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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