years. It reports that 2023 was 0.61°C higher than the 1991—2020 averages and 1.28°C higher than the 1961—1990 averages (World Meteorological Organisation 2024a). The organisation's Secretary-General, Celeste Saulo, laments that 'Over the past 60 years, Africa has observed a warming trend that has become more rapid than the global average. In 2023, the continent experienced deadly heatwaves, heavy rains, floods, tropical cyclones, and prolonged droughts' (World Meteorological Organisation 2024b). This illustrates that climate change impacts Africa disproportionately relative to other regions in the world. There is now a rising incidence of sudden-onset climate events causing heavy loss and damage across the continent. In September 2023, Storm Daniel caused massive damage in Libya while Cyclone Freddy made landfall on the African side of the Indian Ocean, affecting countries such as Madagascar, Mauritius and Reunion (World Meteorological Organisation 2024a).

The worsening impacts of climate change on the continent have serious social and economic consequences. Socially, climate change is a significant contributor to the rise of Africa's disease burden. For example, the 2022 provincial floods in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa, caused widespread waterborne and vector-borne diseases in the province (Presidential Climate Committee 2022). Economically, climate change causes serious costs for African countries as they are losing two to five per cent of their GDP as a result, and many of these countries spend up to nine per cent of their budgets in responding to extreme climate events. The development impact of climate change lies in the resultant widespread poverty. By 2030, this will be a crisis on the continent if climate change is not addressed and adaptation is not ramped up, since up to 118 million people will be exposed to droughts, floods and extreme heat (World Meteorological Organisation 2024b).

Trump 2.0 and climate governance

The re-emergence of Donald Trump following his electoral victory in 2024 brought a whole new dynamic to global climate governance. With his anti-

climate change stance, his emergence at the polls sent tensions through the climate diplomacy structure. In his first term as President, Trump demonstrated his aversion to the concept of climate change, its science and diplomacy. His inward-looking, America-first rhetoric and stance influenced his first-term climate change policy. While the goal of climate governance nationally and internationally before his emergence was to reduce carbon emissions towards ensuring that global warming is capped at 1.5°C above pre-industrial times, Trump sought energy independence for America (The Protect Arctic 2025). Through his America First energy plan, he rolled back 98 environmental laws in the US, and about fourteen were being processed for repeal at the end of his first term (Popovich, Albeck-Ripka and Pierre-Louis 2020). This demonstrated Trump's climate science scepticism. His administration, taking a climate-denying stance, maintained that American energy sufficiency should be ensured by developing new hydrocarbon projects in the country.

Trump withdrew America from the Paris Agreement in his first term as part of his Administration's climate policy. Before this, America had provided leadership in global climate governance by supplying the political, technical and financial means for the UNFCCC structure to operate efficiently. This is especially true of the preceding Obama Administration, which led America to rejoin the Kyoto Protocol and played a key role in shaping the Paris Agreement of 2015. America was also an active member of the global climate negotiation process (Sussman 2015). Domestically, the Obama Administration invested heavily in renewable energy to ensure that America took the lead in the global energy transition. American investment of approximately US$40 billion in renewable energy between 2014 and 2015 demonstrates the seriousness with which the administration took climate change. Trump, however, undermined America's local and international climate involvement, investing in earth-harming hydrocarbon projects and withdrawing the country from international climate commitments.

The foregoing serves as background on the nexus between Trump 2.0 and climate governance. There was no major change in his rhetoric on climate change and the environment during his second presidential campaign. Thus, the apprehension among climate governance stakeholders about his emergence as American President was not misplaced. Following his inauguration, Trump again withdrew the US from the Paris Agreement on 20 January 2025 by an Executive

Order titled Putting America First in International Environmental Agreements (The White House 2025). With this withdrawal, Trump has again abdicated American leadership and agency in global climate governance. This move holds serious implications for the local and international climate advances that have been made. Though it takes a year for withdrawal from the Paris Agreement to be effective, Trump's action means there will be no more commitment from America to the Agreement and its processes.

While Trump has not repealed the Biden Administration's climate law (The Inflation Reduction Act of 2022), he has undermined it significantly by suppressing facilitatory regulations for the effective implementation of the Act. This happens through executive orders, budgetary and regulatory stringency, regulatory rollbacks and legislative efforts. Thus, Trump 2.0 has weakened the most important and celebrated American climate policy, thereby hampering its local and international utility. Hanawalt and Fitch 2025), in an analysis of the first 100 days of Trump 2.0, notes that the US is weakening regulations that are meant to protect America from the financial risks of climate change. This is because the government is weakening institutions developed to ensure that America is financially resilient to climate change, and since Trump has an aversion to climate change and its dynamics, there are co-ordinated efforts to undermine its processes in America. The Corporate Climate Risk Disclosure is also being undermined as government agencies and companies are no longer under pressure to observe environmental codes. For example, the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) and the Federal Acquisition Regulatory Council (FAR Council) have stalled climate risk disclosure, while the White House has issued executive orders that vastly undermine the climate and climate-related regulations of federal and state governments (Hanawalt and Fitch 2025).

Impacts of Trump 2.0 on climate change in Africa

Trump 2.0 has serious implications for climate governance in Africa, as the continent is disproportionately affected by climate change impacts. Africa faces an uncertain future regarding the effects of Trump 2.0 on climate governance on the continent. In the first place, the Trump 2.0 withdrawal from the Paris Agreement is a leadership loss for global climate governance. America's withdrawal from the Paris Agreement denies the world its leadership at a time when co-operation to

reduce emissions is urgently needed. According to Gibson (2025), America's withdrawal from the Paris Agreement does not suggest the failure of the Agreement, but rather, it is an abdication of leadership from America on climate governance. As the world's most powerful and influential nation, its presence in the Paris Agreement helps to galvanise other countries to ensure an effective climate change response, but its withdrawal could discourage other nations from getting involved in mitigation and adaptation because of weak governance or delays in climate commitments (Swain et al. 2025). Thus, America's leadership withdrawal could discourage African countries from developing an effective climate change response.

America has always been an important climate change partner. This is especially true of the Obama Administration. Thus, Trump 2.0 and its anti-climate action connote the loss of a strategic partner for the region in climate governance. While the Trump 2.0 stance on climate change is not directly aimed at Africa, its impact affects the continent because it is one of the main beneficiaries of climate diplomacy. An example of the African-American climate partnership was the 2014 US-African Leaders' Summit in 2014 where climate change was the central discourse (Podesta 2014). While the Biden Administration was criticised for not showing enough commitment to Africa on climate and energy (McPherson-Smith 2022), the impact was not as grave as the Trump 2.0 re-withdrawal from the Paris Agreement. As an African climate and energy partner, the US had many avenues by which it supported the continent. For instance, the US pledged to work with African entrepreneurs to develop clean energy projects and assist farmers to enhance their sustainability in the analysis of climate change as an aspect of US national security (Kodak 2021).

America has been a leading funder of global climate governance. Given the primacy of climate finance as an aspect of climate change response, America's withdrawal and other anti-climate actions constitute a serious threat to Africa's climate governance. The continent is presently in the throes of climate change impacts and most urgently needs all the climate finance it can get to bolster its climate change mitigation, adaptation and resilience building. However, America's withdrawal from the Paris Agreement constitutes a major loss of a climate finance source. The US Department of State, in its progress report on President Biden's Climate Finance Pledge, notes that the US international climate finance for 2022 stood at US$5.8 billion, surpassing the previous year by 286%

(US Department of State 2023). The country's international climate finance was projected to reach US$11 billion by 2024. The implication of this is that Trump 2.0 constitutes a serious financial problem for African and other developing countries. Similarly, the US made the largest expansion of the adaptation fund in 2022, to US$2.3 billion, and projected it to reach US$3 billion by 2024 (US Department of State 2023). Thus, Trump 2.0 has effectively aborted America's climate finance resurgence just as the country was showing greater commitment to international climate finance.

The foregoing, in general, has the potential to abort Africa's climate bandwagoning, thereby possibly stifling the continent's development. As the continent has a serious development deficit—requiring that every possible opportunity for development is explored—global climate governance has always been a viable route to pursue (Olajide 2022a). The vast economic potential in climate change response can trigger African development through the massive investment opportunities in mitigation and adaptation, investment in climate-smart and resilient infrastructure, low-carbon and inclusive growth, clean energy technology transfer and other sundry socioeconomic dividends for the continent (Ndung'u and Azomahou 2023; Were n.d.; UNEP n.d.). Leveraging climate bandwagoning can help to ensure an effective climate change response, so that it mitigates the high cost of addressing climate change impacts that many countries are facing. While climate bandwagoning has always brought maximum climate governance utility to Africa, it currently has to operate within an inconsistent and volatile international environment, as demonstrated by the emergence of Trump 2.0.

Interrogating climate bandwagoning in an inconsistent world

Climate bandwagoning is a relatively new effort in international politics, given the relative recency of global climate governance itself. Its main objective is that actors in the international climate governance process can strategically link their issues to the global climate process. Jinnah (2011) extols the importance and potential of climate bandwagoning by actors in global climate governance. Actors link their issues to the climate process either at inception (formative stage) or during the pendency (operational stage) of the process (Jinnah 2011). Thus, climate bandwagoning offers a whole spectrum of possibilities for actors in strategically

linking their objectives to the climate process. For African countries, the potential of advancing their development by means of the global climate process is the main driver for bandwagoning. Given their unimpressive development trajectory, African climate actors consider the global climate process viable for meeting their development exigencies. To this extent, African countries have always explored the development imperatives through the instrumentalities of multilateral climate negotiations.

African countries have benefited from climate bandwagoning over the years in many areas. The continent has been able to leverage climate finance from the various climate negotiations. For instance, the continent received US$43.7 billion in climate finance in 2021/2022 through climate finance sources, such as the Green Climate Fund (GCF), Global Environment Facility (GEF) and bilateral and multilateral aid (Climate Policy Initiative 2024). The continent has also benefited from the capacity-building and knowledge-sharing portfolio of global climate governance. Given its well-known capacity deficit, Africa has been able to leverage important capacity-building and knowledge-sharing efforts in climate change response in important areas such as renewable energy, food security, rural electrification, subnational climate change response and so on. Thirdly, the continent has become an important bloc in global climate negotiations, speaking with one voice through the African Common Position and the AGN. African countries have outgrown their timid start in global climate governance (Tsega 2016). Last, the continent has benefited from the economic affordances of global climate governance, such as job creation and energy and food security improvement.

While the foregoing sounds impressive for the African continent, it raises critical questions about the challenge of maximising the potential of bandwagoning. It suffices to point out that the so-called affordances of climate bandwagoning are but a weak reflection of what the continent should and could have leveraged from global governance. This is because the global climate process appears to be hesitant to speed up effective climate change responses to the level that can maximally benefit Africa. In terms of climate finance, for example, there is a wide gap between what the continent gets and what it requires for climate bandwagoning to be effective. African countries require about US$3 trillion to achieve their NDCs by 2030, which translates to US$242.4 billion per annum. The paltry US$43.7 billion received in 2022 shows that the climate funders

are not necessarily showing a determined commitment to Africa (African Development Bank 2024). More evidence of climate finance hesitancy is the fact that the US$100 billion commitment made by developed countries in 2009 was only met by 2022. Meanwhile, the continent has suffered costs comparable to that amount and more in the intervening years.

Nothing underscores the unsustainability of climate bandwagoning more than the volatility and inconsistency of the international system within which it is currently operating. The international system is anarchical, despite the rise of normative commitment to the multilateral diplomatic system. The emergence of Trump 2.0 and its anti-climate actions show that it is unwise to base development exigencies on climate bandwagoning. Trump has redefined America's national interests to the exclusion of many of its traditional allies and also Africa. This creates a serious development hiccup for the continent as climate change impacts are worsening and exerting serious human and material costs on society. To this extent, basing development exigencies on climate bandwagoning is a dangerous game that can backfire because of inconsistencies in the international context within which it operates, as shown over the past few years. While the Trump 2.0 stance on climate and the withdrawal from the Paris Agreement are not targeted directly at Africa, their impacts on the continent are serious. This is because America is a major climate finance player and a viable leader, if committed to the ideals of global climate governance. Hence, climate bandwagoning is not necessarily safe for African countries despite its potential to engender development.

The foregoing challenges the relevance of climate bandwagoning, as the world recedes into uncertainty in the wake of Trump 2.0 and other similar developments in the international system. While bandwagoning offers advantages, the fact that it can be eroded by the volatility of the international system shows that African countries need to rethink the climate governance-development nexus. This is because bandwagoning reeks of dependency, which means that development ideation and funding are externally sourced. Thus, it is anti-development to base development goals on a slow and volatile platform, as the general hesitant behaviour of climate financiers and Trump 2.0 has proved.

Conclusion

Africa's climate bandwagoning is in dire straits because of the Trump 2.0 change in climate dynamics. With the US having a rethink of its national interest under the new Administration and challenging extant norms of international politics by jettisoning alliances, chiefly the withdrawal from the Paris Agreement, the logic and relevance of climate bandwagoning by African states becomes questionable. As an international climate bloc that has grown in influence over the years, Africa has used its one voice to push for negotiations that could trigger its development within the UNFCCC and other multilateral climate structures. However, the volatility of the international system is likely to affect its climate governance adversely. With all the countries on the continent depositing their NDCs with the UNFCCC and looking to leverage international support, which is mostly conditional, Trump 2.0 is a direct attack on the continent, even though the withdrawal was not aimed at the continent.

This brings the continent to a whole new juncture where it needs to reassess its climate bandwagoning and chart a new course going forward. As the Trump 2.0 realism asserts the America First rhetoric in climate governance, causing an inward-looking, anti-climate change stance, there is a need for African countries to reconfigure their climate change-development nexus by adopting alternative models to resilience building, which can foster regional innovation and development from within. This will help to attenuate the effects of the volatility caused by Trump 2.0 and future climate-sceptical developments in the international climate process.

While climate bandwagoning is not bad in itself, African countries do not have control over how other countries behave in the international system. Hence, it is always at risk of being affected by the anarchical and volatile nature of the international system. To this extent, the relevance of climate bandwagoning is questionable, not only because of international system volatility, but also because it is slow and does not yield quick wins for the bandwagoning nations. Given that climate change impacts are on a worsening trajectory, the slow pace of climate negotiations vis-à-vis the rising costs of the business-as-usual climate stance shows a critical and unhealthy mismatch. Hence, African countries must consider alternative models of the climate governance-development nexus. Given the flux in social construction in the international system, Africa needs to

consider new partners and to bolster regional climate diplomacy and governance tools for better development performance. While this position allows African countries to continue pursuing the climate agenda based on extant norms such as the CBDR, reframing its utility will help advance the continent's development. Most importantly, it will also shield the continent from the international volatility demonstrated by Trump 2.0.

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CHAPTER 13

Disengaging From Global Health: The Effect of the United States' Withdrawal from the World Health Organisation

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Introduction

In the past two years, health systems globally have been recovering from the COVID-19 pandemic's profound impacts. A significant setback to this recovery has emerged due to the actions of the United States (US). On 20 January 2025, the second day of Trump's inauguration, he issued an executive order stating that the US would withdraw from the World Health Organisation (WHO) and paused the future transfer of US funding to the organisation (The White House 2025a). On the same day, another executive order halted the operations of the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) for a period of 90 days (The White House 2025b). Out of the 44 executive orders and broader foreign policy changes enacted, these two orders are set to have the most severe repercussions for global South states, specifically Africa. However, the withdrawal from the WHO is not unexpected, given that the US initiated a similar withdrawal in 2020.

The actions of the US have provoked strong reactions within the international community, and the long-term effects are yet to be assessed, although a few may already be envisaged. For example, political analysts argue that the departure of a key actor such as the US from the WHO could weaken global response co-ordination and outbreak preparedness (Ogieuhi et al. 2025). Furthermore, due to USAID cutbacks, it is predicted that the US will ultimately suffer because global disease control will weaken, allowing diseases to cross borders (Ogieuhi et al. 2025). On the other hand, a unique opportunity is presented within global health governance for regional co-operation among developing states and non-

state actors to address the gap left by the retreat of the US from global health leadership. US policy decisions are reshaping and impacting the interests of states and non-state actors in global health. In light of this, this article has set out to analyse the effect of the US decisions.

The article is divided into four sections. The first section briefly outlines the relationship between the WHO and the US by setting out projects they have embarked upon. The second section discusses the effect of the US withdrawal in 2020 on global health. The third section examines the 2025 withdrawal and its potential consequences. The fourth section discusses the effects of the cutback of USAID on African states.

The US relationship with the WHO

Since the founding of the WHO in 1948, the US has been a member of the organisation. It became a member through the passing of a joint resolution by both houses of Congress and, since then, successive administrations have supported this resolution (Gostin et al. 2020). While the WHO's constitution sets out how states may become members of the organisation, it does not have a provision for membership withdrawal (World Health Organisation 1948). Recognising this oversight, the US negotiated its own terms for withdrawal, which other member states accepted. In fact, in 1948, the House and the Senate had included a specific provision in the joint resolution stating that:

> "In adopting this joint resolution, the Congress does so with the understanding that, in the absence of any provision in the World Health Organisation Constitution for withdrawal from the Organisation, the United States reserves its right to withdraw from the Organisation on a one-year notice: *Provided, however*, That the financial obligations of the United States to the Organisation shall be met in full for the Organisation's current fiscal year" (Salaam-Blythe et al. 2020; S.J. Res 98, 1948).

This clause therefore allows the US to withdraw from the WHO despite the absence of a formal withdrawal mechanism in the WHO's constitution. Even though the US criticised the WHO's governance and effectiveness at times, it was both a principal funder and a major driver of its agenda (Yazdi-Feyzabadi et al.

2025). Over the last decade, US contributions to the WHO have ranged between US$163 million and US$816 million annually (Gostin et al. 2020). Aside from its financial contributions, the US has actively participated in many WHO initiatives and projects. Twenty-one WHO collaborating centres are located at the US Centres for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and three at the National Institute of Health, which is focused on US priorities, including polio eradication, cancer prevention and global health security (Gostin et al. 2020). These collaborative efforts illustrate the partnership which has existed between the WHO and the US in advancing public health initiatives and enhancing global preparedness for infectious diseases.

The US has been an active participant in WHO governance bodies, such as the Executive Board and the World Health Assembly, which is the WHO's decision-making body (Salaam-Blythe et al. 2020). Recent legislative initiatives of the WHO include amendments to the International Health Regulations (IHR), concluded in 2024, and the adoption of a Pandemic Agreement on 20 May 2025. These two initiatives are similar in certain aspects and are set to change the global health law landscape. The IHR outlines the rights and responsibilities of the WHO and the US in handling international public health events and global health emergencies (Michaud, Rouw and Kates 2024). On the other hand, the US withdrawal from WHO membership in January 2025 ceased its role in the Pandemic Agreement negotiations (World Health Organisation 2025). The Pandemic Agreement, which aims to ensure equity in both access to the tools needed to prevent pandemics as well as access to general health care for all people, will shape health care over the next century (Carlson, Becker and Poisot 2025). Both instruments fall under the governance of the WHO, and require ongoing engagement with the US for their successful implementation.

The US has also provided technical support to the WHO through a variety of activities and partnerships. This includes experts from the US government participating in advisory panels and groups convened by the WHO, as well as supporting research and reference laboratories via WHO collaborating centres (Global Health Policy 2026). A number of US government representatives have served as liaisons at WHO headquarters and regional offices (Global Health Policy 2026). All of these examples illustrate the partnership between the WHO and the US. It incorporates financial support, governance activities, technical support and partnering activities.

The US founded USAID to enhance global health and work in partnership with the WHO. USAID was established in 1961 by President John F. Kennedy to extend development assistance to states around the world (Office of Inspector General n.d.). USAID is one of the major donors of WHO-led programmes and initiatives, as the agency and the WHO both share the goal of improving global health. African states benefit from USAID as they, among other things, receive funding to support vaccination campaigns (Ogieuhi et al. 2025). The US has spearheaded the fight in West Africa against Ebola outbreaks, has made substantial contributions to HIV/AIDS treatment and prevention through the President's Emergency Plan for Aids Relief (PEPFAR) and has played a crucial role in eradicating polio (Ogieuhi et al. 2025). This illustrates that the WHO and the US relationship extends beyond US borders in supporting health initiatives across regions.

The effect of the 2020 US withdrawal from the WHO

At the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, the US took a historic decision to withdraw from the WHO despite its long-standing relationship and shared initiatives. On 29 May 2020, President Trump announced that the US would sever its relationship with the WHO and redirect funds to US global health priorities (Gostin et al. 2020; Ortagus 2020). This decision was preceded by a series of actions and ultimatums, such as the ultimatum issued to WHO Director-General Ghebreysus, requiring substantive improvements to the organisation within thirty days (Mahase 2020). Thereafter, the US administration officially notified the UN Secretary-General on 6 July 2020 of its intention to withdraw from WHO membership (Gostin et al. 2020). The decision to withdraw was taken during a crucial time, with the COVID-19 virus at its peak and research surrounding it still in development.

Among the reasons given for the US withdrawal from the WHO was the organisation's mishandling of the COVID-19 pandemic and other global health crises (Salaam-Blythe et al. 2020). The WHO's failure to adopt urgently needed reforms and its inability to demonstrate independence from the inappropriate political influence of member states were also contributing factors (Salaam-Blythe et al. 2020). The US blamed China for the COVID-19 pandemic and accused the WHO of favouring that country. President Trump furthermore

accused China of withholding critical information about the COVID-19 virus, which, if true, would have prevented the WHO from ensuring a timely and co-ordinated global response (Ogieuhi et al. 2025). The US also continuously suggested that the name used to refer to the pandemic should reflect the origin of the disease (Emeziem 2021). These arguments impeded international efforts to respond to the pandemic.

It must be emphasised that, regardless of states' perceived grievances and strategic interests, transnational crises such as pandemics should be prioritised, given the devastation they cause when responses are compromised (Emeziem 2021). Therefore, diplomatic disputes have far-reaching consequences as they divert the WHO's attention away from ongoing global health crises. Similarly, when funding is withheld or compromised due to diplomatic spats between states, the WHO's capacity to prevent pandemics is diminished (Emeziem 2021). The Trump administration criticised China's low contribution of US$42 million as inadequate, even though its own 'modest' twenty per cent contribution to the WHO budget represents just a fraction of its approximate 25% share of global gross domestic product (Yazdi-Feyzabadi et al. 2025). The US withdrawal due to its issues with China weakened multilateralism within the international community and undermined trust in international organisations. In response, China stated that the US was spreading a 'political virus' at a time when the world required solidarity and co-operation as opposed to confrontation (Aljazeera 2020).

Reports about the failure of the WHO to respond urgently to the COVID-19 pandemic proved to be baseless. As early as 23 January 2020, the WHO had warned nations to get ready for the arrival of the virus (Yarney and Titanji 2025). In the same month, the WHO and China agreed that experts from the organisation would visit China to guide global response efforts related to the outbreak (WHO 2020). A Public Health Emergency of International Concern (PHEIC) was declared by the WHO's Director-General on 30 January 2020, which is one of the most urgent calls to action the WHO can issue (Yarney and Titanji 2025). The WHO's response was timely, and they collaborated with China to assist the global community. Despite these efforts, Trump ignored the warnings, and his delayed actions consequently cost countless American lives (Yarney and Titanji 2025). The administration also interfered with the CDC's efforts to hold media briefings on the COVID-19 virus that would have provided necessary science-based information to the public (Union of Concerned Scientists 2022). The

Trump administration's disregard for the advice provided by the WHO and the CDC had a significant impact on the US pandemic outcome.

When the Biden administration took office on 20 January 2021, one of its first decisions was to overturn the withdrawal from the WHO (Ravelo 2021). Biden believed that the WHO played a crucial role in combatting the pandemic as well as countless other threats to global health and health security (Ravelo 2021). According to Biden (BBC 2020), Trump's withdrawal had undermined international efforts to deal with the pandemic, with devastating consequences for developing states. Biden reaffirmed US commitment to global health collaboration and reestablished its major role within the WHO. In contrast to the Trump administration, the Biden administration championed multilateralism and highlighted its role in global health (Jefford 2024). The withdrawal by Trump was driven by political and strategic considerations, framed as a response to perceived organisational failures and geopolitical tensions.

The effects and potential implications of the US withdrawal from the WHO in 2025

In 2024, Trump won the US elections, and in 2025 he assumed office. Immediately upon President Trump's inauguration, a number of executive orders were handed down. The executive orders came as a surprise to many, even though the Trump campaign had been based on the slogan 'Make America Great Again'. A thread that runs through the international dimensions of the America First agenda is that multilateral initiatives are explicitly deprioritised in favour of bilateral and unilateral initiatives led by the US (Usman 2025). As far as global health is concerned, the order withdrawing the US from the WHO and the freezing of USAID funding are the most significant (The White House 2025a; The White House 2025b).

Numerous reasons were given for withdrawing from the WHO, such as the organisation not aligning with the America First policy. Many of the reasons put forth in 2020 were again reiterated. During his 2024 election campaign, Trump called the WHO 'nothing more than a corrupt globalist scam which disgracefully covered the tracks of the Chinese Communist Party' (Edwards 2025). While the effects of this decision are still unfolding, the negative effects of the withdrawal far outweigh any positive effects for the US. Scholars believe that severing the long-

standing ties and ending the scientific collaboration between the US and the WHO, while also cutting future financial support to the WHO, will have catastrophic effects both domestically and internationally (Yarney and Titanji 2025). The decision underscores not only a shift in US foreign policy but also highlights the fragility of international organisations that are dependent on their more powerful members for consistent, collaborative support (Yazdi-Feyzabadi et al. 2025). Furthermore, it has been predicted that this action by the US suggests the likelihood of their formally leaving the global agency (Faguym and Hughes 2025).

The executive order mandates the withdrawal of WHO personnel from the US. Furthermore, US government personnel or contractors working in any capacity with the WHO have been recalled and reassigned (The White House 2025a). The order also authorises the identification of credible and transparent US and international partners who can assume the necessary activities previously undertaken by the WHO (The White House 2025a). The withdrawal of US personnel will likely disrupt the ongoing initiatives of the WHO. Disruptions can already be seen as programme divisions under the WHO will be reduced from ten to only four, with health systems emerging as one key pillar (Fletcher 2025). The WHO has moreover decided to group disease control departments and health teams, such as health promotion and environment, climate and health, under one division (Fletcher 2025).

The decision to withdraw has had a direct impact on the global health sphere and further impacts are predicted. Firstly, the US is by far the WHO's largest donor and its loss will severely hamper the organisation's activities and operations (Yarney and Titanji 2025). This could decisively shape the direction of global health programmes and related policy debates (Usman 2025). It remains to be seen which other major donors, particularly those in Europe and China, will step into the role vacated by the US. Member states, such as Germany, China, Qatar and Switzerland, along with various non-governmental organisations have made additional contributions to offset US funding losses (World Health Organisation 2025). Secondly, the Trump administration has directed the CDC to cease all communications with the WHO, with no clear indication of whether or when communications will resume (Yarney and Titanji 2025). This has caused an abrupt termination of critical data and expertise exchange (Yarney and Titanji 2025). Data exchange was of crucial importance in combatting the COVID-19 pandemic, but is now being disregarded by the US.

There has been a call for the US withdrawal from the WHO to be declared a PHEIC, as defined in the IHR. A PHEIC is defined as 'an extraordinary event which is determined, as provided in these Regulations, to constitute a public health risk to other states through the international spread of disease and to potentially require a coordinated *[sic]* response" (World Health Organisation 2005). Until now, only disease outbreaks have been classified as a PHEIC; however, given the unpredictable actions of the US, it is necessary to interpret the IHR in a broader context. Using the above definition, three questions will determine whether the US decision to withdraw constitutes a PHEIC. The first question is: is the event serious, sudden, unusual or unexpected? (Bosman 2025). By virtue of the executive order being unprecedented and having a significant impact, the event can indeed be classified as unusual and extraordinary (Bosman 2025). Since the WHO's founding, no member state has ever fully withdrawn (Lakoff 2020).

The second question is: does the event carry implications for public health beyond the affected state's national border? (Bosman 2025). This question can undoubtedly be answered in the positive, as the event has significant implications for many states. Argentina declared its withdrawal from the WHO mere hours after the US, which indicates that the negative stance towards the WHO has started to spread internationally (Aljazeera 2025). President Milei has a close relationship with Trump and far-right administrations currently govern both states (Aljazeera 2025). Both leaders have criticised the WHO for its handling of the COVID-19 pandemic, and Milei's administration has accused the WHO of heightening Argentina's economic crisis (Aljazeera 2025). While Argentina's withdrawal may not be viewed as significant compared to the US withdrawal, it showcases the influence it has in undermining multilateral organisations. Furthermore, a cut to the WHO's programmes for the prevention and control of infectious diseases will have an impact on all states (Bosman 2025).

The third question is: does this event require immediate international action through a co-ordinated response? (Bosman 2025). For essential public health programmes to remain operational, member states, non-governmental organisations and other stakeholders will need to support the WHO in finding ways to replace the funding and perhaps even the governance of the US (Bosman 2025). As all three of these questions can be answered in the affirmative, the US decision to withdraw can indeed be classified as a PHEIC. Giving this decision the status of a PHEIC compels the international community to urgently address

the matter. It should be noted that the US is also expected to be worse off without its membership in the WHO. Without WHO membership, the US will lose access to critical outbreak data and WHO guidance on emerging health threats (Yarney and Titanji 2025). When an outbreak occurs overseas, CDC experts will not be included in global deliberations on containment and response strategies (Yarney and Titanji 2025). The CDC would in such a situation be unable to provide timely, evidence-based guidance to US health care professionals and the public (Yarney and Titanji 2025).

Apart from the withdrawal, global health also took another major blow when the US paused USAID. The executive order states that:

> "The foreign aid industry and bureaucracy are not aligned with American interests … They serve to destabilise world peace by promoting ideas in foreign countries that are directly inverse to harmonious and stable relations internal to and among countries" (The White House 2025b).

The order further states that 'US foreign assistance shall not be disbursed in a manner that does not fully align with the foreign policy of the US president' (The White House 2025b). Department and agency heads with responsibility for US foreign development assistance programmes were ordered to immediately pause new obligations and disbursements of development assistance funds to foreign countries and non-governmental organisations, international organisations and contractors (The White House 2025b). The programmes were placed under pending reviews for programmatic efficiency and consistency with US foreign policy, to be conducted within 90 days of the order (The White House 2025b). This order came as a shock to many developing states, specifically in Africa, and numerous organisations were immediately shut down.

Eight days after this order, and after witnessing its effects, the US Secretary of State granted an emergency waiver to resume USAID under specific conditions. He stated that "implementers of existing life-saving humanitarian assistance programmes should continue or resume work if they have stopped", subject to the directions outlined in the waiver (Rubio 2025). Resuming the implementers were temporary and limited to life-saving humanitarian assistance programmes and no new contracts were allowed to be entered into (Rubio 2025). While this was

seen as resuming necessary support to many, it came with stringent requirements. Life-saving humanitarian assistance was narrowly defined in the waiver as "core life-saving medicine, medical services, food, shelter and subsistence assistance …"(Rubio 2025). Activities that involved abortion-related services, family planning programmes, conferences and initiatives relating to gender, transgender surgeries, or other non-life-saving assistance were excluded from the waiver (Rubio 2025).

Due to its strict requirements, the waiver failed to provide the excepted assistance for the problems caused by the executive order. For example, health interventions, agriculture and food programmes have been affected by the immediate stoppage of ongoing projects (Usman 2025). Numerous non-governmental organisations and contractors face the prospect of job cuts (Usman 2025). Following the 90-day review, USAID will be restructured, reallocated and potentially reduced in the long term (Usman 2025). Despite ongoing lawsuits, the review never materialised, and the Trump administration continued defunding programmes and cutting jobs. In the 2026 budget proposal, there is a request that nearly 85% be cut from the US foreign aid budget (Miolene 2025).

By March 2025, a mere 1000 USAID programmes remained, and they all operate under the US State Department (Miolene 2025). Going forward, the administration will discontinue sexual rights and reproductive health and gender equality initiatives, and instead focus on 'women, children and families' and 'protecting life through initiatives launched during Trump's first term (Usman 2025). A revival of the Journey to Self-Reliance framework, also introduced in Trump's first term, will channel more aid funding towards local organisations instead of the complex of international non-governmental organisations and consultancies (Usman 2025). Furthermore, Trump's new foreign aid agenda will align closely with America First priorities by leveraging aid dollars to support America's security and private sector abroad (Usman 2025).

It has been argued that Trump's executive orders may in fact assist the international community. Some argue that this could prompt further reforms of the WHO, allowing it to better serve public health needs around the globe (Faguym and Hughes 2025). Of course, the US remains liable for its financial commitment to the WHO until the end of its membership in 2026. However, WHO officials have conceded that this commitment is unlikely to be fulfilled, as the US also failed to pay its dues for 2024 (Fletcher 2025). It is interesting to note that, despite Trump's unpredictable actions, he is reportedly open to reversing his decision

if the WHO undergoes reforms and appoints an American as its next Director-General (Yarney and Titanji 2025). Moreover, the US may decide to rejoin the WHO since they are now excluded from research information about diseases. They might also decide to rejoin if a pandemic should break out, severely affecting the country.

The impact of US executive orders and policies on Africa

Africa has been one of the continents most dependent on foreign aid in the post-colonial period. One of the main factors behind Africa's relative underdevelopment is its high disease burden (Stoddard 2025). The continent's reliance on external assistance is underscored in the estimated US$1.2 trillion in aid that it has received over the last 30 years (Galloway 2024). Recent US policy decisions, particularly the executive order to pause USAID, have had significant effects on African states. The dismantling of USAID overnight by the Trump administration has resulted in 90% of its 6300 projects being terminated, which is described as a form of 'geopolitical vandalism' (Kyobutungi, Okereke and Abimbola 2025). Africa's vulnerability to external influences and the urgent need for sustainable development strategies are highlighted by the devastating effects of USAID withdrawal and these abrupt policy shifts.

USAID has been particularly relevant in the fight against HIV/AIDS, malaria and tuberculosis in Africa. The response to the executive orders and policy changes of the US varies among African states, depending on their particular concerns. First, there is outrage about the resultant harm to millions of Africans because of the abrupt withdrawal of treatment (Kyobutungi, Okereke and Abimbola 2025). Second, the sudden job losses at USAID and its partners globally have caused great stress (Kyobutungi Okereke and Abimbola 2025). Third, there is general disbelief about the willingness of the US to give up its soft power, as foreign development aid has always been a tool to advance US interests (Kyobutungi Okereke and Abimbola 2025). While the responses of African states differ, their concern about harm to their population through disease spreading and loss of jobs is similar. Among the immediate effects of USAID terminations are the loss of data collectors at public health facilities, affecting monitoring and evaluation, minimal HIV screening for children and limited support for advanced HIV disease services, limited tuberculosis screening and testing and

the closure of youth and family care clubs, drop-in centres, clinics and mobile outreach initiatives (Metelerkamp 2025). The withdrawal of USAID significantly hinders ongoing public health initiatives and threatens the progress already made in disease control across Africa. As data systems that track programmes globally have been closed, the full effects will take time to grasp (Kyobutungi, Okereke and Abimbola 2025).

US contributions have driven key global health efforts within Africa, of which one of the most notable examples is PEPFAR. Designed to achieve HIV epidemic control while significantly strengthening global health security, PEPFAR was launched in 2003 under the Bush administration to support over 50 countries in the world, including over 25 countries in Africa (Holtzman et al. 2022). Aggressive, high-yield HIV case-finding strategies focusing on index testing and partner notification services in health facilities and the community are a part of PEPFAR's approach to epidemic control (Holtzman et al. 2022). It is PEPFAR's goal to help countries reach HIV epidemic control while ensuring the safety of all its beneficiaries and support staff (Holtzman et al. 2022). PEPFAR exemplifies the pivotal role of US contributions in advancing global health initiatives and meaningful progress in HIV epidemic control across Africa. The WHO predicted that Haiti, Kenya, Lesotho, South Sudan, Burkina Faso, Mali, Nigeria and Ukraine could exhaust their supply of HIV treatments in the coming months (Sunny and Santhosh 2025). Emergency stop-gap measures from the WHO, the Global Fund and European donors were therefore taken in August 2025 (Abdool 2025; Global Fund 2025). While these measures have averted immediate stockouts, the risk of exhausting supplies remains. WHO Director-General Ghebreyesus states that 'The disruptions to HIV programs *[sic]* could undo 20 years of progress' and that this could lead to over ten million additional HIV cases and three million HIV-related deaths (Sunny and Santhosh 2025).

PEPFAR funding was not designed to be permanent nor to take over national responsibilities despite its critical role in the successful implementation of HIV programmes (Sam-Agudu and Koum-Besson 2024). Through PEPFAR, countries were able to fill in specific gaps in national response plans and work towards reducing their funding fragility over time by increasing domestic contributions through diversifying funding and strategically investing scarce resources (Sam-Agudu and Koum-Besson 2024). While PEPFAR supported HIV programmes, its goal was to enable states to gradually reduce dependence on external aid by

strengthening domestic resources and capacities. This goal was still underway when Trump's executive order was handed down. The subsequent waiver granted by Secretary of State Marco Rubio granted an exemption to PEPFAR (Rubio 2025). Activities like the distribution of antiretroviral medications and other essential HIV services were allowed to resume under the waiver, which provided temporary relief (US Mission South Africa 2025).

The US played a significant role in establishing, one of the major health organisations on the African continent, the Africa Centres for Disease Control (Africa CDC) in 2016, in conjunction with the African Union Commission (Tieku 2021). During the COVID-19 epidemic, the Africa CDC emerged as an important pandemic co-ordinating body, providing evidence-based information and institutional innovations that helped African governments respond quickly and effectively (Tieku 2021). Africa CDC has been leading health initiatives on the continent and is an important norm entrepreneur. Due to the USAID funding freeze, Africa CDC has a shortfall of around US$200 million for its fight against M-pox, according to Director-General Kaseya (Rigby 2025). Africa CDC has, however, been proactive in anticipating this decision since April 2023 (Africa CDC 2025). In its Strategic Plan for 2023—2027, local manufacturing became a major focus, contributing to raising funding, strengthening Africa's capacity to produce its own medical countermeasures and reducing dependency on external aid (Africa CDC 2025). Africa CDC spearheaded a series of high-level engagements and technical consultations to sensitise policymakers and galvanise domestic and private sector support in response to the continent's deteriorating external funding landscape (Africa CDC 2025).

Foreign aid has both positive and negative effects on the receiving state. Aid reinforces the negative stereotypes of Africa as a continent of 'beggars' and being a 'helpless child', which implies that it lacks any sense of self-determination and will continue to rely on foreign assistance (Akonor 2008). Africa needs to disprove this stereotype with sustainable progress by empowering local leadership and fostering self-reliance development strategies. Reliance rather than independence is often encouraged by donor agencies and charity-led international aid-driven approaches to healthcare (Ogieuhi et al. 2025). Traditional aid mechanisms often offer temporary relief while undermining local efforts by diverting resources and establishing alternative institutions that harm local health systems (Ogieuhi et al. 2025). Further, African health diplomacy is shaped by donors' influence, since

external players dictate the recipient nation's healthcare priorities in a manner that may not align with local needs (Ogieuhi et al. 2025). This is what the US is trying to achieve with the withdrawal of USAID, as they want recipient states to align with their policies.

Foreign aid has generated significant benefits across Africa and has created various opportunities for Africa's development. Initiatives such as PEPFAR have helped to unlock the continent's economic potential while saving lives (Stoddard 2025). The US assisted African states during the COVID-19 pandemic and supported their call to waive intellectual property rights to access COVID-19 vaccines (Jecker and Atuire 2021). The Jack Ma Foundation and Alibaba Foundation donated over 1.5 million laboratory diagnostic test kits and more than 100 tons of COVID-19 prevention and control materials to African Union member states (Ogieuhi et al. 2025). Without international health assistance during the COVID-19 pandemic, Africa would have faced many difficulties in combatting the pandemic.

While the repercussions of Trump 2.0 policies create challenges for Africa, they also present a crucial opportunity for the continent (Kyobutungi, Okereke and Abimbola 2025). In conjunction with civil society in Africa, African governments must insist on partnerships on their own terms and reject processes that undermine the system (Kyobutungi, Okereke and Abimbola 2025). As Akonor (2008) states, 'Aid to Africa is a band-aid, not a long-term solution' and the creation of true, systemic change is the responsibility of African leaders. Given that Africa is one of the most resource-rich continents on earth, it is unfortunate that dependence on foreign aid has compromised the sovereignty of African states (Akonor 2008). By asserting greater control over their resources and partnerships, African states can transform these challenges into opportunities for sustainable development and strengthened sovereignty.

Conclusion

In this article, the US decision to disengage from global health governance by withdrawing from the WHO and freezing USAID was analysed. States and non-state actors have been affected by these policy decisions of the US in its quest to Make America Great Again. The previous relationship between the US and the WHO achieved great success in global health, characterised by longstanding

commitments, substantial funding, active governance participation and technical collaboration. The decision to withdraw the US from the WHO in 2020 diverted the WHO's attention away from the COVID-19 virus, as it was occupied with satisfying the demands of the US. China was severely criticised by the US, and the WHO was often caught in the middle of diplomatic spats. Many of the reasons provided by the US for its withdrawal proved to be groundless. The decision was overturned by the Biden administration before the withdrawal took effect.

The decision to withdraw from the WHO in 2025 has had severe consequences for global health governance. This time round, the reasons for withdrawing from the WHO are mainly based on prioritising American needs and supporting their own initiatives. US foreign policy has shifted towards unilateralism which could weaken the collective efforts needed to address future health crises. A viable option to provide relief and attempt to resolve global health disruptions is to declare the decisions of the US a PHEIC. This step would induce states to find a timeous solution to the situation. Once regarded as a pillar of global health support, USAID has undergone a marked shift in priorities (Mansour et al. 2025). The waiver for certain USAID projects has provided temporary relief but has failed to mitigate the devastating effects of the initial executive order.

African states have been hardest hit by the US executive orders and resultant policy changes as they rely heavily on external aid for their health systems. Disruptions to USAID has caused job losses, shut down facilities, delayed medicine distribution and halted screening and monitoring of diseases. PEPFAR has been operative in Africa for more than two decades and has achieved success in managing the HIV epidemic. The executive order paused operations of PEPFAR which has caused irreversible damage and loss of trust in the initiative. While aid has driven significant health and development achievements, it has also perpetuated dependency and limited sovereignty. By harnessing the continent's collective resources for the benefit of its people, Africa can break free from its aid dependency (Akonor 2008). If managed wisely, Africa's resource wealth can serve as a foundation for sustainable growth and development. Africa will then be able to build strong health systems that only rely on internal aid, which will minimise the risk of a future disruptions, such as the withdrawal of USAID. As stated by Kesaya, head of Africa CDC:

"The U.S. and others don't have to forget the lessons of COVID. When

> you don't open your eyes to something ongoing in Africa, we can have a mutation of the virus that will become a pandemic and affect all of us" (Rigby 2025).

It is possible to view the US actions with a glimmer of hope, as they might force the WHO to undergo reform to better suit the needs of the international community. These US actions have prompted a prioritisation, realignment, new structure, and workforce reduction, which are changes the WHO now views as an opportunity to transform the organisation. (Fletcher 2025). The WHO budget gaps remain large, but it is not as dire as feared due to the additional contributions by member states since May 2025 (WHO 2025c). Other major role players such as European states, China and non-governmental organisations are presented with the opportunity to take over the US role within the WHO. There is no longer any doubt that the 'shock effect' promised by President Trump will reshape global health governance. It is now only a question of how profound this reshaping will be (Mansour et al. 2025).

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SECTION VI: TARIFFS AND ECONOMIC QUESTIONS

CHAPTER 14

Trump 2.0's Tariff Policy and Its Effect on the US Domestic Economy

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Introduction

Global macroeconomic management principally hinges on monetary and fiscal policy. The effectiveness of these policies, and their resultant implications for economic variables such as prices, employment and profits, largely depend on the prevailing economic conditions. This study is inspired by the fiscal policies implemented in response to the tariff measures of the Trump administration. The central question is how tariff-induced restrictions on foreign goods will affect economic conditions, such as employment, inflation, foreign direct investment, income inequality and exports. According to Clausing and Obstfeld (2024), Trump aims to use the revenue from tariffs to cut income tax, with the projected US$780 billion from tariffs designated for tax reductions on income and investment by the same amount. Clearly, this was meant to lift some tax burdens from corporations and individuals. However, Clausing and Obstfeld (2024) show that only the rich will benefit from this policy, while the bottom 80% of the population, based on income distribution, will lose.

For example, how will Trump's planned income tax adjustments, based on the proceeds from higher tariffs, impact US inflation rates, given the retaliatory stances of countries like China, and the high landing costs of raw materials?

According to Gallo (2015), determining the appropriate price for a product or service is a herculean task. Also, one of the critical factors in pricing is clarity about price elasticity. The modelled tariff proposals by the Budget Lab raise between $1.2 to $4.4 trillion over a decade given conventional assumption. Retaliation by other countries against US tariffs reduces US tariff revenue in relation to the same proposal in a situation of no-retaliation by 12-26%. The Budget Lab computed that the tariffs at first increase the level of consumer prices by 1.2 to 5.1% (Budget Lab 2024). There is a likelihood that Trump's tariff policies worsen the wider capitalist crisis (Siddiqui 2025), accelerating inflation and amplifying trade wars – disproportionately affecting the Global South (Siddiqui 2023).

Accordingly, this chapter examines the implications of Trump's tariffs on the US economy. However, there is inadequate data to quantify the macroeconomic effects of recent United States tariff policy announcements. Moreover, Trump's tariffs and their economic implications are still unfolding. Consequently, this study provides some insights into the potential implications of this policy based on historical data over the last three decades (1991— 2023). The next section examines the arguments around the economic implications of tariff policy.

Drivers and implications of tariff policy

In the view of the US administration, the tariffs aim at multiple goals such as stimulating re-industrialisation, generating revenue, and reducing trade deficits with several trading partners (Alschner et al. 2025). Current studies in economics have extensively examined tariffs as tools for welfare redistribution, trade protection, and political economy, with particular emphasis on the U.S.-China trade conflict from 2018 to 2020 (Jagwani 2026).

A study by Hong, (2025) considered a range of trade theories such as Mercantilism and its Critique, the Theory of Comparative Advantage, Heckscher-Ohlin Theory. Also documented are the prisoner's dilemma, Strategic Interactions in Trade Negotiations, and terms–of–trade theory. The author observed some major theoretical insights, among which is that trade-offs exist between short- and long-term effects, while tariffs only potentially provide transient relief to certain industries but cause long-term costs that exceed short-term advantages (Krugman et al. 2018). Based on the theoretical and empirical considerations presented in Hong, (2025), the author inferred that tariffs are mostly ineffective

in realising policy goals. There have not been significant reductions in trade deficits, generating considerable costs on downstream industries and consumers, resulting in more job losses than gains, and causing retaliatory measures which adversely affected export-oriented sectors (Fajgelbaum et al. 2020; Flaaen and Pierce 2019; Morgan et al. 2022).

For instance, based on the infant industry argument, the unfettered entry of an established international firm into a country could make it difficult for a local start-up firm to prosper (Johnson 2013; Saure 2007). Strategic trade theory shows that in some oligopolistic, high-tech and defence-related industries, tariffs are useful in supporting local firms against foreign competitors, mostly in instances of significant learning-by-doing and economies of scale (Brander Spencer 1985; Das 2021). These and other arguments provide a sound basis for the application of tariffs, although little attention is paid to their sustainability, given the possible impact they may have on other macroeconomic variables and consequently the welfare of households.

In considering the evolution of economic theory and trade, scholars observe that the impacts of tariffs are not immediately observable and that their effects on economic variables are only revealed over time (Pal 2025; Lavergne 2014; O'Rourke 2000). Tariffs influence GDP and price levels, as, according to economic theory, they decrease trade volumes and drive up domestic prices (Krugman and Obstfeld 2009). Blanchard (2017) argues that tariffs might affect output and aggregate demand, but stresses that these impacts do not occur instantaneously. It was observed that reciprocal retaliation causes net welfare losses for the United States' economy (Ignatenko et al. 2025). Therefore, it is important for the United States to have an exploratory overview of the behaviour and performance of its macroeconomic variables over time in order to assess the pros and cons of its tariff policy.

Descriptive evaluation of historical data

The attempt to examine the previous behavioural pattern of major macroeconomic variables resulted in the collection of data sets which spanned 1991 to 2023. The macroeconomic variables include gross domestic product per capita (lgdppc) and patent application, resident (lpar), which were translated by a logarithmic transformation. Other variables in their base form include import value of goods

(impv), export value of goods (expv), inflation (inf), foreign direct investment (fdi), unemployment rate (une) and inequality as measured by Gini coefficient. All the variables were obtained from the World Development Indicators. However, the missing data points on tariff rates for 1994 and 2023 were obtained through interpolation. Also, the inequality measured by the Gini coefficient had a missing data point for 2023, which was obtained through interpolation. Moreover, patent applications, residents, import values and export values have missing data points for 2023 and were obtained through interpolation.

Table 1 shows that the logarithm of gross domestic product per capita is negatively skewed over the data span, with a value of -0.107, which is approximately normally distributed. The negative skewness is an indication of possible weak productivity in the United States over the periods under consideration. Also, import value is approximately normally distributed with a skewness of 0.403. Export value has a skewness of 0.5, foreign direct investment has a skewness of 0.64, the unemployment rate has a skewness of 0.778 and inequality has a skewness of -0.514. The negative skewness of inequality is an indication of relatively fewer incidences of unequal income distribution in the United States as a developed economy. The positive skewness of export value also shows that the country has been making giant strides in domestic production and the export of goods. However, import value, characterised by positive skewness, implies that over time the United States has come to depend on the importation of raw materials for domestic production or of finished goods. Moreover, the United States has been favourable for foreign direct investment considering its positive skewness.

Table 14.1: Descriptive statistics. Source: Authors' computation from Stata 19.

Variables	Obs	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min	Max	p1	p99	Skew.	Kurt.
Lgdppc	33	4.648	.146	4.386	4.918	4.386	4.918	-.107	2.071
Tariff	33	2.232	.813	1.55	4.25	1.55	4.25	1.444	3.83
Impv	33	77.36	37.342	22.896	172.422	22.896	172.422	.403	2.678
Expv	33	75.535	33.86	31.433	160.593	31.433	160.593	.5	2.409
Lpar	33	5.29	.168	4.944	5.47	4.944	5.47	-.739	2.182
Inf	33	2.609	1.457	-.356	8.003	-.356	8.003	1.272	7.219
Fdi	33	1.603	.742	.465	3.406	.465	3.406	.64	2.88
Une	33	5.773	1.66	3.638	9.633	3.638	9.633	.778	2.738
Ine	33	40.552	.896	38	42.9	38	42.9	-.514	4.964

Table 14. 2: Pairwise correlations. Source: Author's computation from Stata 19.

Variables	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)
(1) lgdppc	1.000								
(2) tariff	-0.851***	1.000							
	(0.000)								
(3) impv	0.975***	-0.777***	1.000						
	(0.000)	(0.000)							
(4) expv	0.952***	-0.717***	0.985***	1.000					
	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)						
(5) lpar	0.926***	-0.922***	0.859***	0.834***	1.000				
	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)					
(6) inf	0.083	0.084	0.217	0.172	-0.155	1.000			
	(0.645)	(0.642)	(0.225)	(0.338)	(0.391)				
(7) fdi	0.238	-0.466***	0.197	0.172	0.343	-0.063	1.000		
	(0.182)	(0.006)	(0.271)	(0.338)	(0.051)	(0.727)			
(8) une	-0.179	0.140	-0.190	-0.140	-0.055	-0.358**	-0.381**	1.000	
	(0.319)	(0.436)	(0.289)	(0.437)	(0.763)	(0.041)	(0.029)		
(9) ine	0.679***	-0.656***	0.691***	0.665***	0.662***	-0.017	0.232	-0.394**	1.000
	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.925)	(0.194)	(0.023)	
*** $p<0.01$, ** $p<0.05$									

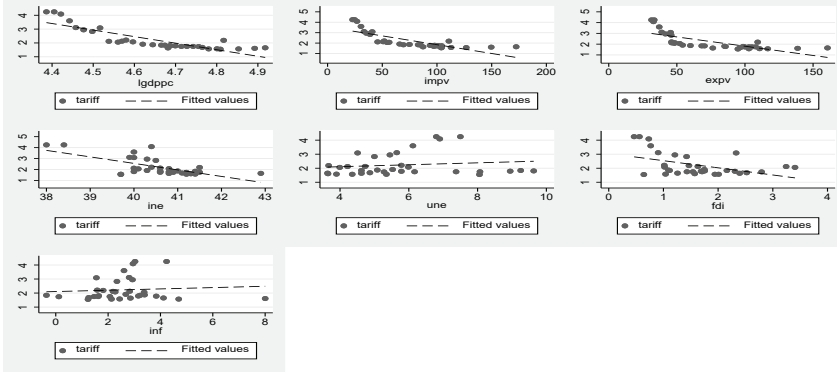

Figure 14.1: Scatter plots. Source: Authors' computation based on WDI database.

Table 14.2 provides information on the degree of correlation among the variables. The data show that GDP per capita and tariff are significantly and negatively correlated (-0.851), indicating that they move in opposite directions simultaneously. However, import value and export value are characterised by a significant direct association with GDP per capita at 0.975 and 0.952, respectively. Patent applications also have a significant direct association with GDP per capita (0.926). The table also shows that inequality has a degree of association of 0.679 with GDP per capita. The second column of Table 14.2 shows the variables that are significantly related to tariffs. These include import value (-0.777), export value (-0.717), patent application (-0.922), foreign direct investment (-0.466) and inequality (-0.656). The common observation among these variables is that they are all negatively associated with the tariff rate. The third column indicates that import value has a significant direct association with export value (0.985), patent application (0.859), and inequality (0.691). The fourth column shows that export value has a significant direct association with patent application (0.834) and inequality (0.665). The fifth column shows that patent application has a significant association with inequality (0.662). The sixth column shows that the inflation rate has a significant negative association with the unemployment rate (-0.358). The findings also show that foreign direct investment has a significantly negative association with the unemployment rate (-0.381), while unemployment has a significant negative association with inequality (-0.394).

Figure 14.1 shows the respective scatter plots with specific consideration for the tariff rate. It provides a visual demonstration of the extent of clustering of the tariff rates around some of the variables as well as confirming the sign and the degree of associations. The outcome shows over time that GDP per capita had a high degree of clustering around tariff rates. The same conclusion goes for import values, export values and inequality. However, unemployment rates, foreign direct investment and inflation rates, although showing some clustering, are far dispersed from some tariff rates.

The new Trump tariff policy and relevant insights

One of the major frontline issues of the current Trump administration is tariff policy, which influences key macroeconomic variables, along with the direction of trade in the United States, the affected economies and the global economy in

general. What are the possible outcomes of key macroeconomic variables in this context, considering previous trends? Despite the inadequacy of data to quantify the extent of impact of the recent tariff policies on key macroeconomic variables in the United States, some insights can be drawn on possible outcomes.

Based on a study by Giesecke and Waschik (2025), the recent US tariffs exert a negative effect on real US GDP in every scenario, such that, if there is no retaliation, the real GDP loss averages -1.3% over the simulation period. It was observed that in the short run, it indicates a negative deviation in employment (-1.5 in 2025). However, in the long run, there is a reflection of a negative deviation in the country's capital stock (-2.0 per cent in 2040) as a result of the negative deviation in the real GDP. While Giesecke and Waschik (2025) worked on simulated data, an attempt was made in the current study to observe historical descriptive patterns. For instance, the scatter plots of Figure 14.1 show that GDP per capita moved in the downward direction around tariff rates. This is an indication of declining output and standard of living over the selected periods. However, while this does not show a cause-and-effect relationship, it does provide information on the Trump administration's capacity to evaluate and prevent the current tariff policy from undermining US productivity and standard of living.

Notably, import and export values both trended in a negative direction over the study period. Building on these previous outcomes, how might the US respond to the retaliatory stance by its major trading partners like China and Canada? China has had a considerable increase in export volume to and trade surpluses with ASEAN countries, along with Africa, South Asia and Latin America in recent years (Tran 2025). Such a magnitude of trade with countries other than the United States indicates that China has considerable stamina for retaliation. This may have a pronounced impact on the import and export values of Figure 14.1, scattered around the tariff rates of the United States in the negative direction.

Another dimension to the potential impact of this development is the negative correlation between tariff rates and income inequality. As evident from the historical data above, a decline in tariff rates is accompanied by a decline in inequality rates. This historical pattern should therefore guide the United States government in its tariff policies. The following figures provide a graphic illustration of the US relationship between inequality and tariff rates over time. The two graphs indicate that inequality, though fluctuating, trended in an upward

direction. The specific effect cannot be concluded, as the exact cause-and-effect relationship was not examined through a regression model.

The Congressional Budget Office's projections indicate that real consumer spending rises by 1.8% in 2026, which is also the rate it increased in 2025. Moreover, numerous other factors constrain spending, including tariff-related price increases, resulting in the continued depletion of purchasing power, alongside weaker population growth stemming from lower net immigration. Higher prices for goods due to tariffs subsequently affect spending patterns by shifting the composition of consumer spending away from goods and towards services (CBO 2026).

According to Russ (2019), estimates from two studies show that the cost of tariffs imposed in 2018 and the first half of 2019, comprising both deadweight loss and direct burden, amounts to about $800 per household. Therefore, it can be implied that the burdens would reduce the real value of household incomes, which could exacerbate income inequality. Figure 14.2 shows that income inequality in the United States has been unstable over the 1991—2023 period and has fluctuated in an upward direction despite downward-trending tariff rates (Figure 14.3). The implication, therefore, is that tariff rate adjustment must be done in conjunction with appropriate monetary policies, such as interest rates, which influence credit conditions in the United States.

The base argument, therefore, revolves around how Trump's tariff policy, along with the retaliatory measures taken by the US trading partners, influences macroeconomic variables in the United States. According to Bouët, Sall and Zheng (2025), China and the United States are the most influenced economies, with losses in GDP of -1.3% for both economies in 2030. Mexico and Canada are the only economies that show a rise in GDP of 6.6% and 1.3%, respectively.

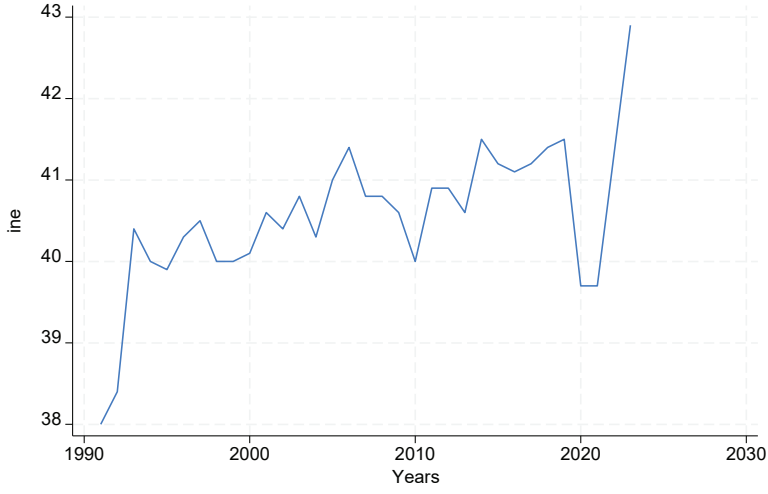

Figure 14.2: Income inequality in the United States over the period 1991 – 2023. Source: Authors' computation based on the WDI database.

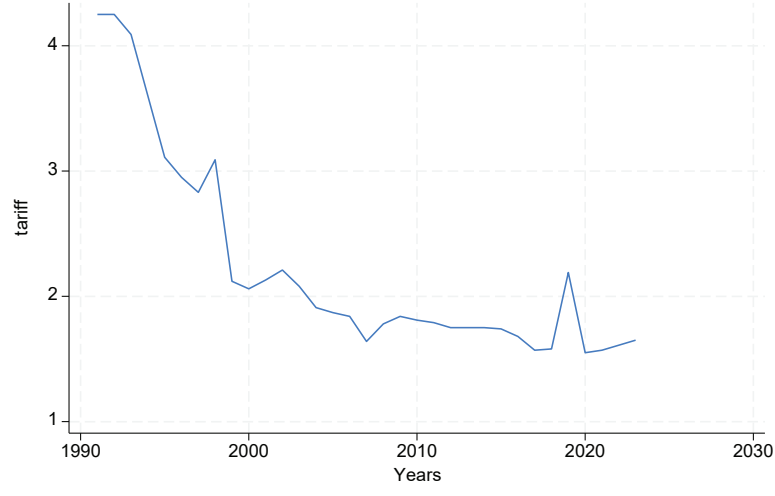

Figure 14.3: Tariff rates in the United States over the period 1991 – 2023. Source: Authors' computation based on the WDI database.

Other trends of the United States macroeconomic variables show export value and import value trending upward from 1991 to 2023. These two graphs show the vital role of the external sector in the United States economy. Foreign policy measures, such as the proposed tariffs, can therefore have a profound effect on the balance of trade. The similar upward-trending import and export values are an indication that the US should therefore be ready for disruptions to its trade balance because of retaliatory measures of its tariff policy from its trading partners.

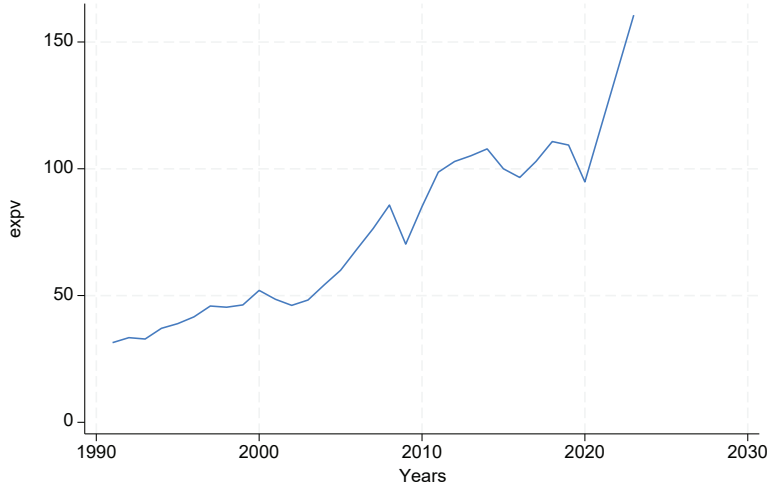

Figure 14.4: Export value in the United States over the period 1991 – 2023. Source: Authors' computation based on WDI database.

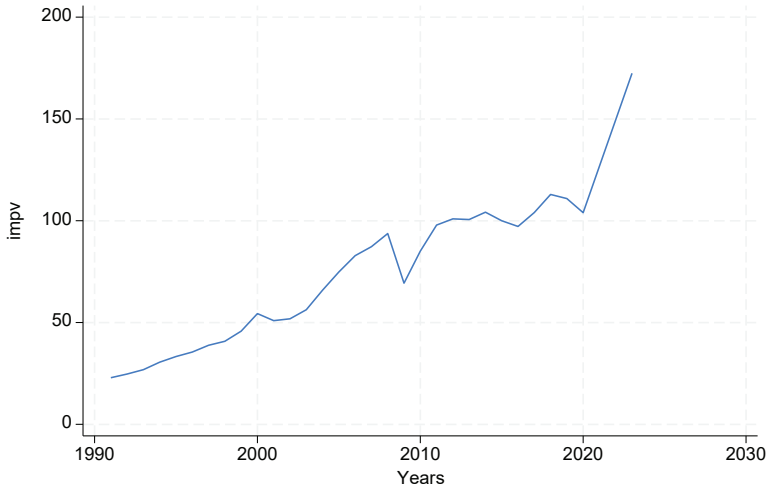

Figure 14.5: Import value in the United States over the period 1991 – 2023. Source: Authors' computation based on WDI data base.

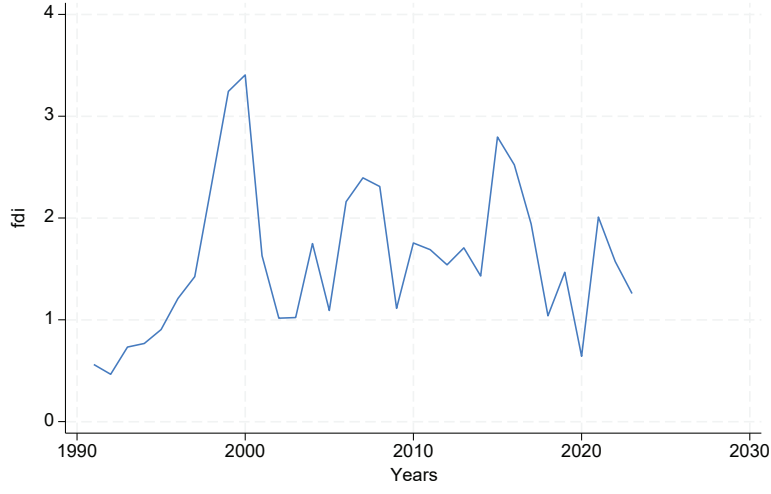

Figure 14.6: Foreign direct investment in the United States over the period 1991 – 2023. Source: Authors' computation based on the WDI database.

Figure 14.6 above provides information on the behaviour of foreign direct investment in the United States for the period 1991 to 2023. The data produced an unstable pattern. This calls for prudence in choosing a foreign policy that will foster a stable environment for direct investment. Several factors could influence the inflow of foreign direct investment, such as the macroeconomic environment, which is largely driven by fiscal and monetary policies. Retaliatory tariffs could negatively affect the cost of raw materials and raise production costs. This could also have consequences for future investments, and may subsequently have a negative effect on output, employment, income distribution and standard of living. Caution is therefore called for when implementing a tariff policy. For instance, according to Hung (2025), the International Chamber of Commerce has admonished that the tariff war 'risks sinking the world in new depression'.

Conclusion

This study could not offer empirical evidence of the exact impact of Trump's tariff policy on various macroeconomic variables in the United States, because of a lack of available data. However, it examines the previous behaviour of certain key macroeconomic variables descriptively in order to provide some cautions on the proposed and already implemented tariff policy. The impact of the tariff policy and the resultant trade war that might result could generate a profound effect on the trade balance of the United States. This is because it will affect the country's import value, which may raise the cost of production for domestic firms. The export value of the country historically trended upward, similar to the import value. This is a caution against distorting the country's trade relations. During the 1991 to 2023 period, income inequality fluctuated in an upward direction, while foreign direct investment lacked stability. It can therefore be surmised that the factors showing volatility in the 1991 to 2023 period may worsen if the tariff measures raise the cost of production, dampen productivity, skew employment, and redistribute income, which leads to income inequality.

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CHAPTER 15

Emerging Economies and the 2025 US Tariff Escalation: Retaliation, Supply Chains and Strategic Diplomacy

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Introduction

The resurgence of economic nationalism has fundamentally reshaped international trade governance in the twenty-first century. Amid growing geopolitical rivalry, states increasingly deploy tariffs, export controls and industrial policies not merely as economic instruments but as tools of strategic competition. The United States' 2025 tariff programme represents one of the most consequential manifestations of this broader shift towards weaponised trade policy. In 2025, under President Trump, the United States undertook one of its most significant trade policy shifts in decades. Acting pursuant to the International Emergency Economic Powers Act (IEEPA), 50 U.S.C. §1701 et seq., the administration introduced a baseline ten per cent tariff on imports from nearly all trading partners through a series of executive actions beginning in April 2025. Officially framed as a strategy to safeguard 'economic sovereignty' and reduce the persistent US trade deficit, the initiative marked a decisive escalation of protectionist measures, an approach that had already defined much of Trump's earlier administration (Kiplinger 2025).

By mid-2025, these measures intensified considerably. Steel and aluminium tariffs were doubled to 50%, while equivalent duties were imposed on Brazilian exports and copper explicitly linked to Brazil's BRICS membership and its perceived ties to China (Lawder, Shalal and Payne 2025; Holland 2025; Politico 2025). Energy trade also came under scrutiny: importers of Russian and Iranian oil faced financial penalties, while Venezuelan oil attracted an additional 25% tariff (The White House 2025). The tariff regime extended beyond metals and energy to cover textiles, jewellery, diamonds, electronics, pharmaceuticals, automobile

components and a broad spectrum of agricultural goods (Associated Press 2025; Lawder, Shalal and Payne2025). For emerging economies such as South Africa, Brazil and India, tariff rates ranging from 15% to 39% substantially reduced the competitiveness of exports in the United States market and increased uncertainty for firms integrated into global value chains. The tariff measures disproportionately affected developing economies with strong export dependence on the United States, threatening market access, disrupting established production networks and potentially slowing progress towards trade liberalisation and export-led growth (UNCTAD 2025a; WTO 2025a). Countries with significant exposure to the U.S. market experienced heightened economic vulnerability as higher tariffs increased production costs, reduced export demand and weakened the competitiveness of labour-intensive and manufacturing sectors.

India was among the economies most affected by the expanded tariff regime. In addition to broad-based import tariffs, U.S. trade restrictions and penalties associated with energy trade heightened pressure on India's export-oriented industries, particularly textiles, footwear, gems and jewellery, seafood, home textiles and carpets. Given the importance of these sectors for employment, foreign exchange earnings and industrial production, the tariff measures posed significant risks to India's export performance and broader economic resilience. In response, Prime Minister Narendra Modi reaffirmed the government's commitment to protecting domestic producers, strengthening economic self-reliance, and expanding export diversification strategies to reduce dependence on any single external market (Rajesh, Jamkhandikar, and Ohri 2025).

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi vowed to implement preventative solutions after describing the US activities as a danger to rural livelihoods and to the country's greater economic self-reliance ambitions (Rajesh, Jamkhandikar and Ohri 2025). In the meantime, after ignoring American diplomatic pressure on trade alliances, Brazil faced rapid tariff escalation. The Brazilian government put its own retaliatory duties on US goods, such as agricultural and machinery exports, and filed formal complaints with the World Trade Organization (WTO) (Politico 2025). In an attempt to make up for losses in the US market share, emerging economies started reorienting their trade relations towards regional partners and South-South co-operation. It is impossible to overestimate the strategic importance of US trade access for economies such as Brazil and India. In industries where American consumer demand was vital, both nations

had devised export-led growth strategies. In addition to jeopardising GDP growth, abrupt disruptions to these trade flows therefore threatened to severely affect employment, currency stability and fiscal revenues (Kiplinger 2025). Furthermore, the tariffs provided another level of economic vulnerability to governments already suffering from inflationary pressures and the effects of the COVID pandemic.

Periodic episodes of protectionism, tariff imposition and trade disputes have profoundly shaped the global trade landscape with significant consequences for both developed and emerging economies. Much of the scholarly focus has been on bilateral conflicts between major powers, most notably the US–China trade war (2018–2020), the disruptions associated with the Smoot–Hawley Tariff Act of the 1930s and the industrial frictions between the United States and Japan in the 1980s (Bown and Irwin 2019; Liu and Woo 2018). These studies demonstrate how tariffs affect domestic industries, disrupt supply chains and alter global trade flows. Yet, comparatively little attention has been paid to how emerging economies, outside the dominant US–China framework, strategically respond to unilateral tariff measures.

This gap is particularly evident in relation to the sweeping 2025 US tariff programme, which targeted a wide array of goods including industrial products, technology-intensive sectors and agricultural commodities from multiple nations. These measures generated unprecedented uncertainty in global supply chains and heightened vulnerabilities in emerging economies heavily dependent on US markets, prompting complex policy responses that remain underexplored. Existing research on trade retaliation has largely emphasised short-term economic effects or dyadic disputes with limited analysis of how states combine traditional instruments such as retaliatory tariffs, quotas and non-tariff barriers with longer-term strategies including supply chain restructuring, regional alignment and trade diversification (Bown 2022; Antràs 2020). Similarly, the literature on global supply chains tends to privilege advanced economies or dominant trade routes, leaving a gap in understanding how developing states navigate structural vulnerabilities to safeguard competitiveness and market access. The scope and speed of the 2025 tariffs provide a unique empirical setting for addressing these deficiencies. Another underexplored dimension concerns the intersection of economic strategy and institutional engagement. Unilateral tariff impositions by hegemonic states undermine not only domestic economies but also the

credibility of multilateral trade institutions such as the WTO. Although the use of WTO mechanisms by individual states has been documented, little systematic research has examined how emerging economies leverage collective responses through regional blocs, plurilateral frameworks or diplomatic coalitions to enhance bargaining power and mitigate asymmetric shocks (Hopewell 2016; WTO 2025a). The 2025 tariffs highlight the need to examine how economic, institutional and political variables converge in shaping these strategies.

The long-term structural consequences of emerging economies' responses also remain poorly understood. While retaliatory measures may offer temporary protection for sensitive industries, more transformative outcomes are likely to emerge through adaptive strategies such as nearshoring, reshoring and the establishment of regional production hubs (IMF 2025; UNCTAD 2025b). Such shifts carry implications for international trade governance, regional integration and the evolving distribution of global economic power. Yet existing scholarship rarely links short-term policy reactions with medium- and long-term structural outcomes. Moreover, the heterogeneity of emerging economies is often overlooked. Brazil, India and South Africa, for example, differ markedly in terms of economic size, sectoral composition, political structures and levels of engagement in trade governance. Their responses to US tariffs are therefore better understood as context-specific blends of retaliation, adaptation and institutional engagement, rather than uniform or reactive measures. Recognising this variation is essential for generating comparative insights that can inform more comprehensive theories of trade policy, coalition-building and resilience. This study seeks to address these limitations by pursuing three interrelated objectives. First, it examines the structural dependencies, sectoral vulnerabilities and domestic political factors that shape emerging economies' responses to unilateral US tariffs. Second, it analyses the range of strategies deployed, including retaliatory tariffs, supply chain realignment, trade diversification and institutional engagement at regional and global levels. Third, it assesses the medium- and long-term implications of these strategies for supply chain restructuring, global trade governance and multilateral framework resilience. By integrating these dimensions, the study advances both theoretical and empirical understanding of the agency of emerging economies in asymmetric trade conflicts. In doing so, it goes beyond dyadic and short-term analyses to illuminate the complex, strategic and context-specific nature of emerging economies' responses to trade

wars. Ultimately, the findings not only enrich academic debates but also offer policymakers critical insights for navigating an increasingly fragmented and unpredictable global trade order.

Trade retaliation and supply chain flexibility

In political and economic studies, trade retaliation is universally regarded as a strategic instrument that blends political signalling with economic disruption. Retaliatory measures are meant to persuade policymakers to change their trade conduct by focusing on industries of significant domestic importance to the offending nation (Bown and Irwin 2019). Both the extent to which the relevant industry is afflicted and the capacity of the targeted economy to absorb or minimise the shock affect how successful such interventions are. For example, research has revealed that earlier instances of US steel and aluminium tariffs induced strategic reactions from key exporters, notably South Korea, Canada and the European Union who levied countervailing taxes on US. exports (Bown 2022). Retaliation is not merely a reactive approach as these instances indicate; it is also an instrument of leverage in greater economic diplomacy, signaling a nation's ability and readiness to defend its interests. The implications of trade retaliations in the modern global economy reach well beyond bilateral ties especially given the intricacy of global supply chains. According to Antràs (2020), trade-policy shocks routinely ricochet across production networks, pushing enterprises to reassess their sourcing, manufacturing and distribution strategies. Since many emerging economies depend on integrated value chains in industries like electronics, textiles, automotive components and agro-processing, these disruptions may be more noticeable for them. The following example serves as an illustration of how supply chain flexibility becomes a crucial adaptation mechanism in response to protectionist measures: during the US-China trade war (2018–2020), companies moved production to nations like Vietnam, Thailand and Mexico in order to avoid tariffs while still having access to US markets (Liu and Woo 2018; Momoh and Oyewole 2026).

In order to mitigate the negative repercussions of trade retaliation, diplomatic intervention is crucial, particularly for growing economies that hold asymmetric positions in international trade. Bilateral talks, regional trade agreements and active membership in multilateral bodies like the WTO are all components

of an effective strategy (Hopewell 2016). India and Brazil, for example, have long utilised the G20 and BRICS platforms to co-ordinate their reactions to protectionist policies, employ collective bargaining to secure concessions or settle conflicts. The African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) and other regional trade forums can also be utilised as tools to diversify markets and minimise sensitivity to unilateral trade shocks. Despite these realisations, a considerable percentage of the literature now in publication considers supply chain flexibility, diplomatic strategy and trade retaliation as different topics without thoroughly investigating how they are connected. In practice, rising nations usually utilise both methods at the same time: supply chain restructuring can be accompanied by economic retaliation, while diplomatic engagement serves to maintain long-term market access and legitimate policy initiatives. This multifaceted strategy is best illustrated by the 2025 US tariff measures which saw nations like Brazil, India and South Africa enact targeted retaliatory tariffs, modify their sourcing plans and step up their engagement with regional and multilateral organisations in an effort to reduce political and economic risk. Understanding how rising economies manage intricate international trade conditions while striking a balance between short-term economic pressures and long-term strategic goals demands an integrated vision (Antràs 2020; Hopewell 2016).

Historical precedents

A historical perspective is important to comprehend present trade retaliation and emerging economy responses. An early and sobering illustration of the risks of extreme protectionism is supplied by the Smoot-Hawley Tariff Act of 1930. The Act sparked substantial retaliatory moves by trading partners notably Canada, the United Kingdom and European countries by increasing US import tariffs to previously unheard-of levels (Irwin 2017). A huge reduction in global trade volumes contributed to economic collapse and the Great Depression. In addition to its economic repercussions, the Smoot-Hawley demonstrates the political perils of unilateral tariff increases by showing how domestic protectionist impulses can have a domino effect on employment, industrial production and international relations.

Trade confrontations between the United States and Japan in the 1980s over the semiconductor and automobile industries revealed that even targeted, sector-

specific measures may provoke serious bilateral difficulties. Japan participated in voluntary export restraints and negotiated settlements as a response to the United States enforcing quotas and threatening tariffs to defend its domestic firms (Prestowitz 1988). These confrontations indicate that while trade retaliation typically supports long-term strategic competition, it can also lead to short-term concessions. In order to stay competitive, Japanese corporations responded by relocating their manufacturing overseas, funding joint ventures in the US and inventing new technology. This era demonstrates how retaliation, market adaptation and strategic business activity interact to generate patterns evident in contemporary trade disputes. A recent example of extensive, multi-sectoral retaliation in a highly integrated global economy is the trade war between the United States and China which lasted from 2018 to 2020. In contrast to previous episodes, this war took place within sophisticated global value chains. The United States targeted hundreds of billions of dollars in Chinese exports including consumer goods, electronics and machinery while China placed reciprocal duties on US agricultural items and industrial inputs (Bown 2020). In order to shield themselves from tariff vulnerability and keep access to US markets, Chinese firms reacted by relocating their supply chains to Southeast Asia and Mexico (Liu and Woo 2018). The conflict also demonstrated the expanding influence of international organisations and negotiation platforms; although the WTO was involved, enforcement constraints meant that both nations increasingly depended on strategic signaling and bilateral negotiations to further their national goals.

There are similarities and contrasts between these historical precursors and the US tariff proposals of 2025. The 2025 tariffs have produced immediate economic pain and a political message comparable to the Smoot-Hawley and US-Japan disputes. However, the scope and timing of policies impacting consumer goods, electronics, metals, energy and other emerging markets reveal a more complicated global environment where geopolitical multipolarity and integrated supply chains increase the likelihood of retaliation as well as its magnitude (Antràs 2020; Hopewell 2016). Furthermore, modern emerging economies have more institutional and diplomatic resources than ever before such as regional trade agreements and co-ordinated involvement in forums like the G20 and BRICS, which allow for more complicated and co-ordinated responses than were previously achievable. Scholars and decision-makers can gain a better understanding of how lessons learned from previous trade conflicts inform

the current strategies of emerging economies for navigating unprecedented multilateral trade disruptions by placing the 2025 episode within this historical continuum.

Role of international institutions

International organisations have kept a tight check on the economic effects of the 2025 US tariff measures which offer crucial factual data for evaluating the vulnerabilities of rising and other worldwide economies. The World Economic Outlook released in April 2025showed the global growth estimate for the year to be 2.8%, a considerable decline from the preceding estimate of 3.6% (IMF 2025). The shockwaves and increased policy uncertainty caused by the raised tariffs, damaging financial and commodity markets were explicitly blamed for this downward adjustment. According to the IMF, emerging countries are especially sensitive to currency rate volatility, inflationary pressures and probable capital flight (Fleming and Alim 2025). According to a Reuters report from mid-2025 countries like Brazil could experience an even slower growth of 2.3% if more tariff rounds are implemented even though emerging markets as a whole might see growth of about 4.1%, supported by stronger-than-expected economic activity in China and a partial easing of US-China tensions (Campos 2025). These estimates demonstrate how the Global South is disproportionately affected by tariff-induced stress.

A May 2025 analysis from UNCTAD throws more light on how the most vulnerable developing economies face an unfair share of the effects of tariff increases. According to the organisation, trade-weighted average US tariffs for many developing nations are greater than 25% and for some least developed countries (LDCs), effective tariffs can approach 44%, which is higher than the average tariffs on China in the targeted industries (UNCTAD 2025a, 2025b). Furthermore, according to UNCTAD's analysis, reciprocal tariffs of up to 50% were implemented in a number of emerging economies; yet these policies frequently resulted in negligible revenue gains for the United States, pointing to inefficiencies and possible policy irrationality (UNCTAD 2025a, 2025b). These results reinforce the necessity for strategic diversification and multilateral participation while also acknowledging the structural vulnerabilities of smaller economies in addressing asymmetric trade battles. The WTO mid-year Trade

Monitoring Report (July 2025) presents a complete review of global trade disruptions, reinforcing the perspectives from the IMF and UNCTAD. The WTO states that newly enacted trade barriers, principally tariffs, now influence 19.4% of global merchandise trade, up from 12.5% in 2024 (WTO 2025a). This equates to a historically extraordinary volume of trade flows of around US$2.7 trillion. Although certain bilateral conversations lead to a slight reduction in some markets, the WTO cautions that the level of trade frictions remains high and ubiquitous, producing continuous uncertainty in international trade. Additionally, WTO predictions foresee a 0.2% drop in the amount of global merchandise trade in 2025, which represents the stifling influence of tariff-related uncertainty on cross-border supply chains, investment and production planning (WTO 2025b). When taken as a whole, these institutional insights emphasise three crucial principles. First, emerging nations that rely substantially on US markets for exports have been disproportionately harmed by the direct and quantitative macroeconomic effects of the 2025 US tariffs. Second, the unequal distribution of tariffs shows structural flaws among developing nations, underlining the necessity of co-ordinated global measures and the limitations of unilateral reprisal. Third, in order to sustain resilience in an increasingly fragmented trade system, the scale and extent of the 2025 tariffs, which worsen already-existing global trade uncertainties require flexible actions in the supply chain, diplomatic and economic sectors.

Despite the fact that the literature on supply chain alterations, trade retaliation and developing market diplomacy provides essential macro-level insights, there are still a number of important gaps. First, the majority of studies focuses on dyadic relationships such as the trade disputes between the United States and China or Japan, and ignore the dynamics of co-ordinated reactions across numerous growing economies (Bown 2022; Evenett 2020). The idea of co-ordinated tariff responses, multilateral discussions or regional blocs acting collectively is concealed by this constraint. Second, the relationship between economic strategy and geopolitical alignment is rarely studied in the research now under publication. Despite their increasing significance in influencing trade outcomes, topics like regional integration projects, engagement in strategic alliances like BRICS and co-ordination of energy policy are typically addressed independently from economic reactions (Hopewell 2016). Last but not least, there is a dearth of empirical evidence about the hybrid strategies utilised by

emerging economies in reaction to abrupt, pervasive and structurally unfair tariffs. Few studies explore how governments concurrently pursue diplomatic negotiations, restructure global supply networks and engage in retaliation in order to reduce vulnerability and sustain long-term competitiveness (Antràs 2020; Liu and Woo 2018). In an increasingly fragmented and multipolar global trade environment, bridging these gaps is vital to gaining a full picture of how emerging economies handle complex trade disruptions.

*T*heoretical framework

The theoretical foundation for analysing retaliation and realignment in response to the Trump 2.0 tariff measures rests on three interrelated perspectives: classical trade theory, strategic trade theory and the political economy of trade conflicts. First, classical trade theory, pioneered by David Ricardo (1817) and further refined by scholars such as Krugman, Obstfeld and Melitz (2018), provides the baseline understanding of comparative advantage. Its core assumption is that free trade fosters efficiency and mutual gains while tariffs distort resource allocation, leading to welfare losses. Retaliatory measures are thus interpreted as defensive strategies taken by states to protect vulnerable sectors and signal discontent. The strength of this theory lies in its elegant economic logic and predictive clarity regarding trade distortions, but its limitation is the neglect of power asymmetries and state-led interventions which makes it less applicable in a world of politically motivated tariffs. Nonetheless, it remains valuable for showing how emerging economies experience efficiency losses and respond in ways that seek to restore equilibrium.

Second, Strategic Trade Theory, advanced by Brander and Spencer (1985) and further developed by Paul Krugman (1986), extends beyond comparative advantage to emphasise how state intervention shapes firm competitiveness in oligopolistic global markets. Its key assumptions are that markets are imperfectly competitive, firms benefit from scale economies and governments can tilt competitive outcomes through tools like tariffs, subsidies or export promotion. The strength of this theory is its ability to capture the proactive, strategic nature of state policy in concentrated industries such as technology, steel or renewable energy. For emerging economies facing US tariffs, its applicability is clear: states may pursue industrial policies, diversify supply chains or provide

targeted incentives to cushion shocks and preserve long-term competitiveness. This framework illuminates how retaliation is not merely defensive but part of a broader strategic realignment of domestic industries.

Finally, the political economy of trade conflicts, as articulated by scholars like Hopewell (2016) and Evenett (2020), situates trade disputes within a broader geopolitical context. It assumes that trade conflicts are shaped not only by market dynamics but also by state interests, bargaining power and coalition-building. Emerging economies often vulnerable to unilateral shocks, strengthen their positions by engaging in multilateral negotiations, forming regional alliances or adopting co-ordinated retaliation to increase leverage against stronger states. Its strength lies in highlighting the intersection of economics and politics explaining why retaliation often serves symbolic, diplomatic and security purposes beyond narrow economic rationality. The theory's applicability is especially strong in the 2025 context where states such as India, Brazil and South Africa seek collective strategies through BRICS, G20 or WTO negotiations to counterbalance US unilateralism. Taken together, these three perspectives, Ricardian efficiency logics, strategic state intervention and political-economic coalition building offer a comprehensive framework for analysing the emerging strategic economic responses of developing states. Their combined strength lies in explaining both the economic rationale and the geopolitical imperatives of retaliation allowing a nuanced understanding of how emerging economies reposition themselves in response to the Trump 2.0 tariffs.

Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative comparative research design centred on in-depth case studies to examine the strategic responses of emerging economies to the 2025US tariff measures. A qualitative approach is particularly suitable because it allows for the exploration of complex interactions between trade retaliation, supply chain reconfiguration and diplomatic manoeuvring, thereby addressing both the political and economic dimensions of the problem. As Yin (2018) highlights, case study research enables an in-depth investigation of contemporary phenomena within real-world contexts while comparative design facilitates the identification of patterns, divergences and convergences across multiple national settings. The research employs a comparative case study method for its

capacity to reveal cross-country similarities and differences in trade strategy. The selection of cases in South Africa, India and Brazil is guided by explicit criteria of comparability and relevance. These countries were selected because they represent large emerging economies with substantial exposure to US trade, active participation in multilateral institutions (for example, WTO, BRICS and G20) and diversified integration into global supply chains. Their inclusion allows the study to assess how variations in sectoral dependency, economic structure and geopolitical alignment shape strategic responses to unilateral US tariffs.

The study relies on both primary and secondary data to ensure depth and triangulation. Quantitative data is drawn from trade and macroeconomic statistics published by the WTO, United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) and the IMF which provide insights into sectoral exposure, trade balances and macroeconomic vulnerabilities. Primary legal and regulatory sources including official tariff schedules, government trade policy documents and WTO dispute settlement filings are analysed to capture institutional and policy-level responses. To supplement these sources, semi-structured expert interviews were conducted with trade economists, policy advisors and industry stakeholders. These interviews provide interpretative depth by uncovering strategic reasoning, political motivations and contextual narratives behind retaliatory trade measures.

The study employs a thematic content analysis to examine qualitative interview data, policy documents and dispute records, identifying recurring themes related to retaliation, coalition-building and industrial adjustment strategies. Quantitative trade indicators are analysed descriptively to map exposure patterns and contextualise policy choices. Comparative analysis is then applied across the three case studies to highlight convergent strategies (for example, multilateral coalition-building) and divergent responses (for example, sector-specific retaliation or industrial policy). This mixed but qualitatively-oriented approach strengthens validity through data triangulation and provides a multidimensional perspective on the interplay between economics and politics in trade conflicts. To enhance validity, multiple data sources (statistics, documents and interviews) are triangulated to cross-check findings. Clear case selection criteria also reduce selection bias and ensure generalisability to other emerging economies with similar characteristics. Reliability is strengthened through transparent documentation of data collection procedures and systematic coding of qualitative materials.

Empirical analysis

Direct retaliatory measures

Emerging economies responded to the 2025 US tariff measures with a combination of direct retaliatory instruments designed both to protect domestic industries and to signal political discontent. South Africa, Brazil and India imposed sector-specific counter-tariffs ranging from 25% to 44% on critical US exports such as steel, electronics, soybeans and machinery parts (UNCTAD 2025a; WTO 2025a). For example, Brazil levied an average of 35% on US steel and soybean imports, reflecting not only the economic importance of these sectors but also the political imperative of shielding communities dependent on agriculture and industrial production. Beyond tariffs, governments employed non-tariff barriers (NTBs) and quotas to maximise leverage while remaining within the bounds of international trade rules. South Africa introduced targeted restrictions on US automobile imports carefully calibrated to avoid overt WTO violations, thereby slowing US market penetration without triggering legal disputes. India, by contrast, adopted stricter certification requirements, technical standards and customs procedures on US pharmaceutical and chemical imports (Bown 2022). These procedural instruments served a dual purpose: they increased transaction costs for US exporters while allowing India to avoid direct sectoral escalation.

The strategic use of such hybrid retaliation, combining formal tariffs with regulatory and procedural barriers, illustrates how emerging economies sought to maintain domestic stability while exerting external pressure**.** These measures resonate with earlier precedents, particularly the 2018–2020 US-China trade war, during which sector-specific counter-tariffs were used to defend politically sensitive industries while leaving space for negotiation (Liu and Woo 2018). Empirical data confirms the significance of such actions: retaliatory policies by Brazil, India and South Africa collectively redirected an estimated US$45 billion in trade flows in 2025 (UNCTAD 2025b), underscoring the material consequences of co-ordinated economic pushback. At the same time, governments faced the delicate task of balancing retaliation with domestic welfare considerations. Excessive countermeasures risked fuelling inflation, disrupting supply chains and undermining export competitiveness. By targeting select industries and calibrating the intensity of tariffs and NTBs, these states demonstrated their

resolve to protect national interests while mitigating adverse domestic spillovers. This approach reflects a nuanced strategy: employing retaliation not as an act of total confrontation, but as a measured tool of negotiation, deterrence and economic preservation.

Trade diversification as strategic realignment

One of the most essential adaptation strategies for emerging economies seeking to reduce exposure to US tariffs is trade diversification. By reorienting exports towards alternative partners, states not only mitigate immediate economic shocks but also restructure their long-term market portfolios. Brazil embodied this trend by expanding its exports of steel, coffee, soy and automotive components to China, India and the African Union (IMF 2025; UNCTAD 2025b). Similarly, India redirected machinery, textiles and pharmaceutical exports to ASEAN countries, the Middle East and Africa, thereby demonstrating flexibility in supply chain allocation and strengthening ties with partners who impose fewer trade barriers. South Africa leveraged the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) framework to expand intra-African trade by approximately twelve per cent in the first half of 2025 (WTO 2025b), underscoring the role of regional integration in cushioning external shocks.

Empirical evidence suggests that diversification entails more than short-term adjustments; it represents a structural realignment of production and export strategies. Firms restructured supply chains, privileging destinations with stable demand and reliable legal frameworks. In parallel, governments used multilateral platforms such as the G20 and BRICS to negotiate trade facilitation measures and broaden market access (Hopewell 2016). These co-operative efforts enhanced collective bargaining positions while embedding diversification within a broader South–South solidarity framework. Infrastructure and logistics investments further reinforced diversification strategies. Indian firms established distribution hubs across Southeast Asia while Brazilian exporters expanded port facilities in West Africa to meet growing demand for steel and soy. These investments demonstrate how diversification operates as both a risk-avoidance mechanism against asymmetric shocks and a pathway towards long-term competitiveness and resilience. In this way, trade diversification represents a deliberate form of strategic market realignment, simultaneously countering US-induced losses

and strengthening regional supply networks that reduce dependence on a single dominant market.

Supply chain restructuring

The imposition of the 2025 US tariffs triggered significant **s**upply chain restructuring across emerging economies as firms sought to reduce vulnerability and sustain competitiveness. To maintain market access and business continuity, corporations adopted a mix of nearshoring and reshoring strategies designed to relocate production closer to regional partners while avoiding exposure to future US protectionist measures. Brazilian steel and automobile firms, for example, transferred segments of production to Mercosur member states in order to retain preferential market access and hedge against prospective tariff shocks (Antràs 2020). India similarly encouraged firms in electronics, pharmaceuticals and textiles to establish regional hubs in Southeast Asia and the Middle East, thereby diversifying industrial bases and reducing dependence on US supply chains. South Africa pursued a parallel strategy through the Southern African Development Community (SADC), fostering integrated production networks in mining, chemicals and agro-processing that linked local sourcing with downstream assembly to ensure both cost efficiency and resilience**.**

These measures reflect the principles of strategic trade theory which underscores the role of state-facilitated industrial repositioning in sustaining global competitiveness (Krugman 1986; Brander and Spencer 1985). Empirical estimates indicate that such structural reforms reduced tariff exposure in key industries by approximately fifteen to twenty per cent**,** while simultaneously stimulating investments in infrastructure, workforce development and technology transfer. Enterprises also revisited raw material procurement strategies, increasingly sourcing from low-tariff countries to stabilise costs. This multidimensional restructuring financial, geographic and operational represents more than a defensive reaction; it constitutes a proactive attempt by emerging economies to embed resilience within regional production systems and secure long-term adaptability against trade disruptions.

Diplomatic and institutional engagement

Economic and operational adjustments were reinforced by diplomatic and institutional initiatives as emerging economies sought to challenge, contain and adapt to US tariff measures. A central mechanism was the WTO dispute settlement system where governments filed complaints contesting the legality of US tariffs. For example, India and Brazil jointly lodged cases against US steel and aluminium tariffs arguing that these measures violated Washington's WTO commitments (WTO 2025a). Although dispute settlement processes are often protracted such legal actions served as signaling mechanisms deterring unilateral policy moves while reaffirming the role of multilateral trade governance.

Regional trade blocs provided additional platforms for collective co-ordination. South Africa mobilised support from SADC and AfCFTA to harmonise tariffs, expedite customs processes and strengthen intra-regional supply chain integration. Brazil leveraged Mercosur, a South American economic and political trade bloc to reinforce its negotiating positions, exchange best practices and implement co-ordinated countermeasures. These blocs enabled emerging economies to pursue preferential arrangements with middle powers and regional partners, thereby creating alternative market access to offset losses from US-centric trade restrictions (Hopewell 2016).

At the plurilateral and global levels, Brazil, India and South Africa intensified engagement within BRICS, the G20 and UNCTAD where they co-ordinated messaging, advocated for systemic reforms and explored financial and technical support mechanisms. Such forum-shopping diplomacy enhanced the legitimacy of their responses while amplifying collective bargaining power in global trade governance.

Empirical evidence suggests that the 2025 tariff crisis produced multilayered responses that were mutually reinforcing. Trade diversification facilitated supply chain shifts while regional diplomatic co-operation ensured that retaliatory actions remained calibrated and did not escalate into uncontrolled trade wars. Taken together, these measures demonstrate how emerging economies managed a fragmented global trade order marked by asymmetric power and rapid policy shifts. Ultimately, the episode illustrates the growing agency of emerging economies in shaping international trade outcomes. Through a combination of sector-specific retaliation, strategic market diversification, industrial repositioning

and institutional engagement, they not only mitigated immediate vulnerabilities but also enhanced their long-term capacity to influence global trade governance. This highlights the necessity of integrated analytical frameworks—linking institutional leverage, geopolitical alignment and economic strategy—for both research and policy on contemporary trade disputes.

Comparative case studies

Direct retaliation, trade diversification and regional integration are all examples of Brazil's response to the 2025US tariffs. Because of the political sensitivity of these industries as well as their economic importance, the Brazilian government placed taxes of an average of 35% on US exports of steel, soybeans and vehicle components (UNCTAD 2025a). These moves were designed to convey criticism of unilateral trade restrictions while safeguarding domestic manufacturers. At the same time, Brazil shifted exports to China, India and African countries in an effort to diversify its market. For example, losses from US market constraints were offset by an eighteen per cent gain in soybean exports to China in the first half of 2025 (IMF 2025). Additionally, Brazil used the Mercosur framework to coordinate regional initiatives such as cross-border investment incentives and aligned tariff reductions. Brazil's position in South American supply chains was improved by this technique, which also increased its bargaining leverage in international fora. Brazil's strategy stresses how political and economic tactics are interconnected. Vulnerable industries were shielded by direct reaction, and sensitivity to US tariffs was minimised by market diversification and regional collaboration. The Brazilian example underlines how vital it is to use both regional alliances and local industrial strategies to successfully manage asymmetric trade shocks (Hopewell 2016).

India is a perfect example of a hybrid approach, comprising proactive diplomatic engagement, supply chain adjustments and targeted tariffs. In response to US tariffs on electronics, machinery and pharmaceuticals, India retaliated by imposing taxes of an average of 30% and establishing stricter customs and technical standards as non-tariff barriers (Bown 2022). Without dramatically altering consumer markets, these policies maintained domestic competitiveness and restrict US imports. A crucial component of India's goal was trade diversification. As a result of market flexibility and strategic alignment

with growing economies, Indian exporters diverted textiles, medicines and machinery to ASEAN nations, the Middle East and African markets (UNCTAD 2025b). Furthermore, Indian corporations made investments in Southeast Asian regional supply centres, enabling production nearshoring and minimising susceptibility to tariffs targeted at the United States. Electronics businesses, for instance, established manufacturing sites in Malaysia and Vietnam, bringing regional vendors into restructured supply chains (Antràs 2020). These economic strategies were reinforced by diplomatic engagement. India engaged in plurilateral talks with other emerging economies through the BRICS and G20 platforms and it actively participated in WTO dispute mechanisms by opposing US steel and aluminium tariffs. These moves boosted India's negotiation position, gave retaliatory acts legitimacy and made it easier to co-ordinate with other impacted economies. India's ability to adapt to unilateral shocks by combining market flexibility with institutional leverage is evidenced by its hybrid approach which demonstrates strategic integration across economic, diplomatic and industrial dimensions (Hopewell 2016).

In the case of South Africa, strategic methods significantly rely on institutional participation and regional integration. South African exports in the mining, chemical and automotive industries were hit by the 2025 US tariffs which led to targeted tariffs, quotas and non-tariff barriers. To lessen market vulnerability without generating broad economic turmoil, quotas were employed to restrict the import of US autos and new technical criteria were introduced for chemical exports (Bown 2022). Using SADC to develop integrated industrial networks, South Africa's reply placed a heavy emphasis on regional supply chain realignment. In order to assure production continuity and decrease their susceptibility to US tariffs, mining and chemical industries built sourcing and assembly agreements among SADC members. In keeping with the focus of strategic trade theory on government-facilitated industry repositioning, these nearshoring measures also fostered regional economic integration and knowledge transfer (Krugman 1986; Brander and Spencer 1985).South Africa's strategy was strengthened through institutional and diplomatic involvement. To enhance intraregional trade, simplify customs procedures and unify tariffs, the government actively engaged with SADC allies. In order to negotiate preferential trade agreements, South Africa also took part in WTO dispute procedures and co-operated plurilaterally with emerging and middle-income economies (Hopewell 2016).

By showing how smaller emerging economies can strengthen their bargaining power and minimise vulnerability through regional co-ordination, this multi-layered approach underlines the complimentary nature of institutional leverage and economic adaptation.

When the three scenarios are studied together, it becomes evident that there are both parallels and differences in the reactions of emerging economies to US tariff shocks. Economic structure, market exposure and geopolitical direction all contribute to variances. Brazil's reliance on industrial and agricultural production is reflected in its strategy which is mainly focused on regional integration and commodity exports. India places a great focus on supply chain flexibility, market diversity and hybrid approaches which are symptomatic of its wide export base and complex sector. Because of its reliance on SADC integration and lesser global market reach, South Africa prioritises regional co-operation and institutional leverage. The adoption of multifaceted approaches that incorporate supply chain adaptation, trade diversification, diplomatic engagement and direct retribution indicates convergence. All three nations understand that direct retribution is insufficient on its own and that more permanent results are gained through co-ordinated methods that combine institutional, political and economic variables (Evenett 2020). Common techniques that strengthen resilience against asymmetric shocks and fortify negotiation positions in global trade governance include trade diversion, regional production hubs and participation with multilateral bodies. The cases also highlight how vital institutional sophistication is. South Africa, India and Brazil all use plurilateral agreements, WTO procedures and regional blocs to support their economic ambitions. The legitimacy and negotiating strength that institutional engagement affords promote the effectiveness of supply chain realignment and trade diversification. According to empirical evidence, governments that adopted integrated, multi-layered strategies saw less exposure to tariffs, lower reductions in export revenues and increased resilience to policy uncertainty. For example, South Africa's SADC-linked production networks enhanced regional market access by roughly twelve per cent, while Brazil's Mercosur plan and India's regional supply hubs cut effective tariff exposure by fifteen to twenty per cent (UNCTAD 2025b; WTO 2025b). These results show the strategic relevance of integrating institutional engagement, regional alignment and economic adaptation.

Lessons for emerging economies

Emerging economies facing asymmetric trade shocks can draw important lessons from the experiences of Brazil, India and South Africa during the 2025 U.S. tariff escalation. Their responses reveal that retaliation alone, whether through tariffs, quotas, or technical barriers, is insufficient to mitigate the wider economic and political repercussions of unilateral trade restrictions. Instead, the most effective strategies combined immediate countermeasures with longer-term adjustments in supply chain organisation, trade diversification, and institutional participation. South Africa's reliance on targeted quotas, Brazil's sector-specific tariffs, and India's hybrid strategy demonstrate that diversified approaches reduce the risk of production disruptions, inflationary pressures, and declining competitiveness in other markets.

A central theme emerging from these cases is the necessity of trade diversification. By redirecting exports to alternative markets, the three countries reduced their dependence on the U.S. and built resilience against future shocks. India strengthened commercial ties with ASEAN and Middle Eastern economies, South Africa expanded intra-African trade under the AfCFTA, and Brazil deepened its engagement with African markets and Mercosur partners. Diversification not only insulated them from tariff-induced vulnerabilities but also enhanced their capacity to withstand the risks of market concentration, highlighting the importance of developing adaptive export networks and investing in market intelligence.

The reorganisation of supply chains also proved essential in sustaining business continuities. Nearshoring, reshoring and the development of regional industrial clusters enabled firms to reduce exposure to tariffs while reinforcing regional integration. South Africa's SADC-integrated supply chains, India's expansion into Southeast Asian production hubs and Brazil's Mercosur-linked adjustments illustrate how geographically diverse and regionally embedded networks can improve competitiveness. By supporting cross-border co-ordination, strengthening local industrial bases and investing in regional infrastructure, emerging economies can transform vulnerability into opportunity. Institutional and diplomatic engagement further shapes the outcomes of these trade disputes. Active participation in multilateral and plurilateral forums allowed these states to

amplify their bargaining power and legitimise their responses. India's use of the WTO dispute settlement mechanism along with its involvement in BRICS and G20 dialogues, illustrates how legal, institutional and diplomatic strategies can be deployed in complementary ways. When pursued proactively and in alignment with broader economic objectives, such engagement enhances both resilience and negotiating strength.

Regional collaboration and integration were also central to the effectiveness of responses. Brazil's alignment within Mercosur and South Africa's reliance on SADC-based supply chains underscore how regional alliances can reduce transaction costs, provide collective resilience and strengthen negotiation positions against larger partners. For smaller and mid-sized emerging economies, regional frameworks serve not only as platforms for market expansion but also as mechanisms for risk-sharing and collective security. Underlying these varied strategies is the recognition that long-term planning is indispensable. Brazil, India and South Africa demonstrated that anticipating shocks, identifying sectoral vulnerabilities and preparing contingency plans are critical to resilience. Investments in technology, infrastructure and human capital reinforced their ability to adapt without derailing broader development goals. By blending economic, political and diplomatic strategies into coherent, forward-looking approaches, emerging economies can better navigate the uncertainties of an increasingly fragmented global trading system.

Effectiveness of retaliation

The 2025 US tariff measures provoked a range of retaliatory responses among emerging economies, yet assessing their effectiveness in shaping US policy requires careful analysis. Evidence from Brazil, India and South Africa demonstrates that direct retaliation tariffs, quotas and non-tariff barriers were partially effective in signaling political dissatisfaction, protecting domestic industries and creating negotiation leverage. For instance, Brazil's 35% tariffs on US soybeans and steel imposed meaningful economic costs on US exporters, prompting initial engagement through bilateral consultations (UNCTAD 2025a). India's targeted tariffs and technical barriers on electronics and pharmaceuticals, combined with WTO filings, communicated a credible threat of protracted trade conflict, thereby

incentivising limited concessions in sector-specific negotiations (Bown 2022).

However, the data suggest that retaliation alone was insufficient to compel broad policy reversal or immediate tariff reduction. US policy persistence reflected domestic political priorities, including protecting politically sensitive constituencies and signaling resolve in trade and industrial strategy. Even co-ordinated BRICS and G20 pressure yielded limited short-term modification of US measures, though it facilitated dialogue and minor sectoral adjustments. These findings align with historical evidence from the 2018–2020 US-China trade war, where counter-tariffs altered the pace and focus of US measures but rarely induced wholesale policy reversal (Liu and Woo 2018). Overall, retaliation serves primarily as a strategic instrument of signaling and negotiation leverage rather than a direct tool to compel unilateral policy change. Its effectiveness is contingent on the size of the targeted economy, the economic impact on sensitive sectors and the credibility of sustained retaliation combined with institutional engagement. Emerging economies maximise influence when retaliation is co-ordinated, calibrated and complemented by trade diversification and diplomatic initiatives, rather than relying on unilateral measures alone.

Although emerging economies responded in a variety of ways to the 2025 US tariff measures, it is important to carefully examine how effective they were in influencing US policy. Direct retaliation tariffs, quotas and non-tariff obstacles were partially successful in expressing political discontent, safeguarding home sectors and generating negotiating leverage, according to evidence from Brazil, India and South Africa. For example, US. exporters faced significant financial consequences as a result of Brazil's 35% tariffs on US steel and soybeans, which prompted initial bilateral negotiations (UNCTAD 2025a). India made modest concessions in sector-specific negotiations by communicating a credible threat of a protracted trade battle through its targeted tariffs and technical obstacles on medicines and electronics, as well as through WTO filings (Bown 2022).

But according to the data, retaliation by itself was not enough to force a quick drop in tariffs or a wider policy reversal. Protecting politically delicate groups and demonstrating tenacity in trade and industrial strategy were two examples of domestic political concerns that were reflected in US policy persistence. Although it promoted discussion and some sectoral changes, even concerted BRICS and G20 pressure resulted in little short-term change of US policies.

These results are consistent with historical data from the US-China trade war of 2018–2020, which showed that counter-tariffs changed the direction and speed of US actions but infrequently resulted in a complete policy reversal (Liu and Woo 2018). In general, revenge is not a direct means of compelling unilateral policy change, but rather a strategic tool of signaling and negotiation leverage. The scale of the targeted economy, the financial impact on vulnerable industries and the legitimacy of persistent retaliation coupled with institutional involvement all affect how effective it is. When retribution is planned, timed and supported by diplomatic efforts and trade diversification as opposed to unilateral actions alone, emerging economies can maximise their effect.

Implications for global trade governance

The 2025 US tariff escalation and the responses of emerging economies highlight important lessons for global trade governance, particularly regarding multilateralism, regionalism and institutional relevance. Despite the unilateral nature of the shock, multilateral institutions such as the WTO remained central. Brazil and India's use of WTO dispute mechanisms illustrates how smaller economies can legitimise their countermeasures within a rules-based framework, thereby avoiding uncontrolled escalation while strengthening the credibility of their actions (WTO 2025a). Regional economic blocs such as SADC, AfCFTA and Mercosur also played a pivotal role in managing the fallout. These platforms enabled states to co-ordinate supply chain realignments, harmonise trade responses and negotiate collectively with external partners. South Africa's reliance on SADC-based co-operation demonstrates how regional integration can lower transaction costs, expand market opportunities and enhance bargaining capacity, underscoring the value of regional institutions as complementary governance structures (Hopewell 2016).

At the same time, the episode revealed the limitations of existing trade rules in restraining dominant powers. WTO standards provide a legal foundation, but weak enforcement and institutional delays often leave smaller states exposed to asymmetric shocks. The co-ordinated strategies of Brazil, India and South Africa show how emerging economies are increasingly turning towards multi-layered governance models that blend retaliation, regional alignment and institutional

engagement. This shift challenges traditional North–South hierarchies and demonstrates how developing economies can exercise agency in shaping trade norms, building resilience and sustaining competitiveness in an era of fragmented global trade governance.

Conclusion and policy implications

The strategic reactions of emerging economies, particularly Brazil, India and South Africa, to the 2025 US tariff measures were analysed in this article. According to empirical study, these economies adopted various measures that included supply chain realignment, trade diversification, direct retaliation and institutional participation. Although these measures were insufficient on their own to materially affect US policy, direct tariffs, quotas and non-tariff barriers gave sector-specific protection while expressing political unhappiness. Whereas supply chain reform, including nearshoring, regional manufacturing centres and infrastructure investment, boosted operational resilience, trade diversification and South-South market development reduced susceptibility. Negotiating leverage was raised, and economic measures were given legitimacy through diplomatic participation through the WTO, regional trade blocs and plurilateral accords. Comparative case studies indicate both convergence and divergence: South Africa leaned on institutional leverage and regional co-operation, India adopted hybrid approaches that stressed market and supply chain flexibility, while Brazil used regional integration.

Prioritising integrated strategies that encompass supply chain adaptability, diversification and retaliation, while also actively engaging in global and regional organisations, are among the policy implications for rising economies. To minimise dependency on dominating economies, authorities should boost intra-emerging market trade, facilitate regulatory harmonisation and invest in regional trade networks and industrial clusters. Organised tactics within regional blocs promote risk-sharing and bargaining strength, guaranteeing stronger long-term economic resilience.

The long-term structural impacts of asymmetric trade shocks, such as changes in global value chains, alterations in South-South trade networks and the efficiency of regional and multilateral institutional systems, deserve additional

examination. Insights for scholars and policymakers to build robust trade policies in an increasingly intricate global trading system.

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SECTION VII:
AFRICAN STRATEGIC OPTIONS

CHAPTER 16

Reshaping Africa's International Relations in an America First World

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Wearing a new face

The face of international relations (IR) is changing. Consequently, the study of IR, which has always been influenced by history, will evolve to adapt to changing global dynamics. The liberal order which has defined IR for a century is rapidly unmaking itself. Those who benefited from and propagated liberal instruments such as globalisation now believe they are being taken advantage of. In addition, the pressures of integrated global markets and the long-term effects of the COVID pandemic have shrunk national budgets and economies and have encouraged many nations to embrace a more nativist view of the world. The worsening climate crisis, political instability and poor governance in parts of the world have also caused mass migration, often via illegal channels. All these factors have led to a sharp and increased distaste for the liberal order. Nowhere is this more pronounced than in the United States of America, long been considered the bastion of the liberal world.

The re-election of Donald Trump as President has re-ignited the fervour to withdraw from and dismantle the liberal order after four years of the Biden administration trying to re-establish it. President Trump's approach to the world is no longer new and has come to be expected; much of what his administration hopes to achieve echoes the plans of his first administration. However, the speed and gusto with which he has addressed these matters, and the wholesale decoupling of foreign policy initiatives, are new.

If America were alone in this, it would be possible to dismiss it as an isolated phenomenon and to expect a more conventional approach from the

next US administration. However, across the world, there are signs of liberal fatigue. The far-right is making serious inroads in mainland Europe; Hungary, Italy, the Netherlands and Switzerland are governed by far-right parties. France continues to flirt with nationalist parties; other national parties are increasing their numbers in parliament across Europe. Further afield, the Russian invasion of Ukraine has returned the age of conquest. In Asia, South Korea, normally a stable democracy, narrowly escaped chaos when its former President declared martial law in the face of mounting public disapproval. In Africa, multiple coups in West Africa have reversed democratisation on the continent. Furthermore, the reignition of conflict in Sudan and mass protests against poor government services across several cities in Africa contribute to a feeling of liberal foreboding. This foreboding is causing many countries to rethink the liberal order and the cost of maintaining it. In the meantime, America, having borne some of the costs of liberalism, is instead promoting national primacy without the pretence of benevolence.

So, we return to how history changes the face of IR. If this is a permanent shift in the world order, be it ever so slight, what happens when IR wears a new face? This chapter is especially interested in how Africa reacts when unbridled self-promotion instead of co-operation and transactionalism instead of multilateralism are the philosophies of relations between nations. This chapter illuminates the opportunities and challenges for Africa's IR from this approach by drawing on primary and secondary sources, along with field research relevant to this discussion. The chapter proceeds as follows: the next section reviews Trump 2.0, analysing how its policies have affected African countries so far and what effect they might still have. Then, in response to Trump 2.0, this study outlines a new approach to Africa's IR and how it can navigate the evolving global order. Finally, the conclusion highlights key observations and draws conclusions on African agency in IR.

When America comes first, what happens next?

America's interest in a post-independent Africa has traditionally been defined by trade, security and liberal orthodoxy propagation. During his first term, Trump did not break away from this too much. While there is still a lot of speculation over what Trump 2.0 will mean for the world historically, in the end, the US-

Africa relationship will still be defined mainly through trade, security and cultural diplomacy. One defining characteristic of the Trump Presidency is his general indifference to and sometimes open disdain for the continent (Ahluwalia 2025: 250). During his first term, Trump did not visit any African nations, and there is no record of him visiting the continent in his private life. Trump has also been on the record using derogatory language to describe African nations (Watkins and Phillips 2018).

His indifference is particularly curious given the mass appeal he enjoys on the continent, with his popularity already established during his days as a reality television star. Many Africans also share his social conservative and religious views; his colourful personality and posturing remind many of a brand of politics and posturing they are more familiar with (Igunza, Bartlett and Bright 2024). Some commentators believe Trump's approach to the world is based on spheres of influence, which include controlling and influencing parts of the world that are beneficial and leaving the rest (Goddard 2025). His indifference may be fuelling the administration's withdrawal from Africa and the relinquishing of its influence on the continent. The State Department has closed multiple embassy locations (Schwikowski 2025), while Russian paramilitary units have established a foothold across the Sahel (Smith 2024).

Another distinction of the Trump administration is the redefinition of the rules of the US-Africa relationship. One of the specific levers of America's policy in Africa has been aid. The Trump administration has reversed this position globally by becoming more strategic with its investments and expecting a return on its participation. Trump removes the sheen and the pretence of benevolence and demands more equity in international relations. Trump sees the world through the lens of relative gains and not absolute gains. Relative gains in IR relate to what and how much one state gains compared to another, rather than calculating the absolute value of the gains (Jackson and Sørensen [1999] 2013: 121). It speaks to the competitive nature of IR, and demonstrates how Trump views the world: how much America loses relative to others, and not how much it benefits from the system it designed. While his view of the world in these terms is widespread, he has been surprisingly lenient with some countries. Tellingly, these countries are not in the developing world. African countries were not spared his tariffs, which his administration argues restore balance to international trade and force trading partners to reconsider their own tariff policies (Princewill 2025).

While America's trade policy is a fast-moving target and America has a trade deficit on goods with Africa, the principle of reciprocity belies the sheer disparity in economic and geopolitical power between the two trading partners. Because Trump does not have a sympathetic view of African countries, he does not feel a sense of responsibility to them.

Much of Trump 2.0 is still unfolding, and unfolding quite rapidly. Only with time and distance will it be possible to scrutinise all the effects of the Trump 2.0 administration. However, enough data is currently available along with data from the first administration to explore how Trump 2.0 will shape relations with Africa. Three broad categories will inform this exploration: trade, security and norms.

Building walls and closing markets

Tariffs are the *topic du jour* (the 'main T' of the moment). Terrorism and its eradication were once central to American foreign policy; now it is tariffs and trade. This approach has nothing particularly new; most countries have had some form of protectionism, especially for strategic industries. Nor is this new to Trump; one of the hallmarks of his first administration was how quickly he reneged on long-standing trade agreements. However, like with all things associated with Trump 2.0, the swift actions and the sweeping effects are new.

The Trump administration has enacted dramatic retaliatory tariffs on all countries, friend and foe alike. African countries have not been spared. The tariff policy is being created in a dynamic environment and has changed several times; however, countries like Algeria, Libya, South Africa and Tunisia are facing some of the steepest tariff hikes (Princewill 2025). At one point, the small country of Lesotho was subject to a 50% tariff, although this was later reconsidered. Eighteen other African countries are now subject to modified tariffs of fifteen per cent or more (The White House 2025a). During this period, Washington received and responded to several calls and requests for tariff renegotiations or a deal to avoid these tariffs, yet Africa was not given special consideration, clearly signalling Trump's position (Princewill 2025).

Indeed, Trump has reserved special ire for South Africa, one of Africa's economic powerhouses, because of his interpretation of domestic land laws as an affront to the white minority's civil liberties. Besides publicly denouncing

the South African government and imposing steep trade tariffs, Trump signed an executive order restricting aid to South Africa. This was purely symbolic, as all foreign aid had been stopped by this stage (Gavin 2025). Trump's muscular approach to South Africa reveals the political dimension of America's trade policy, which is unsurprising. However, this makes US trade relations unpredictable as they do not necessarily adhere to the administration's stated objectives.

Trump's second administration has not yet pronounced an African policy through which to interpret its actions. Nevertheless, reviewing the African policy of his first administration may provide insight into which principles remain and which have shifted. Guided by knowledgeable and trusted persons like the former National Security Advisor, John Bolton, the policy was anchored on prosperity, security and stability (Schneidman and Signé 2018). Prosperity was focused on advancing trade and commercial interests, security on countering terrorism in the Sahel and conflict on stabilising the continent by deploying aid strategically.

Under this vision, America still sought primacy, even though it was more circumspect with its resources; it was still committed to defending its interests against China and used aid as a focal point for soft power and engagement. However, while the Trump 2.0 administration has not issued a clear statement on its engagement with Africa, the gutting of USAID is a clear statement of intent and an indication of a new direction. Forty per cent of USAID's budget was spent in Sub-Saharan Africa (The Economist 2025). For some countries, like Liberia, the aid represented an large part of their GDP. Consequently, they lost 1.6% of their Gross National Income, the largest cut relative to GDP globally (Signé 2025a). These cuts were enacted despite the historical bonds between Liberia and the United States. *Prosper Africa*, a new initiative from the first Trump administration, was meant to refocus US foreign aid as a strategic and mutually beneficial investment, but it has been shuttered with the cuts to aid in his new administration (Launch Base Africa 2025). A holdover from the previous Africa policy is the focus on mutual prosperity and limited engagement, meaning where there is clear benefit and reward. The signals from the White House suggest that America will only engage where interest and influence are aligned; the age of soft power politics is shifting. Trade and not arms is now America's biggest weapon, but even so, America has been lagging behind China for some time now. In 2024, total trade between Africa and China was US$295.56 billion, showing a growth of four per cent compared to 2023 and keeping China Africa's primary

trading partner for the sixteenth year (ECOFIN Agency 2025). In contrast, total trade between Africa and the US was US$104.9 billion, up 8.3% from 2023, but still significantly below that of China (Office of the United States Trade Representative 2025).

Apart from trade, China has firmly established itself as a reliable partner on the continent. Through its famed Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), it has woven an intricate web of economic, social and political interests. The BRI is China's answer to the American Marshall Plan and is a long-term strategy to centre China at the heart of development for a new world order. (Brautigam 2020: 5). The appeal of China's policy for African countries is the generous combination of infrastructure loans, grants and other economic incentives at a time when the rest of the world has lost its appetite for infrastructure finance. During the opening ceremony of the 2018 Forum on China-Africa Co-operation (FOCAC), which is always well attended, China announced a US$60 billion package for African states, consisting of US$10 billion in investment financing, US$15 billion of concessional grants and loans and US$20 billion in credit (Sow 2018). In response to the tariffs and new wave of protectionism from the US, China seized the opportunity and granted market access by removing all tariffs for African products (York 2025). China's relationship with Africa is neither benevolent nor balanced: some of the loans are predatory and have allowed for the forfeiture of national assets, but it is without the usual affectation and pretence of liberalism, and African nations know this.

Traditionally, in both Sino-African and US-Africa relations, the 54 African nations have been grouped into one bloc even though these countries are separate entities as far as diplomatic and trading relationships are concerned.[1] Nevertheless, Africa does often negotiate as a bloc, and the African Growth Opportunity Act (AGOA), the predominant trading agreement, views Africa as a bloc. On the other hand, the Trump administration prefers the transactional bilateral style, and if allowed, it will leverage it to weaken Africa's collective power. There are therefore signs that Trump's engagement with Africa may be openly controversial. Not all prosperity, even if mutually beneficial, is good prosperity.

The Trump administration announced agreements with Eswatini and South Sudan to accept deportees for processing, amid reports of increasing pressure on African countries to agree to these terms (Stone 2025). For example, the Nigerian Foreign Minister detailed how Nigeria had refused a similar deal for Venezuelan

prisoners (Channels Television @channelstv 2025). While controversial, such arrangements are not new; Rwanda and the United Kingdom had a similar arrangement before a new government scrapped it. However, Trump's success with African countries in this regard indicates the appetite for transactionalism on the continent and for currying favour with the US, even if it means breaking from the mould. The African Union (AU) has not pronounced itself on these deals yet, yet it would be curious to see how a continent that knows the horror of forced migration first-hand deals with processing human cargo.

AGOA was extended until December 2026, but many argue that the new tariff regime blunts the benefits of the initiative (Hudson 2025). A general protectionist trend governs Trump 2.0 trade policies, and that is unlikely to change, especially for African countries. Countries that want preferential treatment will need to make bilateral deals that align American interests with theirs.

American strategic indifference

In no other area are America's limited objectives and interests more apparent than in security. America's security interests in Africa have always been driven by geostrategic value, which has waxed and waned over time. America does not feel the same burden of history for Africa as for Europe. In post-independent Africa, especially during the Cold War, Africa's geostrategic and geopolitical value was high as both America and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) looked to extend their influence. When the USSR disintegrated, and the Balkans fell into conflict, that strategic value fell, clearly apparent from the West's halting reaction to the Rwandan genocide (Arthur 2017: 15).

In that period, Africa's security environment was defined by civil wars and conflicts spurred on by ethnicity, nationalist movements and a desire for control of state resources or a combination of all these factors (Wai 2018: 21). There were also wars of secession and independence between Eritrea and Ethiopia, as well as between Sudan and South Sudan (Dersso 2014: 1). In response to these conflicts, the AU and Regional Economic Communities (RECs) became more active security actors. It was during this period that the principle of African Solutions to African Problems became a mainstay of multilateral engagements on the continent (Adekeye and Landsberg 2000: 15). It also meant that African countries began viewing security collectively; indeed, the Economic Community

of West African States (ECOWAS) was instrumental in ending conflict in Liberia and Sierra Leone during this time. Vestiges of some of these conflicts remain or have been transformed into different conflicts.

However, in the wake of the September 11 attacks, Africa once again became important to the US as it prosecuted its Global War on Terror (GWOT). The US increased its attacks on terrorist cells and, over time, shifted to drone attacks that did not require the same workforce and resources as in previous military engagements. Incidentally, America's waging of its campaign against terrorism has, in turn, fuelled terrorism in Africa. For example, the collapse of the Libyan government and breakdown into warring factions flooded the continent with weapons and fighters, which have been manifested in Mali's insurgency conflicts (Bala and Tar 2021: 191).

Dislodging terrorists in the Middle East has also led to an influx of unwanted elements into Africa and the spread of radicalism on the continent, where porous borders, large ungoverned areas and poor governance have encouraged the growth of terrorist groups. Local groups have merged, allied and morphed into terrorist groups that have transnational and international links with bigger groups (Bala and Tar 2021: 191). The Jamaat Nusrat Al-Islam wal Muslimeen (JNIM) in Burkina and Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), which functions across West Africa and the Sahel, are among the deadliest terrorist groups in the world (Institute for Economics & Peace 2024: 2). Additionally, Sub-Saharan Africa is the region most affected by terrorism in the world, recording 59% of terrorism-related deaths in 2023 (Institute for Economics & Peace 2024). Terrorism, which was once localised to East Africa and the Horn of Africa, is now Africa's primary security threat. It has spread across the Sahel, and the Southern African Development Community (SADC) has had to deploy forces in Cabo Delgado, Mozambique, to combat terrorism and extremism (SADC 2021). Sub-Saharan Africa has become the epicentre of terrorist activity in the world (Institute for Economics & Peace 2024: 3).

America's security interests are curbing the spread of terrorism, safeguarding marine trading routes and securing access to strategic resources. While these have always guided security engagements across different administrations, the objectives have become narrower over time. America has never been keen to engage on the continent directly, especially after the debacle of *Operation Black Hawk Down* in Somalia (Williams 2008: 310). It also does not help that African

governments have been unified in rejecting proposals to establish AFRICOM, the African Command of the US, operating on African soil, the command centre of which is in Stuttgart, Germany (van Wyck 2016: 110). America has also been an unreliable partner in security matters for African countries. When Nigeria tried to purchase weapons from America as the Boko Haram threat grew, they were denied under the Leahy Act, which prevents America from trading with countries that have questionable human rights records (Ogbonnaya 2016: 193). America's enforcement of this act is not universal or indiscriminate, as it would disqualify some of its security relationships with non-African governments. However, there are signs of a commitment to a security relationship with Africa.

Increasingly, drone warfare has characterised engagement with Africa. This has been consistent across the Obama, Biden and Trump administrations. Obama dramatically increased the scale of these attacks, with a reported 540 authorised strikes, many of which were executed in Somalia (Zenko 2017). Biden dialled back strikes against Somali targets with 51 targets reported, and Trump, in the first six months of his second administration, authorised 43 strikes in Somalia (Hudson 2025). Trump's increasing use of drone warfare in Somalia is noteworthy because he vowed to end American military engagements and has shown very little other interest in Africa. However, American security policy has always been defined by its interests, and Trump's actions are consistent with policy even if the objectives are narrower. The Somali strikes are likely connected to the safeguarding of maritime routes and not the elimination of terrorist cells, as a similar approach was not taken against cells in the Sahel.

Strategic indifference and transactionalism may define the Trump 2.0 security approach in Africa. In the first six months of Trump 2.0, the administration's only engagement was brokering the Rwanda-Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) peace deal, which stipulated access to critical minerals in DRC (Signé 2025b). The deal is similar in principle to one rejected by Ukraine for being too taxing and not providing security guarantees (Méheut et al. 2025).

However, other conflicts on the continent are unlikely to garner the same attention from the administration. The Sudan Civil War, which is in its second year, has been largely ignored even though Biden played a significant role in mediation and negotiations. A senior AU political officer with experience of the conflict and knowledge of the peace negotiations detailed how America's interference and interests may in fact have complicated the process:

> "The United Nations was being tele-guided behind the scenes by the United States, whose objective was much more long-term. They were not opposed to the military being in power. If the African Union position had been followed, we would have appointed a new Prime Minister, and there would be no crisis"[2].

America's interest in the Sudan conflict has waned over time, and the Trump administration is unlikely to re-enter the fray unless such a move is aligned with its commercial interests. Alignment is, however, unlikely given the many other interests involved in Sudan.

America is also noticeably absent in the Sahel, where terrorist groups are expanding their reach and operations. The Russian African Corps succeeded the Wagner Group, establishing a foothold across the Sahel. In countries like Burkina Faso, the Central African Republic, Mali and Niger, Russia has formalised its security co-operation and helped guarantee regime survival (Smith 2024).

Admittedly, the Trump administration has inherited many of its security priorities. Both the Ukraine-Russian war and the current Israeli-Palestinian conflict preceded Trump 2.0, as did the Iranian escalation.

Abnormal relations

Trump 2.0 is unfolding in real time, but one thing that is already clear and consistent with Trump's first term is his rethinking and reordering of international normative frameworks. During his first term, he aggressively pulled out of climate change agreements and the US-Iran nuclear deal. Furthermore, he withdrew and withheld funding from the World Health Organisation (WHO) at the height of the pandemic. Trump often threatened the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO), which was once considered sacrosanct for Western Security. He also reversed years of long-standing trade agreements.

In his second term, Trump has swiftly reversed long-standing agreements, consistent with his first term. In addition, many of his policies revert to those of his first term, as they were undone during the Biden administration. However, others are new and drastic. The shuttering of aid, which has been part of US foreign policy for decades, while not unheralded, was swift and encompassing. The effects of this will be felt most in Africa, where many countries will struggle

to fill the gap in the social services they provide (The Economist 2025). Even large economies like Nigeria will feel the effects of the withdrawal of aid, with a financing gap of US$160 million (Adebayo 2025). Trump has also aggressively challenged the thinking on trade. During his first term, he set his sights on his North American neighbours and China, but now the dragnet is global and drastic. Trade policies for Trump 2.0 are decidedly protectionist and nationalist, challenging liberal orthodoxy for the last hundred years.

For African countries, it is a curious time: these are the very polices that many were encouraged to reject during the Structural Adjustment of the 1990s championed by the International Monetary Fund (IMF). To watch as America rejects trade liberalisation and raises trade barriers to protect its industries must feel like the world is reversing on its axis. Nevertheless, the question at the heart of these actions is the same as that at the heart of IR: Does power have a moral obligation? As Hans Morgenthau asked, should we consider morality in politics? Therefore, does Trump have an obligation to develop the continent without seeking a return? Should the US grant African countries a preferred trading status, such as AGOA, because it has a responsibility to help developing nations? These may be nuanced, philosophical questions for some, but the answer is clear for Trump 2.0 so far. Marco Rubio, the US Secretary of State, while justifying the end of USAID, mentioned that African states have received the most funding, yet have only voted with the US at the UN 29% of the time (US State Department 2025). There is a clear expectation that relationships come at a cost, and benevolence and goodwill are not currency.

There are other implicit ways that Trump 2.0 may also change normative frameworks for African states. America no longer has as stringent a view on social and political freedoms as previous administrations have had. China has made inroads into Africa because it does not require democratic alignment, whereas America has always done so in the past. However, Trump's transactional approach frees America from this condition. The Trump administration suspended the Foreign Corrupt Practices Act, which prevented trade and engagement with many African administrations (The White House 2025b). On a continent that has seen a reversal in democratisation and democratic liberties, Trump's political style, which is often irreverent and does away with customs and niceties, is familiar to many African leaders. Many African leaders have remained in power through a patchwork of favour-seeking and favour-granting relationships that co-exist with

more formal political networks; this is often referred to as neopatrimonialism (Henderson 2009: 33). Some African leaders may look to Trump's political style as justification to undermine democratic institutions and disregard checks and balances. America's indifference towards Africa will also not force military governments to consider a democratic transition a necessity.

African nations have often used international organisations and multilateralism to advance their interests. The multilateral approach is a norm of Africa's foreign policy. Multilateralism allows strength in numbers and for African states that has often meant voting as a bloc, pooling their numbers to advocate for things that are important to them. Where a clear power imbalance exists, smaller countries can thus counter stronger countries; the practice is defined as soft balancing (Whitaker 2010: 1110). In US-Africa relations, African states identified as vital partners to the US have often demonstrated an independent streak contrary to US interests. Notably, the dissent is concentrated on three issues: the International Criminal Court (ICC), the establishment of AFRICOM and the Global War on Terror (Whitaker 2010: 1110). This view is also corroborated by how African states have voted against US interests in the past. Trump's preferred style of bilateral engagement may reframe this; his view on international organisations being only useful when they further US interests may also reframe African multilateralism. Different African countries have already made strong statements on withdrawing from the ICC (Ssenyonjo 2017: 214). African states hold many common positions on a wide range of issues, including trade, the environment, extraction rights and maritime rights, to name a few. Trump 2.0 may cause African states to rethink this approach if continued US engagement in Africa is determined by interest alignment. An example of this is the BRICS group. South Africa was the first African member of BRICS, and many other African countries have joined the expanded grouping thereafter. BRICS philosophy and expansion have been a point of contention for the Trump administration (Chia and Jordan 2025)

Make Africa Great Again

Trump 2.0 is new, and the administration is rewriting the rules of American foreign policy, but new is not always unprecedented. Historically, Africa has always had to react to change economically, socio-culturally or socio-politically.

Africa is well adapted to its political or economic fortunes changing, but it also demonstrates agency, not waiting to be acted upon but acting on its own. Even at the height of great power competition between Russia and the US, African states made strategic and pragmatic choices that advanced their own interests. Those actions were often referred to as non-alignment, which still shapes the foreign policies of many African nations with their more powerful partners.

As a field of study, Africa's International Relations (AIR) is still relatively new. However, as a practice, it has been around for some time and reveals many traits that can help African nations navigate Trump 2.0. AIR is broadly categorised as the production of knowledge about IR in African academia, which yields a concrete and universal set of African ideas (Khadiagala 2010: 376). The diplomatic practices and foreign policies of African states between themselves and external actors, and the third refers to any approach which takes Africa as the primary unit of analysis in IR (Cornelissen et al. 2012: 1). AIR allows the analysis of the African states as the centre of study, as the actor and not the reactor.

A noted expert and voice in the field, Professor Thomas Tieku, was interviewed as part of this research, and he believes that AIR challenges the structure of the international system:

> "African IR if properly done, and my understanding of it is that it seeks to actually challenge the world as it exists now, one, it seeks to somewhat, seeks to challenge even the configuration of the state system. So, in other words, the African IR is an equity-oriented IR. American IR is a problem-solving IR. It is an IR that takes the world, accepts the world as the best that we can have, or at least the alternative is no better than what we have now"[3].

AIR qualities can shape Africa's IR in a Trump 2.0 world. These qualities are drawn from a wide analysis of African states' foreign policy across East and West Africa. While not conclusive, they are consistent enough to provide a guide on how African states can respond.

Africa's IR is personality-driven. This is not peculiar to Africa; charisma and demagoguery have always coloured the interpretation of the history of the international order. However, in Africa, with weaker institutions, the incidences of this are higher. The state often assumes the personality of the officeholder. Personality as a property of IR is not without its benefits. The strength of

conviction of personalities shaped the normative instruments that African IR currently rests on. The strength of conviction was responsible for retooling the AU when Presidents Olusegun Obasanjo of Nigeria, Abdoulaye Wade of Senegal, Muammar Gaddafi of Libya, Abdelaziz Bouteflika of Algeria and Thabo Mbeki of South Africa called for a renewed Africa. Trump's foreign policy is often personal and idiosyncratic; he has occasionally preferred to bypass convention and state policy and strike personal deals on the strength of his personality. He has attempted this with Vladimir Putin of Russia and Kim Jong Un of North Korea, often against the advice of his advisors. Likewise, African leaders have often come to agreements based on the personalities of their leaders. The ECOWAS intervention in Liberia was driven by Nigeria's President, who had a personal relationship with the troubled Liberian leader, Samuel Doe (Obi 2009: 121). African leaders who manage to be on friendly terms with the US President will likely benefit from the relationship.

Africa's IR is also pragmatic, not paradigmatic. As African states seek opportunities for interest assertion, they have sometimes embraced worldviews that were suitable to the moment; at times there have been Socialist states like Tanzania and Ethiopia, and the everyman appeal of Marxism was well suited to the militant freedom fighters in Angola and other parts of Africa. During the Cold War, African countries pushed for a Non-Aligned Movement to give them freedom of choice in a bipolar world. In the 1990s, at the end of the Cold War, many African states embraced the neoliberal worldview and the IMF's Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs). African countries continue to choose the path or philosophy most beneficial to their objectives, which often informs their foreign relations. This characteristic will serve African leaders well with the transactionalism of Trump 2.0. When interests have a commercial value and not a normative one, it will allow African leaders to make clear-eyed decisions that align with their interests without the theatre of neoliberal guilt or shaming. IR is revealing its real face of *realpolitik*. Already, Francophone Africa, which was firmly tethered to France, is doing an about-face and creating new security relationships with Russia (Jonah 2025). This agile approach to policy options is not new to a continent that has historically been sacked and sought for its resources, but it may be more pronounced in a Trump 2.0 world, and deft political leaders may be able to take advantage. As the Nigerian Minister of Industry, Trade and Investment recently quipped in response to the US tariffs: 'The world is a big place, we do

have old friends, and we are certainly making new friends'[4].

Additionally, another trait of Africa's IR is that it is cyclical. Indeed, this is true of all IR; epochs define history. However, once again, a war in Europe holds the world's attention, as does the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Yet Africa risks being devalued geopolitically and becoming a battleground for proxy battles. The Sudanese conflict has not received the same attention as conflicts elsewhere, even though it has created another humanitarian disaster. Africa is still gripped by insecurity and instability, and African dictators are also reemerging. In all the countries that have experienced a coup in recent years, the military was in charge, or the military had transformed into politicians when the Cold War ended. It is political *déjà vu*. The cyclical nature of IR should make analysis and actions predictable, even with all the changes of a Trump 2.0 world. Trump, despite his unorthodox approach, is highly unlikely to recognise Taiwan as an independent nation and is unlikely to reverse US policy with Israel and withdraw support. Moreover, US policy returned to its more traditional roots after Trump's first term and may do so again. On average, African leaders outlast a US administration; in some cases, like Cameroon and Uganda, there has not been a change in regime since the 1980s. African leaders are more prepared than most to play the long game because, though the face of IR is changing, it may not change for too long, and sometimes it is more of the same.

Conclusion

The actions and policies of the second Trump administration point to a deliberate withdrawing of its influence from the continent, bolstering the theory that spheres of influence govern Trump's foreign policy. So far, Trump does not view Africa as being within his sphere of influence. Trump's indifference towards the continent provides an opportunity for African leaders to demonstrate agency and leadership. African voices have been among the loudest regarding equitable climate change policies, good governance in the extractive industries and United Nations Security Council (UNSC) reform. All these initiatives are antithetical to current US policy and provide an opportunity for African leaders to have a voice.

Trump 2.0 also presents challenges to Africa's IR. There are AIR traits that directly conflict with Trump's style; Africa's IR is normative and it is consensus-seeking. Trump's bilateral and transactional approach will challenge this. His

personal style will further weaken institutions like the AU and force countries to consider common positions in the interest of national objectives. Trump is unlikely to recognise Taiwan but might recognise Western Sahara if this move provides an advantage. How would Africa react? An African nation might agree to host AFRICOM in a security-for-critical-minerals deal. What does that do to Africa's collective position on security? Furthermore, what if more African countries agree to host third-party immigration detention centres? Does this become a standard of US-Africa relations, and what does it do to Africa's normative and ideational frameworks? Trump 2.0 is unfolding in real-time, and history will provide a clearer picture of, and answer to some of these questions. AIR provides a framework to consider them. Lastly, the changes being introduced by Trump's second administration will require nations to adapt quickly. For African leaders, many of whom have been in power for decades, adapting to the latest geopolitical changes has been key to their survival. It is nothing new.

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Endnotes

1 The African Union recognises Western Sahara as a sovereign state, although Morocco and Algeria still dispute this.

2 In May 2023, as part of field research, a senior political officer, AU, was interviewed virtually. The officer remained anonymous to speak candidly.

3 Prof. Thomas Tieku, an authority on Africa's IR was interviewed by the author on 2nd February 2023 as part fieldwork

4 Jumoke Oduwole, the Nigerian Minister for trade, was interviewed on CNN on the 7th August 2025. The full interview is available here https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kgYP100zplo

CHAPTER 17

Revisiting the Debated China-Africa Relationship in South Africa's International Relations Considering Trump's Second Term

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Introduction

Reviewing Rodney's now-classic book analysing Africa's Europe-sponsored woes, *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*, South African Sociologist, Prof. Bernard Magubane posits,

> "But here at last is a book that confronts and exposes the ugliness of imperialism, not to let us hang our heads in shame but to point the way forward to a better future. Africa need not mourn about the rape Europe visited on her, but she must put herself together, as they say, and begin to repair the damage to her economic, political and social fabric" (Magubane 1973: 132).

Since Africa's anticolonial and decolonial struggles, there have been many questions about the path the continent, or even its individual countries, could and should take. The Cold War offered African countries a choice between capitalism and socialism, as a new scramble for the continent ensued between these two

political-economic forces, but disastrously left Africa economically marginalised at the end of the Cold War. Part of Africa's challenge in the early fights against imperialism was a proper diagnosis of the continent's underdevelopment. Here, Frantz Fanon's work ([1952] 1967) became crucial, providing a propaedeutic to the psychology, history and symbolic violence of race, an ideology that made the world work (Fanon [1952] 1967). A second helpful diagnosis was economic, coming from Rodney's (1972) pen in *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*. Here, as per Magubane's review above, Africa finally had a book that correctly provided a cross-disciplinary analysis of history, and began to propose social, economic and political interventions to overhaul the continent's condition at a point when many African countries were gaining their independence.

In South Africa, one such attempt at reconstruction in the post-1994 period has been to deploy diplomacy as a strategy by associating with countries that could aid its development. In this period, arguably, the two primary allies that SA has sought to work with have been the US and China. Politically, these three countries have had many disagreements on global issues, with, for example, SA clashing with the US over the Russia-Ukraine and Israel-Palestine wars. Yet, despite such disagreements over the past 30 years, SA has benefited significantly from trade agreements with the US, such as the African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA) (Fabricius 2018), which are designed (in principle) to benefit SA more than the US, as a means of aiding SA's economic growth. With China, SA seems to have found a strange bedfellow—one that has frequently been accused of being undemocratic, or at best, showing a weak commitment to democracy internally (Yang, Zhou and Chu 2024), which clashes with SA's stance on promoting democracy throughout the world. On the other hand, China's membership in BRICS has been highly strategic and beneficial to SA.

One cannot properly explain US-SA and SA-China relations without analysing US-China relations. The nature of International Relations demands a multipolar analysis because an event in one relationship can trigger ripple effects in others. For example, during Trump 1.0, Chinese companies were barred from using Google services in the US. While this resulted from a conflict between the US and China, or more precisely, between Trump and China, SA felt the impact. Such an observation is important because it illustrates how disputes between global hegemons inevitably impact Africa; she has always been on the losing end. Other examples are the Scramble for Africa and the Cold War. The attention

South Africa is currently getting from China and the US, amongst others, is a strong indicator that the Scramble for Africa might only have started, and not ended, with the Berlin Conference. This reality shows why the original BRIC countries needed a 'gateway into Africa' (Kahn 2011). Thus, the question arises of how South Africa should approach its foreign policy attitude towards China and the US, especially under Trump 2.0. This period does not appear to be conducive to South Africa's foreign policy of non-alignment and friendliness with all major powers. This is further complicated by the world's polycrises (Le Grange 2024), in which nations have had to be self-reliant or form strategic alliances. An example of this was the supply of COVID vaccines, where SA was assisted by China and Russia rather than by the US, which only offered assistance at a later stage. Thus, this paper adopts an interpretive and decolonial paradigm, centralising SA's self-preservation. As will be clear later in the paper, a qualitative and decolonial attitude towards other states helps us interpret the receipt of aid and the pursuit of trade that is framed as benefiting SA. This viewpoint is elaborated on via a theoretical foundation. One may note that this paper opens with somewhat dated literature to address a current problem. This is intentional, pointing to how long Africa has had to contend with these challenges, which, unfortunately, have not yet been addressed sufficiently, either in theory or in practice.

Literature review

China's role in BRICS

China's peaceful rise in the last seven decades is well captured by Kandhari (2023: 2) when she says that 'China's economy has undergone a remarkable transformation over the past 70 years, catapulting the country from its predominantly rural roots to a vibrant, urbanised industrial powerhouse.' China's position as the second-largest economy in the world and the biggest economy within the BRICS+ bloc provides ample reason for an intense examination of its role in BRICS+. It is argued, among other things, that, in BRICS+, China has found powerful allies to challenge the Western democratic system and cultural dominance, as well as its technological pre-eminence (Sarpong and Sibiri 2024). To further its aims of challenging Western dominance, China, Brazil, Russia and South Africa supported the expansion of the BRICS bloc to include countries

such as Egypt, Ethiopia, Indonesia, Iran and the United Arab Emirates. The inclusion of these countries was not without controversy. India objected to the expansion of the group; however, it was outnumbered. Indian policymakers have also raised other concerns, such as China's economic activities and naval presence in the Indian Ocean, which threaten India's influence in the region as well as its national security (Bhatt 2024). Consequently, the rivalry between India and China makes India wary of and concerned about China's influence in BRICS+.

The developments and contradictions emerging from within BRICS+, along with China's handling of these matters, give China more leverage in global affairs. This is because China always seeks peaceful and diplomatic ways to deal with confrontational situations. Moreover, China has been able to successfully use BRICS+ to further its broader strategic vision of shielding itself from Western powers and the intricacies of a multipolar world (Sarpong Sibiri 2024). Given that BRICS+ summits are held annually, China has been able to use these summits to discuss challenges not only concerning BRICS+ member states but also those confronting the world. Part of China's strategy is to counter Western influence and that of some multilateral bodies, such as the UN, G7 and G20. In its pursuit of reshaping multilateral bodies, China seeks to push for a reform agenda. Among other things, it is advocating for the recently established New Development Bank (NDB) and the contingent reserve arrangement (CRA) for BRICS+ countries and the developing world, which have been and continue to be excluded by the Bretton Woods institutions. These newly developed economic institutions seek to challenge the mainstream financial institutions by making funds available to developing countries for economic and infrastructure development without imposing conditionalities (Wang 2022). In recent years, China has moved away from its commitment to non-interference in the internal affairs of other nations. This signals a move towards being a global leader. A case in point is China's involvement in trying to push one of its strategic allies within BRICS+, namely Russia, to end the war with Ukraine. The active role taken by China in the Russia-Ukraine conflict is part of its strategy to project its power and authority not only to BRICS+ countries, but to the world at large. China thus hopes to navigate its geopolitical rivalry with the United States by making use of its role in BRICS+ (Biba 2022).

China's role in South Africa and Africa

The relations between China's role in SA and Africa have generated and continue to generate many positive and negative debates. Amongst the positive sentiments argued in many circles is that because China became its biggest trading partner in 2009, surpassing the United States and Germany, South Africa benefitted in many areas, such as infrastructure, aid and loans. Subsequently, in 2010, China invited South Africa to attend the then BRIC summit in China and to accept full membership, which led to the group being renamed as BRICS (Xiong 2012). South Africa, like many other African states, has hugely benefited from China's credit openness (its 'open checkbook') in the form of aid, loans and trade. China has also assisted with many infrastructure projects on the continent (Msimango 2016). Many analysts question the inclusion of South Africa in BRICS, instead of Egypt or Nigeria, emerging economies with proven reserves of strategic resources such as oil. Xiong (2012) provides a compelling argument for South Africa's inclusion, postulating that this was because

> …"economically, South Africa provides China with an export destination and is a source of raw materials much like the rest of Africa; however, being a regional power, it also presents China with the strategic opportunity to expand its outreach into Africa. China's markets provide South Africa with a channel to diversify traditional north-south economic relations and draw investment from alternative sources."

Therefore, to date, statistics published in the China-Africa Economic Bulletin (Moses et al. 2024) indicate that imports and exports in Africa-China trade have grown significantly, from about US$11.67 billion in 2000 to about US$257.67 billion in 2022. This has led African countries to see China as a significant partner in their quest for development. In addition, Msimango (2016) published a study focusing on Africa-China relations, in which he highlights that the positive aspect of China-Africa relations is that the Chinese do not impose themselves on the internal affairs of any of the African states. Over and above that, the Chinese are investing in sectors such as manufacturing, health,and industrial sectors, which are sectors that Western countries have been and continue to be reluctant to invest in.

However, there are many scholars and analysts, particularly from some African and many Western countries, who hold the view that the role of China in South Africa and Africa is detrimental to the development of the continent. Carmody and Taylor (2010) have long noted that China's aggressiveness in securing external resources has been part of its strategy since realising that its internal resources would no longer meet its developmental needs. Therefore, scholars and analysts such as Li (2007), Ayenagbo (2015) and Benabdallah (2018) hold the view that China's quest for mineral resources to fuel its industrialisation has led China to aggressively penetrate Africa in ways never seen before. They further elaborate that because China provides Africa with an alternative market, China, much like Western countries, continues to extract raw materials from the continent and then returns manufactured goods to it.

The *role of the US in SA and Africa*

South Africa stands at a significant crossroads of profound significance. Having overcome the difficult years of colonialism and apartheid, it now faces several new critical challenges. Firstly, it needs to find its place in a world entering a new era of great power competition between China and the United States of America, and at the same time it needs to deal with Europe and Russia's influence in Africa. Secondly, the post-apartheid state is susceptible to opportunistic governance, crime, corruption, inequalities and social and moral degeneration. The relations between South Africa and the United States, in general, have had and continue to face difficulties. With the second term of the Trump administration (2.0), relations are at their worst (Ray 2025). Historically, the US has, to some degree, assisted South Africa and Africa in various ways. For example, in 2003, the US introduced the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) to assist, in particular, South Africa, which had and continues to grapple with HIV/AIDS. The assistance of PEPFAR complemented the work and resources of the South African government by supporting non-governmental organisations and employing health workers to work within the public health system to strengthen HIV services (Chiliza et al. 2024). However, President Trump has signed several executive orders cutting funding to critical areas around the globe under the pretext of saving money and reducing wastage. Among the executive orders President Trump signed was a ban on foreign assistance to South Africa, claiming

that the South African government was engaged in race-based discrimination against the white minority, after President Ramaphosa signed an expropriation bill into law (Gavin 2025).

The Land Audit Report of 2017 provides disturbing statistics of land ownership, despite the African National Congress government promising to distribute the land. The report indicates that:

> "Whites own 26 663 144 ha or 72% of the total 37 031 283 ha farms and agricultural holdings by individual landowners; followed by Coloured at 5 371 383 ha or 15%, Indians at 2 031 790 ha or 5%, Africans at 1 314 873 ha or 4%, other at 1 271 562 ha or 3%, and co-owners at 425 537 ha or 1%."

Despite these statistics being available and the South African government's response to the issue, President Trump has been convinced by AfriForum that, indeed, white South Africans are persecuted. Moreover, President Trump has also indicated that a further reason for his halting of financial support is 'South Africa's case against Israel at the International Court of Justice (ICJ)', which he sees as 'an aggressive position' (Mbembe and Gilmore 2025), as well as South Africa's alignment with forces said to be anti-West, such as the BRICS bloc and the Non-Aligned Movement. The cost implications of the 'termination of funding to PEPFAR are catastrophic for South Africa. Studies predict this could result in more than half a million unnecessary deaths and up to half a million new infections' (Mbembe and Gilmore 2025).

To further punish South Africa, the US has boycotted the G20 summit currently taking place in South Africa. Bates (2025) states that:

> "The US absence poses a significant challenge to the G20's effectiveness. As the world's largest economy, the US has traditionally played a pivotal role in coordinating *[sic]* global economic policies and addressing pressing international challenges. Without active US participation, the G20's ability to lead global economic cooperation *[sic]* may be severely compromised."

It has also been suggested that the US will use the African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA), signed by former President George W. Bush in 2000, to reprimand SA. The aim of the act is for sub-Saharan African countries to access

the US market duty-free on certain goods (Ray 2025). There is a widely held view among South African analysts that if AGOA is renewed while under the Trump Presidency, it is possible that SA will be excluded. There are other signs that the Trump administration's stance towards Africa is hostile and anti-African, such as the proposed closing of about ten embassies and seventeen consulates across Africa (*New York Times* 2025).

Why the US is worried about China in Africa

In 2010, China surpassed the US as the largest trading partner in Africa, and this milestone worries the US in many ways. It signalled, in practical terms, the decline of US power and the rise of China's hegemony and influence not only in Africa, but around the globe (Msimango 2016). What is particularly worrying the US about China's rise is that it is peaceful, persuasive and without internal interference in the affairs of African states and all states in general. Moreover, China's influence in Africa means that it has access to Africa's resources to fuel its industrialisation, and that does not sit well with the US. Scholars such as Ayodele and Sotola (2014) and others have long documented how China, much like the US and Europeans, is extracting raw materials to fuel its industrialisation and to return cheap manufactured goods to the continent. Therefore, China's access to vast African mineral resources, making it possible to compete with US technological advancement, is another issue worrying the US. Qadri (2024) comments that 'the US-China tech war is not merely a commercial competition but also a geopolitical struggle, as both countries strive for leadership in the technologies that will shape the future—5G networks, AI and quantum computing. The simultaneous product launches by Huawei and Apple represent a microcosm of this larger battle for technological superiority".

Another strategic battle that China relentlessly pursues with the US is the arms race. The US is considered to have the strongest military, highly skilled and employing sophisticated weaponry. When the US Department of Defence published a report in 2024 on Military and Security Developments, it indicated that China is the only competitor to US military power. China has the intent and, increasingly, the capacity to reshape the international order. China is modernising and indigenising its aircraft and unmanned aerial systems rapidly, matching US standards. This shows that China is fast advancing its military capabilities, not

only for its defence, but also for protecting its interests abroad. China has opened a military base in Djibouti, Africa, to ensure that its exports are safely passing through the Gulf of Arabia and to show its military strength (Igbinoba 2016).

BRICS+ decolonial imperative

BRICS+ countries are not homogeneous countries that follow the same political and economic system; some countries are democratic, while others are autocratic. Moreover, some countries rely heavily on the private sector, while others rely heavily on a state-driven economy. However, what they have in common and have agreed upon is a minimum programme of transforming the global South, which has been excluded for far too long by countries in the global North. Zondi (2019) states that 'BRICS' efforts to design a new global governance should entail more fundamental transformation than merely reforming institutions and adjusting some rules', a view supported by Carnegie Foundation for International Peace (2025, par. 2):

> "BRICS avowedly seeks to challenge Western-dominated institutions of global economic governance, as well as to displace the U.S. dollar from its entrenched role in the world economy. Many analysts, therefore, depict BRICS expansion as a watershed moment in the shift to a more egalitarian international system."

This is exemplified by the establishment of new financial institutions, the New Development Bank (NDB), widely known as the BRICS Development Bank, to fund countries of the global South in their efforts towards development. Arguably, BRICS+ are relentlessly fighting to break (or delink, as explained later in the chapter) from Euro-American hegemony, which has dominated the world order since the end of World War II.

Research methods

According to Mingst, *McKibben* and *Arreguin-Toft* (2019), International Relations can and should be analysed at three levels at least: Individual (micro-level), Regional (macro-/country level, considering the actions and influence

of powerful actors), International (macro-level, considering the actions and influences of other countries towards each other, and how these influence any particular country's foreign policy). This paper analyses SA's foreign policy, based on the levels of analysis put forth by Mingst, *McKibben* and *Arreguin-Toft* (2019). The constitutions of SA and the US specify that the presidents of these countries hold the final authority over their respective foreign policies (SA Constitution 1996; Pfiffner 2008). Similarly, Article 11 of the Chinese Constitution stipulates that the President of the People's Republic of China stands as a representative of the Chinese people, including playing the primary role in pursuing International Relations. Thus, taking the argument of Mingst, *McKibben* and *Arreguin-Toft* (2019) into consideration, the work and personality of these leaders become key actors in International Relations. As such, the chapter's research methodology considers key statements, both verbal and written, expressed by these actors.

Furthermore, this chapter considers various communication channels and communiqués relating to foreign policy debates, attitudes, decisions and analysis appearing across various communication channels. Thus, sources of data include the governments'/presidents' communiqués on official government platforms like their websites, policy documents, and social media channels. Moreover, their speeches and media interviews provide important insight. For example, since President Donald Trump's Second Term, from January 2025 to April 2025, much of his communication has been driven through social media channels.

The chapter considers international relations, international relations-related discussions, and other key archival and current foreign-relations-related statements from the countries' key actors. At the macro-level, the chapter considers the policies and policy positions of each country and considers their influence on each other. The collected data includes bilateral policies, statements, discussions, etc. Apart from considering the officially documented foreign policy decisions and communiques of these three countries, this paper also considers their attitudes towards each other. Sibizo's (2023) findings prove important in this regard. Describing the relations between the US and SA under Trump 1.0, she explains that, while official policy statements were phrased to seem as if SA was the primary beneficiary in the relationship, the US also benefited from the relationship. With 'Make America Great Again' as a priority (Fabricius 2018), the administration needed to frame itself as being in a strong position in all its international engagements, both in its attitude and policy documents. Thus, a

focus on official policies, along with communications in the common media, helps unmask what each of the communication channels may hide if considered in isolation from each other. It is for this reason that the interpretive paradigm is important, as it helps to decipher what may be hidden in each actor's messaging.

Findings

To explain the positions and influence of countries around the world, Immanuel Wallerstein (1974) proposed the World-Systems Theory (WST). This theory of International Relations posits that there are three bands, or tiers, of countries in the world. There is the core, composed of a select group of industrialised countries with good healthcare systems and sustainable social and economic institutions, along with international non-governmental organisations (Mingst, *McKibben*; *Arreguin-Toft* 2019).

These nations, most of which benefited from colonisation and slavery, are primarily located in Europe and North America, and often exploit semi-periphery and periphery countries through their multinational corporations and international institutions. The semi-periphery countries are on the second tier, and are made up of developing, industrialising economies that are not as rich as the core, but also not as poor as the periphery countries. These include countries that industrialised in the 1960s and 1970s, when the economic performance of various Asian countries improved significantly from high levels of industrialisation. Finally, at the bottom tier, there are the peripheral countries that are the poorest in the global economy. Periphery countries often hold the least power in the global economy and politics due to their low economic standing.

Wallerstein proposed that countries can move through the three bands, increasing or decreasing the countries' influence in the global economic system (Willis 2020). It is on such analyses that Rodney (1972) based his argument that Europe's development depended on Africa's underdevelopment. This type of manipulation was not limited to the colonial period, as Amin's Delinking Theory illustrates (explained below), and is in fact still happening in this century (Charbonneau 2008; Pereira and Tsikata 2021). Adopting this analytical tool would serve as a strategic framework for SA's approach to International Relations. The theory suggests that SA should approach its international counterparts as

equal partners whose primary concern is themselves. As such, very little benefit should be expected to result from SA's relationship with the US and China. Furthermore, it should be taken for granted that all three countries will seek the best possible profit-related outcome for themselves from the prevailing global capitalist system, as competition is inherently built into the system. Thus, less aid, more investment (not always to SA's long-term benefit) is the foundation upon which to build SA foreign policy.

In the Introduction to this chapter, we pointed to the need for South Africa to protect itself from foreign control. While SA needs to be part of the global economy, it also needs to protect its interests. We argued that Amin's (1987) argument for delinking offers SA inroads into this. Amin (1987) explains delinking as follows:

> "Delinking does not imply the rejection of any foreign technology, because it is foreign, in the name of any cultural nationalism. But it certainly implies that one is conscious that technology is not neutral, neither in regard to social relations of production, nor in regard to patterns of life and consumption… Lastly, delinking is not at all a synonym of refusing to participate in world scientific and ideological currents. The cultural nationalism addicted to the past is a symptom of crisis, not an answer to it. It shows the importance of societies, in a deadlock, which have not yet found their way, associating renovation efficiently with historical continuity" (Amin 1987: 444).

In recent months, the US President Donald Trump has uttered significant remarks about South Africa, an unusual break from the diplomatic and measured approach countries typically take when commenting on another country's internal affairs. For example, Trump remarked that 'terrible things are happening in South Africa' (Dolley 2025), citing SA's recently amended laws on Land Expropriation without Compensation. This is not the place to discuss the validity of Trump's statement, but rather what a statement of this nature says about one's attitude towards another country. This is especially important considering that Trump's utterances have been followed by his invitation to Afrikaners to move to the US as asylum seekers.

Moreover, Trump appears to have taken a stance that seeks to 'punish' South

Africa if it does not correct what he deems to be wrong in the country (Thompson, Sawahel and Manykwe 2025). This is an imperialist attitude— seeking to impede the sovereignty of South Africa through economic means by withdrawing aid and support in the health and education sectors, which has been a contentious policy towards South Africa. There have also been periodic disagreements concerning AGOA. These incidents suggest that Trump seeks to encroach on the country's domestic affairs, as well as his foreign affairs attitude. In contrast, China has not sought this kind of influence over SA; instead, it has adopted a quiet diplomacy that focuses on trade and co-operation instead of coercion. These interventions and utterances from Trump are profoundly different from China's silence on SA's domestic affairs, which also reflects SA's silence on China's contentious issues on democracy (Beckley and Brands 2021). China has continuously sought to strengthen relations with SA through channels like BRICS, thus offering an alternative to the US-SA relationship. The way in which SA has exercised its agency in choosing the countries with which it wants to maintain a relationship is a delinking strategy. Whether SA's decisions are correct is not under discussion here—only the fact that maintaining its sovereignty is primary.

Conclusion

A country's foreign policy is necessarily influenced by different considerations, including the strategies of the key actors, their view of other countries and their attitude towards those countries. When key actors hold negative attitudes towards countries, their policies shift accordingly. From an interpretive stance, this chapter broadly explored the relations between SA, China and the US. The focus of the paper was not the official policies of the countries, but the publicly available communiques of their key actors. Relations between key actors were analysed through introductory-level WST and Delinking theories to establish how the relations between these countries urge SA to keep a decolonial attitude towards its International Relations. Thus, this research does not argue for SA to isolate itself from more powerful countries in the global economy. Instead, it advocates a decolonial approach to analysing powerful countries, concluding that both WST and delinking theories offer coherent frameworks for examining the countries in the study.

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SECTION VIII: CONCLUSION

CHAPTER 18

Reflections on Trump 2.0, Africa and the struggle for agency in the emerging world reorder

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Overview of Trump 2.0

The return of Donald J Trump (Trump 2.0) as the President of the United States (US) has significantly transformed both the domestic and external politics of the world's most powerful nation, with notable implications for the emerging global order, disorder, and reorder. Indeed, Trump 2.0 signals the intensification of a deeper structural shift in world politics: the weakening of liberal internationalism, the resurgence of economic nationalism, the fragmentation of global governance, the return of great power competition and the emergence of a more uncertain and contested global order. In contrast to his predecessors and the well-known traditions of the US, Trump has introduced unprecedented openness and transparency to foreign policy, with previously secret diplomatic communications, negotiations and interactions becoming more openly available to the media and public and therefore more easily scrutinised by them. In many cases, however, these diplomatic engagements have been conducted in ways that convey strategic messages and reflect emerging global geopolitical realities, while challenging some fundamental principles of diplomacy and the US-centric world order that emerged after World War II and survived the Cold War.

In just about ten months into his second administration, Trump has significantly shaped US foreign policy and the emerging world order through his approach to trade, tariffs, immigration, alliances, multilateralism, foreign aid, climate change, critical minerals, democracy, military power, peace and conflict

resolution, among others. When dealing with its trading partners, including Canada, Mexico and China, the new administration employs tariffs to address imbalanced trade relations and reinvent the national economy, as well as to compel political compliance. In the fight against illegal or irregular immigration, Trump imposed a stringent immigration policy with a militarised border and internal policing, leading to mass arrests and deportations of suspected offenders. While this policy is intended to remove illegal immigrants from the US and deter further inflows, the way it has been implemented is seen as questionable in human rights terms and against the rule of law, alarming tourists and threatening the ability of the US to attract global intellectuals and innovators.

The Trump administration has pursued a complex admixture of nationalism, unilateralism, bilateralism and transnationalism in US international relations. Trump has prioritised an America First policy that focuses on domestic benefits in ways that reshape globalised value systems and the traditional rule-based international order. He has reviewed US global commitments and defunded USAID, along with multilateral organisations on climate change, health and culture, with notable consequences for most African and developing countries. With little or no pretence of commitment to, and open denunciation of, global goods, Trump has unapologetically pursued US interests in global affairs. His transactional and deal-making approach has swung US foreign policy away from socio-cultural favouritism of democratic states and rule-based order towards personal idiosyncrasy and rational predictability based on the business logic of loss and gain. This development has improved US relations with the Gulf states, Argentina, Hungary and Russia, while relations with traditional allies, such as Canada and Europe, are rocky.

On the security front, Trump has displayed an inclination towards peace and a disposition for war He has argued that the Russia-Ukraine and Israel-Hamas conflicts happened because of the weakness of his predecessor and promised to end them immediately. In his commitments to peace, he has made notable efforts to resolve these two conflicts with varying degrees of success. Additionally, Trump has played a role in resolving conflicts between India and Pakistan, Rwanda and the Democratic Republic of Congo, Israel and Iran (2025), Thailand and Cambodia and Armenia and Azerbaijan. Nevertheless, the military operations of the US in Iran, Yemen, Venezuela and Nigeria shows a inclination for war. The expansionist and imperial ambitions of Trump over Canada, Greenland, Gaza

and Panama also question his peaceful disposition and tend to rationalise and further embolden Vladimir Putin's aggression in Ukraine, Benjamin Netanyahu's war in Gaza and Lebanon and Xi Jinping's expansionist ambition in Taiwan.

Trump is geopolitically disposed and increasingly informed about great power competition, as he comes to terms with China as a near-peer competitor. Through regulations, tariffs and sanctions, Trump has intensified efforts to contain the rise of China and its access to advanced technologies, while also reducing US reliance on its competitors (Momoh and Oyewole 2026; Wehner 2026; Bowen 2026). However, this measure has sometimes backfired, as when China imposed reciprocal measures against the US, notably in the areas of critical minerals and soybeans, with mutually painful socioeconomic effects. In response, the US has intensified its partnership with Japan, South Korea and Australia, among others, to advance its China strategy. In addition, Trump recognises Russia, as well as China and North Korea, as emerging nuclear threats to the US. As a result of these factors, Trump favours a renewed arms race, including the testing of nuclear weapons in violation of the great power moratorium maintained since the 1990s.

Overall, across the chapters in both volumes of this book, one central argument emerges clearly: Trumpism is not an anomaly but a symptom of systemic transformation. As several contributors correctly note in their chapters, Trump's isolationist and transactional tendencies may inadvertently hasten the emergence of a post-unipolar order. By undermining multilateral institutions, weakening traditional alliances, weaponising tariffs, politicising aid and retreating from aspects of global governance, the United States risks eroding the very liberal order it once led. In this sense, Trump 2.0 may contribute less to American restoration than to the diffusion of global power.

Indeed, Trump 2.0 must be understood within the context of an emerging global system in which power is increasingly diffused, strategic alignments are fluid and states are compelled to navigate overlapping spheres of influence amid deepening uncertainty. At one level, the return of Trumpist foreign policy thinking signifies continuity with earlier patterns of American unilateralism and exceptionalism. The 'America First' doctrine reflects a persistent scepticism towards multilateralism, international institutions, climate commitments, migration regimes and global governance frameworks. Yet Trump 2.0 is also qualitatively different from Trump 1.0. For example, since then, the international environment has profoundly changed. The war in Ukraine, intensifying US-

China rivalry, the ongoing US-Israel war in Iran which has destabilised the Middle East, the militarisation of technological competition, disruptions in global supply chains and renewed great power contestation over critical minerals and strategic maritime routes have fundamentally altered the geopolitical terrain.

Implications for Africa's agency

It is against this fast-evolving world order that this book offers a concise yet diverse perspective from the least-heard voices and the most underestimated continent in international relations: Africa. The book begins with a simple but profoundly important premise: Africa is neither absent from global politics nor silent about the transformations reshaping the international system. Africans observe, interpret, contest and respond to world affairs from diverse historical experiences and strategic locations. Yet African perspectives are too often marginalised within mainstream analyses of global order and United States foreign policy. This book intervenes precisely at that intellectual and political juncture.

The contributors demonstrate that Trump's 'America First' doctrine has profound implications not only for America's allies and rivals, but also for Africa's place in the evolving global system. Whether through tariff wars, immigration restrictions, critical minerals competition, aid retrenchment, geopolitical realignments, climate scepticism or transactional diplomacy, Trump 2.0 is accelerating pressures that compel African states to rethink long-standing assumptions about global partnerships, development trajectories and strategic dependence.

Yet this book does not present Africa merely as a victim of external forces. On the contrary, one of its most significant contributions lies in foregrounding African agency in a rapidly changing world. The chapters collectively reveal that Africa is increasingly navigating a world no longer defined solely by Western dominance. The rise of BRICS, the expansion of South-South co-operation, growing Chinese influence, renewed Russian engagement, surging Gulf investments and shifting middle-power politics are creating new strategic opportunities, but also dilemmas, for African states. Trump 2.0 enters this already volatile geopolitical environment as both disruptor and accelerator.

The two volumes of this book cover the different ways and dimensions by which Trump has shaped and reshaped US foreign policy and the world order,

particularly from African perspectives. Initiated by the ACSUS-UP, the book project began three weeks into Trump's second administration (February 2025). The last contribution to the two volumes was received seven months later (September 2025), while this concluding chapter was completed in November, with some revision thereafter. In offering an early prognosis of Trump 2.0 and its consequences for US foreign policy and world order, contributors have had to evaluate the pros and cons of engaging early with evolving issues. Data inadequacy, shortage of materials, time constraint, trend uncertainty and event trajectory unpredictability make a conclusive analysis of increasingly dynamic themes and fast-moving events challenging. However, contributors have drawn from historical data and Trump 1.0 records, along with early indicators of US foreign policy under the new administration and the resultant international reactions and responses, to illuminate paths to understanding the emerging world order and Africa's position in this context.

There is broad consensus among the contributors that Africa is facing a fragmented world order, characterised by uncertainty, as the structural reordering of the post-US hegemony continues to evolve. The emerging order has created notable disorder in Africa, with spiralling decline in US foreign aid, preferential trade relations, climate funding, medical and humanitarian support, democratic crusade, value-based capacity building and rule-based engagements on the continent. Opinions vary on whether this development is an opportunity or a challenge for Africa. Many contributors view Trump 2.0 and its effects as one of the biggest challenges that African countries have needed to confront, as its ramifications stretch from political stability, peace, conflict and security to socioeconomic and human development questions. In contrast, others consider Trump 2.0, its foreign policy and the associated world (re)order, a rare opportunity to develop and demonstrate the potency of African agency for addressing regional development and security questions without undue external intervention, and in playing a major role in international relations. The extent to which Africa can convert this challenging period into opportunity is a subject for future research. What is clear, though, from the two volumes of this book is that Trump 2.0 and the emerging world order create a paradox for Africa.

On the one hand, a fragmented international order increases vulnerability. African economies remain deeply exposed to external shocks, commodity dependence, debt pressures, technological asymmetries and geopolitical

manipulation. Trump-era protectionism threatens export markets. Immigration crackdowns affect remittances, mobility and educational exchanges. Reductions in aid and development assistance risk weakening already fragile sectors across parts of the continent. Moreover, the intensifying US-China rivalry could transform Africa into a theatre of strategic competition in ways that are reminiscent of earlier eras of external domination. On the other hand, systemic transition also creates room for manoeuvre. A recurring insight across the book is that the decline of Western hegemony creates strategic openings for Africa to co-ordinate its continental and regional platforms, diversify partnerships, strengthen bargaining capacity and pursue greater autonomy in global affairs.

In essence, Trump's retreat from aspects of international leadership has, ironically, created diplomatic and economic spaces for African states to deepen engagements with alternative centres of power, while simultaneously rethinking continental integration and self-reliance (Isike and Schoeman 2023; Amusan and Oyewole 2017; Ekpo et al. 2026). This is particularly evident in the discussions on economic nationalism, critical minerals, industrialisation and trade. Africa's vast reserves of cobalt, lithium, manganese, platinum and rare earth minerals position the continent at the centre of the global energy transition and technological competition. Yet the chapters caution against reproducing historical extractive patterns under new geopolitical conditions. The central challenge for Africa is not simply participation in global supply chains, but moving from extraction to beneficiation, industrialisation and technological sovereignty.

Similarly, the analyses of immigration and security reveal how Trump 2.0 sharpens the contradictions of globalisation. While capital, technology and military influence move relatively freely across borders, African migrants continue to encounter securitised mobility regimes and exclusionary nationalism. The implications extend beyond migration itself: they speak to enduring inequalities in global citizenship, labour mobility and human dignity within the contemporary international system.

The security-focused chapters also expose the geopolitical selectivity embedded in contemporary global governance. From the Sahel to the Indo-Pacific and Western Sahara, security partnerships increasingly reflect strategic competition rather than principled commitments to peace, democracy and development. Trump 2.0 reinforces this trend by privileging transactional alliances and short-term strategic interests over normative internationalism.

This has important implications for states in Africa seeking sustainable security partnerships amid rising global instability.

This aligns with most contributions in the two volumes of this book, which contend that African agencies are mainly responsible for or at least complicit in the numerous developmental and security challenges, as well as the continent's responses to the harsh realities of Trump 2.0, its foreign policy and the current world (re)order. At the same time, African agencies, national governments and regional initiatives are underdeveloped, under-resourced, unprepared, overestimated and underperforming in the face of increasingly complex development, security and international affairs. Alas, in the face of such complexity and uncertainty, Africa remains largely reactive and not proactive. As such, while the US and many other great and medium powers across the world have developed and pursued their own strategies towards Africa, the continent and its member states lack any notable strategy or coherent framework of engagement in the international system. Consequently, the situation of the continent reflects the saying that 'those who stand for nothing fall for anything'.

Concluding remarks and broad recommendations

This book set out to interrogate the implications of Donald Trump's second administration for Africa and the wider international system. Across its chapters, a central theme emerges with striking clarity: Trump 2.0 is not merely about the return of an individual leader to the White House. Rather, it represents the possible consolidation of a broader historical transition in world politics—one marked by the erosion of liberal internationalism, the intensification of geopolitical competition, the resurgence of transactional diplomacy and the acceleration of a fragmented and contested world order. In this context, perhaps the most intellectually significant contribution made by this book is its insistence that Africa must not merely react to global reordering but must actively attempt to shape it.

This requires moving beyond dependency-oriented foreign policy frameworks towards strategic pragmatism rooted in continental priorities. The future of Africa in the emerging order will depend less on the benevolence of great powers than on the continent's own institutional coherence, diplomatic co-ordination and developmental vision. Several chapters therefore correctly

emphasise the importance of the African Continental Free Trade Area, regional integration, industrial policy, economic diversification and collective bargaining mechanisms. These are not simply economic instruments; they are geopolitical necessities in an age of intensifying strategic competition.

Likewise, the book highlights the need for African states to avoid binary geopolitical alignments. The contemporary international system no longer fits neatly into Cold War categories of bloc politics. Africa's strategic interests are better served through flexible multi-alignment, issue-based coalitions and calibrated diplomacy that maximises opportunities across competing centres of power while safeguarding continental autonomy.

Of note, the book also contributes to the decolonisation of international relations scholarship. Too often, analyses of global order treat Africa as peripheral to the 'real' business of world politics. In rejecting this epistemic marginalisation, the book demonstrates that African scholars are not merely consumers of theory produced elsewhere, but active interpreters of global transformations capable of generating original analytical insights into power, order, resistance and agency.

Trump 2.0, therefore, forces Africa to confront difficult but necessary questions: Can the continent convert geopolitical competition into developmental leverage? Can states in Africa resist becoming proxies in great power rivalries? Can continental institutions provide coherent strategic direction in an increasingly fragmented world? Can Africa transform demographic growth, natural resource wealth and strategic location into genuine geopolitical influence? While these questions remain open, what is clear, is that the old certainties are fading. The liberal international order that emerged after the Cold War is under immense strain. Multilateralism is weakening. Economic nationalism is rising. Strategic distrust is deepening. Global governance institutions are increasingly contested. The world is moving towards a more fragmented, unstable and competitive order, the final shape of which remains uncertain.

In this interregnum, Africa occupies a pivotal position as it is no longer merely an object of humanitarian concern or development discourse. Africa is becoming central to debates on energy transition, digital infrastructure, migration, climate justice, maritime security, global markets and institutional reform (Adekeye et al. 2024; Isike 2022). This centrality creates both opportunity and danger. Without strategic co-ordination, Africa risks renewed external exploitation under the guise of partnership and investment. But with coherent leadership and

continental vision, Africa can leverage this moment to redefine its role in world politics. Ultimately, the message of this volume is both cautionary and hopeful.

Trump 2.0 may deepen disorder in the international system, but it also exposes the fragility of old hierarchies and opens new possibilities for global reconfiguration. Whether Africa emerges from this transition more dependent or more autonomous will depend fundamentally on the choices made by African leaders, institutions, intellectuals and societies themselves. The task before Africa is therefore not simply to survive the new world (re)order, but to shape it. To do this, the book arrives at five broad recommendations. First, there is a need to strengthen the African Union and regional economic communities as platforms for collective bargaining and policy co-ordination. A change of mindset is needed for these agencies to develop, activate and demonstrate their capacity to take responsibility and play appropriate, leading roles in addressing African challenges. Expecting so much from and relying so heavily on external players to address African problems exposes the continent and makes it highly vulnerable to the uncertainty of international developments, as is evident in the case of Trump 2.0, its foreign policy and associated order. This requires holistic reflection, adopting a whole-of-government approach, reassessing all sections and mobilising the continent's human and material resources, guided by research-driven strategies for development, security and foreign relations.

Second, and relatedly, Africa, through its regional structures/platforms needs to develop Common African Positions (CAPs) and frameworks of engagement with the US and all great powers (Isike 2022; Isike and Oyewole 2024). This includes the formulation of policy and strategic documents to guide the continent's relations with these powers. Such CAPs will offer all 54 countries in Africa the opportunity to benefit from bloc bargaining in international relations, especially in engagements with the US and other powerful economies. While it is challenging for individual African states to influence the direction of US interests and foreign policy under Trump 2.0, especially on key issues, they still have considerable latitude to influence developments on the continent, because of the bargaining power inherent in operating in a bloc. For example, a CAP on superpower access to the African Continental Free Trade Area (ACFTA) can become a useful leverage for obtaining favourable concessions on security. Such a CAP will also accelerate the implementation of ACFTA as a mechanism for reducing structural dependency and expanding intra-African economic resilience.

Third, beyond political co-operation and sociocultural solidarity, there is an urgent and overriding need to further prioritise and pursue intra-African financing, investment, trade, migration, climate support, research, capacity building, technological transfer and peace and security initiatives at the local (subnational), national, bilateral and multilateral (subregional, continental and global) levels. The work of Afrexim Bank and the African Development Bank should be supported and upscaled to drive this imperative.

Fourth, the continent needs to actively and constructively diversify its international relations while minimising dependency on any one of the great powers. While Africa is encouraged to find ways to improve relations with the US under Trump 2.0 and beyond, the continent also needs to expand its engagements with other major powers in Europe, as well as China, India and Japan, and to explore opportunities for strategic co-operation with middle and emerging powers as well as small states globally.

Finally, all states in Africa must invest in knowledge production, technological capabilities and diplomatic expertise, capable of engaging an increasingly complex geopolitical environment. In this process, Africa is strongly encouraged to sponsor research aimed at creating knowledge that will help foster evidence-based policy engagement with great powers (Abrahamsen 2017; Kupe and Isike 2022). Beyond supporting universities across the continent to establish study centres that study major international powers such as the US, China and Russia, national governments should actively fund these centres to produce the requisite knowledge for partnering as equals with these powers. Increasingly, there is a need for Africans to turn a critical analytical African focus on nations and societies that are major world powers and important actors in Africa's present and future. Obtaining a critical analytical understanding of another society such as the US, with its complex and complicated history, is also a way of gaining a better understanding of ourselves as Africans and of developing pan-Africanist agency and common positions in the continent's dealings with the external environment, and, in particular, an actor as important and prominent as the US.

Ultimately, the political choices made in African capitals will determine whether Africa remains on the margins of a changing world order or whether it shapes it. Great power competition alone does not produce development, sovereignty or transformation. These outcomes require visionary leadership, institutional coherence, social investment and continental solidarity. During

the interregnum wrought, the weakening old order persists, and uncertainty will define global politics. Alliances will shift as institutions get contested, and economic nationalism will continue to rise, leading to the intensifying of strategic competition. Yet amid this turbulence lies the possibility of reimagining Africa's place in the world. The central message of this book is therefore both cautionary and hopeful: Trump 2.0 may deepen global instability, but it may also accelerate the decline of hierarchical global arrangements that historically marginalised Africa. Whether this transition results in renewed dependency or enhanced African agency will depend on the continent's capacity to act collectively, strategically and autonomously in an increasingly fragmented world.

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AFRICAN PERSPECTIVES ON TRUMP 2.0: UNITED STATES FOREIGN POLICY AND THE NEW WORLD (RE)ORDER

★ ★ ★ VOLUME II

EDITED BY CHRISTOPHER ISIKE AND SAMUEL OYEWOLE

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