



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

VOLUME I

EDITED BY
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AND SAMUEL OYEWOLE



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CHRISTOPHER ISIKE AND SAMUEL OYEWOLE**

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African Centre for the Study of the United States,
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**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.

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—**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)

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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

FOREWORD

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

Introducing African Perspectives on Trump 2.0: United States Foreign Policy and the New World (Re)Order

Christopher Isike and Samuel Oyewole

Welcome to Trump 2.0's world

After 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 as 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 'Making America Great Again' (MAGA), which is closely connected to the ideas, proposals, plans and promises of cutting the US government spending and debt, increasing government efficiency, reforming the 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, massive tariffs on importation and deportation of illegal immigrants. Other campaign promises are ensuring that NATO allies pay for their defences, stopping other countries from robbing Americans through aid and trade, 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, 2025; Jacobson and McKinney, 2024). As was evident in the first few weeks and months since Trump assumed office as the 47th US President, he has displayed a remarkable commitment to the implementation and realisation of some 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 world order. On many occasions, Trump has announced the US's intention to acquire Greenland from Denmark, reclaim the Panama Canal from Panama and buy the associated Chinese stakes, take over the Israeli occupied Palestinian territory of Gaza and convert it to a real estate, 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 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 sometimes threatens military action, to advance its objectives. These desires and policy moves have brought the US President Trump's international assessment closer to that of other expansionist leaders, such as Russian President Vladimir Putin and Chinese President Xi Jinping, as evident in their policies regarding Ukraine and the South China Sea, respectively. However, 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; RCI, 2025; Stone and Boymal, 2025). This development has 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, as the Trump administration imposed 25 per cent tariffs on imports from both Canada and Mexico (Peralta and Northam, 2025 RCI, 2025). The Trump administration imposed additional 10 per cent tariffs on all imports from China on 4 February 2025, and an additional 10 per cent on 4 March 2025 (Feingold and Botwright, 2025; Robinson et al., 2025). Amidst these,

Trump promised Europe to be next and announced 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 more than 100 countries across Africa, Asia, the Americas and Europe (Mesa, 2025; Panetta, 2025). This measure was designed to encourage investors to produce in 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 per cent 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). Regardless, Trump's tariff challenged the enduring international economic order that was based on market globalisation, open borders and a multilateral approach to trade regime, which the US represents and defends.

In a move towards de-globalisation, Trump has withdrawn the US from international climate commitments, a decision that has threatened global regimes 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 Egypt, and moved to end the days of the USAID (The White House, 2025a). This development has greatly affected some of the poorest countries and peoples, globally (Democracy Now, 2025; Editorial, 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 in Europe and North America. While the US Vice President JD Vance questioned the democratic credentials of Europe at the Munich Summit in February 2025, the US Defence Secretary Pete Hegseth reiterated Trump's position at NATO's summit, a few days later, that Europe had to pay for its 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 with peace talks, Trump has displayed more tolerance toward Moscow compared to 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). Saudi Arabia has moved from a pariah state status to the new darling of US diplomacy, as it 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 favourable disposition toward autocratic leaders at the expense of decades of US records in promoting multilateralism, democracy, human rights and rule-based order globally.

African perspectives

The field of international relations has been dominated by Euro-American perspectives, often to the detriment of other perspectives, especially from the 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 Australia¹) 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. Amidst these, most of what is considered African perspectives are Western or broadly foreign perspectives of the continent's experiences (Abrahamsen, 2017; Mazrui, 1977; Ogunnubi and Oyewole, 2020; Oyewole, 2025; Taylor, 2010). This is made possible by decades of dedicated resources to African studies in Europe and North America, without commensurate or adequate academic efforts to study world affairs and the place of Africa, other regions and global players on the continent.

Despite some efforts, the commitments towards research and development (R&D) to understand the experiences of Africa, and their relations to events and happenings in the rest of the world, and the major global players, such as the US, are limited. This has limited the recognition of the African contributions to the conceptions and understandings of major subjects of international relations. Notably, Trump 2.0 has become a major development in international affairs, given its influence on the US domestic and foreign policies and the consequences for the 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 interests globally (May, 2024; Transatlantic Task Force, 2025). Amidst these, there are disparate media and policy reflections on the political, economic and cultural prospects and challenges of Africa in relation to the US under Trump 2.0 (Gopalda, 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

1 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).

body of knowledge from Africa that reflects the diversity of African experiences and their multidimensional perspectives on Trump 2.0, its influence on the US foreign policy in relations to the continent and the entire world for academic and policy purposes.

As evident in 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 discussed in international debates, Africa has felt the impact of Trump 2.0, including its influence on US foreign policy and the global order. Despite the popularity and admiration for Trump among the African population, some of his choice of words 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 condemned South Africa’s Expropriation Act as racist against the white minority, alleged genocide against them, and controversially offered refugee status and relocation to the US (Community News, 2025; Friedman, 2025; US Mission South Africa, 2025). Due to these developments, some critical areas of US–South Africa relations have suffered, including Trump’s withdrawal of funding support for the war against HIV/AIDS. Moreover, Trump and his team have been less supportive of South Africa’s hosting of the G20 (Majadibodu, 2025).

Thousands of illegal immigrants from across the world are now facing deportation in the US, and many African nationals, notably Nigerians, Ghanaians, Kenyans, Zambians and Zimbabweans, are affected (Ekanem, 2025a). In March 2025, many African countries appeared on Trump’s visa ban watchlist, including Libya, Somalia and Sudan on the red list (of eleven countries that their citizens are completely banned), Eritrea, Sierra Leone and South Sudan on the orange list (with ten countries that their citizens would 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 (with 22 countries that have 60 days to address concerns and risks) (Cole,

2025; Ferragamo, 2025). Moreover, Trump's global trade war extended tariffs to no fewer than 50 African countries (Mesa, 2025; Panetta, 2025). Although the tariffs were later postponed, they threatened to erode the African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA). Again, the impacts of US aid cuts and suspension 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, and in supporting democracy and climate resilience on the continent as well as reform of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) for the region to secure permanent seats (Isike and Oyewole, 2024a).

Against this background, there is a growing concern about whether Trump 2.0 will improve or undermine the US–Africa relations. Despite its numerous inadequacies, Joe Biden's administration developed a US African strategy, made high-level visits to the continent, supported democracy, climate resilience and socioeconomic development in Africa through trade, aid and investments as well as UNSC reform with African permanent seats (Isike and Oyewole, 2024b, 2024c). While the Trump administration has yet to display sufficient commitment toward these directions, some of its policies have their own considerable merits. Unlike Biden, Trump's foreign policy is culturally indiscriminate of the system of government, thereby offering African democracies and autocratic states similar opportunities to set their relations with the US in a transactional manner (Isike and Oyewole, 2024a). Moreover, Trump notably brokered the DRC–Rwanda Peace deals, where many earlier initiatives have 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 in this volume, believe that Trump 2.0, its associated foreign policy and the global effects are rare opportunities for Africans to reduce aid dependency, better manage its resources to cater for human development, boost intra-African trade and local capacity in value-added

production to raise its strategic importance in global value chain and develop food and economic sovereignty, and 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

8 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 diversity, coherence, conciseness, visibility, timeliness and impacts of the African contributions to knowledge, practice 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 their (potential) contributions to global order, disorder and reorder from an African point of view. The objective was to provide a concise and timely scholarly reflection that combines conciseness with diversity of African experiences, to inspire intellectual deliberations as well as inform and impact policy engagements on the continent, particularly in relation to US foreign policy, in a rapidly changing world order.

This book is the outcome of a hybrid workshop organised on the subject by ACSUS-UP on 19 May 2025. As the first volume of this project, the book is divided into sixteen chapters. Beyond this first chapter introducing the book, there are fifteen other chapters under five sections. Section II focuses on US foreign policy, covering Chapters 2 to 4. Amidst these, Chapter 2 by Prolific S. Mataruse assesses the different approaches to critical minerals derisking as a matter of US national security and economic competitiveness under Presidents Joe Biden and Donald Trump. While Biden prioritises domestic production, international cooperation and sustainable practices to secure supply chains and

counter China's dominance, Trump focuses on promoting domestic exploration, exploitation and processing of critical minerals. Regardless of these differences, Trump 2.0 will likely maintain and expand the Biden-related derisking infrastructure, excluding liberal, environmental, and international commitments, partly because critical minerals mining and processing capacity largely remains global, and building domestic capacity will take time.

In Chapter 3, Zekeri Momoh examines Trump's transactional foreign policy and isolationism, their determinants and implications for the US global leadership. Shaped by irregular migration, bloated bureaucracy, excessive government spending on foreign aid, and high tariffs imposed on US-made goods, among other factors, Trump has pursued a domestic reform and foreign policy that are transactional and isolationist. Hence, the decisions such as the withdrawal of the US from the WHO, UNHCR, Paris Climate Accord, threatening NATO members, trade war and Trump's approaches to the Gaza and Ukraine conflicts have undermined Washington's global leadership and encouraged the emergence of a multipolar world order² with the EU and BRICS looking to shape the global political economy. Chapter 4, by Luvuyo Jalisa and Ayabulela Dlakavu, examines US foreign policy under President Trump (2017–2021 and 2025), particularly the trade policy and the political economy's impact on Africa. It demonstrates the extent to which Trump's nationalist foreign policy, spanning his two presidential terms, has impacted trade policy and volumes between the US and Africa. By analysing Trump's policies, including transactional diplomacy, tariff impositions, aid reductions, and climate agreement withdrawals, the chapter explores Africa's vulnerabilities and opportunities. The chapter concludes that Trump's policies accelerate a fragmented, yet multipolar world order, compelling African nations to prioritise strengthening of regional governance institutions and other existing bilateral and multilateral

2 Some scholars have argued that the world is not yet fully multipolar in the classical Cold War sense, where multiple great powers have roughly equal capabilities. Instead, we are navigating a polycentric international system: asymmetric, fragmented, and marked by issue-based coalitions and ideological competition (see Ash, 2025; Çeviköz, 2025).

partnerships, such as the African Continental Free Trade Agreement (AfCFTA), the EU, UN and relations with China.

In two chapters, Section III focuses on immigration. Chapter 5 by David Akindoyin, Toyosi Ajibade and Samuel Oyewole, examines the characters of immigration policy under Trump's first and second presidencies, factors that are responsible for these developments, and their implications for the US foreign relations. Framed as a challenge to national security, sovereignty and economic prosperity, immigration remains central to Trump's Make America Great Again (MAGA) agenda. While his first term (2017–2021) saw sweeping restrictions, including Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) rescission, travel bans, refugee admission cuts and heightened visa scrutiny, Trump's second term has intensified these measures, expanding deportations, suspending refugee programmes and tightening visa policies, with considerable and enduring impacts on US external relations, Africa and global (dis)order. Chapter 6 by Jude Odigbo and Afa'anwi Ma'abo Che further examines the implications of Trump's anti-immigration policy and deportation on socio-economic, political and security conditions in Africa. Using general strain theory to anchor linkages between migrant deportation and asserted implications, it argues that this development will increase the vulnerability of African states and may compel deportees to resort to desperate measures for survival, as their home countries lack suitable support systems to assist them. It recommends the establishment of a more robust domestic development framework that enhances individuals' capacity to thrive in their home countries, thereby reducing the demand for migration.

In three chapters, Section IV addresses economic nationalism. In Chapter 7, Joel Leonard explores Trump's economic nationalism, as evident in the 'America First' policy, willingness to acquire new territories, tariffs, trade deals and aid policy, as well as the prospects and challenges of these development approaches in a capitalist world order, and the lessons for Africa. Abdurashheed Abdulyakeen's Chapter 8 assesses the waves of Trump's tariffs and implications for Africa's export competitiveness, especially in the textile and agricultural sectors. It laments the vulnerability of Africa to external developments in the global economy

and recommends improving intra-regional trade through AfCFTA, industrialisation, value-added production, trade diversification policies, and collective bargaining for better conditions in global trade under and beyond Trump 2.0. In Chapter 9, Edwin Hlase examines the recent US–South Africa diplomatic meltdown and its economic sovereignty. While much of Trump’s agenda has overlooked Africa, South Africa has emerged as a notable exception. Trump has publicly condemned the South African government, alleging land confiscation, discriminatory policies and ‘anti-Americanism’, and issued a punitive executive order terminating substantial US funding for partnership in critical sectors. The chapter contends that Trump’s approach, despite its punitive nature, presents an opportunity and impetus for South Africa to reconfigure its economic strategies and reduce its dependency. While maintaining ties with the US remains crucial, this chapter underscores the urgency for South Africa and other African states to pursue pathways toward greater economic sovereignty and self-reliance.

Section V on security comprises Chapters 10 to 12. In Chapter 10, Mmamashilo Herminah Mmako and David Maningi Mkhonto examine how Trump 2.0 will shape the US’s commitment towards alliance building in achieving a rules-based order in the Indo–Pacific and as countermeasures against an assertive China. The chapter concludes that continued US leadership in the security dimension of the Indo–Pacific will endure, albeit Washington focuses on China and deterrence attempts. Guillermo Moya Barba’s Chapter 11 analyses the Trump administration’s foreign policy and its implications on the existing conflicts between Spain and Morocco over Western Sahara and the maritime dispute concerning the Canary Islands. It reflects on some possible decisions by Trump that may (re)shape the status quo of the conflicts. Moreover, Chapter 12 by Benjamin Serebour, examines the evolving dynamics of US development assistance in West Africa and its implications for security and democratic governance, with a particular focus on the Sahel region. Drawing on legitimacy crisis and norms diffusion theories, it analyses how poor governance and rising insecurity have contributed to declining public trust in democratic institutions. The chapter examines how the suspension of US aid amid increasing geopolitical competition from Russia has altered

the normative landscape and eroded Western efforts to promote liberal democratic values in the region. It underscores the need for external efforts to promote democracy by employing context-specific approaches that align with the socio-economic and security realities of citizens.

Section VI focuses on geopolitics. In Chapter 13, Neo Letswalo examines how Trump 1.0 and 2.0 MAGA-oriented foreign policy affected the US global leadership position, the implications for US–China geopolitical competition in Africa and the continent’s industrialisation and critical resources. It argues that the US isolationist approach provides a window of opportunity for Africa to develop autonomy from the traditional neoliberal world order and establish the desired industrialisation of the continent. In Chapter 14, Ekeledirichukwu C. Njoku and Samuel Oyewole explore the prospects of Africa’s strategic realignment in response to foreign policy approaches of Trump 2.0 and analyses the balance between strategic patience in US–Africa relations and the continent’s increasing alignment with China, Europe, Russia and other competing powers. It concludes that Africa will likely adopt a wait-and-watch approach, characterised by strategic patience and cautious diplomacy in its engagements with Washington under Trump 2.0, amidst (re)alignment with other major players in international relations.

Section VII focuses on African responses. In Chapter 15, Khouloud Abouri and Hiba Ouzaouit examine the extent to which Trump 2.0 reshapes US–Africa relations by analysing his second-term foreign policy decisions and their implications for Africa’s governance, economy and strategic position. The chapter contributes to the understanding of how Africa navigates shifting global power structures by exploring the impacts of Trump 2.0 and its foreign policy on the region’s political economy and international standing, and the extent to which these policies reinforce historical patterns of marginalisation or open new avenues for African agency in global affairs. Using the case study of South Africa, Chapter 16 by Buhle Mnyanda explores the Global South’s reactions to Trump 2.0. It examines how Trump’s return has affected relations with South Africa, its temporary strategic plans and the available options for repairing relations with the US.

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SECTION II:

UNITED STATES FOREIGN POLICY

CHAPTER 2

Divergent Approaches to Critical Minerals Derisking: A Comparative Analysis of Biden and Trump's Policies

Prolific S. Mataruse

Introduction

The political landscape of the United States of America (US) is largely represented by the Republicans and the Democrats, two dominant parties with contrasting views representing a fault line in US policy discourse. This partisan divide considerably shapes domestic and foreign policy approaches, including those related to critical minerals (Kennedy, 2010). Polarity manifests in divergent policy preferences and priorities on several issues that affect the development and management of public policy, like resource extraction, environmental and trade regulation and international cooperation on critical mineral resources (Fletcher, 2025). This chapter assesses the different approaches of President Joe Biden (Democrat, 46th President) and President Donald Trump (Republican, 45th and 47th President) on critical minerals derisking, an important matter of US national security and economic competitiveness.

Technological advancements and energy requirements have led to an escalating demand for critical minerals, resulting in an increasing focus on the sustainability of supply chains and resource governance. The source identification, extraction and processing of the critical minerals are linked to energy production, defence, transportation and communication technologies. The challenge is how to ensure effective, reliable and responsible resource procurement. Critical minerals are concentrated in a few countries, which means that the supply chains are susceptible to vulnerabilities in those countries. These vulnerabilities include political, social, economic and other factors that can destabilise countries. This is also compounded by the need to ensure responsible resource governance

and uphold human and labour rights and environmental standards. History shows that when responsible procurement has been ignored, the results have been mass suffering of entire populations. Understandably, the US and the European Union (EU) deem it important to protect their supply chains or explore new ones (Von der Leyen, 2023). The US, which is the focus of this chapter, has, over time, recognised these supply chain risks and developed mitigatory strategies with varying emphasis and strategies depending on the administration in office. This research contrasts and analyses the policy divergence and convergence of the Biden and Trump administrations' approaches to securing the vital critical mineral supply chains against vulnerabilities.

Background

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Derisking is a financial risk management concept that has gained new significance as a 'buzzword' in global politics in recent years (Kelly and Wester, 2025). In the realm of business, it refers to managing risk relationships through more careful strategies or termination. Section 6215 of the US's Anti-Money Laundering Act (AMLA) of 2020 defines derisking as actions taken by a financial institution to stop or limit business relationships with certain customers, instead of managing the associated risks. Considerations of profitability, reputation and perceptions, risk aversion, regulatory compliance and sanctions often drive this. An example of derisking is how 'Global financial institutions are increasingly terminating or restricting business relationships with remittance companies and smaller local banks in certain regions of the world' (World Bank, 2016: 1). The key attribute of derisking involves avoiding, rather than managing, high-risk relationships, which tend to incur higher monitoring and compliance costs. At the same time, risk is not always detrimental; it can also be associated with higher profits. However, high risks introduce vulnerabilities that the entity may not be able to sustain, hence the need for derisking. Furthermore, derisking has a checkered history in its association with anti-laundering and anti-terrorism efforts, where it has been accused of overreach by way of 'terminating or restricting business relationships indiscriminately with

broad categories of customers rather than analyzing and managing the specific risks associated with those customers' (Cave, 2023: 1).

In terms of contemporary geopolitics, the related term decoupling precedes the term derisking. Bradsher (2018) observed that decoupling gained traction under President Trump's first term to describe attempts to break up the close links in China–US economic pillars, mainly in high-tech industries, and bring back jobs to the US. The US and Europe have been concerned about derisking their supply chains for some time. European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen (2023) popularised the term in geopolitics. Subsequently, Cave (2023) believes that the term 'derisking' reflects the West's evolving approaches when dealing with a rising China, being seen as a more acceptable term, unlike 'decoupling', although China believes that there is not much difference between the terms. China dominates global value chains in a time of global polycrisis, the convergence of multiple and interconnected crises (Lawrence et al., 2024). This situation has, over time, understandably unsettled Western countries like the US as well as the EU, which began to seek to derisk or create alternative supply chains that they control (Zhou, Crocket and Wang, 2023). Nevertheless, unlike decoupling, derisking is seen to be more diplomatic and surgical. Zhou et al. (2023: 1) underline that Western derisking is based on a faulty approach in which China is the risk when, in their view, China's policies 'have been primarily aimed at addressing internal challenges and policy priorities in China rather than dominating, weaponizing, or causing disruptions in global supply chains'. In this observation, the author advises against confrontational strategies, as these may undermine rational policymaking and lead to disruption.

China is part of a bigger political economy conversation about the US's domestic and global economic dependencies. Economic dependencies can be identified in various strategic areas that can be used as geopolitical leverage by other countries (Sullivan, 2023). These areas of supply chain vulnerability include energy, health accessories, critical minerals and semiconductors. Newman and Farrel (2023) believe that derisking is a code for a new economic security state that marries traditional security and free-market economics, thereby reshaping global politics. The US has adopted the EU's language of derisking as 'the process of managing

the vulnerabilities generated by an interdependent world,' preserving a functioning international system and dealing with problems starting with the most urgent (Newman and Farrel, 2023: 1). The definition of derisking in this chapter is the review and termination of business relationships largely viewed as dependencies, mainly critical minerals dependency, that have developed over time, from which the US feels that its economic and national security have become vulnerable.

As the US fought the war on terror and its economy faltered in the 2008 depression, it became increasingly clear that the US was greatly vulnerable, and this alarmed policymakers. When COVID 19 lockdowns were introduced in 2020, supply chains became a big issue. Barner (2023) notes that the pandemic fueled e-commerce trade and stretched supply chains, resulting in glitches such as port congestion and closures that publicly highlighted the precariousness of the US supply chain. The US would immediately respond with an Executive Order on America's Supply Chains.

26 China continued to expand its commerce, and the US and other Western countries aimed to catch up, resulting in intensified geostrategic competition. China is the world's leading importer and exporter of critical minerals and their derivatives. Rising demand and projections for increased future demand have led to a global race for resources and markets. China's surplus production of US\$1 trillion in 2018 and US\$1.8 trillion in 2023, which is being termed 'overcapacity', resulted in increased Chinese global exports and entrenchment of 'global market concentration in key sectors and deepening supply chain dependencies' (Kelly and Wester, 2025: 1). In the wake of global derisking, several non-Western regions have found themselves caught between China's overcapacity and global derisking, like in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) countries (Kelly and Wester, 2025).

One of the key presidential debate issues from the 2008 election onward was how to bring industry and jobs back to America. Domestic and foreign policy came to be linked together. But how had the US put itself in a position where it felt that it was vulnerable? There was a sense of agreement amongst Democrats and Republicans that neoliberal policies of the Washington Consensus were responsible. President Trump, in 2025,

blamed the policies of the past 50 years. The US Secretary of State, Jake Sullivan (2023), under Biden, identified four factors that have affected the US political economy. Firstly, a weakened industrial base due to limited public funding, with preferences for the private sector and liberalisation based on the mistaken belief that markets allocate capital productively. This resulted in factors like finance being more privileged than critical sectors such as infrastructure and semiconductors, leading to entire supply chains being moved overseas. Unfortunately, the COVID 19 pandemic and the Russia–Ukraine war of 2022 revealed the limitations of this thinking, as it became obvious that these supply chains can be weaponised. Secondly, it was believed that economic integration would make countries peaceful, cooperative, and more compliant with a rules-based order, but instead, the realities of geopolitical and security competition proved otherwise. After experiencing a surge in Chinese exports from 2001, US leaders have come to accept that China continued to support the private sector, while the US did not. Thirdly, there was a recognised need to accelerate climate change investments for job creation, cost reduction and innovation. Fourthly, significant levels of inequality damaged democracy as gains from the system did not reach the middle class. Sullivan (2023: 1) concluded that a ‘new Washington consensus’ should build industrial capacity, resilience and inclusiveness both domestically and abroad in ‘a foreign policy for the middle class’. This involved making public investments in skills and sectors that are foundational to the US economy and national security.

At a conceptual level, derisking, as applied by the US, is characterised by tension between nationalism, internationalism and interdependence in a realist sense. Republicans and Democrats somewhat agree that the application of liberal moral and legal norms to politics, industrialisation, trade and security has fallen short, although there is no consensus on the nature of these failures and the path forward. Liberalism in its variants, republican liberalism (cooperation among democracies) and liberal institutionalism (the role of institutions in achieving liberal views), has been replaced by varying degrees of realist thinking (Heywood, 2015). Perspectives on both sides emphasise that the key aspect of US relations should not centre on unchecked moralising, but rather highlight the

centrality of power and self-interest, viewing states as selfish (egoistic) and competitive, reflecting structural constraints of a state-centric nature in international relations. In this new consensus, national interest and power, not moral principles, guide state behaviour. For Morgenthau (1954), politics is an immutable factor of the international system and functions according to principles of power, such that public policy should aim to address issues of national interest and power. It is this reasoning that compels realists to reject ‘universal moral principles that supposedly apply to all states in all circumstances’ (Heywood, 2015: 60). Waltz (1979) highlights the importance of self-help (that states should primarily depend on no one else but themselves), the security dilemma (the uncertainty and suspicion about other states’ intentions) and relative gains (maintaining or increasing one’s state’s position relative to others) in establishing a balance of power. This balance of power is best maintained in a bipolarity and becomes disrupted by multipolarity, which Waltz (1979) refers to as neorealist stability theory. When one power appears to have an advantage over others, it unsettles the other powers, and the dominant power becomes destabilised when its dominance is threatened or when the number of great powers increases, thereby raising the likelihood of great power rivalry and conflict. The complexity of polycrisis requires great powers to have a well-crafted grand strategy to avert an imperial overreach situation (straining of a powerful nation) because of extensive commitments and responsibilities (Kennedy, 2010). Derisking is, in essence, driven by realist concerns.

This study contributes to the conversation by showing how long the US has been grappling with this issue of derisking, with no real changes. It can help understand the radical approaches of the second Trump administration, the nature and structures of international relations, and how it is not easy for states, even great powers, to change national and international governance. The current world order has taken years to develop, and hasty attempts to immediately change things at this stage may reveal insights for nations on how to understand and address global derisking.

Methodology

This research is qualitative and involves a trend analysis of the statutes and policies of President Biden and President Trump's critical mineral derisking discourse in the US. Data was collected from the Federal Register database on <https://www.federalregister.gov/presidential-documents/executive-orders>, a daily publication of US Federal documents that allows the public to access and comment on official documents (National Archives, 2025). This was complemented by additional primary and secondary documents from the White House and various media outlets. The research identified and grouped the statutes and policies into Executive Orders (EOs), policies and initiatives, legislative efforts and investments and partnerships. Subsequently, a comparative analysis of the grouped data identifies and discusses the divergences and convergences in critical mineral derisking between the two presidents. In this analysis, the research also emphasises extracting the implications of these policies. This comparison is particularly interesting at this stage, because President Trump's term of office is separated from President Biden's one-term interlude. This may indicate policy continuation and discontinuation, considering certain ideological differences between the Democrats and Republicans, as well as the personalities of the leaders.

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First Trump administration's approach to critical minerals derisking

President Trump issued EOs and policies relating to derisking in his first term (2016–2020). The President invoked the Defence Production Act (DPA) in 2017 to 'secure the supply of an array of products deemed critical for national defense ... [and] support domestic mineral extraction and refining, authorizing federal investment in critical mineral projects' (International Energy Agency, 2024: 1). In his first year as President, Trump signed EO 13817, *Federal Strategy to Ensure Secure and Reliable Supplies of Critical Minerals*. This EO stated that dependency on imported critical minerals, domestic mining permit delays and weak domestic geological and geophysical surveys expose the US 'economy and military to adverse foreign government action, natural disaster, and other events that

can disrupt the supply of these key minerals' (Trump, 2017: 1). The EO encourages 'private-sector domestic exploration, production, recycling, and reprocessing of critical minerals, and support for efforts to identify more commonly available technological alternatives to these minerals', to reduce dependency, improve national security, and 'technological superiority and readiness of our Armed Forces' (Trump, 2017: 1). This was to reduce dependency, find new sources by improved exploration and licensing of mining and processing and recycling of critical minerals, and find alternatives to minerals.

On 30 September 2020, President Trump signed EO 13953 *Addressing the Threat to the Domestic Supply Chain from Reliance on Critical Minerals from Foreign Adversaries and Supporting the Domestic Mining and Processing Industries*. The wording of this EO shows a heightened sense of response to vulnerabilities in critical minerals supply chains. It identifies that, because of the previous EO, the US had listed 35 minerals as critical minerals essential to US economic and national security, and 'vulnerable to disruption', because:

For 31 of the 35 critical minerals, the United States imports more than half of its annual consumption. The United States has no domestic production for 14 of the critical minerals and is completely dependent on imports to supply its demand (Trump, 2020: 1).

The EO also shows suspicion over the motives and operations of some of the global actors in the supply chains:

Whereas the United States recognizes the continued importance of cooperation on supply chain issues with international partners and allies, in many cases, the aggressive economic practices of certain non-market foreign producers of critical minerals have destroyed vital mining and manufacturing jobs in the United States (Trump, 2020: 1).

President Trump was more direct in his wording about the US's dependence on China, noting that:

Our dependence on one country, the People's Republic of China (China), for multiple critical minerals is particularly concerning. The United States now imports 80 percent of its rare earth elements directly from China, with portions of the remainder indirectly sourced from China through other countries. In the 1980s, the United States produced more of these elements than any other country in the world, but China used aggressive economic practices to strategically flood the global market for rare earth elements and displace its competitors. Since gaining this advantage, China has exploited its position in the rare earth elements market by coercing industries that rely on these elements to locate their facilities, intellectual property, and technology in China. For instance, multiple companies were forced to add factory capacity in China after it suspended exports of processed rare earth elements to Japan in 2010, threatening that country's industrial and defense sectors and disrupting rare earth elements prices worldwide (Trump, 2020: 1).

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Apart from rare earth elements, in EO 13953, President Trump is dismayed by the US's dependence on foreign sources, mainly China, for barite (75 per cent dependency), gallium (100 per cent dependency) and graphite (100 per cent dependency), all used in high-tech technologies like semiconductors. As a result of this identified dependence on foreign adversaries, President Trump declared that it constituted 'an unusual and extraordinary threat, which has its source in substantial part outside the United States, to the national security, foreign policy, and economy of the United States' and declared 'a national emergency to deal with that threat' (Trump, 2020: 1). He notes the need to enhance domestic 'mining and processing capacity' to firstly reduce US 'dependence on minerals' from countries without 'appropriate minerals supply chain standards, leading to human rights violations, forced and child labour, violent conflict, and health and environmental damage' and secondly, to foster 'a healthier and faster-growing economy for the United States', create jobs and thus enabling a 'Buy American' approach. President Trump's first term derisking approach was increasingly aggressive (Trump, 2020: 1).

Biden's approach to critical minerals derisking

President Biden introduced two EOs related to critical minerals. Firstly, EO 14017, *American Supply Chains*, was signed on 24 February 2021 and directs the Defence Secretary and government agencies to identify risks and make suggestions towards strengthening supply chain resilience, including 'critical minerals and other identified strategic materials, including rare earth elements' (Section 3) (Biden, 2021b: 1). The EO also upholds President Trump's first term's critical mineral EO.

Secondly, on 31 October 2021, EO 14051 *Designation to Exercise Authority Over the National Defense (sic) Stockpile* was signed. It streamlined efforts by both public and private enterprises for acquisition, release and sustainability of the strategic and critical materials of the National Defence Stockpile for 'resilient, diverse, and secure supply chains to ensure our economic prosperity, national security, and national competitiveness' (Biden, 2021a: 1). This EO reinforced other legal provisions such as the Strategic and Critical Materials Stock Piling Act, the National Defence Authorisation Act, and the United States Code.

On 27 November 2023, Biden established the White House Council on Supply Chain Resilience. EO 14123, *White House Council on Supply Chain Resilience*, signed 14 June 2024, strengthens the cabinet-level committee's capacity to coordinate executive actions towards resilient supply chains. Resilient supply chains were described as including domestic factors and close coordination with allies:

... greater domestic production; a diverse and agile supplier base; built-in redundancies; a reliable transportation system; secure critical infrastructure; adequate stockpiles; safe and secure data networks; reliable food systems; and a world-class, globally competitive American manufacturing base and workforce. Close cooperation on building global supply chain resilience with allies and partners who share our values will foster collective economic and national security, encourage innovation, and strengthen the capacity to respond to and recover from international disasters and emergencies (Biden, 2024: 1)

President Biden used the Defence Production Act of 1950 to secure domestic battery supply chains and overseas manufacturing (International Energy Agency, 2024). He pushed for the updating of the critical minerals list, resulting in the 2022 US Geological Survey (USGS) *Critical Minerals List* (CML). President Biden signed Section 7002(a)(2) of the Energy Act of 2020, a bipartisan law enacted at the end of Trump's first term to produce the *Federal Register*, Department of Energy Critical Materials List (Stone, 2025). These lists identified minerals essential to US economic and national security, and which are vulnerable to disruption.

President Biden also initiated several policies and initiatives targeting critical minerals derisking through local production and international cooperation. He pushed for the reform of the US's Mining Law of 1872, which is over 150 years old, by establishing an interagency working group, which submitted some recommendations (Ward-Herzik, 2023). The Supply Chains Disruptions Task Force was established in June 2021 to address short-term supply chain disruptions in the US. At an international summit in Europe, Biden advocated for transparency, diversity, openness, predictability, security and sustainability as key pillars of resilient supply chains and announced a programme called Li-Bridge as a US public-private initiative 'committed to accelerating development of a robust and secure domestic supply chain for lithium-based batteries' (Weinstock, 2022). President Biden also established the National Blueprint for Lithium Batteries (2021–2030), developed by the Federal Consortium for Advanced Batteries, led by the Departments of Energy, Defence, Commerce and State. The US vision for lithium batteries was laid out as:

By 2030, the United States and its partners will establish a secure battery materials and technology supply chain that supports long-term U.S. economic competitiveness and equitable job creation, enables decarbonization, advances social justice, and meets national security requirements (Granholm, 2021: 5).

The National Blueprint for Lithium Batteries aimed, to provide a coordinated approach to ensuring a domestic supply of lithium batteries

and accelerating the development of a robust and secure domestic industrial base (Granholt, 2021: 5). While the blueprint is publicly available, the subsequent Lithium Battery Strategy (2023–2030) developed by the Department of Defence was not publicly released.

Under President Biden, several domestic and international investments and partnerships were initiated. The Department of Defence's Industrial Base Analysis and Sustainment programme awarded a contract of US\$35 million to process heavy rare earth elements in the US at Mountain Pass Rare Earth Mine in California (Webster, 2023). The US Department of Energy funded a US\$140 million Demonstration Project, it described as 'America's first-of-a-kind critical minerals refinery' (US Department of Energy, 2022: 1). These are smaller sums considering that in Zimbabwe alone, China invested about US\$2.79 billion for lithium resource production (Sanchez, 2023). However, about US\$3 billion was allocated for investment in material refining and battery recycling under the US\$1.8 trillion Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act.

Biden also introduced the US\$891 billion Inflation Reduction Act of 2022, which was voted for by all Democrats and rejected by all Republicans in the US Congress. The Act aimed to incentivise domestic mining and processing of critical minerals, climate financing, healthcare measures, tax reform and introduced electric vehicle mandates and motor vehicle subsidies to strengthen American supply chains; facing international criticism for violating World Trade Organisation subsidy rules (Podesta, 2024). The EU, UK and South Korea retaliated with their own domestic subsidies, resulting in a subsidy competition (Stokes, 2024). They were not happy with suggestions that Biden's US was protecting 'foundational technologies with a small yard and high fence'—, protecting its industries while making it difficult for foreign entities (Stokes, 2024: 1). Nevertheless, the second Trump administration paused funding for the climate parts of the Act through an EO

The multi-country Minerals Security Partnership (MSP) was established in 2022 to diversify critical minerals value chains and trigger investment by reputable mining companies. It includes Australia,

Canada, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, India, Italy, Japan, Norway, the Republic of Korea, Sweden, the UK, the US, and the EU (US Department of State, 2025). Upon his exit in December 2024, Biden made it his crowning achievement to secure the Lobito Corridor Railway deal with G7 countries, Angola, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), and Zambia, and to sign Memoranda of Understanding with the DRC and Zambia (Soy, 2024). President Trump may take a more unilateral approach to these arrangements.

Second Trump administration's approach to derisking

President Trump left office in 2021 when the global critical minerals rush was just beginning after the pandemic. When he returned to power in January 2025, President Trump intensified and accelerated his derisking strategies in general, including those related to critical minerals. Of the 143 executive orders Trump issued between January and April 2025, about seven directly affect critical minerals.

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On his first day of his second term, 20 January 2025, President Trump signed two EOs directly related to critical minerals, that is, EO 14154 and EO 14156. The first executive order, EO 14154 *Unleashing American Energy*, sought to unleash American energy from 'burdensome and ideologically motivated regulations' that affect energy (including critical minerals) production (Trump, 2025a: 1). This EO disbanded several associations (for example, the American Climate Corps), revoked over thirteen Biden EOs and cancelled several programmes and contracts linked to climate, environmental and energy initiatives. Some examples include the elimination of 'electric vehicle (EV) mandates' and terminating the Green New Deal by stopping the disbursement of funds under the Inflation Reduction Act or the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (Trump, 2025a: 1). Trump criticised the laws as socialist and hampered by diversity, inclusion and equality provisions and paused billions of funding in 2025, resulting in several lawsuits (Fletcher, 2025).

The EO provides for several changes and new initiatives in support of energy and critical minerals, including rare earth elements production, access and efficiency for employment creation and strengthening supply

chains. It calls for the removal of ‘undue burdens on the domestic mining and processing of non-fuel minerals’ (Trump, 2025a: 1). Federal agencies are directed to prioritise critical minerals projects, identify regulatory barriers, and ‘assess whether exploitative practices and state-assisted mineral projects abroad are unlawful or unduly burden or restrict United States commerce’ (Trump, 2025a: 1).

The second executive order is EO 14156 *Declaring a National Energy Emergency* of 20 January 2025 which decried the inadequacy of ‘The energy and critical minerals (‘energy’) identification, leasing, development, production, transportation, refining, and generation capacity of the United States’ because of ‘the harmful and shortsighted policies of the previous administration’ (Trump, 2025b: 1). As a result, the US was seen as having an unreliable, undiversified and unaffordable supply of critical minerals, creating a threat to national security and economic stability. The state of emergency declared made provisions for rapid responses to resolve the energy deficiencies by affirming the ‘integrity and expansion of our Nation’s energy infrastructure’, completing all authorised ‘infrastructure, energy, environmental, and natural resources projects’, and facilitating ‘the supply, refining, and transportation of energy’ (Trump, 2025b: 1).

The third executive order is EO 14241, *Immediate Measures to Increase American Mineral Production* of 20 March 2025, issued on the basis that ‘it is imperative for our national security that the United States take immediate action to facilitate domestic mineral production to the maximum possible extent’ (Trump, 2025c: 1). This EO provides for certain priority projects, a structure to make recommendations on issues to resolve under the Mining Act of 1872, identification of the land use for mineral projects and sets out to accelerate private and public investment in minerals.

The fourth executive order, EO 14285 *Unleashing America’s Offshore Critical Minerals and Resources*, of 24 April 2025, adds directives for the exploration of seabed critical mineral and energy resources (Trump, 2025d: 1). The fifth executive order, EO 14262 *Strengthening the Reliability and Security of the United States Electric Grid* of 8 April 2025, connected reliable US electricity to resilient supply chains (Trump, 2025e: 1).

The sixth executive order, EO 14272, *Ensuring National Security and*

Economic Resilience Through Section 232 Actions on Processed Critical Minerals and Derivative Products of 15 April 2025, called for the US Department of Commerce 'to determine the effects of imports of any articles on U.S. national security' (Trump, 2025f: 1). This EO observes that the US's dependence on foreign processed critical minerals and derivatives is a threat to US economic and national security.

The United States' manufacturing and defense industrial bases remain dependent on foreign sources for processed critical mineral products. Many of these foreign sources are at risk of serious, sustained, and long-term supply chain shocks. Should the United States lose access to processed critical minerals from foreign sources, the United States' commercial and defense manufacturing base for derivative products could face significant shortages and an inability to meet demand (Trump, 2025f: 1).

President Trump established the *National Energy Dominance Council* because 'It shall be the policy of my Administration to make America energy dominant'. Energy dominant is not defined in the EO, however, it had been used by Trump in his first term in 2017, and then Department of Energy Secretary Rick Perry stated:

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An energy dominant America means self-reliant. It means a secure nation, free from the geopolitical turmoil of other nations who seek to use energy as an economic weapon... An energy dominant America will export to markets around the world, increasing our global leadership and our influence (DiChristopher, 2017).

According to the EO, this is achieved by:

By utilizing our amazing national assets, including our crude oil, natural gas, lease condensates, natural gas liquids, refined petroleum products, uranium, coal, biofuels, geothermal heat, the kinetic movement of flowing water, and critical minerals, we will preserve

and protect our most beautiful places, reduce our dependency on foreign imports, and grow our economy—thereby enabling the reduction of our deficits and our debt (Trump, 2025f: 1).

These EOs related to critical minerals concentrate on accelerated efforts to undo the ‘damage’ or policies of the previous administration and define, simplify and implement critical mineral support. There have been increased commitments to financial support through federal grants and tax incentives supporting domestic production capacity. After an emphasis on domestic production, under Trump, the US has pursued critical minerals supply chains through bilateral agreements with source countries like Australia, Canada, China, the DRC and Ukraine.

Discussion

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The two presidents (Biden and Trump) have made critical minerals derisking a key part of their administrations, although their approaches differ. The themes under focus include domestic production and job creation, international cooperation, environmental and social considerations, and legislative and regulatory frameworks. There are important similarities and differences between the two. In terms of similarities, both share a profound realisation of the necessity of securing critical mineral supply chains for economic stability and national security; both aim to reduce dependence on adversarial nations and foreign nations in general; and both promote domestic production of critical minerals as fundamental to national competitiveness and stability. In terms of differences, President Biden was for more international cooperation and diplomacy, while President Trump was more unilateral and protectionist; Biden included environmental sustainability and social responsibility concerns with economic growth and national security, while Trump was for the economy and national security; Biden used Congress for regulatory frameworks, while Trump mainly used executive authority and regulatory changes.

The derisking approaches of these leaders have long-term positive and negative implications for the US critical minerals industry and supply

chain. The positive effects are likely to be increased domestic production, reduced dependence on adversarial nations, job creation and economic growth. This means more secure supply chains, reduced risks from disruptions and geopolitical tensions and new opportunities as domestic production increases. The negative effects could include increased costs of critical minerals due to higher labour, environmental, and investment standards; short-term supply chain disruptions during the transition to domestic production; and environmental impacts if regulations are rolled back. In the long term, the efforts at derisking may result in supply chain resilience, innovation and competitiveness and change global market dynamics.

The unfortunate reality is that despite significant efforts to derisk, the tide has yet to meaningfully turn in favour of the US, and there are signs of desperation and impatience within the country. Domestic production has remained a distant dream in US policy, as policymakers have failed to reform the systems within projected timelines. Most of the executive orders demonstrate urgency with phrases like 'in the next 10 days' or 'next 100 days'. Such wording reveals a lack of discipline and explains policy inconsistencies that undermine continuity. Biden built upon Trump, but also reversed many of Trump's efforts, while Trump's second-term initiatives have dismantled almost everything associated with Biden. Barner (2023) also notes that some of the derisking structures excluded pertinent procurement experts, highlighting a deficiency in understanding the comprehensive relational and network knowledge necessary to build supply chains and attract essential skills.

The two presidents' diverging approaches to derisking reveal a deeper problem about the fracture between the Democrats and Republicans, and how to interpret the crisis of the neoliberal state that both sides acknowledge. Biden's neoliberal domestic and multilateral approach led back to nationalism and unilateralism. The rational and irrational fears regarding China indicate why others have invoked Thucydides' Trap and neorealist stability theory to explain the US's reactions to the possibility of taking an equal or subordinate role alongside China (Allison, 2017). Trump's reaction to disengage from Biden's tenets raises the question: Can the US afford to move away from multilateralism and overlook

environmental, social and human rights considerations? President Trump thinks so, by using ‘common sense’ and quick-fix approaches. However, the US cannot isolate itself while maintaining access and control of critical mineral supply chains. There are signs of disdain or mixed messages about other countries, undermining perceptions of the US as a reliable and trustworthy business partner. China’s supply chains took time to build partnerships with both friends and foes, establishing contacts and rapport, building networks, creating infrastructure, relocating equipment, attracting the right skills, and addressing context-specific political economy issues. The Chinese carefully selected their allies, remained steadfast with them, and opted not to interfere in their internal affairs as a long-term strategy. While focusing on the domestic market is crucial, China has both domestic and overseas supply chains. However, given the nature of critical minerals, vast overseas supply chains provide more volume and access to minerals concentrated in a few locations. For instance, the DRC has the world’s largest cobalt deposits, South America is rich in lithium resources, and Zimbabwe possesses the world’s largest hard-rock lithium deposits.

Grand strategy, a long-term, high-level policy of plans, principles and behaviour guiding a nation’s domestic and foreign policy, could be the missing link of the US de-risking strategy (Silove, 2017). For a country that wants to catch up with another country that it depends entirely on for critical minerals and has an annual overcapacity of approximately US\$1.8 trillion against the US deficit of US\$36 trillion, as discussed before, the US must think in terms of grand strategy. While neorealism emphasises self-help, the security dilemma, and relative gains over direct confrontation, the required strategy may instead be a patient but steady build-up of power. Grand strategy plays a role, however, the key is to avoid what Kennedy (2010) termed imperial overreach or overstretch by trying to do everything at once. In an era of polycrisis, the US cannot and should not try to be everywhere and do everything or make enemies or friends of everyone.

Conclusion

This chapter shows that the US has been trying to de-risk for over a decade. The biggest challenges to the process involve divided approaches on how to do this. The internal capacity to begin domestic production is hampered by skills shortages, bureaucratic delays, the need to restructure the government and attract local and international investments into the domestic industries. The Biden and Trump administrations show that the issue of critical minerals is an American priority, however, they differed on priorities, methods and values. While both agree that liberal approaches brought the US to a state of vulnerable supply chains, they differ in terms of the intensity of this understanding. For Biden, it is about a renewed focus on domestic investment with considerations of inclusivity, environment, sustainability, innovation and international cooperation to create jobs, maintain competitiveness and secure supply chains. For Trump, Biden's considerations represent burdens that delay domestic production, economic growth and national security. The second Trump administration's first four months in power reveal an administration in a hurry to secure the US's critical supply chains, removing what it considers limitations, maintaining what it considers works, and aggressively pushing forward. In this rush, the US has treated both friends and foes alike in reviewing its supply chains. Despite the attractiveness of ad hoc strategies, they tend to be short-term. The biggest takeaway from this chapter could be that securing supply chains is not only about what is being done, but also how it is being done. The most significant quality of this approach is predictability and long-term plans, principles, and behaviours that unite the nation as part of a consistent grand strategy.

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CHAPTER 3

Implications of Donald Trump's Transactional Foreign Policy Style and Isolationism on the United States' Global Leadership

Zekeri Momoh

Introduction

The United States (US) emerged as a global hegemon owing to military, economic, political and ideological factors that characterised the aftermath of World War II (WWII). It is pertinent to note that the US consolidated its global power through military ascendancy, economic preeminence and ideological leadership. The US's effort was shaped by its determination and the structural changes in the global system that followed WWII. Post WWII, the US possessed supreme military capabilities, including nuclear weapons, many military bases around the world and control of many sea routes around the world. The downfall of European powers during World War II and the wreckage of its impact on European economies set the stage for the United States' emergence as an international security hegemon through the establishment of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) (Ikenberry, 2002). It was against this backdrop that the US used its military might in containing Soviet Union expansionism during the Cold War.

However, the US's economic dominance started around 1945 when the country accounted for about 50 per cent of international industrial output. Also, the US was equally instrumental to the establishment of the Bretton Woods institutions, namely the International Monetary Fund (IMF), World Bank, and General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT), with the primary objective of stabilising the international economy and promoting liberal economic policies around the world

(Gilpin, 2011). Moreover, the US used the Marshall Plan to consolidate its influence by expediting European reconstruction and unification of Western Europe to US economic hegemony. In addition, the US was a key player in promoting liberal democracy and capitalist values around the world, by setting itself as the global leader of the ‘free world’, contrary to the Soviet Union, which was the key player in promoting communist ideology around the world. One of the instruments used by the US to promote liberal democracy and capitalist culture was Western media, which became an instrument of political education in most developing countries around the world (Nye, 2004).

Given the above role of the US in international affairs, after the Cold War, there was a shift in power configuration in the international system in favour of the US, and the world order became the ‘unipolar’ world order characterised by the US dominance of the international system in which Charles Krauthammer (1990: 23) describes as the ‘unipolar moment’. Since then, the US has continued to shape global institutions to represent its national interest and values. For instance, critical decisions and policies of the Bretton Woods institutions and the United Nations (UN) are influenced by the US. This set the pace for the US institutionalising its leadership in a rules-based global order (Ikenberry, 2011).

With the downfall of the Soviet Union in 1991, the US emerged as the global hegemon, with unmatched military and economic capabilities. This era of unipolarity in the international system strengthened the US leadership role through international interventions, economic liberalisation and technological control (Wohlforth, 1999). Today, the re-emergence of President Donald Trump as the 47th President of the US in 2025, has redefined the US foreign policy in many respects, especially the contemporary shift in geopolitical dynamics and declining US foreign aid. Today, Donald Trump remains the President who has issued the highest number of executive orders in recent US history (National Archives, 2021). Although a significant number of Americans disagreed with several of these executive orders (Pew Research Center, 2020), it is pertinent to note that within just three months in office, Trump’s administration implemented sweeping changes that sent shockwaves through the global development community. These included the dismantling of components

of USAID and a freeze on US foreign aid disbursements (KFF, 2017; Radelet, 2021). This came at a time when many developing countries were still struggling to recover from the economic and social impacts of the COVID 19 pandemic and were simultaneously confronting the consequences of the ongoing Russia-Ukraine war (UNDP, 2023).

Moreover, there is an ongoing debate in the field of international relations regarding the perceived decline of the US in the international system (Jacob, Smith and Turner, 2023; Jacob and Momoh, 2023; Nye, 2020). While some studies argue that the role of the US as a global hegemon is diminishing (Layne, 2021; Mearsheimer, 2018), others contend that its hegemonic status remains intact, given its enduring influence and strategic role in global affairs (Brooks and Wohlforth, 2016; Ikenberry, 2020). It is important to note that both sides of this debate have presented compelling evidence to support their positions. However, considering current geopolitical shifts and the noticeable reduction in US foreign aid (Radelet, 2021), it is becoming increasingly difficult for scholars who reject the notion of American decline to maintain their stance. Contemporary political, social and economic realities suggest a reconfiguration of power in the international system that challenges the traditional dominance of the US (Acharya, 2018; Kupchan, 2020).

Overall, the contributions of the US to the growth of the international system cannot be contested, as the US remains the largest donor in the world. One fundamental question in the mind of policymakers and international experts, is centred on China's capability to fill in the gap created by the US, given that China is Africa's largest trade partner and bilateral creditor. However, the US accounted for 22 per cent of the UN budget, 27 per cent for the UN peacekeeping budget and 47 per cent of the UN Population Fund budget (Jacob and Momoh, 2023). It is against this background that this study seeks to investigate the implications of Donald Trump's transactional foreign policy and isolationist posture on the US global leadership.

Conceptual review

Transactional foreign policy

A transactional foreign policy is one driven by direct, short-term gains, rather than long-term strategic objectives or shared values (Haass, 2017). Under this model, relationships between states are seen through the lens of cost-benefit analysis, with cooperation conditional on reciprocal advantage. Donald Trump epitomised this approach through his ‘America First’ doctrine, which emphasised renegotiating trade deals, demanding increased financial contributions from allies such as the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) and placing national interests above global commitments (Lissner and Rapp-Hooper, 2018). The transactional style marked a departure from traditional US leadership, which often combined strategic interests with a sense of responsibility for maintaining global order. This shift undermined trust and predictability in international affairs, as allies and adversaries alike struggled to understand the US’s long-term intentions (Brands, 2018).

Isolationism

Isolationism refers to a foreign policy stance that seeks to minimise a country’s involvement in international affairs, especially military and political alliances. Trump’s rhetoric and actions such as the withdrawal from the Paris Agreement, the Trans-Pacific Partnership and the WHO signalled a clear turn toward isolationist tendencies (Drezner, 2022). This revival of isolationism weakened traditional alliances, reduced America’s diplomatic engagement, and led to a decline in global influence. As the US stepped back, other powers, notably China and Russia, expanded their influence in regions once dominated by American leadership (Ikenberry, 2020).

Global leadership

Global leadership involves a state’s capacity to influence international

norms, shape multilateral agendas, and maintain global stability. Historically, the US has played this role through a combination of military power, economic strength, and ideological appeal. However, under Trump's administration, this leadership was questioned due to perceived unpredictability and unilateralism. The retreat from cooperative global governance diminished America's soft power, its ability to attract and persuade others based on values and culture rather than coercion or payment (Nye, 2004). As trust in US leadership waned, global institutions faced increased fragmentation, and emerging powers gained ground in setting international norms.

Theoretical framework

International relations theorists have developed several theories for the study of foreign policy. One notable theory is the realist theory. Realism emphasises the anarchic nature of the international system, state sovereignty and the pursuit of national interests defined in terms of power by states. Realists argue that states act primarily to ensure their own survival and dominance in a competitive international environment. Within the context of realist theory, Trump's foreign policy, particularly his emphasis on 'America First' and a focus on bilateral engagement over multilateral engagement, as well as his withdrawal from international obligations such as the Paris Climate Agreement and the Iran Nuclear Deal, is a clear reflection of realist tenets. Trump prioritised short-term national gains over long-term global stability and alliances (Mearsheimer, 2018). The implication of Trump's foreign policy approach is that, while asserting US sovereignty, it tends to weaken its global leadership by eroding alliances, diminishing soft power and allowing rivals like China to fill the gap created by the US.

However, constructivism emphasises the role of ideas, identities and norms in shaping relations between states at the international level. Within the framework of constructivist state behaviour, it is influenced not only by material interests but also by ideational factors and perceptions. Thus, Trump's magniloquence and chauvinistic speech reshaped the perception of US identity, moving from a global leader

to a transactional actor. This shift altered how allies and adversaries interpreted American intentions at the international level (Wendt, 1999). The implication of Trump's foreign policy is that it changes US identity and narrative, as it weakened its normative power and global image by reducing its ability to lead by example or shape international norms.

Liberal institutionalism posits that international cooperation and institutions mitigate anarchy and promote global order. Liberal institutionalism emphasises interdependence, rules-based systems, and the importance of institutions such as the UN, NATO, and the World Trade Organisation (WTO). It is pertinent to note within the theoretical explanation, that Trump's rejection of multilateralism, criticism of NATO and withdrawal from WHO signify a retreat from liberal internationalism. By undermining global institutions, Trump's policies destabilised the rules-based order that traditionally upheld US leadership (Ikenberry, 2020). Therefore, the implication of Trump's foreign policy of isolationist shift, diminished trust in US commitments, weakened global governance and challenged the legitimacy of American leadership by emerging global powers like China.

Nevertheless, this study adopts the liberal institutionalism as its framework for analysis. This is because liberal institutionalism offers the most comprehensive framework to assess the implications of Trump's foreign policy style on US global leadership. Trump's withdrawal from multilateral institutions and treaties has significantly disrupted international collaboration and challenged the international liberal order established after WWII (Ikenberry, 2020).

The implications of Trump's foreign policy can be best understood through liberal institutionalism, which emphasises the role of international institutions, rules and cooperation in maintaining global order. According to Ikenberry (2020), US leadership after WWII was based, not solely on power, but on the creation of a liberal order that promoted democracy, free markets and multilateral governance. Trump's rejection of this model disrupted decades of institutional trust. Trump's preference for bilateralism over multilateralism weakened international regimes, challenged the credibility of US commitments and opened space

for revisionist powers to assert influence (Patrick, 2017). Therefore, the erosion of institutional dependence and commitment directly undermined US reliability, making this theory most apt for understanding the long-term leadership consequences.

Nature of Trump's transactional and isolationist foreign policy

A critical assessment of Trump's transactional approach to US foreign policy shows that his administration prioritised short-term US gains and bilateral deals over multilateralism and long-standing diplomatic alliances with other nations. Besides, Trump's 'America First' doctrine has shown that all US foreign relations must produce direct benefits for the US or else it should not be considered. It is pertinent to note that US short-term benefits are measured in terms of economic or strategic benefits. This US foreign policy posture has not changed much, when compared to Trump's first term as US president (Thrall and Goepner, 2017).

One important example was Trump's repeatedly criticised NATO allies, especially Western European nations for failing to meet their defence spending obligations of over two per cent of their Gross Domestic Product (GDP). Recently, Trump has threatened to reduce US commitment to NATO, unless other NATO members increased their contributions, which shows a change from US collective security foreign policy posture to conditional alliance assistance (Brands, 2018). Economically, Trump began trade wars with China, Mexico, Canada and the EU by imposing tariffs on goods from these nations, thereby treating trade negotiations within the context of competitive business transactions rather than tools of cooperation (Bown, 2020).

However, US–North Korea relations under Trump has a transactional undertone. For instance, Trump's contact with Kim Jong-un was conceived within the context of a business deals between two relegating, diplomatic processes and human rights issues to the background (Cha, 2018). Moreover, since 2025, no opportunity has availed itself for both leaders, Donald Trump and Kim Jong-un, to meet and engage in dialogue on matters of mutual concern. However, considering the evolving dynamics

of US foreign policy, especially under the ‘America First’ paradigm, it is likely that Trump would express renewed interest in such a meeting, particularly if it aligns with advancing the USs’ economic and strategic interests.

Trump withdrew the US from several key international agreements, including the Paris Climate Accord, the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (Iran Nuclear Deal), the Trans–Pacific Partnership and the WHO. All these actions signalled a deep scepticism toward international institutions and a preference for unilateral action (Drezner, 2019).

Also important, Trump emphasised domestic protection through aggressive immigration policies, such as the Muslim travel ban, refugee reductions and the construction of a border wall with Mexico and deployment of the US military to the border with Mexico. These measures taken by Trump are driven by a national security narrative, especially the curbing of illegal immigrants into the US, which has been responsible for the growing crime rate and the competition for available jobs that are arguably meant for US citizens. All these embodied a broader isolationist ideology rooted in protecting American sovereignty and identity (Gessen, 2017).

In essence, Trump’s foreign policy in recent years has been defined by pragmatic unilateralism, characterised by transactional alliances and conditional international engagement. Trump’s ‘America First’ stance translated into a retreat from multilateralism and a narrowing of US global leadership, focusing instead on self-interest, economic nationalism, and domestic security. While International Relations scholars viewed this as a necessary correction to decades of overextension, some International Relations scholars have argued that Trump’s foreign policy posture undermined US credibility and disrupted global stability (Sloat, 2020).

Strategic advantages of Trump’s transactional foreign policy and isolationist posture on the United States’ global leadership

Under Donald Trump’s current administration, the economic nationalism that defined his first term has continued to shape US foreign policy. One of the hallmark strategies initiated during his earlier tenure was

the imposition of tariffs on strategic sectors such as steel, aluminium, automobiles and agriculture. These protectionist policies, integral to the broader 'America First' doctrine, were originally designed to reduce trade deficits, revive domestic manufacturing and strengthen national self-reliance in critical industries. During his first term, Trump invoked Section 232 of the Trade Expansion Act of 1962 to impose a 25 per cent tariff on steel and 10 per cent on aluminium, effectively providing US producers a competitive edge against imports (Office of the United States Trade Representative, 2018). This led to short-term boosts in domestic production, such as the reopening of US Steel's Granite City Works in Illinois, which rehired hundreds of workers (Tankersley and Rappeport, 2018).

Now, in his renewed leadership, Trump has signalled a return to or even an expansion of these tariff-based strategies, reaffirming his commitment to protecting US industries and workers. In agriculture, the legacy of the US–China trade war continues to influence policy, with Trump again pledging to defend American farmers through trade leverage and direct subsidies if necessary. The retaliatory tariffs on US soybeans during Trump's first term were countered by multibillion-dollar farm aid packages, and similar measures are likely to re-emerge as he seeks to bolster rural support. Moreover, Trump's prior renegotiation of trade deals, such as the US–Mexico–Canada Agreement (USMCA), has laid a foundation for more assertive trade diplomacy in his current administration, particularly in securing favourable terms for US agricultural and industrial sectors.

Under Donald Trump's current administration, the emphasis on renegotiating trade deals to favour American workers and industries remains central to his foreign policy agenda. A key example often cited by Trump as a model for future trade diplomacy is the renegotiation of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), which was replaced by the United States–Mexico–Canada Agreement (USMCA) in 2020. This agreement, which continues to define US trade relations with its North American neighbours, incorporated several provisions that significantly benefitted US industries and aligned with Trump's long-standing 'America First' approach.

The USMCA expanded market access for US agricultural producers,

especially in sectors like dairy, poultry and eggs, by reducing Canadian tariffs and quotas. According to the US Department of Agriculture, approximately 3.6 per cent of Canada's dairy market was opened to US exporters (USDA, 2020), reinforcing Trump's ongoing pledge to prioritise American farmers. In the automotive sector, the USMCA's requirements that 75 per cent of vehicle content be produced in North America and that 40–45 per cent be made by workers earning at least US\$16 per hour continue to serve as benchmarks in Trump's current trade talks, aimed at reshoring manufacturing and raising labour standards (Lynch, 2020; Villarreal and Fergusson, 2020).

56 While the USMCA was a first-term achievement, its structures and outcomes reflect Trump's present foreign economic policy: a transactional, bilateral-focused strategy that seeks to safeguard US industry from global competition. In sectors such as steel and aluminium, where previous tariff policies stimulated production and temporarily revived dormant plants, Trump has renewed calls for strategic protectionism and self-reliance in key supply chains. Though critics argue that such measures lead to higher consumer costs and downstream disruptions (Fajgelbaum et al., 2020), the Trump administration continues to justify them as necessary trade-offs in preserving national economic security and global bargaining power. As Trump reasserts his influence on global trade in this new term, the USMCA stands as a foundation for future deals symbolising the administration's broader objective of rebalancing international trade to favour American interests and industries.

In Donald Trump's current administration, the issue of burden-sharing within NATO has re-emerged as a central theme in US transatlantic policy. Building on the confrontational, but impactful strategy of his first term, Trump has once again made allied defence spending a litmus test for US commitment to NATO. During his previous presidency, Trump frequently criticised member states for failing to meet the 2 per cent of GDP defence spending benchmark and even proposed a far more ambitious 4–5 per cent target; an idea dismissed by many allies as unrealistic (Braw, 2018). Nonetheless, Trump's pressure campaign during 2016–2020 yielded measurable results: non-US NATO members increased defence spending by nearly 20 per cent, from US\$262 billion in 2016 to US\$313 billion in

2020 (NATO, 2021), with countries like Poland, the UK, and the Baltic states accelerating military modernisation efforts.

Now, in his renewed leadership, Trump continues to leverage NATO spending as a strategic foreign policy tool, doubling down on the argument that the US has carried a disproportionate share of the alliance's defence burden. In public remarks and diplomatic engagements, Trump has reiterated his belief that European allies must take more financial responsibility for their own security, particularly considering evolving threats from Russia and the need to reduce dependency on American military might. Trump's administration has revived calls for conditional US engagement, suggesting that continued American support may hinge on the financial commitments and defence readiness of member states.

Moreover, Trump's earlier rhetoric has had a lasting impact on NATO's internal political dynamics. Former NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg credited Trump with influencing the alliance's financial trajectory, attributing over US\$130 billion in new defence investments between 2016 and 2019 to US pressure (Stoltenberg, 2019). That legacy has now been embraced by Trump's current foreign policy team as justification for maintaining leverage in NATO-related negotiations, particularly regarding troop deployments, military basing agreements and arms procurement.

However, while Trump's renewed emphasis on burden-sharing has reinforced defence spending commitments, it has also reignited diplomatic tensions. Several European leaders continue to express concern that Trump's transactional approach undermines the spirit of collective defence enshrined in Article 5 of the NATO Charter. Despite these frictions, the Trump administration argues that increased allied spending, spurred largely by past and present US pressure, has strengthened NATO's interoperability and responsiveness, making the alliance more effective and equitable. In summary, Trump's current foreign policy toward NATO represents a continuation, and in some areas, an intensification of his earlier approach: demanding greater allied contributions, asserting US strategic dominance, and recalibrating transatlantic relations through the lens of national interest and fiscal fairness.

In Donald Trump's current administration, immigration policy

continues to reflect the ‘restrictionist’ approach established during his first term (2017–2021), with renewed vigour and an expanded political mandate. Building on his earlier emphasis on protecting American jobs and national security, Trump has once again prioritised a hardline immigration stance as a core pillar of his foreign and domestic policy agenda. The foundational belief remains that both undocumented and certain forms of legal immigration pose economic and security threats to the US, especially for low- and middle-income American workers (Huffman, 2019). During his previous tenure, Trump introduced stringent caps and increased scrutiny on legal immigration channels such as the H-1B visa, commonly used in the tech and engineering sectors, arguing that foreign labour undermined opportunities for American professionals (US Department of Labour, 2020). That policy logic persists today, as Trump’s administration resumes efforts to restrict employment-based visas, prioritise merit-based immigration, and scrutinise foreign labour sponsorship under the banner of ‘protecting American workers’.

58 The ‘public charge’ rule, expanded in 2020 to deny green cards to immigrants likely to use public benefits, is now being revisited and potentially broadened under the current administration to include additional forms of federal assistance. This reflects Trump’s continued focus on minimising perceived fiscal burdens posed by low-income immigrants and safeguarding taxpayer resources (Pierce and Bolter, 2020). Furthermore, Trump’s prior use of presidential proclamations, such as the 2020 suspension of certain foreign work visas during the COVID 19 economic downturn (Miroff, 2020), has provided a legal and strategic framework for new executive actions aimed at curbing both temporary and permanent immigration amid ongoing debates about labour market stability and national self-reliance.

Trump’s current immigration agenda also places heightened emphasis on border enforcement and deterrence, including efforts to resume and expand construction of physical barriers at the southern border, increase funding for immigration enforcement agencies and pursue aggressive deportation policies. These initiatives are coupled with renewed rhetorical campaigns portraying immigration as a threat to American cultural identity, economic security and internal cohesion messaging that

has galvanised support among core constituencies. In summary, Trump's present-day immigration policy is not only a continuation of his earlier 'restrictionist' vision, but a reinforcement of it, reframed to address post-pandemic labour dynamics, national security concerns and political pressures from his conservative base. By leaning on precedents established in his first term, Trump has laid the groundwork for a more assertive and unilateral approach to immigration in his second administration.

In Donald Trump's current administration, the principles of the 'Buy American, Hire American' executive order remain central to immigration policy, reinforcing the broader strategy of economic nationalism. Trump continues to draw a direct connection between immigration restrictions and the protection of American jobs, wages and industries. His renewed policy framework builds upon the foundation laid during his first term, particularly in regard to border security and the symbolic power of enforcement measures. Trump's message continues to resonate strongly with voters concerned about illegal border crossings, drug trafficking and perceived national security threats. The partial construction of a border wall during his first term of approximately 452 miles of new and replacement barriers by January 2021 (US Customs and Border Protection, 2021) remains a defining achievement and campaign promise that he has recommitted to expanding. In his second term, efforts to resume and accelerate wall construction have been framed not only as border control, but also as a statement of national sovereignty and immigration deterrence.

The policy requiring asylum seekers to remain in Mexico while their claims are processed in US immigration courts, a central component of the earlier 'Migrant Protection Protocols', has been reinstated and reinforced under Trump's renewed leadership. The goal is to minimise catch-and-release practices, reduce immigration court backlogs, and deter what Trump terms 'frivolous asylum claims' (ACLU, 2020: 3). This aligns with the administration's broader objective of discouraging irregular migration by making the process more difficult and less appealing. Perhaps most controversially, Trump has defended and signalled a willingness to revive 'zero tolerance' policies similar to those implemented in 2018, which mandated the prosecution of all unauthorised border crossers (ACLU,

2020: 4–5). This policy, while resulting in significant backlash due to family separations, was positioned as part of a broader deterrence-based strategy rather than a labour market intervention (ACLU, 2020: 5). In his current term, Trump has reaffirmed his belief in strong punitive measures as necessary to uphold immigration laws and maintain border discipline.

Overall, Trump's present immigration and border policies reflect a continuation and, in many areas, an intensification of his earlier efforts. By doubling down on enforcement, limiting asylum access and reinforcing physical and legal barriers to entry, Trump's administration remains committed to reducing unauthorised immigration and reasserting control over US borders in line with his nationalist policy ethos. While Trump's current immigration policies have continued to emphasise restriction and enforcement, they remain deeply controversial for their humanitarian consequences and economic impact on key US industries. Although these measures have contributed to a reduction in certain categories of immigration, particularly irregular border crossings, they have also reignited criticism from business leaders, advocacy groups and labour-dependent sectors. Industries such as agriculture, hospitality, construction and healthcare, all of which have long relied on immigrant labour, have reported growing labour shortages, especially in low-wage positions that US citizens are often unwilling to fill.

Under Donald Trump's current administration, the continuation and intensification of stricter immigration policies, including visa restrictions, stepped-up deportations and heightened border enforcement, have further exacerbated labour shortages in essential sectors such as agriculture, construction and hospitality. These industries, long dependent on a reliable supply of both documented and undocumented migrant labour for low-wage and seasonal work, have struggled to maintain productivity as the immigrant workforce has continued to decline.

In response, many firms have accelerated investments in automation and robotics as a strategic solution to mitigate ongoing workforce shortages. This trend began during Trump's first term, but has gained new momentum under his renewed enforcement agenda. For instance, the US agricultural sector, especially fruit and vegetable production, remains particularly vulnerable due to its heavy reliance on migrant labour,

primarily from Latin America, for tasks such as planting, harvesting and packing. As Trump's administration enforces stricter limits on temporary agricultural visas (H-2A) and revives policies that heighten deportation fears, farmers have faced intensified hiring challenges. The California Farm Bureau Federation noted that by 2019, over 56 per cent of farmers were already experiencing labour shortages, with some leaving crops unharvested due to a lack of available hands (Davis, 2019), a situation that persists, and in some cases worsens under the current administration.

To adapt, many large-scale farms have accelerated the adoption of labour-saving technologies, including automated harvesters for crops such as strawberries and lettuce; drone surveillance systems for monitoring field conditions and crop health; precision irrigation and AI-powered planning tools to enhance productivity with fewer human workers (Shah and Johnson, 2020). Although these technologies had been in development for years, the Trump administration's continued labour restrictions have acted as a catalyst, especially for large agribusinesses. However, small- and medium-sized farms often lack the capital to invest in expensive automation, creating an uneven technological adoption landscape that may widen the gap between large and small producers.

Similarly, the construction sector remains significantly affected by the tightened immigration policy. The National Association of Home Builders (NAHB) reported that over 70 per cent of firms faced skilled labour shortages as early as 2020; a trend that has continued under Trump's second term. In response, the industry has increasingly turned to robotics and modular building techniques to reduce reliance on manual labour. These include semi-automated bricklaying machines like the SAM100; 3D printing of housing components; prefabricated panels and modular units that reduce on-site labour requirements and project timelines. While automation has helped some sectors adapt to labour constraints, it also presents long-term socioeconomic challenges. Critics warn that the rapid expansion of robotic technologies could displace American workers, particularly in rural or economically vulnerable communities already struggling with job scarcity. Economists such as Acemoglu and Restrepo (2020) have cautioned that this shift may outpace retraining efforts, potentially exacerbating inequality in the labour market. Moreover, the

post-pandemic context has further validated investments in automation, as concerns over worker safety in close-contact environments reinforce the appeal of machine-based solutions. Trump's immigration and labour policies, grounded in economic nationalism and protectionism, have therefore not only reshaped the composition of the labour force but also accelerated a structural transformation of the entire industry towards a more automated future.

Under Donald Trump's current administration, the US has reinforced the inward-looking and transactional foreign policy stance that characterised Trump's first term, commonly framed as 'America First'. This renewed approach has led to the continued retrenchment from traditional global leadership roles, as the administration prioritises bilateralism, national interest and economic sovereignty over multilateral cooperation. Trump has once again signalled scepticism toward global institutions and agreements, echoing his earlier withdrawals from the Paris Climate Accord, the Iran Nuclear Deal (JCPOA), and the WHO during the height of the COVID 19 pandemic.

This sustained disengagement has deepened the strategic vacuum in global governance that was initially created during Trump's first term, which is a void that emerging powers like China and Russia have continued to exploit with increasing effectiveness (Stokes, 2020). Under Trump's renewed isolationist posture, China has expanded its influence through humanitarian diplomacy and infrastructure investment, further consolidating its global footprint. For example, during and after the COVID 19 pandemic, Beijing provided masks, ventilators and vaccines to countries in Africa, Latin America and Southeast Asia, often through bilateral deals and global platforms like COVAX (ISEAS Yusof Ishak Institute, 2021). China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) continues to gain traction in regions left under-engaged by the US, with billions of US dollars in infrastructure funding flowing into Pakistan, Kenya and Serbia (Hillman, 2020). Meanwhile, Trump's persistent rejection of multilateral trade frameworks, including the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), has allowed China to position itself as a leader in trade diplomacy. The Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP), which became the world's largest trade bloc in 2020, excludes the US entirely, reflecting a

shift in global economic leadership (Petri and Plummer, 2020).

Russia has also capitalised on Washington's retreat from global commitments, expanding its role in military and energy diplomacy. In the Middle East, particularly Syria, Russia has entrenched its influence by backing Bashar al-Assad, while also aligning with Iran and Turkey, filling a strategic vacuum previously shaped by US involvement (Trenin, 2018). In Africa, Moscow has pursued an aggressive outreach strategy, signing defence and security agreements with over twenty African countries, and deepening its involvement in mining, arms deals and counterterrorism cooperation (Shaban, 2020). This sustained shift away from US-led global engagement under Trump has contributed to a world that is increasingly multipolar, where power is diffused among multiple centres, rather than concentrated in a unipolar American-led order. For many developing countries, this realignment presents new opportunities to diversify foreign partnerships, negotiate better terms and reduce reliance on Western aid and diplomacy. For example, African nations are turning to China, India, Turkey and Russia for trade, technology and military support, while countries in Latin America, such as Venezuela, Argentina and Bolivia, have deepened strategic ties with Beijing and Moscow (Ellis, 2021).

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Overall, while this multipolarity offers greater flexibility for emerging economies, it also carries the risk of geopolitical fragmentation, increased strategic competition and the weakening of liberal international norms that the US traditionally championed. Under Trump's current term, the global order appears increasingly defined by competitive nationalism and transactional diplomacy, rather than collective problem-solving and values-based leadership.

Strategic costs of Trump's transactional foreign policy and isolationist posture on the USs' global leadership

Trump's return to power in 2025 would not simply revive his first-term foreign policy, it would accelerate and institutionalise it. The 'America First' doctrine would likely evolve into a systematic retrenchment from alliances, aggressive economic nationalism and deliberate dismantling of multilateral norms. While this might appeal to domestic political

bases focused on sovereignty and industrial revival, the international costs could be significant: reduced global stability, weakened Western alliances and a reordering of power that benefits strategic competitors. During his presidency, Donald Trump adopted a transactional approach to foreign policy, where international partnerships were judged primarily on immediate, quantifiable benefits to the US. This posture marked a sharp departure from the traditional US role as a consensus-builder within alliances like NATO, the UN and emerging frameworks like AUKUS (Australia–United Kingdom–United States). Trump's frequent threats to reduce US contributions or even withdraw from longstanding security agreements unsettled allies and weakened perceptions of American reliability. Trump repeatedly criticised NATO members for not spending enough on defence, branding the alliance 'obsolete' in 2017 and threatening to pull out if partners failed to meet their obligations (Erlanger, 2019). While he did succeed in pressuring some countries to increase their military spending, his rhetoric also alarmed European allies who began to question the long-term commitment of the US to transatlantic security.

Present Trump's administration, he promises a return and intensification of these policies under his revived 'America First 2.0' agenda. His public statements, campaign platform, and advisor memos offer clear indications of how past strategies are likely to be amplified in office. Trump's first term saw frequent disparagement of NATO, calling it 'obsolete' and criticising allies for failing to meet spending targets (Erlanger, 2019: 12). Trump has reaffirmed his intention to reduce or eliminate support for NATO countries that do not contribute 2 per cent of their GDP to defence. In a 2024 rally, Trump even stated he would 'encourage Russia to do whatever the hell they want' to delinquent allies (Klein, 2024: 5). A 2025 Trump administration could, therefore, formalise this stance, triggering a security crisis in Europe and encouraging Russia's aggression in places like the Baltics and Moldova (Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2025).

Similarly, while the AUKUS agreement was launched during the Biden administration, the scepticism sown during the Trump years influenced allied expectations about US consistency. Many international observers

pointed out that Trump's 'America First' policy left partners feeling vulnerable to sudden policy shifts (Brands, 2019; US Senate Democratic Report, 2020). These uncertainties created what political scientists call a credibility gap, a dissonance between US promises and perceived willingness to follow through. France's president Emmanuel Macron, for instance, responded by calling for 'strategic autonomy' for Europe, arguing that Europe could no longer fully rely on US security guarantees (Macron, 2020: 4).

Ironically, even as Trump strained alliance cohesion, his administration's adversarial stance toward China and continued sanctions on Russia helped pivot NATO's focus toward emerging threats. However, many experts argue that NATO unity during and after Trump has relied less on US leadership and more on a shared perception of Russia as a destabilising actor, especially after the 2014 annexation of Crimea and the 2022 full-scale invasion of Ukraine (Kroenig and Ashford, 2021). The increasing convergence among NATO states on deterring Russian aggression suggests that alliance resilience is now anchored more in shared strategic threats than in diplomatic pressure from Washington. For example, in 2020, Germany and France launched new joint defence projects under the Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO) framework, reinforcing intra-European collaboration regardless of US signals (Biscop, 2018).

This shift has broader implications for global security governance. When the leading power in an alliance is seen as unpredictable, smaller allies may seek hedging strategies by diversifying security ties, enhancing self-reliance, or deepening regional cooperation. Trump's approach, thus, unintentionally accelerated debates over NATO's future, the EU's strategic independence and even Japan and South Korea's moves to expand indigenous defence capabilities. In summary, Trump's aggressive bargaining and threats to withdraw from alliances damaged US global credibility and highlighted the fragility of international cohesion when leadership is volatile. Alliance solidarity now hinges more on geopolitical threats like Russia's aggression than on the consistency of American diplomatic engagement.

One of the major consequences of Donald Trump's protectionist trade policy, particularly the imposition of tariffs on imports from China, the

EU and other partners, was the inevitable retaliation by affected nations. While the Trump administration argued that tariffs were necessary to correct trade imbalances and revive American manufacturing (Navarro, 2018), the global trading system responded in kind, significantly affecting US exporters and creating ripple effects across global supply chains. China, in response to US tariffs on US\$250 billion worth of its goods, imposed retaliatory tariffs on approximately US\$110 billion in US exports. These measures disproportionately targeted politically sensitive sectors such as soybeans, pork, dairy and automobiles, hitting states that had strongly supported Trump in the 2016 election (Bown and Kolb, 2025). For example, US soybean exports to China dropped by nearly 75 per cent in 2018 compared to 2017, forcing many American farmers to rely on emergency federal subsidies.

66 The US Department of Agriculture (USDA) launched the Market Facilitation Program (MFP), allocating over US\$28 billion between 2018 and 2020 to compensate for lost agricultural income (USDA, 2019). This marked the largest farm bailout in US history, drawing criticism from both domestic and international observers for distorting markets and reflecting the deeper costs of the trade war (FAS, 2020). These subsidies revealed a paradox: while the Trump administration advocated for free market principles and reduced government intervention, it was forced to deploy massive state assistance to shield vulnerable sectors from the fallout of its own trade policy. Farmers, especially in the Midwest, became increasingly dependent on federal aid, creating long-term uncertainty about the sustainability of such protectionist strategies.

Moreover, some firms in the automotive and electronics sectors reported falling revenues due to diminished export competitiveness and higher costs for imported components. According to the Peterson Institute for International Economics, retaliatory tariffs led to a decline in US exports of affected goods by up to 26 per cent (Amiti, Redding and Weinstein, 2019). The Trump-era trade wars also destabilised global trade networks. Manufacturers across Asia and Europe began shifting production away from the US and China to Third World Countries like Vietnam, Mexico and Malaysia to avoid tariff burdens (World Bank, 2020). This reconfiguration not only reduced US participation in key value

chains but also invited competitors to fill the voids in markets vacated by American firms. In addition, the WTO was weakened by the US blocking appointments to its appellate body, hampering global dispute resolution mechanisms. This fostered a more fragmented and confrontational international trade environment (Evenett and Fritz, 2019).

While former President Donald Trump's tariff policies were aimed at protecting American industries and reducing trade deficits, they had significant unintended consequences for US consumers and global supply chains. These effects were particularly evident in the form of increased consumer prices and widespread supply chain disruptions that rippled through both domestic and international markets. Empirical studies found that the tariffs imposed under the Trump administration especially on Chinese goods under Section 301 of the Trade Act were largely passed on to US consumers. Amiti et al. (2019) found that the full burden of tariffs was borne by US importers and ultimately transferred to consumers in the form of higher prices. According to their analysis, there was virtually no significant price reduction from foreign exporters to offset the tariffs. Trump launched major trade wars, especially with China, using tariffs to pursue strategic economic aims (Fajgelbaum et al., 2020).

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Trump's 2024 policy memo proposed a universal 10 per cent tariff on all imports and a 60 per cent tariff on Chinese goods, a dramatic escalation of his earlier trade war (Bown and Kolb, 2025). This would inflame global trade tensions, raise US consumer prices and provoke retaliation from key partners like the EU, Canada and Mexico. Trump targeted China with tariffs, tech restrictions on Huawei and accusations over COVID 19 origins. Trump's administration would likely resume a Cold War-style confrontation, pushing US allies to take sides and fragmenting the global digital economy (Brands, 2018).

The economic cost to consumers was substantial. The National Bureau of Economic Research (NBER) estimated that the welfare loss from higher prices due to tariffs amounted to about US\$1.4 billion per month, with additional deadweight losses from misallocation and reduced variety of imported goods (Fajgelbaum et al., 2020). These effects were especially pronounced in the consumer electronics, home appliances, and clothing sectors, where US producers rely heavily on global inputs. In addition to

price effects, Trump's tariffs accelerated a realignment of global supply chains, particularly in sectors like electronics, automotive and machinery. The World Bank and WTO reported a decline in US–China trade volumes and a rerouting of intermediate goods through third-party countries such as Vietnam, Mexico and Malaysia (World Bank, 2021). For example, Apple Inc. began diversifying its supply base away from China, moving production of certain iPhone models to India and Vietnam in response to tariff pressures.

Similarly, manufacturers like General Motors and Toyota faced higher costs for imported steel and aluminium, leading to price hikes and, in some cases, reduced output in US plants (Bown, 2020). These supply chain shifts often increased transaction costs and led to longer lead times, as firms were forced to restructure their logistics, renegotiate supplier contracts, and navigate new regulatory environments. The disruptions caused by Trump's tariff policies illustrate how protectionist measures can have far-reaching consequences beyond their intended targets. Not only were consumers affected through direct price increases, but industries also faced higher input costs, delayed deliveries, and weakened competitiveness in global markets. Moreover, the uncertainty surrounding trade policy during Trump's term discouraged investment in sectors heavily reliant on international supply chains.

Under the Trump administration, stringent immigration policies significantly impacted labour-intensive industries such as agriculture and construction. These policies, which included enhanced border security, workplace raids and increased deportations, were primarily aimed at curbing irregular immigration. However, they also had unintended negative effects on critical sectors that rely heavily on undocumented labour. One of the most visible consequences was felt in the agricultural sector. According to a 2016 report by the US Department of Labour, approximately 42 per cent of crop farmworkers in the US were undocumented (US Department of Labour, 2016). Trump's immigration enforcement measures, such as increased ICE (Immigration and Customs Enforcement) raids and deportations, instilled widespread fear in immigrant communities, causing many workers to leave the labour force or avoid going to work.

The resulting labour shortages disrupted food production and supply chains, particularly in high-labour crops like fruits and vegetables. For instance, growers in California's Central Valley reported leaving produce unharvested due to a lack of workers. This led to increased production costs as farms had to raise wages to attract the smaller pool of available legal labour or shift to less labour-intensive crops (Martin, 2017). Additionally, a study by the Centre for Global Development found that restricting undocumented labour in agriculture would lead to reduced agricultural output and higher consumer prices, particularly for fresh produce (Clemens, 2018).

The construction industry also suffered from similar pressures. A significant proportion of workers in residential and commercial construction projects are immigrants, many of whom are undocumented. In 2019, the NAHB reported that about 24 per cent of construction workers were foreign-born, with a notable share lacking legal status (NAHB, 2019). Heightened immigration enforcement made it harder for contractors to find reliable labour, causing delays in housing projects and inflating costs. In states with strong construction markets like Texas and Florida, contractors reported turning down projects due to workforce constraints, while wage inflation further raised the cost of construction (Gonzalez-Barrera and Krogstad, 2019). These labour gaps in both agriculture and construction had ripple effects across the US economy. Reduced supply in agriculture contributed to rising food prices, while slower construction growth affected housing availability and infrastructure development. Trump's restrictive immigration policies led to labour shortages in agriculture, hospitality and construction (Martin, 2017). Trump has pledged to launch the largest deportation operation in US history in 2025, using the National Guard if necessary (Fox News, 2024). This could again undermine industries dependent on immigrant labour, increase food prices and destabilise local economies (Clemens, 2018). Moreover, the fear and uncertainty created by aggressive immigration enforcement undermined employer–employee trust and stability in local economies.

One of the defining features of Donald Trump's foreign and environmental policy was the rejection of multilateral climate agreements

and the weakening of domestic environmental regulations. The withdrawal from the 2015 Paris Climate Accord in 2017 symbolised a larger retreat from global environmental governance, which had serious diplomatic, environmental and reputational consequences for the US. The US has historically played a central role in shaping global climate cooperation. However, Trump's decision to exit the Paris Agreement, citing economic disadvantages and perceived unfair treatment of the US (White House, 2017), undermined the credibility of US climate diplomacy. The Paris Agreement aimed to limit global warming to below 2°C above pre-industrial levels through nationally determined contributions (NDCs). With the US being the world's second-largest emitter of greenhouse gases, its withdrawal weakened the momentum and moral authority of global climate efforts (Leahy, 2020). The move drew international condemnation, with European leaders such as Emmanuel Macron and Angela Merkel publicly reaffirming their commitment to the Accord without US participation. This effectively isolated the US diplomatically, as 196 countries continued their commitment, while the US stood alone in its exit until re-entry under President Biden in 2021 (Bodansky, 2017).

Domestically, the Trump administration rolled back over 100 environmental rules (Popovich, Albeck-Ripka and Pierre-Louis, 2020). This included the repeal of the Clean Power Plan, which was designed under President Obama to reduce carbon emissions from power plants, and the loosening of fuel efficiency standards for automobiles, moves that increased domestic emissions and slowed progress toward a low-carbon economy. The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), under the Trump administration, also reduced the scope of the Clean Water Act, limited the use of scientific evidence in policymaking, and opened up public lands for fossil fuel extraction (Plumer and Davenport, 2020). These actions not only had environmental costs, but they also diminished the regulatory predictability needed by green investors and businesses seeking to transition toward sustainable models.

Strategically, the US's retreat from climate leadership created a vacuum that was quickly filled by China and the EU, who positioned themselves as global leaders in clean energy and climate finance (Zhang and Barr, 2019). The EU's Green Deal and China's BRI both emphasised climate

sustainability, contrasting sharply with US policy during the Trump era. Economically, the lack of federal support for renewables during this period risked undermining US competitiveness in emerging green technologies. For example, while solar and wind power capacity expanded due to state-level initiatives and market forces, federal subsidies and incentives stagnated, slowing the overall transition.

Trump exited the Paris Climate Agreement and dismantled over 100 environmental regulations, claiming they hurt American industry (Popovich et al., 2020). Trump vows to withdraw the US again from the Paris Agreement and repeal clean energy subsidies under the Inflation Reduction Act. His second-term policies would abandon global climate leadership, giving China and the EU more control in green technology markets and weakening the global push toward net-zero emissions (Zhang and Barr, 2019). Trump withdrew from the Iran nuclear deal, the TPP and undermined the WTO appellate system (Evenett and Fritz, 2019). Trump's second term would likely deepen this trajectory, with planned withdrawals from international bodies like the WHO, further paralysing multilateral diplomacy, which risks creating vacuums filled by China, Russia and regional actors, weakening US influence in global governance (Biscop, 2018).

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Conclusion

The Trump administration is influenced by both domestic and foreign factors. This study investigated the implications of Donald Trump's transactional foreign policy and isolationist posture on the US global leadership. It is observed that the domestic consequences of President Trump's policies during his second term are closely related to his first term (2017–2021), which focused on issues of tax policy, regulation, trade, healthcare and government spending. President Trump's policies during his second term, especially those affecting the US economy, will have regional consequences both within the US and globally. Regional impacts could vary based on his economic policies, trade strategies and regulatory shifts. The global consequences of President Trump's foreign policy have far-reaching implications, particularly in the areas of international trade,

global economic stability, foreign investment and geopolitical relations. Drawing from his first term, Trump's policies and approach to global economic issues would have significant ripple effects worldwide. Overall, the broader consequences of President Trump's foreign policy have continued to be shaped by a combination of policies aimed at reducing government regulation, emphasising American industrial interests, and focusing on economic nationalism, which has several potential broader consequences, including impacts on trade, labour markets, fiscal policy and economic inequality.

Recommendations

72 The US should recommit itself to multilateral institutions such as the UN, NATO, WHO, WTO and other international organisations. This is because consistent US engagement at the international level through multilateral platforms will strengthen international governance and reestablish the US as a reliable partner. This is equally key in rebuilding confidence in the US and in restoring its leadership and influence in world politics.

Regional continental organisations, such as the EU, African Union, and Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), should reduce their over-dependence on the US, rather than compromising their political, economic, and strategic independence. This can be achieved through investment in their defence, regional trade agreements and crisis management frameworks to strengthen regional stability in the face of uncertain US commitment.

The UN should strengthen international rules to prevent any one country's withdrawal or policy shift from destabilising the global system, drawing from the lessons of the US.

States, civil society, academia and international organisations should prioritise promoting norms of responsible leadership, transparency and predictability in foreign policy. This will, among other things, involve advocacy for continuity across administrations and build international norms that discourage abrupt policy reversals driven by domestic politics.

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CHAPTER 4

Trump-era United States Foreign Policy: Impact on African Economies and Policymaking (2017–2021, 2025)

Luvuyo Jalisa and Ayabulela Dlakavu

Introduction and problem statement

The international order established after the Cold War, predominantly driven by US-led liberal institutionalism, is now experiencing significant fragmentation. This decline is driven by the revival of isolationist and nationalist ideologies, championed by Donald Trump's 'America First' policy. This approach has transformed US foreign relations by emphasising transactional diplomacy, expressing scepticism towards multilateral efforts, and reassessing global alliances. Trump's presidencies (2017–2021; 2025–present) signify a substantial break from the US-led liberal internationalist agenda, challenging the foundational principles of collective security, free trade, and collaborative institutions that have supported global governance since 1945 (Ikenberry, 2018). This chapter examines the consequences of this shift for Africa, a continent often marginalised in geopolitical power-brokering mechanisms, yet especially vulnerable to shifts in the global distribution of political and economic power. By placing Trump's policies within frameworks of classic economic liberalism, liberal institutionalism and economic nationalism, the chapter highlights how Africa is affected by a dynamic world increasingly characterised by competing national interests, fluid alliances and diminishing multilateral coordination and cooperation.

The 'America First' doctrine prioritises specific US national interests over global collective governance and cooperation, influencing Washington's international relations across three primary areas: security, economy and diplomacy. Trump's mixed feelings towards NATO, demonstrated by threats to cut funding and challenge Article

5 commitments, undermine transatlantic unity (Webber, 2021). His withdrawal from the Paris Climate Accord and the World Health Organisation (WHO) points to a wider retreat from collaborative environmental and health governance (Betsill, 2017). On the economic front, measures such as punitive tariffs, reductions in aid (barring strategic allies like Israel and Egypt), and the dismantling of trade agreements like the Trans-Pacific Partnership have reshaped global supply chains, heightening vulnerabilities for African economies dependent on exports and development aid support (Prabhakar, 2024). These nationalist policies indicate a shift away from the embedded liberalism that once balanced market access with social welfare, favouring a mercantilist zero-sum transactional mindset instead.

For Africa, the consequences are complex. Trump's transactional style enforced through threats to cut UN peacekeeping funding crucial for conflict-affected countries like Mali and South Sudan, erratic aid cuts and provoking diplomatic tensions (e.g., warnings to South Africa regarding land reform and trade, and subsequently imposing 30 per cent tariffs), has strained established partnerships and heightened existential challenges, from climate resilience to security (Adebajo, 2023). Nevertheless, this fragmentation has also ignited a sense of agency among African nations. Regional organisations like the African Union (AU) are increasing their commitment to implement the African Continental Free Trade Agreement (AfCFTA), while countries are diversifying their alliances through frameworks such as the Forum on China–Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) and the EU–Africa Summit (Yang, 2024). These strategies align with Acharya's concept of 'multiplex world', where regions develop polycentric approaches to reduce reliance on unstable great powers. (van Lennep and Acharya, 2019: 12).

The research problem and gap addressed by this study are the realities whereby much scholarly work has focused on Trump's impact on traditional allies and major powers (Cooley and Nexon, 2025; Walt, 2018). A critical analytical gap remains regarding the impact of these Trump policies on African economies and policy responses. Studies that do address Africa tend to focus on specific bilateral relationships or individual policy areas rather than a comprehensive assessment of

the ‘America First’ doctrine’s multifaceted continental effects (Adebajo, 2023; Schneidman, 2025). This knowledge gap is problematic, since it obscures how peripheral regions, such as Africa, exercise agency in responding to volatility and national security threats created by a great power. Moreover, such a research gap limits understanding of emerging multipolar dynamics and the opportunities multipolarity presents to the developing world. Thus, this study is significant for several reasons. First, African states represent a substantial portion of the global periphery that relies heavily on stable trading relationships and multilateral frameworks for economic development and security. It is, therefore, important to understand the impact of the articulated ‘America First’ policy on African economies and economic policy. Second, Africa’s rapid demographic growth and increasing economic integration through initiatives like the AfCFTA make it a crucial testing ground for understanding how peripheral regions are affected by, and adapt to, the retreat of hegemony. Third, the continent’s strategic importance in global supply chains for critical minerals and its role in climate governance make African responses to US policy shifts consequential for global economic stability. All these are critical to the discussions put forward in this study.

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Literature review and frameworks

Existing literature on Trump’s foreign economic policy

Trump’s foreign economic policy has generated substantial scholarly attention, though with notable geographic and thematic gaps. Helleiner (2019, 2023) provides a comprehensive analysis of the shift from embedded liberalism toward economic nationalism, arguing that Trump’s policies represent a fundamental departure from post-war international economic norms. Fajgelbaum et al. (2020) provide a quantitative assessment of tariff impacts, demonstrating that protectionist measures reduced US real income by US\$7.2 billion annually, while failing to achieve stated objectives of reducing trade deficits.

Studies of Trump’s multilateral disengagement emphasise institutional impacts. Patrick (2021) and Nye (2020) examine withdrawals from

international organisations and climate agreements, arguing that these actions undermine global governance capacity. However, this literature predominantly focuses on the effects within the developed world and the multilateral architecture of the Liberal International Order, with limited attention on how institutional fragmentation and US foreign policy under Trump affects developing regions.

Research on African responses to changing US policy remains fragmented. Ndzendze (2021) provides valuable data on US–South Africa trade relations, while Kohnert (2025) offers a preliminary assessment of the implications of Trump 2.0. However, these contributions lack systematic theoretical grounding and comprehensive regional analysis and continental responses; thus, this chapter builds on this and addresses the knowledge gaps identified.

Theoretical framework

84 This section of the chapter explains key theories in international relations and political economy to analyse how US President Donald Trump's 'America First' policies changed global dynamics, especially for Africa. We will look at two generally contrasting theories in international political economy: economic liberalism (i.e., classic economic liberalism and liberal institutionalism), economic nationalism (i.e., mercantilism) and the concept of post-hegemonic multilateralism. Each helps one understand how US actions under Trump affected and continue to affect Africa and how African countries are responding.

Economic liberalism

Economic liberalism is a theory explaining the rationale for eliminating barriers to international trade. Classical economic liberalism is a socio-economic philosophy founded by Adam Smith, premised on the principles of individual freedom from state overreach and secure private property rights, with market forces of supply and demand being the drivers of free market economies and economic development. The underlying idea is that free market economies encourage individuals

to deploy or invest their capital in competitive industries (economic sectors) of their choosing, which naturally breeds economic competition, economic activity, economic growth and therefore, national economic development. Classical liberalism is sometimes referred to as *laissez-faire* economics, where the economy is self-regulating through supply and demand forces *vis-à-vis* the production and selling of goods, services and labour (Sally, 1998). For its part, neoliberalism (which is the recent advancements in economic liberal thinking) promotes principles such as free trade and unrestricted movement of capital, knowledge and people. It is these economic liberalism principles that are the primary drivers of globalisation, the latter term referring to a highly interconnected and interdependent global economy and international system (Kundnani, 2017). It is this globalised and interdependent free trade international system that is the subject of protectionist Trump's economic policy, particularly in this post-2025 era.

Liberal institutionalism

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Institutional liberalism, also known as liberal institutionalism, is another sub-school of liberalism. An international institution is defined as an international organisation or any rule(s) which governs the foreign policies and actions of states (Jackson and Sorensen, 2013). Liberal institutionalism promotes the idea that international institutions and regimes reduce anarchy by facilitating cooperation, lowering transaction costs and enhancing mutual trust among countries. Organisations like the UN, World Trade Organisation (WTO), and the AU serve as guardians of a rules-based international order, promoting reciprocity and collective efforts. The 'America First' approach, however, marked a shift away from institutionalist norms, highlighted by the US's withdrawal from the Paris Climate Accord and the WHO, threats to NATO funding and hindrances to WTO dispute resolution (Nye, 2020; Patrick, 2021). This shift toward bilateralism indicated a profound distrust of institutional limits on national sovereignty. While African states have embraced multilateral frameworks like AfCFTA, power asymmetries often undermine their effectiveness. The COVID 19 pandemic revealed these inequities, as African nations faced significant vaccine shortages despite mechanisms like COVAX.

Economic nationalism as Trump's alternative to globalisation and the liberal economic order

According to Bhaduri (2000), economic nationalism is an economic philosophy and practice whereby a nation-state endeavours to exert greater control over the domestic economy, while also seeking self-reliance and protection of domestic economic players (businesses) from the global economy. Economic nationalism is, therefore, the opposite of economic posture and philosophy to free market economic thinking and policy as espoused by economic liberalism. Examples of economic nationalist (i.e., mercantilist) policies include the protection of domestic infant industries from international competitors through policy instruments such as tariffs and non-tariff barriers on foreign goods and services. This practice is contrary to the economic liberalist goal of removing barriers to international trade, such as tariffs and non-tariff barriers (i.e., free trade). It is worth noting that economic nationalism is an established economic policy position of newly industrialising nation-states, such as when the newly industrialising US under Abraham Lincoln in the nineteenth century adopted an average import tariff of approximately 30 per cent on all foreign goods entering the US market (Bhaduri, 2000).

Economic nationalism is central to the 'America First' agenda, which includes tariffs, import restrictions and trade renegotiations, such as the US–Mexico–Canada Agreement (USMCA) and pressures on African nations to pursue bilateral agreements (Noland, 2020). Africa's engagement with Economic Nationalism has roots in post-independence development strategies. Contemporary manifestations include resource sovereignty initiatives and local content requirements. The global resurgence of protectionist policies has created both challenges and opportunities for African economies, disrupting established export sectors while intensifying debates about self-sufficiency. Many African states have adopted what Rodrik (2023) argues to be pragmatic economic nationalism, combining selective protection of strategic industries with continued participation in global markets, as seen in East Asian Developmental States, Rwanda's technology sector and Morocco's automotive industry.

Having provided a review of the essence of two contrasting yet enduring economic schools of thought (economic liberalism and economic nationalism), the next sections examine the stated foreign economic policies of the two Trump administrations against actual trade statistics between the US under Trump and African nations. The aim is to track whether Trump's public economic nationalist policy postures have affected trade volumes between the US and African nations from 2017 to 2021 and 2025.

Methodology

This chapter adopts a concurrent mixed-methods approach to examine the effects of Trump's 'America First' policy on Africa. It integrates both qualitative and quantitative methods to understand the diverse impacts of US policy changes on the continent's political economy, security and diplomatic relations. The adoption of the concurrent mixed methods allows for triangulation of findings that combine comparative case studies and critical discourse analysis, informed by contrasting theories of economic liberalism and economic nationalism. This approach links large-scale structural changes with localised regional responses, while engaging in discussions around global order and peripheral agency (Creswell and Plano-Clark, 2017; George and Bennett, 2005). The focus reflects Ragin's (2009: 9) idea of 'causal complexity' in the context of transnational issues, where outcomes arise from the interaction of structural limitations and responsive agency. The qualitative data utilised in this chapter includes content analysis of US and African foreign policies, including critical discourse analysis of official policy statements, speeches, opinion pieces and diplomatic communiqués from both US and African governments.

The quantitative data consulted and analysed in this chapter include trade statistics (from 2016 to 2025 from the Office of the US Trade Representative, World Bank and African Development Bank), along with direct observations during the two Trump administrations (2017–2021; 2025–present) and presented using descriptive statistics. Content analysis encompasses a detailed and systematic review of materials (in this case, trade statistics and stated foreign policies) aimed at revealing patterns,

themes or biases (Mohajan, 2018). This mixed-methods approach helps answer the main research question regarding the real effects of the ‘America First’ policy on African economies and policymaking.

This study has some limitations. First, the ongoing nature of Donald Trump’s second term makes it difficult to draw definitive conclusions about long-term impacts on African economies and policymaking. This limitation, however, is mitigated by the study’s focus on the first completed Trump administration (2017–2021), which provides a four-year data period on US foreign policy, particularly on trade with Africa. Another limitation is that the second Trump administration is still at a relative infancy stage as much of the data for 2025 is based on preliminary sources, however, the foreign policy choices taken thus far in 2025 have been sufficiently far-reaching on the global economy, warranting an inquiry that can provide key insights to make inferences about the current and future trajectory of the global political economy. It is for these reasons that a mixed-methods approach was used to use qualitative and quantitative data to provide informed analysis that has depth and breadth *vis-à-vis* US–Africa economic relations, particularly on the trade terrain, which is vital for Africa in the context of AfCFTA and other emerging global trade relations.

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Empirical analysis of the Trump administration’s international trade policies

This section provides a review of the international trade positions of the two Trump administrations and their impact on trade volumes (movement of goods and services) between America and African nations from 2017 to 2021 and 2025 (the second Trump term).

First Trump term (2017–2021): Trade policy, trade wars and impact on US–Africa trade

Trump’s first administration (2017–2021) protectionist agenda, rooted in economic nationalism (Helleiner, 2019), targeted perceived unfair trade practices, particularly by China. The administration imposed tariffs

on approximately US\$370 billion of Chinese goods under Section 301 of the Trade Act of 1974, as well as on steel, aluminium, solar panels and washing machines from various countries. These measures were justified through expanded interpretations of Section 232 (national security) and Section 301 (unfair trade practices) of US trade law (Irwin, 2017).

The Phase One trade deal with China (2020) secured limited Chinese commitments to purchase US goods but failed to address structural issues, such as intellectual property theft (Autor et al., 2020). This bilateral trade deal with China, following a period of economic trade warfare since 2017, is evidence of a move from Washington's shift from the multilateral free trade regime coordinated by the WTO, towards economic nationalist ideals pursuing American interests through bilateral arrangements. This is contrary to the post-1945 US-founded Liberal International Order, where successive US government had traditionally sought to promote a multilateral-led international free trade system under the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT, 1947–1995) and its successor, the WTO (1995–). The waging of economic warfare by the first Trump administration against China in 2018 was itself, an economic nationalist foreign policy position, designed to protect the US economy from perceived Chinese unfair trade practices such as intellectual property theft. Such a trade war, therefore, lends credence to claims that the Trump administration has a tendency to advance an economic nationalist posture in both theory and practice.

Similarly, the renegotiation of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) into the USMCA preserved trilateral free trade between the three North American countries but introduced labour and environmental provisions with limited enforcement (Villarreal and Fergusson, 2019). These actions reflected a shift from multilateralism to bilateral deal-making, prioritising short-term gains over institutionalised cooperation through liberal international institutions as prescribed by liberal institutionalism.

Economists remain divided on the efficacy of these policies. Fajgelbaum et al. (2020) estimated that tariffs reduced US real income by US\$7.2 billion annually, with the burden falling disproportionately on American consumers and import-dependent industries. Critics

highlighted that while tariffs protected select US industries, they raised input costs for downstream sectors (e.g., automotive) and triggered retaliatory measures from trading partners. However, some studies suggested modest employment gains in protected sectors (Flaen and Pierce, 2019).

Trump's first-term political and economic impact on Africa

Ndzendze (2021) provides the following US–South Africa trade relations in the years 2017–2020: South African exported goods and services to the US grew by 14.1 per cent in Trump's first-year in office (2017), grew by 9.44 per cent in Trump's second year (2018), declined by 7.86 per cent in the third year (2019) and grew by 31.79 per cent in the fourth and final year in office (i.e., 2020, impressive numbers given the global disruption in commerce by the COVID 19 pandemic in that year). Likewise, US imported goods into the South African market grew by an annual average of 11.86 per cent during Trump's first term as US president (2017–2021). Thus, despite the common association of Trump as an anti-free trade and protectionist president, the trade statistics between South Africa and the US show a relatively free movement of South African goods in the US market, and reciprocally, a relatively free movement of US imports in the South African market. In fact, the value of South African exports to the US increased from US\$6.7 billion in 2013 under the Barack Obama administration to US\$10 billion in 2020 under Trump. This further indicates the deepening of trade relations between the US and South Africa during the first Trump administration, to the extent that the US had a trade deficit worth US\$11.7 billion in 2021, benefitting South Africa's positive balance of trade with the world's largest economy.

A further indication of the strategic nature of US–Africa economic relations during the first Trump term is that the Africa Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA), Washington's economic policy of granting tariff-free access to the US market to free market and democratic African nations, continued from 2017 to 2021. There was, therefore, no need for African nations to make any major trade policy changes, *vis-à-vis* the US and other major trading partners in the global society of nations.

According to the Office of the United States Trade Representative (2022), the total value of trade between the US and Sub-Saharan African nations (imports and exports combined) was estimated to be US\$44.9 billion in 2021, compared to US\$34 billion in 2016 at the end of Obama’s term as US President. This means that US–Africa trade under Trump’s first term grew by US\$10.9 billion, an indication of stronger US–Africa exchange of goods, rather than US protectionism and tariffs on African goods. Table 4.1 shows volumes of trade between Sub-Saharan African nations and the US under the first Trump administration (2017–2021), where Africa retained an advantageous trade surplus with America throughout the four years of the first Trump term.

Table 4.1: US/Sub-Saharan Africa trade relations under the first Trump administration (2017–2021)

Year	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Value of African exports to the US (in US\$ billions)	24.9	25.1	21	19.2	28.3
Value US imports to Africa (in US\$ billions)	14.1	15.9	15.8	13.5	16.6

Source: Office of the United States Trade Representative (2022, Online)

The US–Africa trade statistics of Trump’s first presidential term, therefore, demonstrate Washington’s commitment to the ideals and policies of free international trade, which is a tenet of economic liberalism. Furthermore, the continuation of the AGOA legislation, which aims to encourage African governments to maintain democratic political systems and free market economic policies, is a further indication of support for economic liberalism during the first Presidential term (2017–2021). Free market economies are an age-old principle of economic liberalism theory in economics and political economy. The broader image that these trade statistics and free movement of goods between African nations and America demonstrate is that the first Trump administration may not have been necessarily an advocate of economic nationalism and a destroyer of multilateralism per se. Rather, what the trade statistics, free

trade legislation for Africa, and tariffs on China demonstrate is that the US likely sought to correct a massive trade deficit with China, which is the second-largest economy and arguably approaching economic power parity with the US. Moreover, trade deficits contribute to the broader current account deficits that the US economy has come to be characterised by, which stood at -US\$466 billion in 2017 when Trump assumed the American presidency (Bureau of Economic Analysis, 2018). That Balance of Payments deficit simply means that the US economy experiences more outflows of money than inflows, which is a sign of de-industrialisation, which is not good for industrial employment for Americans, a typically labour-intensive economic sector. As a result, one could conclude that the first Trump administration adopted both economic nationalist and economically liberal policies in equal measure with the intention of safeguarding American economic interests: chiefly, reducing the Balance of Trade and Balance of Payments deficits that have come to characterise a post-industrial American economy that has ceded industrialisation to emerging economies with relatively lower labour costs and better economies of scale.

Second Trump administration (2025-2028): Trade policy, trade wars, and impact on US-Africa trade

With effect from 1 February 2025, the Trump administration, a month into its tenure, levied an additional 25 per cent tariffs on imports from Canada and Mexico, with whom the US is meant to be in a free trade agreement with—the USMCA (The White House, 2025b). The Trump administration asserted that these tariffs were imposed in retaliation to Mexico and Canada's failure to cooperate with the US to address illegal immigration and drug trafficking from these neighbouring countries. This represents a change in Trump's second term, where tariffs on trade are levied not as a reciprocal measure, but to address US grievances with its neighbouring countries on non-trade matters.

On 2 April 2025, Trump invoked his presidential authority in terms of the International Emergency Economic Powers Act of 1977 (IEEPA) to address what he called large trade deficits negatively affecting the

American economy. As of February 2025, the US had a trade deficit in goods and services of US\$122 billion (Bureau of Economic Analysis, 2025). This trade deficit means the US consumes more than it produces and sells, which Trump has partially explained as one of the primary reasons for escalating tariffs. The unilateral course correction procedure chosen by the Trump administration was to impose a base 10 per cent tariff on all imports from other countries, effective 5 April 2025 (The White House, 2025a). Additionally, Trump imposed higher individualised tariffs on countries with whom the US had the largest trade deficits as of 2024, such as China (-US\$380 billion), Mexico (-US\$130 billion), Vietnam (-US\$123 billion), Thailand (-US\$45.6 billion) and the EU at -US\$224 billion (Brookings Institution, 2024; EU, 2025; Guarascio 2025). Table 4.2 shows trade partners with higher trade tariffs as imposed effective 9 April 2025. Tariffs are intended to address America’s trade deficits with the respective countries, intending to equalise reciprocal trade barriers.

Table 4.2: Additional tariffs imposed on countries deemed as the ten ‘worst offenders’ by Washington, DC

Country	Import tariff rate
Lesotho	49%
Cambodia	49%
Madagascar	47%
Vietnam	46%
Botswana	37%
Thailand	36%
China	34%
Taiwan	32%
South Africa	30%
India	26%

Sources: CNN (2025); Daily Maverick (2025); Mmegi, 2025; Wong and Epstein (2025)

From Table 4.2, four of the 10 ‘worst offender’ countries receiving the biggest tariffs from the US were African nations, Lesotho, Madagascar, Botswana and South Africa were subjected to tariffs ranging from 30 to 49 per cent. However, the US administration suspended the implementation of these tariffs for 90 days (i.e., until July 2025), with all countries in the world being subjected to a common tariff of 10 per cent in the interim, effective as of 5 April 2025. These import tariffs are likely to reduce the appeal of African imports in the US market, thereby reducing or even eradicating Africa’s long-held trade surplus with the US. Such losses in foreign earnings for African agriculture and manufacturers could lead to a loss of economic activity, economic stagnation or regression and job losses. Countries like Lesotho, which lack a diversified economy, could be hardest hit, particularly the fragile textile industry.

Trump’s second term has, thus far, been a personification of economic nationalism with regard to international trade policy, against many countries with whom the US incurs large trade deficits, particularly against the second biggest economy that rivals America, namely China. Building on previous campaign proposals, the administration introduced the Reshoring America Act (2025), offering tax credits to firms relocating supply chains from China and imposing stricter export controls on advanced technologies (The White House, 2025b). This approach mirrors the bipartisan CHIPS and Science Act (2022) that prioritises punitive measures over incentives, exacerbating global supply chain fragmentation. The administration has doubled down on tariffs, extending them to Chinese electric vehicles and renewable energy components under the guise of ‘national security’, while proposing ‘Tax Cuts 2.0’ to make permanent the individual provisions of the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act (TCJA) set to expire in 2025 and introduce additional corporate incentives for domestic manufacturing (The White House, 2025b). Such policies are a continuation of Trump’s first-term measures designed to re-industrialise the American economy and possibly reposition the US as a global manufacturing pace-setter akin to Washington’s leadership of the Second and Third Industrial Revolutions.

Further implications of Trump 2.0 economic nationalism (2025 and beyond) for the international order and Africa

The second Trump term has institutionalised tariffs, particularly against China. However, the administration's rejection of multilateral coordination (e.g., refusing to join the Indo–Pacific Economic Framework) is one of the most important components of the Trump administration, signalling a loss of confidence and interest in the Liberal International Economic Order underpinned by the WTO's international free trade regime. Such rejections of multilateral economic management institutions are not a random policy but appear to be based on the belief that such multilateral institutions provide gains for America's economic competitors (i.e., China and the EU) and consequently, work against US economic interests.

Anti-multilateral US policies have important implications for African foreign policy: African governments must adapt and relate to Washington DC, at a bilateral level. This means that trade and investment agreements with the US must be negotiated directly with Washington, rather than through the WTO and multilateral financial forums (i.e., the Group of Twenty [G20] or the World Economic Forum). African nations' foreign policy apparatus and diplomatic corps must devise appropriate bilateral strategies in dealing with Trump's second administration. It is, therefore, likely that the AGOA may be scrapped rather than renewed by the Republican Party-led Congress later in 2025.

During Trump's second presidential term, which focuses on more globalised economic nationalism (to address trade and balance of payments deficits), the long-standing trend of US trade liberalisation is significantly undermined. US administrations have leveraged the AGOA to persuade African countries to establish and maintain liberal democracy and free market political and economic systems. At the same time, however, AGOA has been essential to US–Africa trade since 2000, providing a lucrative duty-free market to African goods and services. In 2025, AGOA eligibility was revoked for Ethiopia, Mali and Zimbabwe due to alleged labour and human rights abuses, a decision critics denounced as politically motivated amid Africa's growing ties with the EU and China (Schneidman, 2025). Nigeria and Kenya faced retaliatory tariffs of 40 per

cent on poultry and textiles, while South Africa's steel and aluminium exports were targeted as a response to perceived land reform laws that violate individual property rights, a cornerstone of economic liberal philosophy and theory (Adebajo, 2023). These actions have destabilised export sectors, such as Kenya's floriculture and Lesotho's garment industry, worsening North–South disparities and threatening industrial growth in these African economies (Rodrik, 2018).

With African nations being subject to the blanket interim 10 per cent US global tariff, which came into effect in April 2025, it is key for African nations to diversify their export markets through expansive trade and industrial policy, while also continuing to create comparative advantages for export-oriented domestic goods and services in existing markets. Another important consideration for African economic policymakers is to operationalise and implement AfCFTA signed in 2018 (Mahlangu, 2024), which effectively seeks to remove tariff and non-tariff barriers of 55 economies, accounting for 1.3 billion people. This is a large and relatively untapped intra-African free trade area that can stimulate the marginal rate of intra-African trade (which is a meagre 3 per cent of total world trade), intra-African investments and African industrialisation. This AfCFTA may also be a catalyst to intra-African investment in road, rail and ocean infrastructure to link all sub-regions of Africa with each other, paving the way for mass job creation, mobility of goods, services and people and perhaps serve as an eventual catalyst to the creation of the single African currency long touted by pan-Africanists.

By 2023, intra-African trade under the AfCFTA had increased to 15 per cent of Africa's total trade, largely due to customs reforms and digital trade initiatives (Africa Export–Import Bank, 2024: 13). The April 2025 AfCFTA Ministerial Conference in the Democratic Republic of the Congo aimed to evaluate the agreement's implementation. The conference recognised emerging geopolitical tensions and stressed that AfCFTA transcends mere policies and legal frameworks; it is about reshaping Africa's economic landscape by enhancing intra-African trade, fostering industrialisation, creating jobs and building resilient economies. This was evidenced by South Africa's strategic protectionism in its poultry sector, inspired by Rodrik's advocacy for industrial policy, showcasing

how selective economic nationalism could strengthen local industries without inciting global backlash (Department of Trade, Industry and Competition, 2024). This situation exemplifies Acharya's concept of multiplex multilateralism, where regional institutions help counterbalance hegemonic retreat or protectionism.

Diplomatic diversification and multipolarity

In response to US anti-globalisation, African nations are seeking to forge 'multi-alignment' strategies. The expansion of BRICS+ in 2025, welcoming Nigeria, Algeria, Egypt and Ethiopia, while the New Development Bank has been supporting infrastructure projects in Kenya and Ethiopia since before 2020 (Manyazewal, 2019). The EU–Africa Summit in 2025 adopted a commitment to strengthen trade relations, further diverging from US climate policy reticence.

American retreat and African agency

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US disengagement from multilateral fora has strained its ties with traditional ties. For Africa, this US disengagement signifies an opportunity for innovation and occupying space in a multipolar world order. The AfCFTA, BRICS+, the Africa–EU Summit and networked security partnerships reflect a continent striving for multipolarity to assert its sovereignty. While challenges like systemic risks, debt dependency, norm fragmentation and elite capture remain, Africa's adaptive strategies illustrate Acharya's (2016: 454) concept of a multiplex international system. The decline of US economic dominance paradoxically empowers Africa to redefine its global standing, balancing resilience with strategic realignment.

Discussions

Theoretical implications

The empirical findings presented in this study challenge the conventional

theoretical expectations. Most significantly, the disconnect between Trump's economic nationalist rhetoric and actual trade performance during 2017–2021 suggests that economic nationalism's implementation is more complex and selective than theoretical frameworks typically acknowledge. The evidence from the trade statistics compared to trade policy pronouncements demonstrates that in both his two presidential terms, Trump has balanced economic nationalist policies (i.e., trade warfare with China and other countries with whom the US has trade deficits) with economic liberalism (continuation of free trade with African nations in the first term through AGOA and the USMCA). It does appear from early foreign policy pronouncements early in Trump's second-term that the US may be willing to ramp up protectionist trade policy in a bid to reduce America's large Balance of Trade and Balance of Payments deficits relative to its economic competitors (EU and China) and other countries who may be perceived as threats to American economic interests (i.e., countries like South Africa who align with American economic competitors: China and the EU).

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From a liberal institutionalist perspective, the continuity of AGOA during the first Trump term demonstrates institutional resilience, particularly when arrangements serve mutual interests and involve limited domestic political costs. However, the second term's universal tariff implementation and AGOA weaponisation reveal the fragility of such arrangements when political priorities and national interests shift.

The African response pattern supports Acharya's (2018) multiplex multilateralism framework while adding a nuanced understanding of how peripheral regions exercise agency. Rather than passive adaptation to great power competition, African states have proactively constructed alternative institutional arrangements (AfCFTA, BRICS+), while maintaining selective engagement with the US, such as through AGOA. This pattern suggests that post-hegemonic multilateralism emerges through strategic diversification, rather than wholesale rejection of existing relationships.

Policy contradictions and unexpected results

Several findings contradict conventional wisdom about Trump's 'America First' policy. First, the growth of US–Africa trade from 2017 to 2021 challenges narratives of a comprehensive US retreat from the continent. This growth occurred despite diplomatic tensions and rhetorical hostility, suggesting that economic relationships can maintain momentum despite political tensions.

Second, the selective nature of early Trump-era protectionism reveals the importance of domestic political considerations in shaping economic nationalist policies. African countries largely escaped initial tariff waves, not due to their strategic importance, but because they posed a limited threat to US domestic industries.

Third, Trump's unpredictable policies have inadvertently helped African countries work more closely together. When the US is unreliable, African nations must seek alternative options and become more self-sufficient. This has prompted them to establish stronger institutions and partnerships with one another more quickly than they might have if they could still rely on the steady hegemonic leadership of the US.

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Broader implications for global order

The relationship between the US and Africa under Trump illustrates how the world is changing as a whole. America has moved away from working with everyone to focusing mainly on its own interests. This creates both new chances and new problems for regions like Africa. Old ways of helping countries develop are breaking down (i.e., aid); however, this makes room for African countries to work more with other developing and developed nations and create their own institutions or economic relationships centred on mutual interests.

What is happening is that smaller regions are building contingency plans to protect themselves when big powers like the US act unpredictably. What can be seen unravelling is the 'defensive multipolarity' where countries are creating safety nets by working with multiple partners instead of relying on just one. This suggests that a world with many centres

of power might not come from big countries planning it that way. Instead, it is happening because smaller countries are adapting and finding new partnerships to protect themselves from uncertainty.

Critical engagement with existing scholarly work

These findings provide important insights into academic discussions about how global power shifts and institutional changes occur. Unlike theories that predict institutional breakdown when dominant powers decline (Mearsheimer, 2018a), the African case reveals more nuanced processes of adaptation and institutional creativity. The often-neglected regions appear to have more power to influence the post-hegemonic international order than conventional theories recognise.

Nevertheless, this analysis also exposes weaknesses in overly positive views of institutional durability. The rapid transformation of AGOA from a technical trade programme into a foreign policy tool shows how quickly institutional frameworks can become politicised when new leadership changes priorities.

Conclusions

The Trump administration's 'America First' and bilateral approach to international relations, particularly in trade and investment, significantly disrupted the established post-World War II multilateral practices in international relations and the global political economy. By withdrawing from vital organisations such as WHO and the Paris Climate Accord, imposing unilateral tariffs, and weaponizing trade tools like AGOA, Trump's administration confronted liberal institutional principles and promoted a protectionist, nationalist agenda. These policies are largely driven by America's domestic economic interests. For Africa, this disengagement creates both vulnerabilities and opportunities, revealing structural dependence on particular export markets, while simultaneously spurring opportunities for intra-African collaboration and deeper integration, strategic diversification of diplomatic and economic partnerships and enhanced agency in global forums. As the

international system continues to evolve, Africa's adaptive responses highlight the ongoing tension between institutional frameworks and nationalist impulses, the transition from US hegemonic stability in an uncertain yet dynamic multipolar world, and between dependency and an opportunity for genuine African self-determination. The continent's evolving strategies signal a redefinition of its global engagement, not as mere recipients of great power interests, but as proactive, resilient players contributing to the establishment of a more multipolar and inclusive international framework.

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SECTION III: IMMIGRATION

CHAPTER 5

Trump's Immigration Policy and United States Foreign Relations

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Introduction

Immigration has served as both a domestic policy and a symbolic frontier in US politics and foreign policy, where questions of sovereignty and national interest collide. Under President Donald Trump, these tensions were sharpened and reconfigured into a core governing strategy. From the campaign trail to the White House, immigration policy moved from the periphery of political discourse to its centre, reflecting a broader project that intertwined nationalism and executive power. While many of Trump's immigration policies focused on domestic enforcement and legal rollbacks, relatively less attention has been paid to their foreign policy dimensions, particularly regarding Africa. This chapter explores how immigration became a key site through which US–Africa relations were reimaged, examining both the indirect and direct implications of Trump-era immigration measures for African states and African migrants.

This study examines US immigration policy under Trump, across both terms. During his first term (2017–2021), immigration policy became a defining mechanism of statecraft, with about 400 administrative actions ranging from travel bans to visa restrictions (Pierce, Bolter and Selee, 2018). Though Africa was not a central focus of these policies, the continent was not untouched, as countries like Somalia, Eritrea and Nigeria were included in successive travel bans. Still, the impacts were largely peripheral and overshadowed by more visible policy changes toward Latin America and the Middle East. By contrast, Trump's second term (2025–present) has ushered in a new phase in which African countries feature more prominently regarding policy consequences and

diplomatic signalling. In examining these developments, this work makes three key contributions. First, it links immigration enforcement to foreign policy dynamics, showing how domestic decisions reverberate globally. Second, it foregrounds African perspectives, emphasising how Trump's evolving immigration policy has affected African mobility, diplomacy, and perceptions of US credibility. Third, it highlights the shifting nature of global order, where immigration policy becomes a tool of both inclusion and exclusion, shaping not just who enters the US, but how the US itself is seen on the world stage.

This reconfiguration of immigration as both a domestic and diplomatic tool reflects a broader trend in global politics, where mobility regimes increasingly function as instruments of geopolitical alignment. Under Trump, immigration policy was not merely reactive to internal pressures, but actively used to structure international relationships, elevate certain allies, and penalise perceived threats or non-cooperative states. While Africa was not the rhetorical centrepiece of Trump's first-term immigration agenda, the continent was not immune to its logics of restriction. The inclusion of African countries in travel bans, reductions in refugee resettlement, and changes to visa categories cumulatively shaped the contours of US–Africa engagement. As this chapter demonstrates, these seemingly administrative or legal changes carried outsized diplomatic weight, altering bilateral ties, impacting educational and labour flows and contributing to a broader recalibration of African perceptions of the US as a global partner. These dynamics only deepen in Trump's second term, where African countries feature more prominently in both policy consequences and political signalling. Moreover, even beyond the temporal scope of this chapter, new travel measures and proposed immigration restrictions continue to emerge, further entrenching exclusionary trends. As this chapter demonstrates, these seemingly administrative or legal changes carried outsized diplomatic weight, altering bilateral ties and contributing to a broader recalibration of African perceptions of the US as a global partner.

The framework for the US immigration policy

US immigration policy does not emerge from neutral institutional machinery or technocratic judgment, rather, it reflects a deeper context over the meaning of sovereignty, the limits of democratic inclusion, and the moral commitments a liberal state is willing to compromise to secure its geopolitical and economic interests. Thus, immigration policy in the US is best viewed not as a product of a singular ideological position, but as the outcome of competing and often contradictory imperatives. Liberalism, with its normative emphasis on rights, individual autonomy and rule of law constraints, shapes both the promise and failure of US immigration policy (Akakpo and Lenard, 2014). On the one hand, it generates expansive judicial interpretations that shield certain noncitizens from arbitrary treatment; on the other hand, it relies heavily on procedural legality to justify exclusion, detention and deportation. The state appears bound by law, yet uses that very law to delimit who is worthy of protection.

Layered over this is the realist impulse, an insistence that the state's primary function is to defend its borders, regulate its population, and prioritise its citizens (Silva, 2008). In practice, this leads to securitised immigration enforcement that legitimises surveillance, detention, and militarised borders under the logic of sovereignty. A third axis is the capitalist logic, where immigration is a mechanism of labour regulation (Silva, 2008). Here, policy is not simply about inclusion or exclusion, it is about conditional incorporation. Crucially, these frameworks do not operate in silos. Rather, they collide and converge in complex ways. For instance, the liberal language of human rights may be invoked to defend asylum seekers, even as the system narrows the legal definition of refugee to exclude most displaced persons. Similarly, the state may restrict unauthorised immigration rhetorically, while quietly tolerating undocumented labour in agriculture or domestic work. Immigration policy, therefore, functions as a terrain of ideological compromise, one that protects the formal commitments of liberal democracy, while operationalising the demands of national security and capital accumulation (Silva, 2008).

In most countries, immigration policy is not a technocratic issue

isolated from politics, it is deeply interwoven into how power is negotiated, legitimised, and contested. In recent years, this entanglement has sharpened significantly. The direction immigration policy takes, toward restriction or liberalisation, is often shaped by a range of demographic, economic and political factors. Declining birth rates and aging populations, for instance, have driven some governments to adopt more open immigration policies to counter labour shortages and ensure economic sustainability (National Academy of Sciences, 2016).

In other cases, immigration has become a mechanism for responding to geopolitical shifts, global inequality or humanitarian obligations. These pressures interact with the ideological frameworks described above, liberal, realist and capitalist, so that any given policy can reflect a blend of moral posturing, national security concerns and labour market pragmatism. Furthermore, immigration rhetoric has become an increasingly central feature of electoral politics. The rise of populist leaders and right-wing parties across the globe has been marked by a strategic amplification of anti-immigrant sentiment, suggesting that immigration discourse is often less about managing flows than about mobilising constituencies (Silva, 2008). In this sense, immigration policy does not merely reflect political outcomes, it helps shape them. In the US, this has long been the case. Far from a story of linear progress, US immigration policy has consistently oscillated between openness and restriction, not in response to the actual presence or behaviour of migrants, but to the anxieties they are made to symbolise.

In the early US history, a period from the late 1780s or 1789 to the 1830s, immigration policy was almost non-existent, not because of an ideological commitment to openness, but because the young state lacked regulatory infrastructure, and migration largely served settler-colonial expansion (Higham, 1956). As the nineteenth century progressed, racialised exclusion became formalised, from the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 to the national origins' quotas of the 1920s, which sought to engineer a particular demographic future aligned with white, Anglo-Saxon dominance (Higham, 1956). Even moments that appear inclusive on the surface, such as the 1965 Hart-Celler Act, were shaped less by a

moral reckoning than by geopolitical calculation (Gilbertson, 2007). While the law formally dismantled race-based quotas, it reoriented immigration around skilled labour and family reunification, sidelining low-skilled migrants. The logic was strategic; amid Cold War tensions, the US could not plausibly position itself as a global leader in democracy and human rights while maintaining overtly racist immigration laws. Thus, even reformist policies often masked deeper efforts to reframe exclusion in more palatable terms.

The post-9/11 period marked a pivotal rupture in US immigration governance. Immigration became inseparable from counterterrorism, effectively blurring the boundary between foreign policy and domestic enforcement (Rathod, 2011). The creation of the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), which absorbed immigration functions previously handled by civil agencies, signalled a shift from regulatory administration to national security infrastructure (Rathod, 2011). Immigration enforcement was no longer just a bureaucratic process, it became a militarised apparatus, with the southern border transformed into a performative stage for sovereign control, a spectacle designed to reassure the public that the state remained in command. Legally, this shift operated within the existing doctrine of plenary power, which grants Congress and the executive branch broad discretion over immigration, relatively unconstrained by the constitutional protections that apply in most other domains of law (Koulisch, 2024).

Within this context, the Trump administration did not introduce an entirely new immigration regime so much as it intensified and exposed the contradictions already embedded within it. Immigration was not a marginal issue, but a central focus of both Trump's campaign rhetoric and governing agenda, with direct implications for foreign policy as well. What distinguished Trump's first term was not the invention of exclusion, but the unmasking of its foundational logic. By stripping away the rhetorical balance maintained by previous administrations between enforcement and humanitarianism, security and rights, Trump's approach laid bare the instrumental role of immigration in asserting state authority. Whether one characterises this as a mobilisation or manipulation of

executive power, the administration leveraged existing legal structures to make explicit what had long been implicit, its immigration policy serves, above all, as a mechanism for exercising and displaying state control.

Immigration policy and foreign relations in Trump's first term

Immigration occupied a focal point in the political project of Trump's administration. It functioned as both a policy domain and symbolic repertoire, used to signal authority, galvanise support and distinguish the administration's approach from that of its predecessor. From the earliest days of the 2016 campaign, immigration was positioned as a defining issue, often invoked about concerns about security, economic protectionism and cultural cohesion. This centrality translated into an ambitious agenda once in office. The administration proposed more than 400 immigration related actions between 2017 and 2021, ranging from high-profile executive orders like the travel bans to regulatory changes affecting refugee admissions, international students, employment-based visas and border enforcement (Pierce et al., 2018).

Among the most significant changes were efforts to reshape both legal and illegal migration channels. On the illegal front, in January 2017, the Trump administration eliminated the Obama-era enforcement priorities that had focused primarily on individuals with serious criminal records (Rosenberg and Trevizo, 2025). Under the new policy, virtually any undocumented immigrant could be targeted for arrest or removal, regardless of criminal history. The DHS also expanded expedited removal (Rosenberg and Trevizo, 2025); a process that allows certain individuals to be deported without a court hearing, to apply not just at the border, but anywhere in the country for individuals who could not prove they had been in the US for at least two years.

Another major change during the Trump administration involved expanding programmes like 287(g), which allows the DHS to authorise local and state law enforcement officers to perform certain immigration enforcement functions, including initiating deportation proceedings (Pierce et al., 2018). Legal immigration pathways were also significantly affected. Family-based migration faced growing legislative scrutiny,

while greater preference was placed on skill-based selection criteria. Programmes such as DACA and Temporary Protected Status (TPS) were both targeted for termination, and refugee admissions were reduced to the lowest level since the modern resettlement framework was established in 1980 (Pierce et al., 2018). The administration also introduced additional layers of vetting for visa applicants, including enhanced background checks, requests for social media handles and more extensive biographical disclosures. In-person interviews were made mandatory for all green card applicants, even in routine cases where previous administrations had waived this requirement (Pierce et al., 2018). Efforts were also made to end humanitarian parole for specific categories of migrants, especially those from countries like Cuba, Haiti, Nicaragua and Venezuela (Rosenberg and Trevizo, 2025).

The impact of these changes extended to international students as well. Policies affecting Optional Practical Training (OPT), heightened visa scrutiny, particularly for applicants in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) fields, and an attempted restriction on visa eligibility for students during the COVID 19 pandemic, when universities moved their classes online, created widespread uncertainty (Redden, 2020). This period shaped international perceptions of the US as a less predictable and less welcoming destination for higher education and skilled migration.

The Trump administration also resumed large-scale workplace immigration raids, especially in industries such as food processing and construction. One of the largest such operations took place in Mississippi in 2019, resulting in hundreds of detentions (US Immigration and Customs Enforcement, 2019). That same year, the administration expanded the public charge rule, altering the criteria for determining whether immigrants might become dependent on public benefits (Pierce et al., 2018). Policies also targeted lawful permanent residency. The administration signalled plans to tighten public charge rules by making green-card or visa extensions harder for applicants who used a wider range of public benefits and tax credits (Pierce et al., 2018).

The implementation of 'zero-tolerance' policies at the southern border also generated considerable attention. Under this directive,

adults prosecuted for unauthorised entry were separated from their children or guardians, a policy that, while later modified, underscored the administration's deterrence-based approach to border enforcement (Pierce et al., 2018). Other administrative changes included the rescinding of the deference policy, which had previously allowed visa officers to treat past approvals as presumptively valid. Under the new policy, each visa renewal, particularly for employment-based categories like H-1B, was treated as a first-time application, resulting in a surge in delays and denials (Rosenberg and Trevizo, 2025).

Additionally, the administration moved to end work permits for spouses of H-1B visa holders (under the H-4 EAD programme), further complicating life for thousands of skilled workers and their families (Rosenberg and Trevizo, 2025). At the local level, the administration targeted sanctuary cities, threatening to withhold Department of Justice grants from jurisdictions that did not fully cooperate with federal immigration authorities (Pierce et al., 2018). These pressures were accompanied by increased interior arrests and deportations. In 2017 alone, over 61 000 removals took place from the interior of the country, many involving individuals with no criminal convictions, marking a shift from the enforcement priorities of previous administrations (Ballotpedia, 2019).

Finally, the administration issued multiple iterations of travel bans, beginning in January 2017, which restricted entry from several predominantly Muslim-majority countries (Ballotpedia, 2019). Although initially challenged in court, the third version of the ban was ultimately upheld by the US Supreme Court. These travel bans became emblematic of the administration's broader effort to reduce both legal and unauthorised migration through executive action. While many of these policies were later contested, revised or overturned by judicial interventions or subsequent administrations, the period was marked by a climate of uncertainty, unpredictability and a strategic recalibration of how migration was regulated, enforced and perceived, both within the US and globally.

Trump's immigration policies during his first term undeniably shaped US foreign policy. Bilateral and multilateral relationships increasingly

became conditioned by immigration negotiations and compliance. For instance, aid to Central American countries was tied to their willingness to accept asylum agreements that redirected migrants away from the US. Countries like Guatemala and El Salvador were asked to receive third-country asylum seekers, effectively externalising parts of the US asylum process (Pierce et al., 2018). Mexico's role became especially pivotal, under threat of tariffs, its government assumed expanded border enforcement responsibilities, deploying the National Guard to its southern border (Foreign Policy, 2019).

The most direct foreign policy consequences of Trump's immigration strategy thus unfolded in Central America and parts of the Middle East, where enforcement deals, migration controls and restrictive entry policies were explicitly linked to diplomatic leverage (Rosenberg and Trevizo, 2025). By contrast, Africa was not a central focus of this immigration-driven foreign policy agenda. While several African countries, such as Somalia, Sudan and later Nigeria and Eritrea, were included at various stages of the travel bans, these actions were generally framed around terrorism concerns and the broader Muslim ban, rather than any targeted African strategy (Immigration Tracking Project, 2020). As a result, most African states experienced the Trump-era immigration shifts indirectly, through reduced refugee admissions, growing visa restrictions, uncertainty around student mobility and a shift in how the US was perceived as a destination for opportunity and exchange. However, these peripheral effects would not last. Trump's second term brought a notable shift, with African countries more squarely affected by the immigration policies, moving from minimal consequences to more direct and material impacts.

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Immigration and foreign relations in Trump's second term

President Trump promptly acted following his inauguration, commencing with many executive orders. This was not unexpected, he was fulfilling his campaign commitments, which had a considerable worldwide effect. One of his distinguishing features was the initiation of large deportations of illegal immigrants, the militarisation of border enforcement, stringent

asylum limitations and the elimination of legitimate migration avenues, among others. These policies not only altered US immigration procedures domestically, but also damaged relations with critical regions such as Latin America and Africa.

Mass deportations and enforcement crackdown

Within days of President Trump's second inauguration, the administration moved to implement what was described as the largest domestic deportation operation in US history, launching hundreds of deportation flights and even invoking a dormant 1798 statute (the Alien Enemies Act) to summarily expel certain groups (Montoya-Galvez, 2025). This approach targeted millions of undocumented residents, prioritising those deemed criminal or national security threats. The Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) intensified its activities, and by February 2025, monthly immigration arrests had surged to record levels, exceeding any seen in any other month for the past seven years (Craft Singh, 2025). Highly publicised ICE raids swept workplaces and communities, and prior restrictions on enforcement in sensitive locations like schools, hospitals and churches were largely removed (Ainsley and Martinez, 2024; Rahman, 2025).

The administration signalled it would use all means necessary, including border militarisation, to achieve its aims. Trump indicated he was prepared to deploy National Guard units and even active-duty military personnel to the southern border if needed to halt unauthorised crossings (Copp Baldor, 2025). Indeed, military resources were briefly brought to bear; for example, US Air Force aircraft were used to transport deportees until defence officials halted that practice in March due to cost and legal concerns (Roy, 2025).

In addition, a signature move by Trump on his very first day back in office was the termination of the US Customs and Border Protection (CBP) One mobile app system, which under the previous administration had allowed migrants to schedule asylum appointments at ports of entry. The CBP announced it would no longer honour any of the tens of thousands of appointments that had been pre-booked, abruptly stranding

migrants who had been pursuing lawful entry (Heilweil, 2025). The shutdown of CBP One effectively eliminated a key pathway for asylum seekers, leading many desperate individuals to consider riskier irregular crossings or leaving them in limbo in Northern Mexico. Together, these measures reflected a hardline enforcement stance not seen in modern times, drawing domestic legal challenges and international scrutiny.

Travel bans and refugee selection

Trump's second-term agenda also revised and expanded travel bans and made refugee policy starkly selective, steps that had significant repercussions for US relations abroad. In early 2025, the administration began weighing an expansion of the travel restrictions first introduced in 2017. An internal memo outlined plans to bar entry for nationals of up to dozens of countries, heavily concentrated in Africa and the broader Global South, drawing parallels to the earlier 'Muslim ban' (Helmore, 2025). This proposed new travel ban list encompassed nations such as Eritrea, South Sudan and others in Africa, as well as countries in Asia and the Middle East, under the purported rationale of security concerns. Such measures provoked anger among the affected countries, which viewed the blanket restrictions as discriminatory.

At the same time, the administration suspended the general US refugee resettlement programme (USRAP), imposing an indefinite pause on admissions of refugees from traditional channels (Betancourt, 2025). This halt to refugee intakes marked a historic low in US humanitarian admissions and drew condemnation from international refugee agencies. However, one controversial exception stood out, President Trump signed an executive order offering expedited refugee resettlement exclusively to white South Africans (Afrikaners), framing it as a response to what President Trump considers to be a human rights violation in South Africa. The order authorised up to 250 000 Afrikaners to resettle in the US and even cut US foreign aid to South Africa in protest the South Africa's land reform policies (Kumwenda-Mtambo and Schenck, 2025). The South African government rejected Trump's characterization of its domestic affairs, accusing Washington of stoking misinformation and racism. Even

many intended beneficiaries in the Afrikaner community expressed reluctance or scorn, with some leaders publicly declining the offer, arguing that they are not interested in becoming refugees (Kumwenda-Mtambo and Schenck, 2025). Nonetheless, the message both domestically and internationally was clear, President Trump would continue to put ‘America First’, a slogan that aligns with his broader agenda for his second term.

More strikingly, some Americans received emails from the DHS directing them to leave the US, an occurrence that has caused significant distress among legal US citizens (Mejia, 2025). For many, the requirement to validate their citizenship status or seek counsel from an immigration attorney was formerly unimaginable. This portrays the extensive ramifications of heightened immigration enforcement and the increasing sense of uncertainty it has instigated, even among individuals with legal status.

Domestic consequences of Trump’s immigration policy

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President Trump’s 2.0 immigration policies have brought about a range of structural and social transformations within and outside the US. These policies have been signed mostly through executive orders aimed at controlling the way immigrants enter the US and pushing those who are already in, out. The reason for this is to promote national security. These have been achieved through several measures; nonetheless, these actions also engendered extensive institutional, diplomatic, humanitarian and economic consequences that continue to unfold. The ramifications to foster an in-depth understanding of the policy landscape are evaluated, recognising both the underlying motivations and the changing repercussions of these decisions.

Domestic governance and economic effects

The repercussions of intensified policing also infiltrated the economic sphere. The extensive elimination of labourers, particularly in sectors that conventionally rely on foreign labour, imposed pressure on industries such as agriculture and construction. Certain localities had workforce

shortages and escalating operating expenses, which subsequently impacted consumer pricing and productivity (Butler, 2025). The indefinite suspension of refugee admissions has led numerous resettlement agencies to halt or reduce their activities, resulting in economic hardships for nonprofits and the communities they serve.

The US faces a growing challenge in the increase in the ageing population and decrease in birth rate (Adejogbe Ahmed, 2025), although Trump 2.0 has proposed a US\$5 000 baby bonus for new mothers. It is uncertain if this policy will work or not (Pequen˜o IV, 2025). However, the idea of restraining immigration could have long-term over-reaching economic effects. Immigrants are hardworking and play a crucial role by filling workforce shortages, promoting innovation and boosting entrepreneurship. Many immigrants start and manage small and large-scale businesses, create jobs and pay taxes. These activities have a significant impact on the US economy. Therefore, strict immigration laws may lead to a labour shortage, which would impede economic growth and reduce the country's ability to maintain its position as a global economic powerhouse.

Educational dimensions

The Trump administration's immigration and research funding policies are starting to impact American higher education institutions. The administration announced in early 2025 that it was suspending approximately US\$11 billion in research grants, with indications that further cuts might be forthcoming (Nadworny, 2025). This development has significantly impacted the capacity of universities to extend research opportunities to international students. Numerous students who had obtained financing offers have had those offers revoked because of the changing regulatory environment, while many who had not received offers and were anticipating them ultimately did not obtain any.

Moreover, recent modifications to visa procedures have engendered confusion for both present and potential overseas students. Several existing student visas have been revoked and subsequently reinstated after legal action was taken and a policy change, which has continued

to cause fear among present students in the US (Raymond, 2025). This uncertainty has been most pronounced for students from nations listed on the administration's revised travel restriction list. These students face an uncertain future while juggling the demands of maintaining their legal status and navigating an unpredictable visa environment. The consequences could be extensive in the future. Talented students who previously might have wanted to study in the US may now start turning to other nations that provide more stable and visible options for studying abroad.

National security framing and humanitarian effects

Security rationales were a prominent feature of the administration's immigration justification. The rapid deployment of National Guard units to the border, the expanded use of surveillance and the revival of broad travel restrictions illustrated the administration's intent to view immigration through a security lens (Copp and Baldor, 2025). From a governance standpoint, this approach brought clarity and coherence to enforcement operations, and it was well-received by segments of the public who valued order and decisiveness.

At the same time, several humanitarian concerns emerged. The termination of programmes such as the CBP One asylum scheduling app left many individuals in procedural limbo, particularly those who had followed established legal protocols in seeking protection (Heilweil, 2025). The abrupt change increased strain on shelter systems in Northern Mexico and raised concerns about exposure to exploitation or danger for vulnerable individuals. These outcomes suggest the importance of considering humanitarian logistics alongside enforcement goals, particularly in managing border flows.

Trump's immigration and the consequences for foreign relations

The second-term immigration policies of the Trump administration have no doubt begun to show wider-reaching implications for African nations, extending beyond visa decisions to broader concerns about

equity, mobility and diplomatic reciprocity. Heightened restrictions and the reclassification of several African countries under stringent travel categories created uncertainty for students, researchers and professionals seeking entry to the US. Some individuals experienced revocations or indefinite delays of student and work visas, while others faced the withdrawal of research funding offers following the suspension of approximately US\$11 billion in federal grants. Many smart and talented Africans have had their educational and professional goals severely impacted by these policy changes, especially those who had plans to return home and support the development of their country. Such limitations may eventually slow down human capital development and technological transfer or diffusion throughout Africa, necessitating African countries to make more proactive investments in self-driven development pathways.

These policy adjustments have diplomatically affected how African states interact with the US and its global rivals. The perceived selectivity of US refugee policy, specifically the preference for white South Africans, while other African refugee populations endured continuous restrictions, prompts questions about fairness and humanitarian consistency. A growing desire by African states to show agency in the discourse surrounding global mobility was reflected in Namibia's decision to impose visa requirements for US nationals, which was described as a reciprocal step. African countries may be forced to diversify their partnerships, possibly fortifying ties with nations like China, which might offer more advantageous conditions, due to worries about the decline in US development funding to Africa and a more transactional foreign policy. These changes have the potential to change the symbolic image of the US in Africa, turning it from an iconic representation of opportunity, to a more uncertain locale. If left unchecked, the cumulative impact may alter the nature of long-term interaction between the US and the African continent, altering both strategic alignment and public sentiment.

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Diplomatic realignments and bilateral relationships

The international dimension of immigration policy was particularly salient in the second term. In Latin America, for example, deportation

agreements and the use of economic levers such as threatened tariffs led to renewed discussions about equity and cooperation in regional migration management (Roy, 2025). While these arrangements secured short-term compliance, they also introduced a layer of complexity to traditional diplomatic partnerships, especially where the perception of unilateralism emerged.

Trump's second-term immigration policies significantly influenced US foreign relations, particularly with Latin America, Europe and Africa. With the rise in deportations, Latin American nations saw direct pressure to accept both their nationals and third-country migrants deported from the US (Roy, 2025). US authorities engaged in negotiations for deportation agreements with El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras and Mexico, utilising diplomatic and economic instruments. Colombia initially declined flights transporting Venezuelan migrants, however, altered its stance with a threat of trade sanctions from the US (Roy, 2025). The conversations, however effective, raised issues regarding coercion and unilateralism, undermining trust and complicating existing cooperative arrangements.

In parallel, Mexico was tasked with renewed responsibilities under revived programmes like 'Remain in Mexico', placing significant logistical and political pressure on its asylum infrastructure. Meanwhile, the presence of US troops near the border signalled a securitised posture that raised further regional concern. Though some governments cooperated to preserve bilateral ties, these policies introduced new complexities into US–Latin America relations and may diminish long-standing goodwill.

The immigration issue in Africa posed comparable diplomatic obstacles. Increased travel restrictions impacting several African nations elicited criticism from Africans, which challenged the rationale and fairness of the prohibitions. The US choice to provide refugee resettlement only to white South Africans received significant attention and was perceived as a threat to the Indigenous Black South Africans, thereby supporting racial selectivity in immigration policy. Although most African governments refrained from providing explicit public replies, the change in tone was apparent in their shifting diplomatic stances.

Namibia, for instance, responded by introducing visa requirements for American travellers, an apparent reciprocity measure. The government

has signalled that it might implement visa restrictions on more Western countries that fail to provide reciprocal access to Namibians (Shipale, 2025). These events indicate an increasing readiness among African nations to contest inequitable visa policies. Furthermore, many countries of the world, except Namibia, have been reserved about the US visa waiver, where no African country is on the list. For many Africans, acquiring a US visa was already challenging, and with more limitations, prospects for study, research, and professional advancement overseas may become increasingly constrained. Visa limitations enacted by the US and African nations might impede interpersonal exchanges and affect decisions related to foreign investment and tourism, thereby obstructing economic progress and regional collaboration in Africa.

Conclusion

The trajectory of US immigration policy under President Trump's 2.0 represents a critical juncture in the emerging relationship between migration governance and foreign affairs. The implications of these policies have extended far beyond US borders, reshaping diplomatic ties, altering global perceptions, and triggering structural responses in countries affected by the policy shifts, despite their domestic positioning as a matter of border control and national security towards making America great again, which is the core motive of the Trump 2.0 administration. Whether through expansive deportation operations, the rollback of asylum pathways, or the reconfiguration of visa regimes and immigration has been deployed as a central tool of executive authority, one that asserts sovereign control while sending unmistakable signals to both domestic audiences and foreign governments.

The repercussions of this approach have been diverse. Domestically, it has incited discussions regarding humanitarian obligations, educational accessibility and labour sustainability. The policies have increased tensions regarding global responsibility, reciprocity and fairness, and have put the resilience of bilateral relationships to the test on a global scale. The repercussions have also progressed from a peripheral issue to a pronounced one in Africa, particularly. From travel restrictions and

visa denials to selective refugee resettlement and reduced educational access, the continent has encountered a set of challenges that reflect not only on immigration enforcement, but ask deeper questions about equity and geopolitical positioning. Policy responses by African states, such as Namibia's imposition of visa requirements, signal a more assertive posture in negotiating mobility norms and underscore the broader recalibration of diplomatic relations.

Ultimately, the second-term agenda has not simply redefined the contours of immigration, it has also illuminated the extent to which migration serves as a barometer of national intent and global perception.

The lasting impact will depend not only on the permanence of these policies, but also on how other nations choose to interpret and respond to the signals they send.

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CHAPTER 6

Inventing a New Order of Uncertainties: Trump's Anti-Immigration Policy and the Dilemmas of African Deportees

Jude Odigbo and Afa'anwiMa'abo Che

Introduction

There is no doubt that (anti-) immigration policy is central to President Trump's foreign policy agenda, both during his first term and in the current United States (US) administration. Scholars have extensively commented on Trump's repressive anti-immigration stance (Armenta, 2017; Currier, 2018; Montange, 2022; Odumosu and Kaniye-Ebeku, 2025; Perea, 2020; Srikantiah and Sinnar, 2019), often highlighting perceived white nationalism as a driving force behind these policies and the intensified enforcement that accompanies them, suggesting that such measures may exacerbate cultural divides and reinforce the clash of civilisations thesis (Che, 2019; Huntington, 1993).

During his initial campaign, Trump prioritised immigration, emphasising the need to build a wall along the US–Mexico border. He expressed dissatisfaction with the state of the border and was particularly critical of how migrants were allowed to enter the US illegally or were granted temporary stays. Trump infamously labelled Mexican migrants as 'rapists' (Srikantiah and Sinnar, 2019: 198) and referred to immigrants from Haiti, El Salvador and African nations as coming from 'shithole countries' (Srikantiah and Sinnar, 2019: 199), suggesting people from these countries were unworthy of entry into the US. Consequently, Trump implemented stringent immigration measures to limit the entry of migrants from these regions. In 2017, his administration introduced the first version of the Muslim Travel Ban, restricting entry for certain non-citizens from Muslim-majority countries (Srikantiah and Sinnar,

2019). This ban, along with the 2017 suspension of refugee admissions, exacerbated the humanitarian crisis in war-torn Syria.

Between 2017 and 2018, Trump's administration also terminated Temporary Protected Status (TPS) for non-citizens from El Salvador, Haiti, Nicaragua and Sudan. This status had previously been granted by earlier administrations to protect individuals unable to return to their home countries due to armed conflict, natural disasters, or other crises (American Immigration Council, 2024; Srikantiah and Sinner, 2019). In his 2024 campaign, Trump pledged to carry out large-scale deportations of illegal immigrants and to construct detention facilities at the borders prior to deportation.

Since the beginning of his second term, there has been a surge of scholarly commentary on Trump's policies. Some studies focus on his unilateral diplomacy and the shift in US foreign policy regarding the Russia–Ukraine war (Crosston, 2025; Kupchan, 2025; Mills, 2025), while others examine his steadfast support for Israel during the conflict in Gaza (Cohen-Almagor, 2025; Othman, 2024; Shavit, 2025). This study, however, specifically addresses Trump's anti-immigration policy and the challenges faced by African deportees. This focus is crucial given the unique circumstances of African governments, which often lack the institutional frameworks and public support systems necessary to assist deportees upon their return.

The remainder of this chapter is structured as follows: First, immigration and immigration policy is defined; second, drawing on various documents, including scholarly articles, and media and policy reports, Trump's (anti)immigration policy and its implementation are substantiated. Next, the theoretical framework is outlined, while deploying it to discuss the dilemmas and risks confronting African deportees. The chapter is concluded by proposing policy measures for redressing the causes of illegal migration from African states.

Conceptualising immigration and immigration policy

In recent years, immigration has become a prominent topic in global discussions. Many nations are hesitant to accept individuals seeking to

settle, leading to the implementation of various immigration laws and emergency policies aimed at managing the unprecedented rise in global immigration. Esses et al. (2017) highlighted that international migration is increasing, with diverse reactions from citizens of receiving countries. There is now more consensus than disagreement among nations regarding the definition of immigration. However, policies and approaches to immigration issues vary significantly. Esses et al. (2017) describe immigration as the voluntary or involuntary movement of people to a new country where they intend to reside for an extended period. The United Nations (UN) defines an international migrant as someone living in a country other than their country of birth (United Nations, 2018). Immigration is often viewed as the movement of individuals either voluntarily or through coercion seeking to settle permanently in another country for economic or political reasons.

The surge in immigration has prompted increased scholarly investigation into its motivations, implications for receiving nations, and economic consequences. Developed countries pay close attention to immigration, recognising its potential economic and cultural impacts (Altonji and Card, 1991; Borjas, 2019; Dustmann and Preston, 2004; OECD, 2018). Research indicates that immigration can contribute positively to the economic development of destination countries. Moreover, international migration can benefit both the country of origin and the receiving nation. Kaba (2019) argues that skilled individuals often migrate to societies that effectively utilise their talents. For example, Khullar et al. (2017) note that by 2017, over 160 000 foreign medical graduates were working in the US, many from developing countries. While the US benefits from their expertise, this situation can lead to 'brain drain', resulting in shortages of medical personnel in their home countries.

In response to these dynamics, governments develop and implement immigration policies to manage migration flows. Perez (2015) and Bolter (2019) define immigration policy as a set of measures that allow states to control the influx of individuals seeking to establish residence, work or seek asylum due to conflict or persecution. Essentially, immigration policies are deliberate governmental actions aimed at regulating the number of authorised, undocumented and irregular migrants in a country.

Governments often cite several reasons for prioritising immigration policies, including the protection of domestic jobs and the economy. They also consider the cultural and security implications of uncontrolled borders, as is the case with the Trump government (Pengelly, 2024).

Trump's anti-immigration policy

From Europe to the Middle East, Latin America, Asia and Africa, virtually every continent is affected by Trump's foreign policy decisions following his return as the 47th US president. Trump's approach to trade, security and immigration has created ambiguities that impact traditional US allies and other nations. For example, reciprocal tariff strategies have strained relationships with European trading partners, while Trump's positions on NATO funding, exclusion of Europe from cease-fire negotiations in the Russia–Ukraine conflict, escalating tariffs with China, stringent immigration measures targeting Latin American migrants, particularly from Mexico and large-scale deportations affecting many African countries, highlight the challenges in his approach to international relations.

During his first term, Trump adopted a stringent stance on immigration, dismantling many established frameworks designed to facilitate the process. The following are some key anti-immigration actions taken during Trump's first term in office:

- In 2017, Trump ended the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) programme, which had allowed undocumented individuals who entered the US as children to obtain work permits (Srikantiah and Sinnar, 2019).
- Executive Order 13768, titled '*Enhancing Public Safety in the Interior of the United States*,' expanded the list of deportable offenses and enabled local law enforcement to work closely with Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) (Odumosu and Kaniye-Ebeku, 2025).
- In June 2018, the Supreme Court upheld the Trump administration's Muslim Travel Ban (Srikantiah and Sinnar, 2019).

- In July 2018, the federal government separated 2737 immigrant children from their families (Kaba, 2019).
- Trump declared a national emergency to secure funding for the construction of a wall along the Mexican border, ended Temporary Protected Status (TPS) for immigrants from several countries, including El Salvador, Haiti, Honduras, Liberia, Nicaragua and Sudan, and threatened nations that did not comply with US immigration policies (Kaba, 2019).

These measures represent a significant shift in US immigration policy, moving away from previous practices that considered immigrants on specific grounds. Monyani (2021) noted that Trump's 'America First' mantra reflects a nativist approach that disregarded family reunification and the safety and well-being of immigrants. His administration prioritised American workers and industries in its immigration policies, often portraying immigrants as a threat to American interests, values and security. This shift led to significant tensions, protests and international criticism, as was the case with the 2020 travel ban under Presidential Proclamation 9983, which restricted entry into the US for individuals from several Muslim-majority nations. This policy was framed as a measure to protect national security, however, it faced widespread condemnation for being discriminatory and for undermining the principles of religious freedom and diversity that the US is built upon (Odumosu and Kaniye-Ebeku, 2025). Also, the implementation of the US anti-immigration policy under Trump led to the separation of thousands of immigrant families at the US–Mexico border, as adults apprehended for illegal crossing were prosecuted, resulting in their children being placed in separate facilities. While the administration claimed this was necessary to deter illegal immigration, it faced significant backlash from human rights advocates, leading to widespread protests against the policy due to its traumatic impact on families (Castillo et al., 2018).

In contrast, the Biden administration, which replaced the first Trump administration, took a more tolerant and proactive approach to immigration, focusing on respecting immigrant rights while addressing the increasing number of migrants entering the US for various reasons.

According to Mena (2025), in 2023, there were approximately 47.8 million immigrants in the US, contributing US\$1.7 trillion in spending power and paying around US\$652 billion in taxes. Additionally, about 2.8 million people immigrated legally that year, including refugees and individuals on work visas, which accounted for 84 per cent of the country's population growth in 2024 (Mena, 2025).

Conversely, the 'Trump 2.0' approach views immigration through a lens of suspicion, often categorising migrants as undocumented or illegally present. Upon his return to the White House, Trump signed seven executive orders related to immigration, which included:

- an order outlining the military's role in protecting US territorial integrity;
- an order emphasising the meaning and value of American citizenship;
- an order realigning the US Refugee Admissions Programme;
- an order ending taxpayer subsidisation of open borders;
- an order securing US borders;
- an order protecting the American people against invasion; and
- an order safeguarding the US from foreign terrorists and other national security threats (Bustillo, 2025).

These actions reflect a shift back to a more restrictive immigration policy focused on national security and border control. Following these executive orders, there has been a significant crackdown on immigrants and undocumented individuals in the US. Trump has taken deliberate steps to enforce deportations, securing agreements with countries like Costa Rica, Panama and El Salvador to accept deportees from the US who are not from those countries (Jacobson, Uribe and Sherman, 2025).

However, the deportation of immigrants may have negative repercussions for the US economy. Analysts argue that the US relies on immigrant labour, and Trump's policies could have severe consequences for various industries and overall economic growth. For instance, Allianz Trade estimates that Trump's crackdown on both illegal and legal

immigration could reduce the gross domestic product (GDP) growth rate to below 2 per cent annually by 2026. The Brookings Institution predicts that growth could drop to 0.4 per cent in 2025 if Trump continues to restrict legal immigration and conducts 3.4 million deportations (Mena, 2025). In the first quarter of 2025, the US GDP fell by 0.3 per cent. President Trump refused to take responsibility for this and instead blamed the Biden administration for poor economic management and excessive spending.

Pivoting from elite theory to strain theory to understand the dilemmas of African deportees

Elite theory, articulated by thinkers such as Vilfredo Pareto, Roberto Michels, Gaetano Mosca and José Ortega Gasset, provides a framework for understanding Trump's anti-immigration and deportation policies. This theory emphasises the interplay between American populist sentiment and elite interests as key motivators of these policies. According to elite theory, Trump's anti-immigration stance reflects the relationship between political, economic and cultural elites and the electorate. Trump positioned himself as an outsider challenging the political elite, appealing to American working-class voters who perceived immigration as a threat to their jobs and security. His hard-line approach resonated with these voters, while also aligning with certain American business elites and interest groups that favoured a labour market focused on American workers, reducing competition from immigrant labour. This alignment was evident in the United Steelworkers Union strike actions in 2015 (US Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2016). By adopting a nationalist immigration policy, Trump consolidated support from his political base and addressed the frustrations of those feeling marginalised by cultural elites advocating for diversity. Ultimately, his re-election and anti-immigration approach illustrate how elite dynamics can shape significant political decisions.

While elite theory effectively highlights the influence of elite interests on US immigration policy, its focus on domestic politics limits its applicability in predicting the outcomes and challenges posed by

America's unauthorised migrant deportation policy, particularly for African countries. Many African nations are among the least developed, most corrupt and most affected by inequality, repression, climate change, poverty and insecurity, driving both voluntary and involuntary emigration to the US and other developed countries. Given that stress is a key factor in prompting economic, environmental and security-related migration from Africa, theories that emphasise the challenging conditions in migrant source countries are more suitable for understanding the dilemmas faced by African deportees.

Strain theory from sociology is particularly relevant in this context. According to the traditional version of strain theory (Merton, 1938), individuals may engage in crime, conflict, substance abuse, anti-government protests and other non-conformist behaviours as 'normal' responses to 'abnormal' political and socio-economic structures that fail to meet citizens' security and welfare needs. Deportees often experience significant stress during forced repatriation, losing their jobs, income, and social networks, which complicate their reintegration into their home countries. This stress is exacerbated by feelings of frustration over their losses. General strain theory posits that such frustration can lead to alienation, depression, irritability and an increased risk of engaging in violent or criminal behaviour (Agnew, 1992; 2001; 2005).

Several sources of emotional and social strain are associated with deportation. Deportees may struggle to reconnect with family and friends, leading to feelings of isolation. Many returned without financial resources or job opportunities, heightening anxiety about their livelihoods. They may also face social stigma or discrimination, which contributes to emotional distress. The trauma of deportation can result in mental health issues, including Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), further aggravated by the challenges of adjusting to life back home. Navigating local bureaucracies, often characterised by corruption and inefficiency and obtaining necessary identification documents can create significant obstacles, adding to their frustration.

Additionally, deportees may find that their previous support systems have changed or disappeared, leaving them without essential emotional and financial support. After living abroad, they may struggle to adapt to

local customs and norms, feeling out of place in their own country. For instance, deportees from war-torn areas in Africa or African nations still experiencing armed conflict face harsher and unimaginable experiences beyond mere stigma. Presently, African nations like Ethiopia, Somalia, Cameroon, Mozambique, Sudan, Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and South Sudan, etc., have all, however, at different times, relapsed into either subtle violent conflict or internal political instability, while nations like Sudan are still facing devastating civil war.

Deporting asylum seekers to these areas not only counteracts international laws and obligations, but it may also be a quick invitation to death. For instance, it is worth noting that the eruption of conflict in 2017 in Cameroon led to a mass exodus of people. Arieff (2018) asserted that the outbreak of violent confrontations in Cameroon between the 'Ambaboy's' (the separatist fighters) and government forces in 2017 resulted in colossal destruction of many villages and communities such as Mamfe, Bali, Bafut, Kumba, Kumbo and some parts of Bamenda. It is known that Cameroonians deported from US in 2019, 2020, 2021 and 2022 experienced abuses by Cameroonian authorities (Human Rights Watch, 2024). These abuses, according to the report, include rape, torture, physical abuse, forced disappearances, arbitrary arrest and detention, extortion, unfair prosecutions and confiscation of their national identity cards, restrictions on freedom of movement and the targeting of relatives (Human Rights Watch, 2024).

Thus, Somalia and Nigeria, which have the highest number of deportees (see Appendix 1 below), face stiff socio-economic and political dislocations, with sections of the countries under severe security threats. Generally, most West Africa states grapple with the increasing incidence of unemployment, abysmal infrastructural facilities, poor foreign direct investment flow, lack of technology, corruption, political instability and poor healthcare delivery system, produce primary commodities with precarious prices, highly indebted and some unable to meet their debt servicing obligations, wars, conflicts, endemic military interventions, low life expectancy and high level of illiteracy. As a result, West African deportees face more misery. For instance, a Nigerian deportee from the US in 2016 lamented his ordeals in the US and how his family rejected

him when he was deported to Nigeria. According to the said deportee, 'my family members felt I had brought added burden upon them when I should be helping them with their needs, as a result, they simply rejected me for coming with nothing' (Ojoye, 2016: 61). For this individual, starting life again is shrouded with all manner of fear and uncertainty.

The above situations face many deportees in Africa, because many African states are yet to establish a credible and sustainable scheme or support framework for their citizens in difficult times (Alumona and Odigbo, 2017). This is largely because the African landscape is replete with many illegitimate and unstable governments which emerged from the ruins of insecurity, corruption and wars (Aja, 2024; Collier, 2009). For instance, the Sudan civil war has been described as having resulted in one of the world's worst displacements, with millions of people already killed. Presently, conflict between the Sudanese Armed Forces and the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces has internally displaced millions of Sudanese with attendant humanitarian consequences. Therefore, deporting people to this war-torn country is a tacit invitation to further endanger their lives. The fact that virtually all African nations appear to lack any public support systems to ameliorate the sufferings of the deportees means that people are likely to be disposed to a crueller condition beyond rupturing their socio-economic lifelines.

Indeed, it is even unlawful to return a person to an unsafe environment against their wishes. A deportee who does not have access to psychological therapy in a society coupled with unchecked stigmatisation for being deported may dehumanise the person, cause such a person to commit suicide or be lured to crimes and thereby, adds or compounds the rising crime rates in Africa. In addition to stigmatisation, returnees face daily economic struggles, a situation that has only become worse with the rising conflicts and instability that have a severe impact on Africa's already struggling economy (Zandonini, 2020). Some states like Nigeria will arrest and abandon such person(s) in prison without trial for years. Udegbe (2013) lamented that to-date, Nigeria still has deportees held in Kirikiri Prison. In most cases, African deportees are either not been compensated by the deporting nation or accepted and assisted by the receiving native country.

Clearly, deportation inevitably inflicts unquantifiable damages to 'African deportees' and might compel many to resort to crime or adopt desperate means of survival. Overall, these challenges and the overwhelming stress they create can lead some deportees to engage in violent or illegal activities as a coping mechanism. The lack of institutional support for reintegration, combined with increased risks of insecurity, creates a challenging order of uncertainties for African deportees in their home countries.

Conclusion

This paper's analysis of Trump's immigration policies highlights the intricate relationship between US domestic politics, elite interests and the significant challenges faced by African emigrants. The stringent measures implemented during Trump's tenure not only exacerbate the difficulties encountered by migrants, but also underscore the vulnerabilities of African nations in managing the return of deportees. As these individuals grapple with the trauma of forced repatriation, economic instability and social reintegration, it becomes imperative to address the root causes of illegal migration from African countries.

To redress the root causes of unauthorised migration, African governments should prioritise the establishment of transparent and accountable institutions that can manage migration and support deportees while investing in job creation and sustainable economic development through partnerships with international organisations and private sector investments that focus on creating opportunities in sectors such as agriculture, renewable energy and simple consumer goods manufacturing. Additionally, implementing comprehensive education and vocational training programmes can equip individuals with the skills needed for local job markets, thereby enhancing human capital and reducing the economic pressures that lead to migration. Furthermore, African nations should collaborate on migration management strategies, sharing best practices and resources to address the challenges of deportation and reintegration. It is also essential for governments in conflict-affected countries, notably Cameroon, DRC and Sudan, to actively engage in conflict resolution

and peace-building initiatives to address the root causes of migration, including political instability, violence and human rights abuses. The ongoing Anglophone crisis has resulted in significant violence and repression against English-speaking communities, leading to widespread displacement and prompting many individuals to flee the country in search of safety. The recent suspension of TPS for Cameroonian nationals in the US (Aleaziz, 2025) exacerbates these challenges, as it increases the risk of deportation for individuals. TPS suspension not only threatens the safety and well-being of those affected by conflicts in Southern Cameroon, but it also places additional strain on Cameroon's already fragile systems, which lack the capacity to support returning individuals. By promoting inclusive governance, protecting human rights and addressing the grievances that fuel unrest, governments in Africa can create a more stable environment that reduces the pressures driving their citizens to migrate and helps mitigate the negative implications of US immigration policies.

142 Ultimately, raising awareness about the challenges faced by deportees and fostering a culture of acceptance can help reduce social stigma. Public campaigns promoting understanding and support for reintegration efforts can encourage communities to embrace returnees as valuable contributors. By adopting these measures, which align with strain theory's emphasis on addressing the socio-economic pressures that lead to migration, African countries can create an environment that not only addresses the immediate challenges of deportation but also tackles the underlying issues that compel individuals to seek refuge elsewhere.

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Appendix: 6.1: Number of African immigrants awaiting deportation in the United States

African region	Country	Number of people awaiting deportation in the US
West Africa	Benin	102
	Burkina Faso	303
	Cape Verde	314
	Gambia	1035
	Ghana	3228
	Guinea	1897
	Guinea-Bissau	48
	Liberia	1563
	Niger	642
	Nigeria	3690
	Senegal	1689
	Sierra Leone	1563
	Togo	427
	Total	16501
North Africa	Algeria	306
	Egypt	1461
	Libya	89
	Morocco	495
	Sudan	1012
	Total	3363

African region	Country	Number of people awaiting deportation in the US
East Africa	Djibouti	29
	Eritrea	973
	Ethiopia	1713
	Kenya	1282
	Madagascar	5
	Malawi	56
	Mozambique	14
	Rwanda	338
	Somalia	4090
	South Sudan	136
	Uganda	393
	Zambia	174
	Zimbabwe	545
	Total	10210
Central Africa	Central African Republic	82
	Chad	169
	Congo	795
	Equatorial Guinea	20
	Sao Tome and Principe	1
	Democratic Republic of Congo	1068
	Cameroon	1736
	Gabon	60
	Total	3931
Southern Africa	Angola	662
	Botswana	12
	Namibia	19
	South Africa	379
	Total	1072

Source: Adapted from Sulaimon (2025)

SECTION IV: ECONOMIC NATIONALISM

CHAPTER 7

Trump 2.0 and the Rise of Economic Nationalism: Lessons for African Development in a Capitalist World

Joel Leonard

Introduction

In recent years, global economic dynamics have been reshaped by the resurgence of economic nationalism, a political-economic doctrine that prioritises national interests, domestic industries and sovereign control over economic policy (Rodrik, 2018). This shift marks a departure from the post-Cold War consensus of liberal globalisation, where free trade, open markets and multilateral cooperation were seen as the bedrock of progress (Fukuyama, 2022). The return of Donald Trump to the political forefront, often dubbed ‘Trump 2.0’, has reignited these debates with renewed intensity. Under his ‘America First’ agenda, Trump advanced a model of strategic economic nationalism that redefined the United States (US) approach to global trade, industry policy and international alliances (Bremmer, 2023). More assertive and calculated than during his first term, Trump’s policies reflect a broader global pivot toward protectionism, seen also in China’s state capitalism and the EU’s recalibration of industrial policy (Tooze, 2022).

Despite widespread analysis of Trump’s economic policies in the context of Western alliances and Asian economies, there remains a critical research gap concerning the implications of these policies for African development. This paper seeks to address that gap by examining how African nations can extract strategic insights from Trump’s economic nationalism to inform their own development models.

Research questions

The resurgence of economic nationalism in global politics—most prominently embodied in Donald Trump’s ‘America First’ doctrine—has reshaped debates about sovereignty, industrial strategy, and participation in the global economy. As major powers increasingly retreat from liberal globalisation and adopt more protectionist economic policies, African nations are confronted with both challenges and opportunities. Understanding these shifts is crucial for African policymakers aiming to strengthen domestic industries, mitigate external vulnerabilities, and navigate a rapidly evolving international economic landscape.

Against this backdrop, this study examines the strategic dimensions of Trump 2.0’s economic nationalism and assesses its relevance for African development trajectories. The following research questions guide the analysis:

- 154 1. What are the core features of Trump 2.0’s economic nationalism, and how do they compare with other global protectionist models?
2. How can African countries adopt or adapt elements of economic nationalism without undermining their participation in the global capitalist system?
3. What policy strategies can African states employ to balance the benefits of open markets with the need for domestic economic resilience?

This paper argues that, regardless of one’s political orientation, Trump’s approach offers valuable policy lessons for African nations seeking to strengthen economic sovereignty, industrial capacity and strategic autonomy. While not advocating for uncritical adoption of protectionism, the analysis investigates how aspects of economic nationalism can be repurposed to reduce dependency and economic fragility in African economies.

The paper is structured as follows: first, it provides a conceptual overview of economic nationalism and capitalism; second, it analyses

Trump's economic doctrine; third, it compares Trump's approach with those of other global actors; fourth, it examines African economic structures; fifth, it identifies lessons Africa can draw from Trump 2.0; sixth, it discusses policy adaptations and finally, it concludes with practical recommendations for African policymakers.

Understanding economic nationalism and capitalism

To understand the significance of Trump 2.0's policies and their relevance for African development, it is crucial to first define and distinguish the two dominant economic paradigms at the heart of this discussion: economic nationalism and capitalism. While both can coexist, they are rooted in different philosophies and can produce competing policy directions.

American expansionism, economic nationalism, and the rise of Trump's 'America First' agenda

The notion of 'America First' advanced by Donald Trump is not an isolated development in US foreign and economic policy, but rather a modern iteration of long-standing traditions of economic nationalism and imperial expansionism (Kupchan, 2020; Mead, 2017). Scholars have traced the roots of US foreign policy to territorial expansion, protectionism and the pursuit of economic dominance, which are echoed in Trump's rhetoric and policies (Colás and Saull, 2006; Herring, 2008). This literature review explores the historical antecedents of these ideas, their evolution, and the ways in which Trump's policies reflect both continuities and shifts in American foreign policy.

The historical roots of US expansionism and economic nationalism

The US foreign policy has been deeply intertwined with the ideals of manifest destiny and expansionism since its early years. The Louisiana Purchase of 1803, the acquisition of Alaska in 1867, and the annexation of Hawaii and territories following the Spanish–American War are key events that highlight the US's longstanding ambitions for territorial and

economic growth (Gaddis, 2005). According to Hunt (2009), these territorial acquisitions were framed not only as extensions of American values but also as economic necessities to secure access to resources and trade routes. Scholars like Chomsky (2020) argue that American expansionism has always been driven by economic interests, often cloaked in the language of democracy promotion and global security.

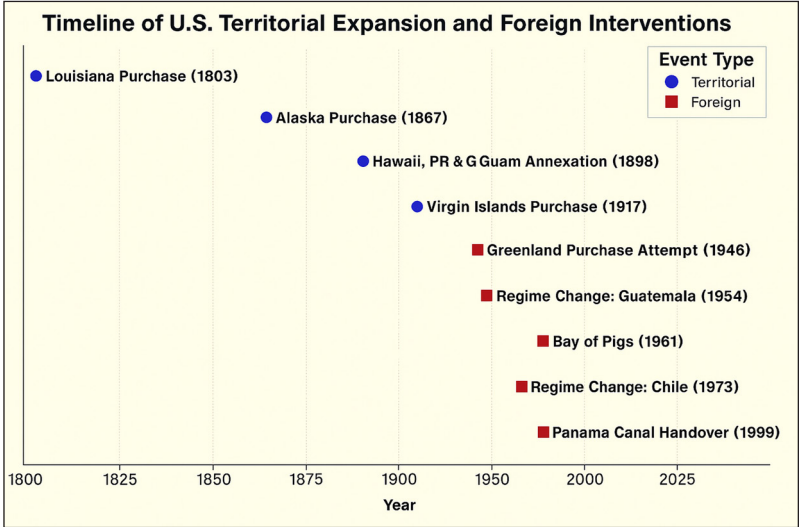


Figure 7.1: A graphical representation of key US territorial acquisitions and foreign interventions from 1803 to 1999

Source: Author's own

The role of the US in the Panama Canal and its influence in Latin America through regime change and military intervention (such as the Bay of Pigs invasion in 1961) reflect a history of imperial control designed to safeguard US economic and strategic interests in the Western Hemisphere (Grandin, 2006; Kinzer, 2007). Despite the rhetorical justifications of promoting democracy or human rights, the underlying motivations are often centred on economic control and geopolitical influence.

The economic nationalism of Trump and its historical continuities

Trump's 'America First' agenda can be seen as a revival of economic nationalism, a policy tradition that has ebbed and flowed throughout US history. Historically, economic nationalism in the US has involved the use of tariffs, protectionist trade policies and the support of domestic industries to strengthen national economic power. The Smoot-Hawley Tariff Act of 1930, for example, was a key example of the US retreating from global trade to prioritise domestic industries during the Great Depression (Miller, 2020). Trump's use of tariffs as a central feature of his economic policy reflects a protectionist agenda aimed at restoring American manufacturing jobs, reducing trade deficits, and decreasing dependence on foreign nations, such as China. Scholars such as Miller (2020) have noted that Trump's rhetoric around economic sovereignty and his blunt stance on trade renegotiations align with past protectionist moments in US history, when the nation sought to shield its domestic economy from global competition. The desire for economic self-sufficiency is also evident in Trump's approach to military and geopolitical influence, as seen in his repeated calls to control Greenland and reassert US dominance over international trade routes, such as the Panama Canal. As Hunt (2009) points out, these actions are not new but are part of a broader pattern of US interventionism in Latin America and the Caribbean, where American influence has historically been maintained through economic and military means.

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The modern implications: Trump as a reflection of America's global vision

Trump's 'America First' rhetoric has been controversial, however, it is firmly rooted in the traditions of American economic nationalism and imperial ambitions. As Chomsky (2020) and Gaddis (2005) argue, American foreign policy has often been characterised by a desire to control key economic assets such as the Panama Canal, oil reserves and trade routes, to safeguard its geopolitical and economic interests. Trump's bold

statements regarding Greenland, his interest in Canada and his aggressive stance on global trade underscore a return to economic protectionism that prioritises American power and wealth. These developments signal a renewed phase of economic nationalism where Trump, unlike past US presidents, openly embraces a more brazen and less diplomatically nuanced approach. Hunt (2009) notes that while past leaders justified such actions through the rhetoric of global security and democracy, Trump dispenses with these ideals in favour of blunt economic self-interest. In this context, Trump's policies reflect a modern resurgence of economic nationalism in the US, providing a point of reflection for other nations, including African countries, that seek to navigate the tensions between national autonomy and global integration. As African nations grapple with similar economic pressures, the US experience under Trump offers valuable insights into how economic nationalism can be employed to balance domestic priorities with the demands of global capitalism.

Economic nationalism: Origins and principles

Economic nationalism is an ideology that prioritises national control over economic policy, emphasising the protection and growth of domestic industries, employment and markets. It often manifests through tariffs, trade restrictions, subsidies for local businesses and strategic government intervention in the economy (Helleiner, 2002; Rodrik, 2018). The core belief is that economic independence strengthens national sovereignty and resilience. Historically, economic nationalism has been a common strategy for states seeking to build industrial capacity. The US, for example, employed protectionist tariffs throughout the nineteenth century to protect its emerging industries (Chang, 2002). Germany under Bismarck, post-war Japan and even modern-day China have used forms of economic nationalism to transition from weak or dependent economies into global industrial powers (Reinert, 2007). It is, therefore, not a relic of the past, but a strategy with ongoing relevance.

Capitalism: Dynamics and global reach

Capitalism, by contrast, is based on free market principles where the means of production are privately owned, and economic activity is driven by supply and demand. The system rewards competition, innovation and efficiency. Its primary aim is to create wealth through open exchange, entrepreneurship and limited state intervention (Friedman, 2002; Smith, [1776] 2003). Capitalism has been the dominant global economic model since the late twentieth century, particularly following the collapse of the Soviet Union. Institutions such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Bank, and the World Trade Organisation (WTO) have promoted capitalist reforms worldwide, particularly in developing nations (Peet, 2003; Stiglitz, 2003). In Africa, Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs) in the 1980s and 1990s, which emphasised liberalisation, privatisation and deregulation, were textbook applications of capitalist orthodoxy (Mkandawire and Soludo, 1999). While capitalism fosters growth and innovation, critics argue that it also leads to inequality, market failures and vulnerability to global shocks, particularly in underdeveloped economies with fragile infrastructure and limited industrial bases (Rodrik, 2011; Stiglitz, 2003).

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The tension and intersection

Though seemingly at odds, economic nationalism and capitalism are not mutually exclusive. In fact, many of today's most successful economies combine capitalist principles with nationalistic safeguards. China is a prime example, blending state capitalism with global market participation (Bremmer, 2010). The US, often seen as a bastion of free market capitalism, has also historically engaged in protectionist practices, especially under Trump (Miller, 2020; Rodrik, 2018). The real tension lies in the balance: capitalism promotes integration into the global economy, while economic nationalism emphasises self-reliance. Too much protectionism can stifle innovation and lead to inefficiency; too much openness can expose domestic industries to harmful competition and external dependency (Chang, 2002).

For African countries, the challenge is even more complex. Most African economies are heavily dependent on raw material exports, foreign investment, and aid (Mkandawire and Soludo, 1999; Taylor, 2016). This dependence limits policy flexibility and increases vulnerability to external shocks such as commodity price fluctuations or geopolitical crises. As such, blindly embracing capitalism without strategic safeguards may reinforce dependency rather than drive transformation (Acemoglu and Robinson, 2012; Rodrik, 2011).

Why this matters for Africa: The case for strategic economic nationalism

The stark developmental contrasts between a sample study of West Africa and the US, as highlighted in the comparative Table 7.1 below, underscore the urgency for African policymakers to chart a strategic economic path tailored to the continent's unique context. Despite West Africa's lower GDP per capita (~US\$2 200), compared to the US (~US\$83 000), its population size (~US\$430 million), resource endowments and emerging tech and fintech sectors position it for robust, independent economic development, if managed through a strategic hybrid of economic nationalism and capitalist engagement.

Table 7.1: A comparison table between West Africa and the US

Category	West Africa (as a single state)	United States of America
Countries included	16 countries (e.g., Nigeria, Ghana, Senegal, etc.)	50 states + Washington D.C.
Population	~430 million (2025 est.)	~334 million (2025 est.)
Area	~6.1 million km ²	~9.6 million km ²
GDP (nominal)	~\$950 billion (2024 est.)	~\$28 trillion (2024 est.)
GDP per capita	~\$2,200	~\$83,000
Major languages	English, French, Arabic, Hausa, Yoruba, Wolof, etc.	English (main), Spanish (growing), others
Currency	XOF, NGN,GHS, GMD, SLE, GNF etc.	US Dollar (US\$)
Natural resources	Oil, gas, gold, cocoa, bauxite, rubber, cotton	Oil, gas, agriculture, tech, industrial minerals
Technology/ Industry	Developing, with growing fintech, agriculture, mining	Advanced—global leader in tech, finance, defence
Climate	Tropical to semi-arid (Sahel), coastal humid	Arctic to tropical, desert

Source: Author’s own

The capacity for independent development

West Africa, if conceptualised as a single economic bloc, possesses significant human and natural resources. With approximately 5 million km² of land and vast reserves of oil, gas, gold, cocoa, bauxite and rubber, the region is not resource-poor (UNCTAD, 2022). These are critical assets that can drive industrialisation, if protected from exploitative global value chains. Drawing on Rodrik (2011), economic nationalism becomes essential here, not to retreat from global trade, but to provide policy space for infant industries to mature.

Dani Rodrik (2011: 70) argues that successful development often hinges on a state’s ability to ‘discipline globalisation’, meaning that countries must adopt heterodox policies that may go against global neoliberal norms in order to nurture domestic capacity. The US itself has historically done this from the early use of tariffs and subsidies to protect industries, to Trump’s more recent return to tariffs and trade renegotiations (Miller, 2020).

Similarly, West Africa's growing fintech, agriculture and mining sectors, despite being in a developing stage, show promising signs of endogenous capacity. While the US boasts advanced, global leadership in tech and finance, it took centuries of protected economic development to reach that point, often involving aggressive economic nationalism (Chang, 2002).

Why economic nationalism is a viable path

What makes economic nationalism especially relevant for Africa is the continent's history of SAPs and trade liberalisation that failed to yield inclusive growth (Mkandawire and Soludo, 1999). These externally imposed reforms often hollowed out local industries and increased dependency. Trump's unapologetic pursuit of US interests through tariffs, renegotiated trade deals and reduced foreign aid offers a contemporary example of how even global powers pursue self-interested policies under the guise of national development (Stiglitz, 2018; Taylor, 2016).

For African states, the takeaway is clear: embracing global capitalism does not require abandoning domestic priorities. Rather, a balanced model, as suggested by Acemoglu and Robinson (2012), emphasises strong institutions that can selectively engage the global economy while building internal resilience.

Policy relevance of the US-West Africa comparison

Table 7.1 further reveals that West Africa's larger population (430 million vs. 334 million in the US) offers a potentially large internal market, which can be used to scale industries if integrated and protected properly akin to the US model of continental economic integration. Moreover, with a tropical and semi-arid climate conducive to year-round agriculture and an increasingly educated and urbanised youth population, the region is well-positioned to drive its own industrial revolution if guided by intentional state-led planning. Currencies, languages and infrastructure fragmentation remain key challenges, however, they also represent areas where regional cooperation, not global dependence, can yield powerful

synergies. As the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) takes hold, opportunities for regional economic nationalism, develop as a bloc to protect and scale African industries to become even more viable.

Global responses: EU, China and the new protectionist order

The rise of Trump 2.0 and the resurgence of US economic nationalism did not occur in isolation. Rather, it intensified a global trend already underway, a shift from liberal globalisation toward strategic protectionism. Major economic powers like China and the EU have, in various forms, adopted their own versions of economic nationalism, contributing to the emergence of a new global protectionist order (Hopewell, 2021; Rodrik, 2020). This shift has profound implications for the Global South, particularly African nations, whose development paths are often shaped by external power structures (Taylor, 2020).

China: State capitalism as strategic nationalism

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China represents the most successful hybrid model of capitalism embedded within a nationalist framework. Its economic rise has been orchestrated through state-directed industrial policy, tight control over key sectors and aggressive global expansion via the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) (Naughton, 2018; Rolland, 2019). The Chinese state subsidises industries, restricts foreign ownership in strategic sectors and imposes technological transfer conditions on foreign investors (Kennedy, 2020).

Beijing's success shows that economic nationalism is not inherently incompatible with growth and globalisation. In fact, China has used the global capitalist system to its advantage while preserving autonomy over domestic economic priorities (Kroeber, 2016). For African leaders, this underscores the viability of pursuing global competitiveness without surrendering national control.

Trump's economic agenda was, in many ways, a direct reaction to China's economic rise. The US–China trade war was not just about trade imbalances, but about challenging the strategic threat posed by China's

state-led model (Bown, 2020). Africa, often caught between Chinese and Western economic influences, finds itself in the crossfire of this emerging bipolar global economy (Sun, 2019).

European Union: Defensive industrial policy

The EU, long a champion of free trade and multilateralism, has also begun to pivot toward economic self-preservation. Facing supply chain vulnerabilities and dependence on foreign technologies, the EU has launched policies like the European Industrial Strategy, aimed at boosting domestic innovation and reducing reliance on non-EU countries for critical technologies and raw materials (European Commission, 2020; Pisani-Ferry, 2021).

Post-COVID, the EU intensified efforts to protect 'strategic autonomy', especially in sectors such as pharmaceuticals, energy and digital infrastructure (Leonard et al., 2021). The Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism is another example of the EU adopting protectionist tools under the guise of environmental policy; a move likely to impact African exporters lacking green technology capacity (Bruegel, 2021).

A fractured global economic consensus

Together, these shifts by the US, China and the EU signify a fracturing of the global consensus that dominated the post-Cold War era. The WTO's authority has weakened, regional trade blocs have gained momentum and countries are increasingly using trade, aid and technology access as tools of strategic influence (Baldwin, 2016; Hopewell, 2021).

For African nations, this new landscape offers both risks and opportunities. On the one hand, increased global protectionism may shrink market access and reduce aid dependency (Friedman, 2020). On the other hand, it creates space for policy experimentation and South–South alliances, potentially enabling African states to assert greater economic agency (Adebajo, 2021).

Rather than passively absorbing the outcomes of great power competition, Africa can and must position itself as a shaper of its economic

destiny. Observing how major powers adapt their capitalist systems with nationalistic safeguards provides African policymakers with a spectrum of strategies to explore (Rodrik, 2020; Mkandawire, 2014).

African economies: Structural realities and policy vulnerabilities

To meaningfully assess what lessons Trump 2.0 and global economic nationalism offer for Africa, one must first understand the structural realities of African economies. Despite the diversity of the continent, many African countries share common developmental features, characterised by weak industrial bases, reliance on commodity exports and high vulnerability to external economic shocks (UNECA, 2020; McMillan, Page and Te Velde, 2017). These structural conditions create both limitations and openings in the quest for economic self-determination.

Overdependence on raw material exports

Many African economies are built on a narrow base of commodity exports, such as oil in Nigeria and Angola, copper in Zambia, cocoa in Ghana and Côte d'Ivoire and gold in South Africa and Tanzania (AfDB, 2021; UNCTAD, 2019). These sectors are capital-intensive, often foreign-owned, and generate limited employment. More importantly, they expose countries to price volatility on international markets, over which they have little control (Collier and Goderis, 2009).

This dependence on extractive industries mirrors the colonial economic model, where Africa served as a supplier of raw materials for industrial powers. In this context, integration into global capitalism has not fostered robust, diversified development, but rather a neo-colonial economic dependency (Amin, 1976; Mkandawire, 2014).

Weak industrialisation and manufacturing gaps

Industrialisation remains one of Africa's biggest economic challenges. The manufacturing sector contributes only around 10–12 per cent to GDP in many countries, compared to 25–30 per cent in East Asian economies at

similar stages of development (UNIDO, 2019; Lin, 2012). The lack of infrastructure, energy reliability, skilled labour and technology access has hindered African industrial growth (AfDB, 2020).

This structural gap is compounded by premature deindustrialisation, a phenomenon where countries lose manufacturing capacity before fully industrialising, due to exposure to cheap imports and unfavourable trade terms (Rodrik, 2016). The liberalisation promoted by structural adjustment programmes in the 1980s and 1990s accelerated this trend, dismantling tariffs and protective barriers without first building local competitiveness (Mkandawire and Soludo, 1999).

Aid dependency and external policy influence

Many African governments remain highly dependent on foreign aid and concessional loans, which limits their policy autonomy (Andrews, Pritchett and Woolcock, 2017; Moyo, 2009). Donor-driven development agendas, tied to neoliberal principles, have often prioritised macroeconomic stability over structural transformation (Stiglitz, 2003). Conditions imposed by institutions like the IMF and World Bank discourage strategic state intervention, despite historical evidence that such intervention has played a key role in most developed economies (Chang, 2002).

This external influence results in weak domestic policy sovereignty. Governments often lack the flexibility to impose tariffs, subsidise key industries, or protect infant sectors, all central to the economic nationalism pursued by Trump or China (Rodrik, 2007).

Fragmented regional markets

Another key challenge is the fragmentation of African markets. Despite the establishment of AfCFTA, intra-African trade remains below 20 per cent, compared to over 60 per cent in Europe (UNECA, 2021). Weak logistics, non-tariff barriers and political rivalries hamper the realisation of a truly integrated continental economy (Songwe, 2019).

Without regional coordination, African countries compete in global markets, rather than collaborate to scale industries or negotiate better

trade terms. This weakens their collective bargaining power and limits the potential for continental value chains to emerge (Signé and Van der Ven, 2019).

Political economy constraints

The political economy of reform in Africa is often shaped by elite interests, corruption and short-term electoral pressures (Booth and Golooba-Mutebi, 2012). Nationalistic policies such as subsidies, industrial policy or import restrictions require long-term planning and political consensus, which is frequently undermined by unstable governance and weak institutions (Acemoglu and Robinson, 2012).

Moreover, economic nationalism in Africa must be carefully managed to avoid crony capitalism, where protectionist policies benefit a small elite, rather than foster broad-based development (Kelsall, 2013).

Turning vulnerabilities into strategy

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While these challenges are real, they are not insurmountable. Trump 2.0 shows that even advanced economies are reconsidering the costs of hyper-globalisation. For Africa, the key is to transform structural weaknesses into strategic imperatives: use protection where it builds capacity; deploy capitalism where it stimulates competition and innovation and assert policy space where external pressures restrict domestic development goals (Rodrik, 2020; Taylor, 2020).

The next section explores how African countries can extract concrete insights from the Trump model to reframe their economic strategies and build resilient, sovereign economies.

Lessons from Trump 2.0 – A strategic framework for African development

Despite its divisive nature, Trump 2.0 offers several critical lessons for African countries grappling with the challenge of balancing economic nationalism and global capitalism. By critically examining Trump's economic policies, African nations can adapt

certain strategies to recalibrate their own development trajectories. The framework proposed in this section emphasises strategic autonomy, economic diversification and innovative industrial policies (Rodrik, 2020; Taylor, 2020).

Economic sovereignty and protection of domestic industries

One of the key pillars of Trump's economic nationalism was economic sovereignty, the idea that the US must prioritise its own industries, jobs, and national interests in a globalised world (Bown and Irwin, 2019). For Africa, the lesson here is that economic sovereignty must be central to development strategy.

While global trade has brought benefits, African nations must learn to protect strategic sectors such as agriculture, manufacturing and technology. These sectors should not be left to the whims of global markets, but rather should be nurtured through carefully crafted protectionist policies, such as tariffs on goods that could undermine local industries (Chang, 2002; Rodrik, 2007).

African governments could adopt infant industry protection measures for key sectors, such as automotive manufacturing, textiles, pharmaceuticals, and technology, all of which are critical to reducing dependency on foreign goods (UNCTAD, 2019). By strengthening these industries, African countries can diversify their economies and reduce reliance on raw material exports (Lin, 2012).

Innovation and competition as catalysts for growth

At the same time, Trump's embrace of competition and innovation in sectors such as technology, defence and pharmaceuticals also offer lessons (Muro et al., 2020). Trump's tax cuts and deregulation efforts aimed at fostering entrepreneurship and private sector innovation underscore the importance of creating environments conducive to business growth (White House, 2018). For African countries, fostering entrepreneurial ecosystems is critical. By incentivising local start-ups, creating favourable tax regimes for small businesses and investing in

education and training, African nations can begin to shift from being passive consumers of technology to active producers (Signé, 2020).

In addition, to spur innovation, African governments must ensure that research and development (R&D) receive adequate funding and support (AfDB, 2020). For instance, countries like Kenya and Nigeria have seen success with digital innovation in mobile banking and agritech (World Bank, 2019). By investing in such sectors, African countries can develop the technological autonomy that is essential for sustainable development.

Bilateral trade agreements and regional cooperation

Trump's rejection of multilateral trade agreements in favour of bilateral trade deals demonstrates the importance of tailoring economic agreements to national priorities (Evenett and Fritz, 2020). African countries should pursue bilateral agreements that focus on fostering intra-Africa trade and securing access to critical global markets.

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The AfCFTA presents a golden opportunity for African nations to pool resources, reduce trade barriers and build regional supply chains (UNECA, 2021). However, individual countries must also negotiate directly with other major powers to secure favourable trade terms (Signé and Van der Ven, 2019).

By adopting a strategic mix of multilateral and bilateral agreements, African countries can increase their negotiating power and begin to shift the terms of trade in their favour. This means making trade deals that focus not only on exports, but also on technology transfer, skills development and industrial investment (UNCTAD, 2021).

Leveraging the global supply chain - Reshoring and strategic autonomy

Trump's reshoring policy, which aims to bring manufacturing back to the US from overseas, is driven by the desire to reduce dependency on foreign nations for critical goods and services (Office of Trade and Manufacturing Policy, 2020). While Africa cannot fully reshape global supply chains in

the same way, it can leverage its role in global value chains to increase the value-added activities within its own borders (Gereffi, 2018).

For instance, rather than simply exporting raw materials like minerals, oil and agricultural products, African countries should push for downstream processing within their own borders (UNIDO, 2020). By developing refining, processing and manufacturing capacities, African nations can increase the local economic value derived from these commodities.

Additionally, strategic autonomy in sectors such as energy, healthcare and agriculture is essential (Rodrik, 2020). Africa can explore alternative energy sources like solar and wind, which not only address energy access issues but also offer new opportunities for job creation and technological innovation (IRENA, 2021).

Aligning national priorities with global trends

170 Trump's second term was marked by policy recalibration that aligned national goals with global trends, particularly in technology and innovation (Muro et al., 2020). While Africa should assert its sovereignty, it must also recognise the importance of engaging with the global economy, especially in emerging sectors such as renewable energy, artificial intelligence and biotechnology (Signé, 2020).

African countries must identify global megatrends and align their development goals accordingly. For example, as the world transitions toward a green economy, African nations can invest in sustainable industries such as electric vehicles, green energy and eco-friendly agriculture (AfDB, 2021). These sectors offer not only environmental benefits, but also economic opportunities in the long term (OECD, 2020).

A balanced, nationally focused globalism

Trump 2.0's economic nationalism offers valuable insights into how African countries can rethink their place in the global economy. The key lesson is that Africa can embrace global capitalism without becoming

subordinate to it. By striking a balance between strategic protectionism and innovation-driven competition, African countries can build resilient, diversified economies that are self-sustaining, globally competitive, and strategically autonomous (Rodrik, 2020; Taylor, 2020).

The future of African development depends not only on participating in the global market, but on actively shaping the terms of that participation. Drawing lessons from Trump's economic nationalism, African policymakers can craft development strategies that prioritise domestic industries, stimulate innovation and ensure that the continent's economic growth is grounded in self-reliance and sovereignty.

Conclusion and policy recommendations

In the face of rising economic nationalism, exemplified by Trump 2.0, African countries find themselves at a pivotal moment in their development journey. The tension between economic nationalism and global capitalism presents both challenges and opportunities. By examining Trump's policies and the experiences of other global powers, African policymakers can identify strategies that will allow them to navigate this evolving global landscape effectively.

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The lessons from Trump 2.0 underscore the importance of economic sovereignty, protecting local industries, fostering innovation and asserting policy space in the face of global competition. However, this must not lead to self-isolation. Capitalism, with its emphasis on innovation, competition and global integration, remains an essential driver of economic growth. Thus, a balanced approach is required, one that combines elements of protectionism for strategic sectors with active participation in global markets to access new technologies, capital and trade partnerships.

Policy recommendations

1. Develop national industrial strategies: Focus on diversifying the economy, particularly in manufacturing, technology and renewable energy. Protectionist policies should be used judiciously to support nascent industries.

2. Encourage innovation and technology transfer: Invest in R&D and entrepreneurial ecosystems, focusing on sectors that can drive long-term growth.
3. Strengthen regional integration: Fully implement AfCFTA and invest in regional infrastructure to boost intra-Africa trade and collective bargaining power.
4. Build strategic autonomy in critical sectors: Focus on achieving self-sufficiency in areas like energy, agriculture and healthcare, reducing reliance on external powers.
5. Create long-term vision plans: Foster political stability and long-term economic planning that balances national goals with global integration.

By embracing these recommendations, African nations can create economies that are both self-sustaining and globally competitive, setting a new course for sustainable development in the twenty-first century.

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CHAPTER 8

Assessing the Effects of Trump's 2.0 Tariffs on Africa's Export Competitiveness

Abdulrasheed Abdulyakeen

Introduction

Considering the continuing trade war between the United States (US) and China, the tariff policies implemented under Trump's 2.0 presidency have had a substantial impact on the global trading landscape. The immediate consequences of these tariffs on the US and China have received much attention, however, little is known about how these policies have impacted Sub-Saharan African nations, particularly in terms of their ability to compete internationally. Understanding how shifts in global trade dynamics, especially US tariffs, impact African countries' standing in international markets is essential as their economies are depending more on trade (Adebajo, 2025; Cohen, 2025; Dube, 2025). Africa's export industries, such as manufacturing, mining and agriculture, are vital to many of the continent's economies. However, traditional trade flows have been interrupted by the US's imposition of tariffs and other protectionist measures, pushing African nations to adapt to new economic realities. With uncertainty surrounding global commerce, some nations have been able to diversify their trading partnerships, while others have found it difficult to keep their competitive edge. With an emphasis on how the continent has dealt with the difficulties presented by these trade policies, this study attempts to evaluate how Trump's 2.0 tariffs have affected Africa's export competitiveness. This study will advance knowledge of the wider effects of the US–China trade war on Africa's trading environment by analysing the effects on important industries like manufacturing, energy and agriculture.

Global trade patterns have changed significantly as a result of the Trump's 2.0 tariffs, especially the trade war with China. The studies currently available on the indirect consequences of these policies on Sub-Saharan African nations are lacking, nonetheless. Africa's distinct role in international trade receives little attention in most of the studies currently accessible, which mostly concentrates on the effects of the US–China trade war on established economies or emerging markets. Particularly, there are not many thorough studies on how US tariffs on Chinese goods have impacted the export competitiveness of African nations, which rely significantly on the sale of raw materials. African countries are frequently stuck between the US trade policies and China's increasing economic might, making this research gap crucial. Some African nations continue to rely on conventional markets, such as the US, while others have bolstered their commercial relations with China. African countries may have trouble retaining market access and obtaining advantageous conditions for their goods, since US tariffs have hampered trade with China. By evaluating how Trump's tariffs have impacted Africa's capacity to compete in global markets and the wider ramifications for trade policy in the area, the current study aims to fill this gap.

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Trump's trade war and global trade dynamics

President Donald Trump started the trade war between the US and China in 2018, and it had a significant impact on both countries' economies as well as the dynamics of international commerce. Global supply networks, international trade flows and the overall economic environment were all altered by the US tariffs placed on Chinese imports and the subsequent retaliatory tariffs from China on US exports. This dispute, which was fuelled by Trump's 'America First' trade policy, was centred on lowering the trade gap between the US and China, resolving issues with intellectual property theft and stopping what were seen as unfair trade practices by China (Mbeya, 2025; Sachs, 2025). Sub-Saharan African nations and other places that depend on international commerce for economic growth and development were among those affected, however, the effects went well beyond the US and China.

Several increasing tariffs were imposed during the Trump administration's trade war, impacting goods valued at hundreds of billions of dollars. Targeting important sectors such as electronics, manufacturing and consumer goods, the US levied a 25 per cent tariff on US\$34 billion worth of Chinese imports in 2018. These levies' reach grew over time, impacting an additional US\$200 billion in Chinese imports. China responded by enacting taxes on American imports, including consumer and industrial goods, as well as agricultural products such as soybeans. Trump asserted that unfair state subsidies, forced technology transfers and intellectual property theft were all part of China's trade policies, and he sought to rectify the trade imbalance between the US and China (Sharma, 2025; Stewart and Thorbecke, 2025). Established supply networks were significantly impacted by this trade war, particularly those that relied heavily on Chinese manufacturing. As a global centre for low-cost manufacturing, China has become an essential link in the supply chain for goods used by people worldwide, including many African countries. African economies, which often export raw materials and import finished goods, were indirectly affected by tariffs that disrupted these global supply chains.

In several respects, the US–China trade war changed the nature of international trade. First, it forced businesses to reconsider their sourcing strategy by upsetting long-standing trade flows. Businesses searched for alternate manufacturing sites abroad, especially in Southeast Asia, Latin America and to a lesser extent, Africa, as tariffs increased the cost of Chinese goods on the American market. Although it was difficult to scale up production to meet the new global demand, several African nations, especially those with lower labour costs, were seen as possible winners of this change. Second, the trade war made the world economy more uncertain. Other regions saw market volatility and economic slowdowns as a result of the trade friction between the two biggest economies in the world. For example, the African Development Bank (2025) stated that the US–China trade war had a negative impact on international investment, commodity prices and economic stability by slowing global growth. Due to their heavy reliance on commodity exports, several African nations were left exposed to changes in global demand and prices brought on by the trade war.

Africa's export competitiveness was indirectly harmed by the US–China trade war, even though it had a direct influence on international trade ties. Africa exports a wide range of minerals, agricultural products and raw materials to China and the US, resulting in substantial trade between the two nations. African nations that relied on American markets and Chinese manufacturing for their exports faced new difficulties as the trade war upended global supply chains. Price instability was one of the main effects of the trade war on African exports. The market for African exports, especially those linked to Chinese demand, became increasingly erratic as tariffs on Chinese commodities increased the production costs for global supply chains. The shifting dynamics of the US–China trade war have an impact on price swings for African commodities like copper, oil and cobalt, which are essential to the Chinese manufacturing sector. African exporters, thus, faced difficulties in accessing markets and dealing with price volatility (Zhou and Njoroge, 2025; Zou and Tang, 2025). Furthermore, African nations that shipped agricultural goods to the US and China were entangled in the trade dispute. African exporters had the chance to close gaps in the Chinese market as a result of China's retaliatory tariffs on American agricultural products. These chances, however, were frequently fleeting and heavily reliant on the dynamic political environment of the US–China relationship. African nations that sell wine, fruits and vegetables to China, such as South Africa and Kenya, may have seen a brief increase in exports; however, they also had to contend with escalating competition from other emerging countries looking to break into the Chinese market.

Although African nations faced both possibilities and difficulties due to the US–China trade war, the overall effects have been complex. On the one hand, African countries with a wealth of natural resources and lower labour costs were able to take advantage of the opportunities that the changing global supply chains presented. As businesses looked to move their manufacturing operations outside of China, nations with thriving manufacturing industries, such as Ethiopia and Kenya, were able to draw in foreign investment. However, many African countries struggled to take advantage of these chances. One important barrier is the absence of infrastructure and industrial capability. Although several African nations

aimed to gain from changes in supply chains, many lacked the labour and manufacturing capacity needed to satisfy the demands of international markets. Furthermore, it was challenging for the continent to integrate into the global supply chain in more developed sectors, because of its reliance on exporting low-value commodities and raw materials. The trade war between the US and China also brought attention to how susceptible African economies are to outside economic shocks. Many African nations found themselves at risk of economic instability as global markets became increasingly volatile and commodities prices varied. To reduce the impact of external shocks, this vulnerability highlighted the necessity of economic diversification and increased reliance on intra-African trade (Dube, 2025; Ghosh and Milner, 2025).

African nations were forced to re-evaluate their trade strategies because of the changing global trade dynamics brought about by Trump's trade war. African countries started looking into new markets as the US–China conflict upended established trade patterns, especially within the African continent. To lessen Africa's reliance on outside markets and boost intra-African commerce, initiatives such as the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), which aims to establish a single continental market for goods and services, have attracted increased attention. The AfCFTA is viewed as a crucial tactic to lessen the adverse effects of disruptions in global trade by promoting regional integration, which may increase Africa's negotiating leverage in global trade. However, for African nations to take advantage of intracontinental trade potential, AfCFTA will require large expenditures in technology, infrastructure and regulatory frameworks (Rutherford and Van Besebroeck, 2025).

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Impact on African agricultural exports

Cocoa, coffee, cotton, tobacco and other agricultural exports are major sources of income for many African nations. African agricultural products were directly impacted by the tariffs imposed by the Trump administration, both in terms of competitiveness with Chinese exports and changes in global demand. According to Stewart and Thorbecke (2025), the trade war led to large price swings that impacted the demand for raw materials,

posing problems for the global agriculture industry. Global commodity price fluctuations brought on by tariffs disproportionately affected African nations that depend on exporting to China. For instance, it became more difficult for African producers to be competitive because of rising competition from other international suppliers for African coffee and cocoa exports to the US and other markets. Significant repercussions for African agricultural exports were among the many effects of the Trump administration's US–China trade war on international trade. African nations are particularly susceptible to changes in international trade patterns and tariffs, since they are significant exporters of agricultural products like cocoa, coffee, tea, tobacco and fresh fruit. African agricultural producers and exporters were directly impacted by the trade war between the US and China, which changed market access and consumer demand for agricultural products, and increased price volatility. With an emphasis on market disruptions, price volatility and the changing dynamics of global trade, this section examines the direct and indirect implications of the US–China trade war on agricultural exports from Africa.

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Market disruptions resulted from the Trump administration's tariffs on Chinese goods, including agricultural items, especially in the agricultural sector. China retaliated by placing duties on US agricultural exports, such as soybeans, cotton and pork, in response to the US placing tariffs on Chinese goods worth billions of dollars. African nations attempted to fill the void this produced in the Chinese market (Lopes and Nweke, 2025; Mwanza, 2025). For example, when US agricultural exports were priced out of the market, nations that export agricultural products like fruit, wine and vegetables, such as South Africa, Kenya and Ghana, saw an opportunity to boost exports to China. In certain instances, African nations could profit from this change by exploiting China's demand for substitute suppliers of goods like cotton and soybeans. These chances, though, were frequently fleeting and heavily reliant on the shifting political climate of the trade war between the US and China. African agricultural exporters' access to conventional markets was also hampered by the tariffs. African nations that depended significantly on exports to China occasionally experienced payment delays, a decline in order volumes and heightened rivalry from other international providers looking to take the place of

American exporters. African producers encountered obstacles such as limited marketing reach, logistical problems and regulatory impediments that hindered their capacity to fully benefit from the changing trade dynamics as they looked for new markets.

African agricultural exports are extremely vulnerable to changes in world prices, and the trade war between the US and China made matters worse. Price volatility resulted from the uncertainty created by the tariffs on agricultural commodities markets. Global demand for substitute suppliers, especially African nations, varied in response to price fluctuations and shifting trade flows when China placed tariffs on US agricultural products. For instance, there was significant volatility in the prices of important agricultural exports from Africa, like wine, coffee and cocoa. According to Sachs (2025), the trade war caused agricultural product prices to fluctuate, which made it challenging for African farmers to forecast their revenue and make long-term investment plans. Price volatility had a direct effect on farmers in Ghana and Côte d'Ivoire, where smallholder producers found it difficult to sustain steady revenue levels in the case of cocoa, one of the continent's most significant exports. Furthermore, because the trade war had a knock-on effect on commodity markets, African farmers—especially those cultivating cash crops—were vulnerable to worldwide price shocks. African nations found it more difficult to negotiate long-term trade agreements and investments because of the uncertainty created by fluctuating tariffs, which also damaged investor confidence in the continent's agricultural sectors.

African nations were compelled to reassess their economic alliances and policies due to the global trade disruptions caused by the US–China trade war. The tariffs had an impact on agricultural exports from Africa, however, several nations tried to expand their trade networks and find new customers. For instance, the horticultural industry in Kenya, which exports fruits, vegetables and flowers to the US and Europe, has endeavoured to broaden its scope to include the Middle East and Asia (Kumar and Vines, 2025). Similarly, South Africa, which exports wine and fresh food to China and the US, began to diversify its trading partners by increasing exports to countries inside the European Union (EU), as well as to other rising markets in Asia and Africa. However, because

African agricultural exports frequently encounter obstacles relating to tariffs, transportation facilities and regulatory frameworks, these attempts were compounded by logistical issues. By encouraging intra-African trade, AfCFTA, which went into effect in 2021, gives African nations the chance to lessen their reliance on outside markets. Through AfCFTA, African agricultural producers can access new regional markets with lower tariffs, which can mitigate the effects of foreign trade wars, like the US–China trade war.

184 Although some African countries had the chance to boost their agricultural exports to China, several obstacles prevented Africa from completely replacing the agricultural exports from the US that were impacted by the tariffs. First, African agricultural sectors frequently lack the infrastructure, technological capacity and production scale necessary to satisfy China's high demand for agricultural products. For instance, although nations like Ghana and Côte d'Ivoire produce a lot of cocoa, they are not as capable at exporting goods like soybeans, which the US used to be a big exporter of to China. Furthermore, smallholder farmers continue to dominate the African agricultural sector, despite obstacles to financing, land ownership and access to contemporary farming equipment. These limitations make it more difficult for the industry to swiftly increase output and satisfy changing demand around the world. African farmers have thus found it difficult to fully capitalise on the opportunities brought about by the US–China trade war, particularly in markets that demand steady, large-scale supplies (Cohen, 2025; Mbeya, 2025). Africa's agricultural value chains were also significantly impacted by the trade war. The agricultural industries in many African nations are intricately linked to international supply networks, especially for goods like cocoa, tea and coffee. Both producers' upstream and downstream businesses, like processing and packaging, were impacted by the disruption of these global supply chains, especially due to tariff increases and trade uncertainties. Furthermore, the wider trade uncertainty brought about by the tariffs had an impact on foreign direct investment (FDI) in Africa's agricultural sector, which is essential for market access, technology adoption and infrastructure development. Investors grew increasingly wary as US–China trade ties deteriorated, especially in industries that were highly susceptible to global

market swings. The expansion and competitiveness of Africa's agricultural industry are impacted by this decreased investment.

The US–China trade war's long-term effects for African agricultural exports are still developing. While some African countries were able to take advantage of some opportunities, the overall impact remains uneven. African agricultural exporters will likely continue to face challenges from the disruption of international agricultural markets and the volatility of commodity prices. Additionally, Africa's capacity to effectively compete in international markets may be hampered by the move toward protectionist trade policies in the US and other regions. In the longer term, African nations may need to invest in agricultural diversification, infrastructure improvements and technology adoption to strengthen their competitiveness. Expanding regional markets through initiatives like AfCFTA will also be vital for minimising reliance on foreign markets that are subject to global trade conflicts.

Why trade diversification is vital for Africa

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Reducing economic sensitivity to changes in commodity prices is one of the primary advantages of trade diversification. Economic instability can result from external shocks to African nations that rely significantly on agricultural exports, gold or oil. African nations can establish a more stable economic climate that is less dependent on the volatility of raw commodity markets by diversifying into other industries, including manufacturing, technology and services. For example, nations like Nigeria or Angola have significant economic setbacks when the price of oil declines globally. These consequences can be lessened by diversifying into sectors including light manufacturing, tourism and information technology (IT). According to Adebajo (2025), expanding the economic base through diversification promotes long-term economic resilience. Economies are more resilient to changes in market demand, trade interruptions and global economic crises when they have several thriving sectors. In addition to being more resilient to outside shocks, nations with a wide variety of exports are also better equipped to draw in consistent FDI in a variety of sectors. By fostering intraregional trade and lowering

dependency on external markets, regional economic integration, such as that achieved through AfCFTA, is essential to improving economic resilience. One of the most important ways to increase competitiveness is to shift from exporting raw materials to value-added products (such as processed goods or high-tech services). Countries can boost their trade revenue and solidify their place in international markets by raising the value of their exports. For instance, African nations like Ghana or Côte d'Ivoire should concentrate on developing cocoa processing companies to make chocolate and other goods, rather than exporting raw cocoa beans. This strategy can boost African economies' overall competitiveness in international markets, improve the trade balance and generate jobs.

Industrialisation, the process by which economies shift from being largely dependent on agriculture and raw materials to being based on manufacturing and services, is made possible by trade diversification. In addition to increasing economic growth, industrialisation raises living standards and creates jobs. By generating value-added industries, the growth of the manufacturing sector, which includes electronics, cars and textiles, plays a crucial part in changing the economy. Infrastructure investments, innovation promotion and targeted policies can all help to support this transition. One of the most promising instruments for increasing trade diversity throughout the continent is AfCFTA, which came into play in 2021. By removing barriers to intra-African trade, AfCFTA enables African countries to access new markets within the continent, encouraging industrialisation and broadening the range of goods sold. By taking advantage of the sizable, unexplored intra-African market, African nations can diversify their exports. More diverse economies can be built on the foundation of the ease with which capital, goods and services can be moved across international borders. According to studies, if African nations can lower trade obstacles such as tariffs and non-tariff measures, intra-African commerce might rise dramatically (Mbeya, 2025; Mwanza, 2025).

Poor infrastructure is one of the main obstacles to trade diversification. Lack of connectivity, ineffective ports and inadequate transportation networks can all impede trade and raise operating costs. African nations must place a high priority on enhancing digital infrastructure

like broadband internet and mobile connectivity, as well as physical infrastructure like ports, airports, railroads and highways, to promote trade diversification. In addition to lowering transaction costs, infrastructure investments will make it possible for new sectors to emerge, such as digital services and e-commerce, which can increase competitiveness and diversify exports. A key factor in promoting trade diversification is human capital. The development of new industries, such as technology, manufacturing and services, requires a competent labour force. African countries must invest in education and vocational training programmes to equip workers with the skills needed to support the growth of varied industries (International Trade Centre, 2025). For example, a focus on STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) education can help generate a workforce capable of thriving in high-tech areas like information technology, biotechnology and digital finance, which are increasingly crucial in global trade.

Innovation and technology are important forces behind competitiveness. African countries must embrace technology improvements to increase the quality and competitiveness of their exports. This includes investing in R&D, adopting modern manufacturing techniques and supporting entrepreneurship in emerging industries like fintech, e-commerce and renewable energy. Precision farming and agro-processing technology are two examples of agricultural innovations that can boost value addition and raise the competitiveness of African agricultural exports. New trade prospects can be facilitated by digital platforms and mobile applications, especially for small- and medium-sized businesses (SMEs) and small firms. SMEs are frequently the foundation of economic diversification; however, they confront several obstacles, such as restricted financial access, a lack of market knowledge and poor infrastructure. Policies and initiatives that support SMEs' expansion by giving them access to money, training and markets should be developed by governments and development partners. Further diversification can be achieved by assisting entrepreneurs who invent and produce new goods, as this can result in the development of new industries and export revenue streams.

The impact of tariffs on African manufacturing sectors

One of the most widely used tools in trade policy is a tariff, which is a tax levied on imports. Tariffs have a significant impact on economies, especially in developing nations like Africa, where the manufacturing sector is frequently in its infancy or underdeveloped. Depending on their design and implementation, tariffs have the potential to both support regional industries and cause difficulties for production. Tariffs have a wide range of consequences on the manufacturing sector in African nations, affecting everything from foreign investment to domestic production.

According to Sachs (2025), safeguarding home sectors from overseas competition is one of the main reasons governments impose tariffs. When it comes to African manufacturing, tariffs can provide several protective advantages: The problem of low-cost imports oversaturating local marketplaces affects several African nations. Local manufacturers may be weakened by imported goods, which are often produced more cheaply in countries with developed manufacturing sectors. Tariffs increase the price of these imports, giving domestic producers a competitive edge. Tariffs can act as a kind of protection for developing industries that are not yet competitive on the international scene for nations attempting to expand their manufacturing sectors. This gives local businesses time to grow and improve their efficiency before they must contend with fierce worldwide competition. Tariffs can incentivise firms and consumers to purchase locally produced items by raising the cost of imports. This can boost the market for goods made in the country, encouraging producers to boost output, develop new ideas and grow their businesses. For example, local manufacturers may increase their efforts to meet demand and invest in manufacturing capacity when tariffs are placed on imported vehicles. Tariffs have several drawbacks for African manufacturing sectors, even though they can provide protection (Sharma, 2025; Kumar and Vines, 2025). To create their final items, many African businesses depend on imported intermediates and raw materials. Tariffs on these inputs increase production costs for domestic producers, making it more difficult for them to compete both domestically and abroad. A tariff on imported equipment or parts, for instance, may make it more expensive

to produce manufactured items in Africa, which would raise consumer costs. Manufacturers' profit margins will be reduced if they are unable to pass on the increased input costs to customers (due to price sensitivity or competition). This may restrict the manufacturer's capacity to grow their business, increase productivity or reinvest in technology.

Consumer prices frequently increase because of tariffs on imported items. Tariffs may shield domestic producers, however, if input costs rise, so too may the price of items made in the country. For instance, local producers that depend on imported fertilisers, equipment or packing materials may see a rise in the cost of locally produced food if a tariff is placed on imported food items. As cheaper imported goods become more expensive or less available, customers may have fewer options in the marketplace because of increasing tariffs. This might make it more difficult for those in lower-income groups to obtain high-quality goods and services (Ghosh and Milner, 2025). Trade partners frequently retaliate against tariffs, which can hurt other economic sectors. For instance, the exporting nation (like the EU or China) may impose its own tariffs on African exports, like agricultural items or raw materials, in retaliation for an African nation's imposition of taxes on imported automobiles. This has the potential to reduce export earnings and affect the entire economy, including non-manufacturing industries. Negotiating trade agreements with other countries or regional blocs may be challenging for states that impose high tariffs. For instance, taxes on essential inputs may make local goods more costly than those from other countries, which would limit Africa's ability to participate in global value chains. Tariffs on technology and machinery may make it more difficult to improve production methods, which would lower local manufacturing's overall competitiveness.

One of the primary focuses of regional trade policy is the AfCFTA, which aims to reduce trade barriers and increase intra-African trade. Tariffs between African nations are being lowered or removed under the AfCFTA framework in an effort to promote industrialisation and increase intraregional trade. AfCFTA's goal is to lower intra-African trade barriers, which will result in lower prices for goods and services and a more integrated market. Giving producers access to less expensive raw materials, intermediate goods and even completed goods from other African nations

can help African manufacturing. Additionally, it creates new markets for domestically produced manufactured items. African nations can create regional manufacturing value chains with lower tariffs. An electronics product, for instance, may be put together with components from several African nations, fostering a more competitive and effective manufacturing industry throughout the continent (African Development Bank, 2025). Even though AfCFTA seeks to lower tariffs, African nations continue to have disparate trade policies and tariff systems, which could make integration more difficult. Lowering import duties that could hurt their fledgling industries may make nations with heavily protected industrial sectors hesitant. It is still quite difficult to get consistent tariff rates across African countries. Despite lowering tariffs within Africa, AfCFTA does not fully shield African producers from lower-priced imports from other countries. Open trade policies may make it difficult for nations to compete with the cheap commodities made in nations like China, particularly in sectors like electronics and textiles.

190 Policymakers, academics and international organisations are increasingly in agreement that Africa requires a fair tariff policy. On the one hand, protective tariffs might lessen dependency on imports and foster the growth of regional manufacturing sectors. Conversely, overprotection in the form of high tariffs can result in reduced competitiveness, increased costs and inefficiency. Many analysts advise African nations to implement targeted and ‘smart’ protectionist policies—such as time-bound tariffs or tariffs targeted at particular industries that are essential for long-term economic growth and diversification—instead of imposing broad tariffs. The sector’s overall competitiveness can be raised by policies that prioritise the development of value-added sectors like processing and assembly over the export of raw materials alone. By concentrating on export-led policies, several African nations, like those in East Asia, have seen notable growth in their manufacturing sectors. Export-driven growth helps to spur innovation, improve production efficiencies and offer access to wider global markets. However, African manufacturing must concentrate on cutting costs, enhancing product quality and using technology in order to compete in international markets.

The role of African trade policy in addressing the challenges of US tariffs

African economies face major obstacles because of US tariffs on African goods, especially as they work to expand and diversify their trade sectors. One of Africa's most significant trading partners historically, has been the US, and new tariff policies may influence anything from industrial development to export growth. To overcome these obstacles and lessen the detrimental effects of US tariffs on their economies, African nations must make the most of their trade policies. Therefore, African trade policy must be flexible, strategic and centred on strengthening intraregional economic integration as well as reducing external threats.

According to Friedman (2025), US tariffs can reduce the competitiveness of African exports in the US market, particularly when they are applied to textiles, agricultural products and specific industrial goods. For instance, US tariffs impact African agricultural products such as cocoa, coffee and specific minerals, raising their prices and decreasing their appeal to American consumers. Preferential trade agreements with the US, like the African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA), benefit Africa by granting duty-free access to a large number of African goods. However, these advantages may be compromised, and African nations' incentives to export to the US may be diminished if the US imposes taxes on particular African items. African producers must contend with established exporters like China, India and Southeast Asia, who frequently enjoy lower tariffs or better trade terms, in addition to other developing nations, when African goods are subject to higher tariffs in the US. These nations might be able to provide goods at reduced costs, which would further strain African exports. To boost its industrial and manufacturing sectors, several African nations import raw materials, machinery and equipment from the US. Tariffs imposed by the US on these goods may raise production costs and hinder Africa's capacity to establish competitive manufacturing industries. For instance, production prices may increase for African manufacturers who depend on American industrial goods or intermediate items, lowering the competitiveness of their final products, both domestically and abroad.

Considering these obstacles, African nations must create strong

trade policies that can mitigate the effects of US tariffs and improve their trading positions, both domestically and internationally. African trade policy can be used in several ways: One of the most effective ways for African countries to respond to US tariffs is to reduce their reliance on the US market by increasing intra-Africa trade. AfCFTA, which was established in 2021, aspires to create a single market for products and services throughout the continent by lowering trade barriers and harmonising regulations. By improving regional integration, AfCFTA helps African countries shift their focus from US exports to intra-regional trade, offering a bigger market for African commodities. This can help counterbalance the negative impact of US tariffs by opening new trade opportunities within the continent. AfCFTA can enable African nations to build regional value chains, where raw materials or intermediate items are exchanged and processed within the continent, reducing dependency on foreign markets like the US for both raw materials and manufactured products (Cohen, 2025; Mbeya, 2025).

192 African countries should diversify their trade contacts to lessen exposure to US tariffs. African products may find new markets if commercial relations with nations in Asia, the EU and the Middle East are strengthened. To offset the difficulties caused by US tariffs, trade with China, which has grown to be one of Africa's biggest trading partners, can be increased. African countries can reach alternative markets that might not impose comparable tariffs by concentrating on non-traditional trading partners. African nations ought to investigate prospects in developing regions including the Caribbean, Southeast Asia and Latin America. These areas might present chances to increase commerce and discover fresh markets for African goods. African nations can lessen the effects of US tariffs by increasing their own competitiveness, especially through the development of their infrastructure. The ability for African manufacturers to compete with other international producers, notably those from nations with lower tariff barriers than the US, can be improved by investments in digital infrastructure, energy and transportation. To increase the effectiveness of cross-border trade both inside and outside of Africa, infrastructure investments in ports, airports, highways and railroads are crucial. This can lessen dependency on any one trading

partner and make it easier to move goods to other markets.

Under trade accords like AGOA, African nations can also bargain collectively and diplomatically for better terms with the US. In the context of AfCFTA, African leaders might collaborate through regional organisations such as the African Union and the African Development Bank to advocate for reduced tariffs and advantageous trade terms. While AfCFTA can reduce tariffs within Africa, countries may also pursue trade agreements with other global powers. Negotiating free trade agreements with the US, the EU or China that include more favourable terms or tariff reductions, could help offset the negative effects of US tariffs. African countries should support policies that stimulate domestic processing of raw resources into higher-value goods. By adding value domestically, African countries can better compete in global markets by producing more advanced and diversified products. Even with US tariffs in place, creating export processing zones where businesses can obtain tax breaks and other advantages, could increase African exports by making them more competitive. To make sectors more competitive, African governments should also support innovation and the uptake of new technology. This entails implementing sophisticated production methods, including automation, and assisting sectors with the rising demand around the world, like electronics and renewable energy.

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To make commerce simpler and more effective, African nations must enhance customs processes, lower trade obstacles and simplify regulatory frameworks. Institutions capable of managing cross-border trade and making sure that taxes and charges are applied in a way that supports regional sectors are necessary for the successful implementation of trade agreements such as AfCFTA. Governments can implement programmes that provide financial support, export credit and insurance to assist African exporters in overcoming the difficulties presented by tariffs. Exporters may be encouraged to diversify into new markets as a result of the decreased financial risks.

The future of African export competitiveness post-Trump tariff

The effects of the Trump administration's US tariffs are still influencing

African trade dynamics as 2025 approaches. However, African nations now have new chances to boost their export competitiveness due to the evolving global political environment, the Biden administration's changes to US trade policies, and the continued development of AfCFTA. Examining the changing trade landscape and the tactics African nations can use to take advantage of new opportunities is essential to comprehending the future of African exports in the post-Trump tariff era.

194 Although some of the protectionist policies that defined the Trump administration were abandoned by the Biden administration, many of the tariffs that were put in place under Trump's presidency, particularly on steel, aluminium and some agricultural products, remain in effect, albeit with minor modifications. Key African exports, including textiles, agricultural products and raw materials, may not be as competitive in the US market as goods from nations with preferential tariff treatment or lower production costs. African nations that depend on exporting to the US continue to face difficulties because of US tariffs (Chin and Lard, 2025; Dube, 2025). Global trade flows have realigned because of the Trump administration's increase in trade conflicts and tariffs. The need to diversify markets and find new trading partners grew as some African products lost their competitiveness in the US. By focusing more on cooperative trade agreements and lowering some of the friction brought on by tariffs, the Biden administration has taken a more multilateral and cooperative approach to trade. Tariffs on certain items may decline, however, for Africa to remain competitive, new trade objectives, including technology, climate change and digital economy trade policies, are emerging. Through AGOA, the US and Africa have a long-standing preferential trade agreement that permits many African exports to enter the country duty-free. However, the Biden administration's policies will determine AGOA's future. If African nations support US interests like economic facilitation, democratic governance and human rights, they may be granted continuing access under AGOA. The future of AGOA may depend on the continuing of US commerce with Africa and additional amendments that broaden the agreement's scope to cover more goods, particularly in value-added industries like machinery and electronics.

One of the most important trade agreements for African nations is

AfCFTA. By 2025 and beyond, AfCFTA's objectives to establish a single market with lower tariffs and standardised trade regulations may greatly increase Africa's export competitiveness. AfCFTA will encourage African nations to trade more with one another, rather than relying primarily on external markets like the US or China by removing tariffs on intra-African trade and harmonising rules of origin. This change will promote more resilient and diverse export strategies and help African nations avoid becoming vulnerable to tariffs imposed by external powers, such as the US. Through the development of regional supply chains, wherein raw materials, semi-finished commodities and services are exchanged throughout the continent, African nations can benefit from AfCFTA. African nations can increase the value of their exports and lessen their dependency on the sale of raw commodities, which are frequently prone to unstable global price swings, by concentrating on industrialising their local economies and processing raw materials domestically. African companies will have access to new clients throughout the continent because of AfCFTA, which will expand the market to include over 1.3 billion people. African exports can become more competitive as a result of this expanded market base, which can spur innovation and raise demand for value-added goods (Mwanza, 2025; Sachs, 2025). African nations must keep investing in ports, roads, railroads and digital infrastructure to enable easier and more affordable intra-African commerce if they want AfCFTA to reach its full potential. Exporters can sell their goods at more competitive prices if trade facilitation improves their costs. Furthermore, improving transportation and logistics systems will fortify Africa's supply chains and its capacity to effectively satisfy global demand.

African nations must keep diversifying their economic links to lessen the effects of US tariffs and lessen their reliance on any one market. Exploring new markets and promoting trade with emerging economies and neighbours will be crucial to Africa's export competitiveness in the future. For many African nations, China remains a vital commercial partner, particularly when it comes to the export of natural resources. Africa's export environment will probably continue to be significantly influenced by China's need for raw materials and its investments in African infrastructure, notwithstanding worries about the long-term viability of

trade relations. African countries must make sure they negotiate fair trade conditions and diversify into higher-value goods like electronics, processed goods and finished goods, instead of only exporting commodities. The EU remains another crucial partner for African countries, particularly for agricultural goods, textiles and high-tech products. The EU–Africa economic connection continues to offer prospects, particularly in areas such as green energy, climate change mitigation and digital technology (Adebajo, 2025; Zhou and Njoroge, 2025). Similarly, India is becoming an increasingly important trade partner, particularly in sectors such as pharmaceuticals, textiles and chemicals. African nations must also search for new markets in developing economies in Asia, Latin America and the Middle East in addition to their traditional trading partners. Africa's strategic location between key global trade routes positions it well to expand its reach into these growing markets. With the right trade policies and infrastructure in place, Africa could become a hub for trade between these regions.

196 African nations must prioritise industrialisation, innovation, and the adoption of new technology if they want their exports to compete on the global market. Africa will be more successful in the future if it moves up the value chain to create superior manufactured goods and services that can compete globally, rather than just exporting raw commodities. To stand out from other growing economies, African nations must concentrate on exporting value-added goods. African economies can boost their export value and shift away from low-margin, raw material exports by establishing industries such as advanced agriculture, digital services, renewable energy and electronics manufacturing. African nations have a great opportunity to boost their export competitiveness through the digital economy. Digital trade, e-commerce platforms and Africa's expanding tech industry may create new avenues for the export of services. African countries may establish themselves as major participants in the global digital economy by giving priority to innovation hubs and digital infrastructure. African export competitiveness will be significantly impacted by the green shift. African countries with a wealth of renewable energy resources, such as wind and solar, may capitalise on the growing demand for clean energy technology worldwide as sustainability and climate change become

increasingly important issues. Africa may gain a competitive edge through the development and export of eco-friendly manufacturing, sustainable agriculture and green technologies.

Conclusion

A combination of industrialisation, innovation, strategic diversification and regional integration will determine African export competitiveness in 2025 and beyond. By lowering their reliance on the US, boosting intra-African commerce and adopting innovative, sustainable technology, African nations may turn the difficulties caused by US tariffs under the Trump administration into opportunities for prosperity. Africa's ability to adapt and create robust, diverse and value-added economies that can prosper in a quickly changing global market will be just as important to the continent's export competitiveness in the future as external trade policies.

Recommendations

1. By lowering intra-African trade obstacles and establishing a single market, AfCFTA offers a revolutionary chance for Africa's economic destiny. Prioritising the following actions will help you get the most out of AfCFTA. Ensure that all member states fully implement the terms of the AfCFTA. To facilitate smooth international trade, national trade policies must align with the AfCFTA framework. Reduce non-tariff obstacles, such as administrative bottlenecks, regulatory irregularities and customs delays, which currently raise operating costs and impede competitiveness, by standardising customs processes throughout the continent.
2. Although the US is still a significant trading partner for many African countries, African exports are susceptible to changes in trade policy and tariffs due to their continued reliance on a small number of markets. African nations should explore

rising markets in Asia (like India and Japan), the Middle East (like Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates) and Latin America (like Brazil and Argentina) in order to diversify their economic links. The economy of these areas is expanding, as is the demand for agricultural products, raw minerals and other African exports. To obtain better conditions for African exports, make use of current bilateral agreements, investigate new ones and join international trade networks such as BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa). Make the most of the EU–Africa collaboration, especially in areas like agriculture, green energy and the digital economy. Africa can increase its export base by taking advantage of the EU’s need for sustainable goods, especially in the areas of sustainable agriculture and renewable energy technologies. Promote more flexible terms that enable African value-added products to enter EU markets under preferential conditions to increase Africa’s involvement in EU trade agreements.

3. Africa’s ability to advance up the value chain will be just as important to its competitiveness in the global market as the raw materials it exports. African nations must: Provide tax cuts, financial access and industry infrastructure development as incentives for domestic production to promote industrialisation. Africa will benefit from this by diversifying its exports into goods like electronics, textiles, cars and medications. Create regional industrial clusters to promote innovation, economies of scale, and specialisation. By assisting sectors ranging from processing agriculture to auto assembly, these centres can draw in international capital and generate employment.
4. Innovation and digital technology must be at the heart of export strategy to guarantee Africa’s competitiveness in the twenty-first century. Digital trade is the way of the future, and Africa needs to make significant investments in this area. Encourage the export of digital goods, such as software, internet platforms, IT services and digital content. Fintech, e-commerce, and other digital services with high-value potential can fall under

this category, particularly in the post-pandemic environment. Invest in digital infrastructure, such as e-commerce platforms and broadband connectivity. African countries can help consumers and enterprises participate more successfully in international digital trade by investing in these areas.

5. Good governance and sensible policies are necessary for any trade plan to be successful. African nations must focus on creating favourable conditions for investment and trade. Simplify governance around trade by lowering corruption, increasing transparency and establishing more predictable and business-friendly trade laws. This entails streamlining customs processes, eliminating inefficient bureaucracy, and making it simpler to launch and operate a firm. Improve training and capacity-building initiatives pertaining to trade for stakeholders in the private sector, as well as government representatives. African nations will be better able to negotiate trade agreements and adhere to international trade standards if they build institutional capacity.
6. Africa can establish itself as a leader in green exports, including eco-friendly agricultural products, sustainable manufacturing and renewable energy technology, as the demand for sustainable products grows globally. Invest in sustainable agriculture and renewable energy sources, including solar, wind and geothermal. Africa has abundant renewable energy resources that can be utilised to power regional industries, lower energy costs, and generate green jobs, all of which will enhance the appeal of the continent's exports to other countries. Encourage organic and sustainable farming methods to satisfy the rising demand for certified and environmentally friendly goods worldwide. African exports may become more diverse as a result, moving beyond basic commodities. To build a strong foundation for sustainable commerce, align trade and climate policies. African nations should adopt sustainability practices and environmental standards aligned with international trends to ensure they can compete in green industries.

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CHAPTER 9

The United States–South Africa Diplomatic Meltdown: Crisis or Catalyst for Economic Sovereignty?

Edwin Hlase

Introduction

Since resuming the United States (US) presidency on 20 January 2025, Donald Trump has pursued an aggressive and unilateral foreign policy, marked by executive orders and abrupt diplomatic shifts. His revived ‘America First’ agenda, characterised by transactionalism, nationalist rhetoric and a rejection of multilateralism, has strained long-standing alliances and destabilised the global diplomatic landscape (Lowell et al., 2025). Trump’s decisions to renegotiate international agreements, impose sweeping tariffs, openly criticise allied leaders and side with Russia in its invasion of Ukraine have introduced widespread uncertainty (Yourish et al., 2025), forcing nations to rethink their strategic alignments in an increasingly volatile world.

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While Africa has largely remained peripheral to Trump’s foreign policy, South Africa has stood out as a notable exception. In public statements and social media posts, Trump accused the South African government of land seizures, racial discrimination and ‘anti-Americanism’, claims widely discredited, but amplified by conservative US media (Usman and Carroll, 2025). In response, his administration issued an executive order offering asylum to white South Africans, particularly Afrikaners, and terminated key streams of financial assistance (The White House, 2025a), including funding from the President’s Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR), a cornerstone of South Africa’s HIV/AIDS response (Usman and Carroll, 2025).

The most consequential threat, however, as noted by Fabricius (2025), concerned the African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA), a vital US

trade initiative that provides duty-free access for select African exports. As one of AGOA's main beneficiaries, South Africa relies heavily on this framework for exports such as vehicles, citrus and textiles. Alarmed by the economic implications, South African officials mounted urgent diplomatic efforts to preserve these trade benefits. However, on 2 April 2025, Trump announced sweeping tariffs on all US imports. Though temporarily delayed by 90 days, the tariffs, applied indiscriminately, effectively nullified AGOA's advantages. South Africa was hit with a 30 per cent tariff on all exports, sparking fears of factory closures, job losses and reduced foreign earnings (Fabricius, 2025).

204 Against this backdrop, this paper adopts a postcolonial lens to reflect on US–South Africa relations since 1994 and argues that a diplomatic rupture was not solely the result of Trump's volatile leadership, but rather the culmination of deeper tensions rooted in asymmetrical power dynamics and conflicting priorities. Trump's nationalist and transactional approach to foreign policy, prioritising short-term US gains over long-term alliances, intensified these strains, undermining multilateralism and reducing space for policy autonomy among smaller states like South Africa. Paradoxically, however, Trump's punitive and isolationist stance highlighted the dangers of dependency, compelling South Africa to reassess its development model. This moment of rupture, while disruptive, also creates strategic opportunities for South Africa and its African peers to assert greater autonomy through regional integration, economic self-reliance, and diversified global partnerships. Pragmatic engagement with the US remains vital, but on more balanced and sovereign terms.

This chapter is structured as follows: The opening section outlines the methodology, detailing the sources of data and the postcolonial theoretical lens guiding the study. The second section traces the historical trajectory of US–South Africa relations since the end of apartheid in 1994, highlighting both cooperation and recurring tensions that have shaped the bilateral dynamic over three decades. The third section focuses on Trump's first presidential term (2016–2020), examining key points of diplomatic friction and how these tensions laid the groundwork for more pronounced confrontations in his second term. The fourth section analyses Trump's return to power in 2025, with a focus on the broader

global diplomatic disruptions he triggered and the reemergence of South Africa as a foreign policy target. The fifth section critically examines how Trump's punitive measures may unintentionally open space for South Africa and its African peers to strengthen intra-continental cooperation and pursue economic self-reliance. The final section explores strategic responses and concludes with reflections on the broader implications for African sovereignty in an increasingly fractured global order.

Methodology

Data sources

This chapter primarily draws on publicly available sources, including journal and news articles, research publications, government and organisational documents, and other relevant materials. Its primary objective is to provide a grounded and contextually rich analysis of the US–South Africa diplomatic fallout. It seeks to capture both the factual developments and the broader discursive and geopolitical dynamics that shaped the crisis. This approach enables a multi-perspective examination of the rupture, ensuring that the analysis is not only evidence-based, but also reflective of competing narratives, policy shifts and the underlying power asymmetries between the two states.

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Theoretical approach

This study is grounded in a postcolonial theoretical framework, an interdisciplinary and critical approach that interrogates how the enduring legacies of colonialism and imperialism continue to shape contemporary international relations, particularly between the Global North and South. Postcolonial theory challenges the presumed neutrality of mainstream International Relations (IR) paradigms, exposing their Eurocentrism, historical amnesia and failure to account for the structural and discursive continuities of colonial domination in global politics.

Foundational thinkers such as Frantz Fanon, Edward Said, Gayatri Spivak and Mohammed Ayoob have shown how international systems,

often perceived as neutral or universal, are deeply embedded in histories of conquest, racial hierarchy and cultural erasure (Manchanda, 2018). As Peoples and Vaughan-Williams (2021) argue, postcolonialism reveals how IR as a discipline has often been complicit in reinforcing asymmetrical power structures, privileging Western perspectives, while marginalising those of the colonised world.

Drawing on this tradition, this study operates on three central assumptions: First, contemporary international relations reflect colonial-era hierarchies in which Western states continue to exert dominance over former colonies through economic, political and epistemic means. Africa is routinely positioned as peripheral, its efforts to address historical injustices often delegitimised through racialised discourses that portray such initiatives (for example, land reform and affirmative action laws) as threats to ‘universal’ norms, rather than legitimate exercises of sovereignty (Grovgui, 2013; Said, 1979).

206 Second, Western powers continue to employ aid, trade access, and diplomatic legitimacy as instruments of neo-imperial discipline. Conditionalities such as threats to remove AGOA benefits or suspend development assistance function as modern iterations of colonial authority, reinforcing dependency, while denying the South genuine autonomy. These practices, as Grovgui (2013) highlighted, reflect the enduring assumption that the Global North retains the moral and political authority to define what constitutes ‘acceptable’ governance.

Third, formerly colonised nations frequently respond to such pressures by promoting multilateralism, regional solidarity and non-alignment as strategies to reclaim agency and resist hegemonic power. South Africa’s engagement with BRICS, its leadership within the African Union (AU), and its appeal to international legal bodies like the International Court of Justice exemplify this quest for alternative sites of legitimacy and collective action beyond the Western-centric order.

This theoretical approach will guide the analysis by framing the US–South Africa diplomatic fallout during the Trump presidency as more than a bilateral disagreement. Instead, it will be examined as a symptom of deeper postcolonial tensions, wherein a Global South state’s assertion of sovereignty and alternative political identity is met with coercive

pushback by a Global North power. The analysis will unpack how Trump's nationalist and transactional policies reflect neocolonial logics, how South Africa's responses challenge the norms of Western dominance, and how this episode illuminates broader struggles over representation, legitimacy and agency in the international system. Through this lens, the study will assess both the structural constraints and the emancipatory potential embedded in South Africa's diplomatic strategies.

US–South Africa relations since 1994: Cooperation, tensions and double standards

The end of apartheid in 1994 marked a pivotal moment in US–South Africa relations, ushering in a new era of diplomatic engagement after decades of estrangement. During apartheid, the US maintained a cautious and often contradictory stance, reluctant to impose sanctions and slow to fully support the anti-apartheid movement (Goldstone, 2005). With South Africa's transition to democracy under Nelson Mandela, Washington, under the Clinton administration, embraced the 'new' South Africa as a potential regional anchor of stability, liberal democracy and market-oriented reform (Cook, 2013). The early post-apartheid period was marked by political goodwill, increased aid flows and efforts to integrate South Africa into global governance structures. Washington also encouraged Pretoria to assume a continental leadership role, positioning it as an African champion of liberal values.

Yet, despite this optimism, structural and historical tensions, rooted in colonial and racial hierarchies, soon emerged, complicating the relationship. While the US projected a vision of a unipolar, liberal international order centred on Western norms, South Africa advanced a foreign policy grounded in multilateralism, non-alignment and solidarity with the Global South. This divergence revealed a deeper postcolonial fault line, where the foreign policy autonomy of a newly democratic African state clashed with the expectations of a Global North power still invested in its global hegemony.

South Africa's relationships with countries such as Cuba and Libya, nations that had supported the anti-apartheid struggle, but were deemed

pariahs by the US, became early sites of contestation (Cook, 2013; Drogin, 1997). A flashpoint came in 1997, when Pretoria's plan to sell advanced fire-control systems to Syria—then designated by the US as a state sponsor of terrorism—provoked a strong reaction from Washington, including threats to cut off foreign aid (Daley, 1997). The episode illustrated how US diplomacy continued to operate through postcolonial conditionality: economic partnership was contingent on conformity with US strategic preferences, often at the expense of African agency. While Nelson Mandela's government initially resisted, it ultimately suspended the sale (Drogin, 1997), highlighting how material dependence constrained sovereign decision-making.

Mandela's open criticism of US foreign policy further underscored South Africa's attempt to assert an independent global voice. His denouncements of American complicity in Turkey's occupation of Northern Cyprus and the 1999 North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) bombing of Yugoslavia reflected a rejection of Western exceptionalism. In 2003, Mandela famously condemned the US invasion of Iraq as a tragedy and an act of imperialism, highlighting how Pretoria saw international law and multilateral institutions as crucial to a just global order (Lulat, 2008; Sontag, 1999; Swarns, 2003). These tensions reflect South Africa's effort to resist hegemonic discourse and demand equal footing in global affairs, a position that often provokes backlash from the US foreign policy establishment, accustomed to compliance from Global South states.

Economically, US engagement with South Africa was shaped by liberal market ideology. The AGOA, introduced in 2000, was emblematic of the US effort to integrate African economies into a global trade regime premised on deregulation and open markets. South Africa emerged as one of AGOA's top beneficiaries, exporting cars, citrus and textiles to the US market. However, friction arose when Pretoria implemented anti-dumping duties on US poultry imports in an attempt to protect local South African producers (Naumann, 2015). South Africa's redistributive and developmental policies—such as Black Economic Empowerment (BEE) and local content requirements—also diverged from Washington's neoliberal template. American investors often perceived these measures as

protectionist (Naumann, 2015), revealing the tension between national development priorities and external economic expectations shaped by post-Washington consensus orthodoxy.

Under the presidencies of Thabo Mbeki and Jacob Zuma, these divergences deepened. Mbeki's commitment to 'African solutions for African problems', especially his 'quiet diplomacy' to Zimbabwe's Robert Mugabe, reflected a rejection of Western interventionism and a preference for continental diplomacy (Cook, 2013; Lulat, 2008). Mbeki's strong opposition to the 2011 NATO intervention in Libya, which resulted in Muammar Qaddafi's death, further hardened Pretoria's scepticism about Western-led regime change (Weissman, 2018). These positions, while consistent with South Africa's postcolonial commitment to sovereignty and non-interference, were frequently interpreted in Washington as enabling authoritarianism (Cook, 2013), reflecting a persistent North–South moral asymmetry where the West retains the authority to judge the legitimacy of other nations' foreign policy choices.

Simultaneously, Pretoria's calls for the reform of global institutions, including the United Nations Security Council (UNSC), International Monetary Fund (IMF), World Bank and World Trade Organisation (WTO), put it at odds with US strategic interests (Cook, 2013). Despite its formal rhetoric on inclusivity, the US has resisted substantive changes to these institutions, thereby preserving the architecture of global governance inherited from the colonial era. South Africa's challenge to these structures represents a broader effort by Global South states to reshape the global order, not merely as subjects of international law, but as co-authors of its rules.

Despite these political frictions, cooperation did flourish in some areas, especially in public health. The US's PEPFAR provided billions in funding and technical support for South Africa's HIV/AIDS response, helping build critical public health capacity (Cook, 2013). This engagement, however, was not free from tension. Mbeki's AIDS denialism—his questioning of the link between HIV and AIDS—clashed with US policy and global scientific consensus, leading to diplomatic fallout. The situation stabilised under Zuma, who adopted a more pragmatic and health-driven approach (Weissman, 2018). Yet even in this area, the dynamics of donor-

recipient relations reflected hierarchies of expertise and legitimacy, with the US positioned as the benevolent technocratic power and South Africa as the errant pupil.

President Barack Obama's administration sought to reframe the relationship as a partnership rather than patronage, emphasising education, health and trade during his 2013 visit (Cook, 2013; Pillay, 2014). However, tensions remained. South Africa's increasing engagement with BRICS and its criticism of Western double standards in forums such as the United Nations (UN) generated unease in Washington. From a postcolonial perspective, Pretoria's alignment with BRICS represents not just economic diversification, but an ideological challenge to Western-centric narratives of global leadership. This assertiveness was, however, tempered by contradictions in South Africa's own foreign policy. One such contradiction emerged in 2015, when South Africa refused to arrest Sudanese President Omar al-Bashir—wanted by the International Criminal Court (ICC) for crimes against humanity—during an AU summit in Johannesburg (Gqiza and Ogunnubi, 2019). The decision provoked criticism from both domestic and international actors, including the US, and cast doubt on Pretoria's commitment to international justice. This episode reveals the tensions inherent in postcolonial diplomacy, where solidarity with fellow Global South states can conflict with human rights obligations and multilateral legal frameworks.

The 'Trump Card': Heightened frictions in US-South Africa relations

The election of Donald Trump to the US presidency in 2016 ushered in a distinctly turbulent period in US–South Africa relations. Although bilateral ties had weathered ideological and diplomatic disagreements in the past, the Trump era represented a deeper rupture, defined not only by policy divergence, but by a broader erosion of multilateral norms and the reassertion of hierarchical global power relations. Central to this shift was the Trump administration's 'America First' agenda, which embraced economic nationalism, unilateralism and a form of transactional diplomacy that sidelined historical alliances and downplayed developmental commitments. This moment exposed the

fragility of South Africa's position within the US-led international order and revealed the persistence of postcolonial asymmetries in the global diplomatic landscape.

One of the earliest and most consequential flashpoints, as Serino (2025) noted, was the Trump administration's overt disengagement from Africa and its dismissive, even derogatory, rhetoric toward the continent. Africa's marginalisation in US strategic planning became evident as Trump offered little diplomatic or developmental attention to African partners. A low point came in January 2018, when Trump reportedly referred to African nations using vulgar and racially charged language during an immigration policy discussion (Serino, 2025). Although partially denied by the White House, the remarks sparked continental outrage. South Africa formally summoned the US chargé d'affaires to protest, underscoring the gravity of the diplomatic breach (Mabuza, 2018). This revealed more than a cultural insensitivity; it exposed the durability of colonial racial imaginaries in contemporary diplomacy, where African nations continue to be devalued in Western political discourse.

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While the Trump administration launched the 'Prosper Africa' initiative in late 2018, it was widely perceived as a geopolitical countermeasure against China and Russia, rather than a genuine commitment to mutual development (Signé and Olander, 2019). The initiative lacked strategic coherence, senior-level engagement and actionable implementation frameworks (Schneidman, 2020). Trump's frequent proposals to slash foreign aid, including PEPFAR funding and the closure of USAID offices, amplified anxieties among South African policymakers. Although the US Congress intervened to preserve key programmes (Signé and Olander, 2019), the administration's approach signalled a retreat from cooperative, development-oriented engagement. From a postcolonial perspective, such shifts reveal the volatility of aid-dependent relationships and highlight how the Global South remains structurally vulnerable to the policy whims of Global North powers.

A particularly inflammatory episode occurred in August 2018 when Trump tweeted that he had instructed the US State Department to investigate land expropriation and violence against white farmers in South Africa. Echoing far-right conspiracy theories, Trump claimed the South

African government was seizing land from white farmers and permitting large-scale killing, despite no credible evidence supporting such claims (Serino, 2025; Wilson, 2018). Pretoria swiftly condemned the statement, framing it as misinformation and neocolonial interference in its domestic affairs (Wilson, 2018). The controversy illuminated the racialised lens through which Trump engaged with African issues, centring white grievance while ignoring the historical realities of apartheid-era land dispossession. The incident starkly illustrates the postcolonial critique of Western foreign policy as being animated by selective moralism (Manchanda, 2018; Spivak, 1988), often privileging settler-descendant narratives over indigenous struggles for justice.

Economically, Trump's protectionist posture created additional tensions. His administration's threats to revoke AGOA benefits unless South Africa opened its markets further reflected a broader transactionalism that instrumentalised trade preferences as disciplinary tools (Kohnert, 2018). While South Africa maintained its AGOA eligibility during Trump's first term, friction remained over poultry imports, local content requirements and intellectual property rights. These tensions underscore how economic relations between the Global North and South are often embedded in asymmetrical structures of dependency, with market access used to enforce compliance with US commercial and strategic interests, echoing the extractive and hierarchical logics of empire.

At the multilateral level, the ideological rift widened. Trump's open hostility toward global institutions, evident in his withdrawal from the Paris Climate Agreement and the World Health Organisation (WHO), ran counter to South Africa's historical commitment to multilateralism, international law and global governance reform (RSA, 2017). South Africa's foreign policy has long been anchored in a postcolonial commitment to inclusive international institutions that reflect the voices of formerly colonised nations. Trump's unilateralism undermined these principles and cast doubt on the US's reliability as a global partner. This divergence is not merely ideological; it reflects a deeper struggle over whose voices count in shaping international norms, a central concern of postcolonial IR theory (Spivak, 1988).

The Biden administration (2021–2025) attempted to reverse course,

restoring support for multilateralism and renewing US commitments to global development, climate cooperation, and democratic governance (Usman and Carroll, 2025). However, geopolitical tensions persisted beneath the surface. South Africa's diplomatic non-alignment, particularly its position on Russia's 2022 invasion of Ukraine, drew criticism from Washington and Brussels. Pretoria's abstention in the UN General Assembly vote condemning Russia (UN News, 2022) and its repeated calls for negotiated solutions were framed by some Western observers as evidence of strategic ambiguity, or worse, complicity (Buccus, 2025).

From a postcolonial perspective, South Africa's actions can be read as a deliberate assertion of agency, resisting pressure to align reflexively with Western geopolitical priorities. Pretoria's posture reflects a Global South tradition of strategic non-alignment, dating back to the Bandung Conference and the Non-Aligned Movement, intended to insulate postcolonial states from the coercive polarities of global superpower competition. In this light, South Africa's efforts to maintain ties with Russia and China should not be understood as ideological allegiance, but as part of a broader recalibration of diplomatic sovereignty in an increasingly multipolar world.

Nevertheless, South Africa's claims to neutrality were severely tested by its hosting of the Exercise Mosi II naval drills with Russia and China in February 2023, held during the one-year anniversary of the Ukraine invasion (Ramsden, 2023). While South Africa framed the exercises as routine and apolitical, the symbolism and timing were impossible to ignore. From Washington's perspective, this marked a serious breach of diplomatic trust, exacerbated by reports that South Africa had covertly supplied weapons to Russia via the sanctioned vessel *Lady R*, which docked at a military base in December 2022. Although Pretoria denied the allegations, the incident triggered high-level rebukes from US officials and generated debate over whether punitive economic or diplomatic measures would follow (Ramsden, 2023).

Trump's return to power in 2025: Global diplomatic shifts and South Africa's re-emergence as a foreign policy target – A postcolonial reinterpretation

Trump's return to the US presidency on 20 January 2025 marked a seismic shift in global affairs. Emboldened by a nationalist mandate and driven by deepening disillusionment with liberal internationalism, Trump's second term ushered in an even more uncompromising brand of unilateralism and transactionalism. The new administration articulated a vision of global engagement premised on narrow national interest, coercive diplomacy and open disdain for multilateral institutions (Lowell et al., 2025). Within this volatile international environment, South Africa, once peripheral to US strategic interests, reemerged as a significant target of Trump's punitive foreign policy. This renewed focus was shaped not only by contemporary geopolitical shifts, but also by deep-seated racialised narratives and colonial hierarchies that continue to shape Western engagement with the Global South.

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From the outset, Trump's rhetoric signalled a stark departure from the principles of collective diplomacy. In his inauguration speech, Trump warned that the US would no longer be 'shackled by foreign entanglements or unfair trade deals', heralding a 'new era of absolute sovereignty' (The White House, 2025b). Trump's administration quickly moved to withdraw from key pillars of global cooperation, including the Paris Climate Agreement, the WHO, and the UN Human Rights Commission (UNHRC). US funding to the World Bank and IMF was slashed, reflecting a worldview in which international institutions were framed as vehicles of 'global freeloading' (Yourish et al., 2025). This retreat from multilateralism opened space for rival powers like China and Russia to consolidate regional influence and challenged the very architecture of post-World War II international governance.

Trump's policies not only undermined long-standing alliances, but they also revived a postcolonial script of punishment and compliance. As part of this vision, nations that resisted US hegemony or pursued autonomous foreign policy paths were cast as adversarial or ungrateful (Lowell et al., 2025). South Africa's increasing alignment with the BRICS bloc, its vocal

advocacy for multilateralism and its critical stance on Western double standards placed it firmly within Trump's foreign policy crosshairs. The reemergence of South Africa as a target in 2025 thus reflects not a sudden geopolitical rupture, but the continuing struggle over who gets to define global legitimacy, morality and leadership.

'Mission South Africa': Discursive 'delegitimisation' and racialised diplomacy

The renewed antagonism toward South Africa was not entirely novel. Within US conservative discourse, post-apartheid South Africa has long been portrayed as a case study in failed transformation, marked by land redistribution, state inefficiency and racialised governance (Cabral, 2025; McGreal, 2025). Trump and his allies strategically drew upon this narrative, invoking inflammatory claims of 'white genocide', land seizures and Marxist economic planning (Cabral, 2025; Serino, 2025). These assertions, though debunked by human rights monitors, resonated with sections of Trump's political base and formed part of a racialised moral economy in which postcolonial attempts at redress were cast as threats to Western civilisation (Serino, 2025; Wilson, 2018).

From a postcolonial perspective, Trump's rhetoric functions as a form of symbolic violence, delegitimising South Africa's sovereignty, pathologising its internal democratic processes and reviving paternalistic tropes of civilisational decline. Such discourses reflect what Edward Said described as the Orientalism of Africa—a framing in which the continent's resistance to Western models of development or diplomacy is seen not as autonomy, but as deviance (Said, 1979). Trump's narrative positioned South Africa as an object of discipline, rather than a subject of equal engagement.

The Trump administration's framing of South Africa paved the way for concrete policy retaliation. In March 2025, Trump signed an executive order terminating significant US development assistance, including cuts to PEPFAR—a programme central to South Africa's HIV/AIDS response (Usman and Carroll, 2025). This decision marked a sharp departure from decades of health diplomacy and served as a stark reminder of the

instrumental nature of development aid in postcolonial geopolitics. In April, Trump imposed sweeping 30 per cent tariffs on all South African exports, citing national security and 'unfair competition' (Fabricius, 2025). Although a 90-day suspension was later introduced, the tariffs signalled the effective erosion of AGOA preferences and posed existential threats to South Africa's automotive, agricultural and textile industries. These measures exemplify neocolonial conditionalities in which economic tools are weaponised to enforce ideological conformity. As postcolonial theorists like Mohammed Ayoob argue, the Global South's political autonomy remains constrained by structural economic dependencies maintained through global trade and financial systems (Ayoob, 1995).

Trump also proposed to suspend South Africa from US-backed security training programmes and bilateral trade dialogues (Usman and Carroll, 2025), further revealing an intent to isolate rather than engage. Rather than responding to concrete violations of international norms, these punitive actions were driven by ideological divergence, underscoring a worldview in which loyalty, not legality, determines the legitimacy of state behaviour.

The diplomatic standoff reached new heights during South Africa's presidency of the G20 in 2025. US Secretary of State, Marco Rubio publicly boycotted the G20 foreign ministers' meeting in Cape Town, denouncing Pretoria's alleged alignment with authoritarian regimes and its 'anti-American' agenda (Gumede, 2025). This boycott, unprecedented in G20 history, was symptomatic of a broader fracture in the global governance system. South Africa, leveraging its G20 chairmanship, sought to prioritise issues of debt relief, climate justice and IMF governance reform, demands aligned with the AU and Global South priorities (Gumede, 2025). From a postcolonial perspective, Pretoria's agenda represented an attempt to redefine what constitutes global urgency and who has the authority to set the terms of global cooperation. In response, the US's retreat from the G20 and its efforts to delegitimise South African leadership reinforced the colonial logics of inclusion and exclusion in global diplomacy.

Tensions intensified further in March when Rubio declared South African Ambassador Ebrahim Rasool *persona non grata* (Usman and

Carroll, 2025). During a closed-door webinar, Rasool had criticised Trump's administration for mobilising a 'supremacist instinct' and weaponising 'white victimhood' to justify its foreign and domestic policies (Knickmeyer and Lee, 2025). Though made in a private setting, his remarks were quickly politicised, and his expulsion was framed as a defence of American dignity and diplomatic norms.

This episode reflects the fragility of the postcolonial voice in global politics. Rasool's critique, rooted in a history of anti-apartheid activism and solidarity politics was recast, not as a legitimate contribution to international discourse, but as an unacceptable challenge to US authority. As Spivak (1988) observed, this silencing of subaltern critique exposes the boundaries of who is allowed to speak and be heard in international relations. Pretoria, for its part, refrained from reciprocal measures, signalling its intent to preserve diplomatic channels. Yet the asymmetry of the exchange highlighted how postcolonial states must often choose between voice and access, critique and cooperation, a dynamic that remains central to their global engagement.

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South Africa's treatment under Trump's second term was not an isolated anomaly, but part of a broader strategy of global disciplining, in which states that challenge US dominance, particularly in the Global South, face economic, diplomatic and symbolic retaliation. Trump's foreign policy resurrected the imperial binaries of civilised versus uncivilised, cooperative versus rogue, liberal versus illiberal, placing South Africa on the latter side of each dichotomy. However, this crisis also revealed spaces for resistance. South Africa's continued commitment to multilateralism, its advocacy for global economic reform and its insistence on development-oriented diplomacy reflect a postcolonial aspiration to reshape the global order on more equitable terms.

Implications for South Africa and the Global South: Turning adversity into opportunity

Pretoria's continued diplomatic engagement with Washington amid escalating tensions reveals a pragmatic recognition: the US remains a vital economic partner. One restraining factor against full punitive escalation

was the strategic value of South African mineral exports, especially platinum group metals and manganese, which are indispensable to the US high-tech and manufacturing sectors. These commodities account for approximately 33 per cent of South Africa's exports to the US and were conspicuously excluded from Trump's 2025 tariff regime (Ngundu, 2025). Far from incidental, this exemption illustrates how trade is increasingly governed by national strategic imperatives. As Ngundu (2025) notes, the move was designed to protect US industrial competitiveness and secure critical supply chains. In this context, South Africa's mineral wealth offers a limited buffer against economic coercion and, more importantly, serves as a postcolonial site of leverage where Global South states can reclaim agency within exploitative trade relations historically rooted in extractive colonialism.

218 However, the reemergence of South Africa as a target of US foreign policy highlighted the precarity of its position within the global economic order. Trump's actions—tariffs, aid withdrawal and diplomatic hostility—exposed the fragility of postcolonial sovereignty when it is overly reliant on preferential access to Western markets. This economic backlash catalysed a critical moment of introspection. South African leaders, policy analysts and civil society actors began to interrogate not just short-term losses but the deeper structural dependencies that had persisted since the country's democratic transition (Vandome, 2025). The result was a surge of policy debate on trade diversification, accelerated intra-African economic integration through the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) and the imperative of domestic industrialisation (RSA, 2025).

The immediate consequences of Trump's measures were predictably harsh. Export-driven sectors, such as agriculture, automobile manufacturing and textiles—long beneficiaries of AGOA's duty-free access—faced sudden barriers, threatening employment, investment and production chains. Development programmes were also curtailed, with PEPFAR cuts jeopardising gains in public health and HIV/AIDS prevention. This crisis, however, also triggered a strategic recalibration, compelling South Africa to revisit its global alliances and reassert its commitment to non-alignment and multilateral solidarity, long-standing themes in postcolonial African diplomacy.

South Africa's May 2025 economic response plan emphasised value-added exports, regional trade expansion and new partnerships, signalling an intention to mitigate future dependency risks (RSA, 2025). More broadly, Trump's coercive diplomacy served as an unintended catalyst for deeper intra-African cooperation and stronger South–South linkages. As Vandome (2025) observes, South Africa's increasing engagement with China, Russia, India, and Brazil was not merely opportunistic, but reflected a growing Global South consensus: that the postwar international order remains shaped by colonial legacies, exclusionary institutions and power asymmetries antithetical to Southern development.

This pivot was particularly evident during South Africa's 2025 G20 presidency. Pretoria utilised the platform to foreground issues that had long been marginalised in global governance—climate justice, debt relief and the reform of Bretton Woods institutions (Vandome, 2025). These positions, while clashing with US preferences, were embraced by many Global South states, reinforcing a collective effort to reshape the normative architecture of international cooperation. Postcolonial theory helps one see these moves not simply as policy disputes, but as acts of epistemic resistance—efforts to redefine what counts as global 'urgency', and who gets to articulate it.

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AfCFTA and the struggle for continental autonomy

The AfCFTA presents one of the most promising pathways for transforming this moment of adversity into long-term autonomy. Launched in 2021, AfCFTA seeks to create a unified African market of over 1.4 billion people and a combined Gross Domestic Product of US\$3.4 trillion (Hagos, 2023; Ryder, Lwere and Eguegu, 2025). It represents an attempt to reverse Africa's colonial economic legacy, which fragmented the continent into export-dependent enclaves tethered to distant metropolises (Hagos, 2023). Trump's aggressive trade nationalism reaffirmed the urgency of operationalising AfCFTA, not simply as a trade mechanism, but as a pan-African economic sovereignty project.

South Africa is well-positioned to drive the implementation of the AfCFTA, given its relatively diversified economy, advanced infrastructure,

and financial systems. By reorienting investment and trade toward African partners, Pretoria can not only shield itself from great power volatility but also help reshape the continent's insertion into the global economy on terms more reflective of African priorities. The project's success, however, requires more than economic will. It demands political coordination, harmonised regulatory frameworks and a shared continental commitment to postcolonial emancipation from external domination (Hagos, 2023).

Beyond Africa, South Africa and its neighbours are seeking to diversify trade and diplomatic partnerships with emerging markets across Latin America, Southeast Asia and the Middle East. This global diversification, while not without risks, offers strategic hedging against future Western volatility. However, as postcolonial theorists warn (Grovogui, 2013; Spivak, 1988), dependency is not only a geographic condition, but also a structural one. Avoiding 'new colonialism' from China or others will require African states to strengthen domestic industrial bases, set their own regulatory terms and centre the voices of their own peoples in development planning.

Despite the strategic momentum generated by recent diplomatic shocks, formidable structural obstacles continue to hamper Africa's path toward genuine transformation. Many African states remain burdened by deep infrastructural deficits, fragmented regulatory regimes, weak manufacturing bases and limited intra-continental connectivity. Compounding these constraints are governance challenges, including policy inconsistency, bureaucratic inefficiencies and elite networks that remain closely aligned with Western capital and donor priorities (Hagos, 2023). These entrenched dynamics undermine efforts to industrialise, reduce external dependency and assert policy sovereignty.

In the short term, the economic fallout from Trump-era punitive measures, ranging from inflation and rising food prices to cuts in social spending, risks fuelling domestic discontent, populist rhetoric and protectionist reflexes that could undermine long-term regional integration. Crucially, diversification may not necessarily lead to emancipation. Shifting economic alliances—whether toward BRICS, China, or the Gulf States—without simultaneously investing in domestic capacity-building, technological innovation, and labour-

intensive industries may simply reproduce dependency in new forms. True postcolonial sovereignty requires more than shifting geopolitical orientation. It demands a transformation of production systems, financial autonomy, and institutional coherence. Without structural reform that centres African priorities and capabilities, today's diversification efforts risk becoming tomorrow's subordination, merely replacing one master with another.

Conclusion

This chapter has examined how the return of Donald Trump to the US presidency in 2025 profoundly disrupted US–South Africa relations, marking a new and volatile phase in an already asymmetrical partnership. The Trump administration's punitive approach, manifested through sweeping tariffs, aid cuts, and diplomatic marginalisation, was grounded in a foreign policy worldview shaped by nationalism, transactionalism, and a retributive logic that framed multilateralism and dissent as threats to American primacy. South Africa, portrayed as ideologically adversarial and aligned with global 'rivals' such as China and Russia, became an illustrative target within a broader effort to discipline the Global South.

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Viewed through a postcolonial lens, these actions are not merely deviations from liberal norms; they are extensions of entrenched global hierarchies forged in the colonial era. The use of trade and aid as coercive tools reflects a persistent belief in the right of Western powers to define the terms of acceptable governance, diplomacy and development in the Global South. The racialised discourse around South Africa, particularly narratives of 'white victimhood', land expropriation and alleged economic mismanagement, echoes colonial tropes that cast African agency as inherently dangerous or incompetent.

Paradoxically, Trump's coercive diplomacy also served as a catalyst for critical introspection and strategic recalibration. The shock of economic retaliation and diplomatic isolation exposed South Africa's overreliance on preferential trade access and Western development assistance. In response, the country has begun to articulate a more assertive and diversified foreign policy posture, one that embraces regional integration

through the AfCFTA, deepens cooperation with BRICS and other Global South partners and foregrounds the need for reform in global governance institutions. This repositioning signals a broader desire to transcend neocolonial dependency and reclaim agency in international affairs. However, as this chapter has argued, the path forward is not without obstacles. Internal challenges, ranging from elite capture and infrastructural deficits to policy incoherence, risk undermining these ambitions. Moreover, replacing Western dependency with uncritical engagement with new powers like China or Russia, risks replicating old patterns of extraction and external control.

Ultimately, Trump's return to power has forced South Africa, and the continent more broadly, to confront a fundamental question: will Africa continue to operate on the periphery of a system it did not design, or will it forge a new path rooted in self-reliance, regional solidarity and postcolonial sovereignty? The answer will define not only Africa's future, but also the evolving shape of global order itself.

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SECTION V: SECURITY

CHAPTER 10

Trump 2.0 and United States-Led Security Alliances in the Indo-Pacific Region: Withered Leadership or a New Course of Action?

Mmamashilo Herminah Mmako
David Maningi Mkhonto

Introduction

The United States (US) presidency has a long-standing history of honour and prestige. However, the inauguration of Donald Trump as America's 45th president in 2017 undoubtedly raised much criticism, mainly due to his actions and rhetoric as well as a decline in democracy and fragmented foreign policy (Rowland, 2021). However, on 20 January 2025, Trump was sworn in for the second time as America's 47th president, after a 312-vote win against opponent Kamala Harris (FitzGerald, 2024). Since taking office, Trump has signed numerous orders, including the controversial halt of foreign aid. As America repositions itself to the 'Make America Great Again' stance, how it will fracture in the Indo-Pacific security framework and strategic alliance formation, is worth exploring. The Indo-Pacific region, comprised of the vast Indian and Pacific oceans, has pivoted as a power play arena where major powers compete and cooperate on mutual interests (Doyle and Rumley, 2019). Alliance building had warranted a key focus of the US's Indo-Pacific approach under the previous Biden administration to counter an assertive China. This appears to be a rhetoric for the current Trump administration, as US Secretary of State Marco Rubio pledged to promote the Indo-Pacific alliance's work after meeting with foreign ministers from Japan, Australia, and India at the Quad meeting, just a day after Trump's inauguration (Brunnstrom, Lewis and Pal, 2025).

Trump's latest moves, however, suggest a rhetoric of unpredictability and fragmentation in global and regional foreign policy pursuits. Trump's move to dismantle foreign aid and demand that North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) members spend 5 per cent of their Gross Domestic Product (GDP) on defence implicates security alliances in the Indo-Pacific region, particularly for the European Union (EU) and the United Kingdom (UK). In addition, the strained US-Ukraine relations further complicate US-EU relations, and the implications thereof for security cooperation in the Indo-Pacific must be considered. Further, Australia, a member state of the trilateral security partnership between Australia, the United Kingdom, and the United States (AUKUS), has increased its defence budget by US\$6.66 billion over the next four years as pressure mounts from Trump to increase defence spending (Needham, 2025). The impact of strained US-Australia relations could potentially impact the future of AUKUS.

232 In the Indo-Pacific region, US security leadership can be traced through strategic partnerships such as the Quadrilateral (Quad) alliance, consisting of the US, Australia, India and Japan and the AUKUS alliance. These alliances reinforce America's strategic interests in the region—they largely focus on broad areas such as regional security, economic development and technological cooperation, as well as strengthening defence cooperation, notably through advanced military technology exchanges. Together, these partnerships demonstrate the US's capabilities to counter emerging rivalries, maintain maritime security, and ensure stability in the Indo-Pacific region (Bisley, 2025). The US considers the Indo-Pacific to be the most strategically important region in the twenty-first century, accounting for over two-thirds of global economic production and crucial sea routes such as the South China Sea (Hu, 2020). For Washington, the Quad serves as a diplomatic and economic conduit, while AUKUS is mostly for the deterrence of aggression, mainly stemming from China. Over the last five years, the US has rapidly increased its spending on Indo-Pacific security. The US House of Representatives under the Biden administration passed an Indo-Pacific Bill in 2024 totalling US\$8.1 billion allocated for submarine capacity growth with the Department of Defence and Military Construction budgets, and support

for Taiwan and other regional allies, including military equipment transfers (Fiddler, 2024). The Indo-Pacific Bill, alongside aid for Ukraine and Israel, was labelled as ‘national security priorities’.

However, as Trump’s isolationist stance intensifies, the US leadership in the Indo-Pacific is poised for significant changes. It is unclear if the Trump administration will prioritise the Indo-Pacific security domain, and if strategic security partnerships are relevant to the current US foreign policy objectives. As such, this chapter seeks to examine US leadership under the Trump 2.0 administration on strategic security alliances in the Indo-Pacific region. To achieve its objective, the paper presents a discussion of three critical areas. In the first section, the chapter examines the Indo-Pacific region’s reaction to Trump 2.0’s foreign policy. In section two, a discussion of the US-led security alliances in the Indo-Pacific is presented, with a focus on the Quad and AUKUS alliances. And thirdly, Trump’s legacy and the future of US leadership in the Indo-Pacific region are analysed.

These discussions will be framed around the theoretical tenets of structural/neorealist theory as broadened by Waltz (1979) and Mearsheimer (2001). Neorealist theory is selected for its relevance to the unfolding geopolitical landscape in the Indo-Pacific region where security forms the very fundamental survival of states—the Trump administration’s ‘hard-line’ strategic competition with China marking the Indo-Pacific as a key arena for regional competition. Further, neorealist ideals such as the US label of China as a ‘revisionist state’ and a threat to US national security, establishing a rules-based order in the Indo-Pacific as a counterbalance to China and a pivot of coalitions of like-minded nations to balance China’s rise, as well as focus on boosting arms sales and defence cooperation in the region. This helps frame Trump’s approach in the Indo-Pacific and allows for better mapping out what his second administration’s regional objectives and implications will be on US security leadership in the region. In this regard, we conclude with remarks on the impact of Trump’s neorealist approach on US security leadership in the Indo-Pacific.

Theoretical framework

According to Zimmerman (2001), theories enhance one's understanding and knowledge by predicting and explaining previously unknown phenomena. These theories are critical in explaining various experiences. This chapter sheds light on structural/neorealism to examine US leadership in Indo-Pacific security alliances under the second Trump administration. The focus on security in the Indo-Pacific is crucial, since the region hosts several security threats, including the Taiwan conflict, the India-China boundary dispute and maritime disputes involving the South and East China Seas (Heiduk, 2022).

Structural realism, widely popularised by Kenneth Waltz (1979), posits that security concerns and the anarchic nature of the international system shape and influence state behaviours and actions. Waltz' 1979 study titled *Theory of International Politics* argues that the anarchic nature of the international system explains recurring patterns like power balances, war proneness and alliance formation due to the socialisation of states to imitate each other. Neorealism, much like classical realism (Lebow, 2024), ignores human nature and focuses more on structural units such as shifts of power. Thus, neorealists highlight three systems: unipolar, where there is one great power, bipolar, which consists of two great powers and multipolar, which involves more than two great powers (Hansen, 2010). Due to the lack of central authority in the international system, states are concerned with their survival and thus prioritise security. This is validated by two sets of structural neorealism thought, that is, offensive and defensive, albeit in different ways. Offensive realists such as John Mearsheimer assert that the ultimate goal of states is to attain power (Mearsheimer, 2001). Therefore, offensive realism would expect the Indo-Pacific nations to invest more in military capabilities to dominate the region; in that way, they can ensure their survival and independence (Hu, 2022). On the other hand, defensive realists such as Waltz (1979) argue that states are restricted in their power pursuit and primarily seek power to achieve an equilibrium.

Waltz (1979) further posits that security is best achieved when states enhance capabilities through internal and external balance, which

prevents powerful states from achieving hegemony and promotes a stable power balance. Therefore, defensive neorealism in the Indo-Pacific would demand nuances of inclusivity and regional integration ideals as seen in the mandate of the Association of East Asian Nations (ASEAN), for which the general consensus among regional actors is that ASEAN is the centre of the Indo-Pacific region (Beeson and Lee-Brown, 2021; Mmako, 2024). In addition, strategic partnerships and alliances in the Indo-Pacific such as AUKUS and the Quad are best described by Waltz defensive realist thought—they are considered as measures that aim to prevent potential aggression and defend strategic interests in the Indo-Pacific, rather than seeking dominance in response to China's growing influence (Fong, 2023).

Under the neorealism framework, pursuing national interests is a form of statecraft driven by the inherent anarchy of the international system. Recent developments in the Trump 2.0 administration demonstrate the weaponisation of economic leverage to deter a growing China. This is exemplified by a tariff rise of 125 per cent on Chinese goods over and above existing trade barriers imposed on the nation (Kong, 2025). Moreover, Trump 2.0 leadership in the Indo-Pacific region seems to be leaning more towards offensive realism. As geopolitical tensions escalate between the US and China, Taiwan is likely to be the centre of Trump's security focus in the Indo-Pacific as a continuum of US-China geopolitical rivalry. Furthermore, as Mearsheimer (2001) suggests that states are primarily concerned with acquiring power, it remains uncertain whether the Trump 2.0 administration will prioritise strengthening trust with allies and partners in the Indo-Pacific region, particularly in security matters¹.

1 As it stands, Trump's offensive neorealist approach on global partners, namely NATO members and the EU allies may implicate security partnerships and engagements in the Indo-Pacific on mutual interests, namely deterring China and its Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and Maritime Silk Road Initiative flagships in the Indo-Pacific region as well as maintaining a rules-based order in the region (Posaner et al., 2025).

Indo-Pacific regional reaction to Trump 2.0 foreign policy

The US has long maintained ties to the Indo-Pacific, dating back to 1784 with trading merchandise that served China (Kolakowski, 2018). Indeed, the US has long regarded itself as a ‘Pacific nation’. It is, therefore, expected that the Indo-Pacific would probe into Trump’s foreign policy objectives in the region. This time, however, the region is faced with an aggressive stance of an ‘America First’ approach. Over the last four years, the Biden administration aimed to foster cross-regional cooperation and establish various mini-laterals in the Indo-Pacific region—including US–Japan–Australia, US–Japan–Republic of Korea (ROK), US–Japan–India and US–Japan–the Philippines—resulting in institutionalising these partnerships to the level of quasi-alliance (Yatsumi, 2024). Yet, uncertainties in the Trump 2.0 foreign policy approach linger questions of whether these partnerships will be capable enough to withstand another term of the ‘Americentrism’.² India’s Prime Minister, Narendra Modi’s call with Trump and official visit shortly after Trump’s inauguration signalled two key takeaways: firstly, the need to gain assurance of US continued commitment to strengthen ties with India amid global tariff threats and US commitment to enhancing their strategic partnership in the Indo-Pacific and Indo-Pacific Quad collaboration, with India set to host the first Quad Leaders in 2025 (Biswas and Inamdar, 2025).

Akin to the US, India regards China as a strategic rival in the Indo-Pacific and the unfolding re-emergence of the US–China trade war and geopolitical contest is likely to centre on bilateral engagements in Indo-Pacific matters. The reimposition of tariffs on China could have significant implications for China’s influence in the Indo-Pacific. Trump tariffs are expected to target critical sectors such as electronics, steel and consumer goods, causing Chinese export revenue to plummet (Klomp, 2025). However, Trump’s protectionist approach may pave the way for heightened Chinese influence in the Indo-Pacific, particularly on ASEAN relations. Since taking office, Trump has imposed tariffs on

2 Delanaye, Pottel and Glasscock (2022: 856) describes Americentrism as ‘a term signifying a tendency to view the world in an overly American-focused perspective’.

individual ASEAN nations, namely, Cambodia (49 per cent), Laos (48 per cent), Vietnam (46 per cent), and Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore have rates between 10 per cent and 36 per cent (Yeoh 2025). While most ASEAN nations export heavily to the US, China remains their largest trade partner, and the escalation of US–China tensions may push for closer ASEAN–China ties despite ASEAN’s unresponsiveness to tariff hikes.³ Further, to mitigate losses due to US-imposed tariffs, China may increase its focus on regional trade alliances, such as strengthening the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) or boosting its BRI. It is important to note that the RCEP is the world’s largest free trade agreement and China trade with RCEP members has frequently accounted for over 30 per cent of its net trade (Khan, Ali and Shah, 2022). As a key player, China’s influence in the RCEP is expected to expand, and given US tariff hikes on some of the ASEAN nations that are also RCEP and BRI members, China may gain favour against an ‘aggressive’ US in the Indo-Pacific. China’s economic leverage far outweighs the US albeit, security guarantees for regional members favours the US. Therefore, as geopolitical tensions rise between the two rivals, how regional members reciprocate, whether through hedging or side picking, will determine a rising US or China regional influence.

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Regionally, however, current US efforts in the Indo-Pacific are in a state of suspense. For instance, Shoji (2025) states that with Trump’s geoeconomic pullback through tariffs and global aid scrap, the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework (IPEF)’s future is unclear. Globally, Trump’s stance on Hamas in the Israel–Palestine conflict prompt Malaysia to showcase its support to Hamas and has often lobbied in the United Nations (UN) for Palestine—this may have also motivated Malaysia to apply for BRICS membership (Shoji, 2025). Indonesia, Vietnam and Thailand alongside Malaysia are BRICS partner countries.

3 In an article published by the South China Morning Post, ASEAN has refused to retaliate against Trump’s tariffs against individual members and has instead chosen open communication and collaboration with the US. ASEAN ideals are based on cooperation, dialogue and engagements and peace and security. For full article, see: <https://www.scmp.com/week-asia/economics/article/3305931/hitched-trumps-tariff-roller-coaster-anxious-asean-ministers-meet-malaysia>

Also implicated is South Africa's⁴ dwindled relations with the US under the Trump 2.0 presidency and how their engagement will unfold in the Indian Ocean region must be considered. Perhaps even more concerning is the apprehension that is rapidly spreading in America's backyard—the Pacific region. Trump's withdrawal from the Paris Climate Agreement and aid retreat threatens the survival of the island nations as expressed by Samoa's Prime Minister (Jackson, 2025). The Pacific Islands like the island nations in the Indian Ocean region are greatly impacted by climate change and rely heavily on forums such as the Paris Climate Agreement and the World Health Organisation (WHO) for assistance in climate adaptation, disaster management and the resilience to harsh weather. Trump's first week of office saw the US removal from both these forums, a significant decision affecting the Indo-Pacific region and the rest of the world's efforts to address the impact of climate and global health crisis (Jackson, 2025).

238 **US-led security alliances in the Indo-Pacific: A focus on the Quad and AUKUS**

For many years, security studies have mainly focused on war and ways to prevent it (Buzan and Hansen, 2009). However, many changes have occurred since the end of the cold war, necessitating a broader thinking into what security is and how it should be understood in a globalised world. For instance, the surge of maritime security concept was a result of rising threats at sea, such as piracy, terrorism and Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated (IUU) fishing (Okafor-Yarwood and Onuoha, 2023). The Indo-Pacific region gained prominence due to its emergence as a hub for social mobility and economic growth, largely driven by commercial maritime activity and security assurance. The US has played a crucial role in the provision of regional security, and strategic alliance building has been a focal point (Townshend and Crabtree, 2022). When the Quad alliance (comprising Australia, India, Japan and the US) was established

4 South Africa is a regional member of the Indian Ocean region and a member of the Indian Ocean Rim Association.

in 2004, its key mandate was on humanitarian concerns to offer assistance and support following the Tsunami catastrophe, which devastated the Indian Ocean region. However, as geopolitical dynamics in the Indo-Pacific heightened, so did the Quad mandate change, largely focusing on security amid a rising and assertive China, leading to the rise of the Quad 2.0 in 2017 with a key focus on fostering a free and open Indo-Pacific. This vision was premised on three guiding principles: cooperation on broad regional matters such as maritime security, health, climate change etcetera, continual dialogue at various levels, including leaders' summits and foreign ministers' meetings and joint military exercises including the Malabar naval exercises⁵ (Kliem, 2020). While it encompasses security concerns, the Quad's agenda is broader than AUKUS, focusing on promoting a rules-based international order and practical cooperation across multiple sectors. Recent activities in early 2025 include foreign ministers' meetings reaffirming their commitment and joint efforts in disaster relief and military training exercises (Brunnstrom et al., 2025).

During the first Trump administration, China had already reached greater heights in strategic outreach within the Indo-Pacific and globally. In this realisation, policymakers in the US, Japan, Australia and India began implementing the idea of the Indo-Pacific as an interconnected region as a 'containment' strategy against China (Mohan and Govella, 2022). By then, Japan's then Prime Minister, Shinzo Abe, advocated strongly for cooperation between the four Quad nations. This led to regular meetings of senior officials and eventually, the convention of the first Quad foreign ministers in 2019 in New York City. However, it was under the Biden administration that the US leadership in the security environment of the Indo-Pacific region was prevalent. In March 2021, the US hosted the inaugural Quad leaders' summit, marking the Biden administration's first major summit, emphasising the Quad's significance as the primary policy vehicle in the region.

Following the summit, the Quad released its first joined statement and

5 The Malabar exercises are naval exercises involving the US, India, Japan and recently, Australia in 2020. These exercises highlight the growing synergy among the Quad nations and showcase their security mandate in fostering joint efforts to establish a favourable maritime security framework in the Indo-Pacific region (see Haldar, 2024).

the launch of the vaccines, climate, and critical, emerging technologies, infrastructure coordination, cyber and space quickly followed suit, marking the formalisation of the group (Mohan and Govella, 2022). The Quad was also significant for Biden's promotion of a 'networked security architecture' through strategic alliance building. Although the pivot of the Quad highlights a successful US regional security mandate, the challenge of the isolation of key regional structures persists. This pertains to the sidelining of ASEAN in matters that implicate the region. Koga (2023) argues that the Quad's exclusive stance may marginalise ASEAN and hinder collaboration on issues like the South China Sea dispute. The question of ASEAN centrality emphasised in the Quad members' Indo-Pacific Strategies further complicate the Quad's mandate of maintaining a rules-based order and Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FIOP) ideals, largely pertaining to an anti-China stance.

240 The first Trump administration described China as a 'strategic rival' and thereby centralised Asia in the US foreign policy (Ünsal, 2023). The Biden administration also followed this path. This led to broadening the security agenda of the US beyond the Quad to establishing more minilateral groupings founded on containing an aggressive China. The establishment of AUKUS in 2021 by the US, Australia and the UK was formed to deepen diplomatic, security, and defence cooperation in the Indo-Pacific region (Novita, 2022). AUKUS builds on an already existing intelligence alliance, known as the 'Five Eyes' between the US, Australia, UK and New Zealand.⁶ What makes AUKUS unique to the 'Five Eyes' alliance lies in its security cooperation and defence mandate. This includes acquiring weaponry, particularly nuclear-powered submarines (Novita, 2022). The agreement in AUKUS is that Australia will acquire eight nuclear-powered submarines under the support of the Royal Australian Navy.

The US commitment to the partnership is largely traced during the Biden administration where US congress passed US\$3.4 billion to support AUKUS submarine acquisition (Townshend and Crabtree, 2022).

6 The 'Five Eyes' alliance plays a strategic position in the Indo-Pacific region through its intelligence-sharing system and impact on regional security and geopolitics.

However, the AUKUS treaty's supply of nuclear-powered submarines to Australia faces new challenges due to US tariffs and concerns that the submarines may decrease deterrence against China (Needham, 2025). As part of the AUKUS arms agreement, the US is set to provide Australia with three to five Virginia-class nuclear-powered submarines, with the first one expected to be delivered in 2032. This agreement is part of a deterrence strategy against China and a reflection of common interests and values. However, Australia has a deadline of 2025 to pay the US US\$2 billion to enhance its submarine shipyards, and how the Trump 2.0 administration navigates the deadline will influence the future of AUKUS. As it stands, shifts in US foreign policy, disorienting its allies, particularly the European region, holds implications for US leadership and the impact on security alliances in the region. Trump's backtrack from support of Ukraine and NATO as well as the UK's designed submarine, AUKUS-ISNN's failure to tailor Australia's needs—the submarine is too big and costly for Australia's geographical and strategic needs and may impact AUKUS initiatives (Briggs, 2025). The UK itself has a declined defence budget, and its focus is primarily on NATO, as AUKUS lags.

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The Trump 2.0 presidency is his final administration, making him ineligible for a third term under the Twenty-second Amendment to the US Constitution (Nicholas et al., 2025). However, actions implemented by the current administration may have an impact on US foreign policy in the future, particularly in terms of recovering global trust, reestablishing alliances and partnerships and re-building US global leadership. US security alignment within the Quad and AUKUS under the Trump 2.0 administration may face clashes. For instance, in an article published by The Times of India⁷ in 2024, the Quad leaders raised security concerns over the Israel–Palestine conflict, calling for a two-state solution to end the war. Trump's recent stance on the war is contradictory, proposing neighbouring nations to take in Palestinians, in an attempt to 'clean out' Gaza (Cuddy and Donnison, 2025). In addition, most of the Quad and AUKUS nations have expressed their support for Ukraine in the Russia–

7 For full article, see: <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/world/us/states-must-refrain-what-quad-members-said-on-ukraine-gaza-china/articleshow/113566458.cms>

Ukraine war, a clear contradiction to Trump's 'conditional support' for Ukraine on the basis of access to rare earth minerals in exchange for financial support (Leonard, 2025). The UK has been a strong supporter of Ukraine, providing military and humanitarian assistance—this may implicate US–UK relations, also noting UK's foreign secretary David Lammy remarks that the 'US land seizure of Greenland is not going to happen' (Wintour, 2025). Internal tensions unfolding in these security pacts under the Trump 2.0 administration are inevitable and may likely impact security cooperation in the Indo–Pacific region.

Perhaps, the question that must be raised here is, can the Quad and AUKUS survive Trump's transactional approach? Indeed, the future of these strategic partnerships under the Trump 2.0 administration remains opaque. However, it can be argued that despite uncertainties, the Quad and AUKUS will likely continue to garner US support even under the current Trump presidency. Firstly, it is important to echo that Trump's increased demands from key regional partners and allies such as Australia and NATO partners in the EU could strain relations and weaken security cooperation (Puri, 2025). However, one aspect that is clear is that China remains America's biggest threat in the Indo–Pacific region and globally—this we argue, will greatly influence Trump's continued security agenda in the Indo–Pacific. AUKUS for instance, is more than a transactional arms partnership, but rather, a deterrence effort by Australia and the US as its key regional partner, to China's military upscale in both the Indian and Pacific regions.

The US–China competition in the current Trump 2.0 administration is undoubtedly beyond trade tit-for-tat but transcends to geostrategic rivalry where Taiwan is the focal point. During the first Trump administration, the US strengthened diplomatic and economic ties with Taiwan—the US sold more than 18 billion USD in arms and Trump telephonically spoke with Taiwan's Tsai ahead of his inaugurations (Maizland and Fong, 2025). Biden further deepened ties with Taiwan by becoming the first US president to officially invite Taiwan's representatives to Washington. Although Trump is yet to indicate a position in Taiwan–China tensions, neither Beijing nor Washington have backed from the threat of the use of force for either

reunification in the case of China and defending Taiwan for the US (Maizland and Fong, 2025).

Further, the Trump 2.0 presidency seems to be following a pattern of seeking to demonstrate America's greatness and we argue that it is this pattern that will drive US leadership and support in the Indo-Pacific despite transactional and isolationist approaches to regional partners and allies as a demonstration of America's capabilities in the region. Further, following Modi's visit to Washington, both leaders have agreed to elevate defence cooperation, including deploying US and Indian militaries in the Indo-Pacific. In fact, this recent bilateral engagement resulted in the launch of the US-India COMPACT (Catalysing Opportunities for Military Partnership, Accelerated Commerce and Technology) for the twenty-first Century to drive transformative change and cooperation, as well as pivoting the new ten-year framework for the US-India Major Defence Partnership (The White House, 2025). Therefore, with the rising need to assert leadership in the Indo-Pacific, Trump will likely continue to support the Quad and AUKUS, and these strategic partnerships will likely influence the Trump 2.0 era.

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Trump's legacy and the future of the US leadership in the Indo-Pacific region

In 2017, the US officially adopted the Indo-Pacific term as a replacement for the traditional 'Asia-Pacific' in key national strategic policy documents and as a new approach towards Asia (Medcalf, 2018). Previously, the notion of the Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FIOP) was anchored by Shinzo Abe, who first formally articulated the FOIP concept in 2016, though its foundational ideas can be traced back to his 2007 speech in the Indian Parliament titled '*Confluence of the Two Seas*' (Schoeman and Wu, 2022). In this earlier speech, Abe emphasised the growing strategic importance of the convergence of the Indian and Pacific Oceans and the need for a broader Asia that included a rising India. The Trump 2.0 administration formally adopted the FOIP vision, elevating it to a core component of its national security strategy. Prior, President Obama had declared to the

Australian Government in 2011, ‘With most of the world’s nuclear power and half of humanity, Asia will largely define whether the century ahead will be marked by conflict or cooperation, needless suffering or human progress’ (The White House, 2011: para. 15).

Indeed, the rise of Asia, particularly China’s ascent, fuelled a pivot of US focus in the Indo–Pacific region and broader Asia. This pivot began with the adoption of the Indo–Pacific term in policy use and the formation of various strategic partnerships, alliances and minilateral groupings. Furthermore, the renaming of the United States Indo–Pacific Command (USPACOM) to the United States Indo–Pacific Command (US–INDOPACOM), and development of the US–Indo–Pacific Strategy signify strengthened US engagement, regional ties and policy centralisation to the Indo–Pacific. In fact, the Trump administration has implemented initiatives such as increased engagement in the Indian Ocean and Pacific Islands, policies promoting transparency and anti-corruption, as well as digital infrastructure and energy cooperation programs (Ford, 2020).

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The Trump 1.0 presidency had further placed a strong emphasis on India in its Indo–Pacific policy, understanding India’s key role in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) and as a strategic contender to China’s influence in the Indo–Pacific. Trump’s focus on the Quad held a strategic nuance—the Quad members are the Indo–Pacific’s largest democracies, aligning with Washington’s global promotion of democracy (Sen, 2023). Under Trump, India and the US signed a Comprehensive Global Strategic Partnership Agreement. The agreement emphasised India’s Indo–Pacific position and US involvement, with the US purchasing naval Apache helicopters from India to enhance its naval security capabilities (Sen, 2023). Furthermore, Trump’s visit to Asia and attendance at the ASEAN summit in 2017 signalled America’s commitment to the Indo–Pacific and strengthening US alliances and partnerships amidst a strengthened ASEAN–China ties (The White House, 2017). Yet, the Trump 2.0 administration’s imposition of higher tariffs on ASEAN nations could further weaken US assurance in the Indo–Pacific. As a result of higher tariffs, ASEAN nations are pursuing diversification and stronger regional integration to counter unprecedented shocks (Yeoh 2025). Further,

Washington's vague strategy towards the Indo-Pacific during the Trump 1.0 presidency fostered distrust and led to a decrease in its regional influence. For instance, Trump's withdrawal from the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP) in 2018 led to its exclusion from a significant regional trade agreement, while weakening its leadership position—China leveraged the withdrawal by indicating its interest in joining the CPTPP (Mmako, 2024).

Unlike the Obama administration, which echoed the US as a Pacific nation and himself as 'America's first Pacific president' (Limaye, 2012:4), the Trump presidencies suggest a retraction from the former. Already, Trump has labelled climate change a 'scam' and a 'hoax', and the Republican Platform has vowed to prioritise nuclear power and other energy sources as a means to reduce the high cost of living and inflation (Talbot, 2024). By this anti-climate change stance, the Trump 2.0 administration risks US leadership and influence in the Pacific region—on the other hand, China has pledged support for the Pacific Islands to address the calamities of climate change (Wilson and Xin, 2025). China's regional support comes at a time when the US has cut down on foreign aid, further weakening US leadership in the region.

The Pacific region is also home to Australia and New Zealand, two of America's great allies in the region. Security frames the very essence of island nations' survival, a nuance that is one of the drivers of AUKUS security cooperation. Therefore, Trump's withdrawal from the Paris Climate Agreement could threaten the survival of the island nations. Many of the Pacific nations view the global community's inability to address climate change concerns as a 'death sentence', with Trump's pledge to revoke the Paris Agreement as a potential end (Ratuva, 2017:170). Recently, President Trump issued a proclamation allowing American commercial fishing in the Pacific Ocean as part of the 'America First' Fishing Policy (The White House, 2025). While this may boost the American economy, it holds environmental implications for the protected fishing areas, further impacting the Pacific region. Furthermore, Trump's stance on worldwide tariff rises does not exempt the Pacific nations. For instance, Timor-Leste got a 10 per cent tariff while Vanuatu, Nauru and Fiji were imposed with higher tariffs, 23 per cent, 30 per cent and

32 per cent, respectively (Howes, Wood and Chowdhury, 2025). While the Pacific nations are less impacted by the tariff hikes, unlike Asia, these tariffs, which impact the global economy, implicate the island nations. One thing is certain: Trump's hostility will have a significant impact on US leadership in the Indo-Pacific region.

Conclusion

The Indo-Pacific region remains strategic to the US interests, despite Trump's neorealist approach. The security dimension in this region is America's top priority amidst an assertive China. The Quadrilateral alliance and the trilateral AUKUS partnership are two of the explored security alliances in this chapter. Both these alliances are founded on anti-China ideals; thus, their mandate is to forge stronger security cooperation in the Indo-Pacific on common interests. Despite Trump's recent transactional and isolationist approaches in the Indo-Pacific engagements, the chapter concludes that the Quad and AUKUS will still garner US support to demonstrate US capabilities against a rising China. However, Trump's aggressive stance with regards to tariff imposition, withdrawal from key agreements, global aid cuts and pressurising regional partners to double down on defence spending, will likely taint US leadership in security guarantees for Indo-Pacific regional allies and partners. This may suggest continuation of a hedging strategy or side picking for some, as current US foreign policy becomes increasingly ambiguous.

The current Trump 2.0 administration's isolationist approach may likely erase the legacy established during Trump 1.0 administration, particularly the adoption of the Indo-Pacific term in policy, the remaining of the US-PACOM to US-INDOPACOM, adoption of US strategy towards the Indo-Pacific and various alliances and partnerships and US-led minilateral groupings. In essence, Trump's offensive realist approach, particularly the recent global tariff imposition will only push strategic partners and allies further from the US and perhaps even closer to China as a deterrence attempt. This may likely drive US allies and partners in the Indo-Pacific to forge regional security minilateral groupings outside US leadership. In conclusion, the trajectory of US foreign policy in

the Indo-Pacific region under the current Trump 2.0 administration lacks in assurance of US commitment and leadership. While the Indo-Pacific strategic framework and increased focus on China are likely to persist, the manner in which the US interacts with its allies and navigates the complex geopolitical landscape may change considerably, greatly impacting regional security alliances. Lastly, the US's ability to strike a balance between the need for ongoing, cooperative engagement with its regional partners and a more assertive 'America First' agenda will ultimately determine its ability to continue playing a leading role in the Indo-Pacific's security framework, where, since the Obama and Trump 1.0 administrations, the US has managed to establish leadership in.

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CHAPTER 11

Implications of Trump's Foreign Policy on the Spanish-Moroccan Conflicts and the Western Sahara Situation

Guillermo Moya Barba

Introduction

The complex and evolving relationship between the United States (US) and Morocco (rooted in centuries-old diplomatic ties) has acquired renewed geopolitical significance in recent years. From Morocco's early recognition of American independence in the eighteenth century to the strategic alliances of the post-World War II and Cold War periods, US-Moroccan cooperation has been a constant thread in North African diplomacy. This historical continuity took a pivotal turn under the administration of Donald J. Trump, whose foreign policy marked a sharp departure from prior multilateral approaches, favouring bilateralism and the promotion of US strategic interests (particularly in relation to energy security, critical minerals and regional stability).

This chapter examines how Trump-era foreign policy altered the geopolitical landscape in the longstanding disputes between Spain and Morocco, particularly in relation to the Western Sahara conflict and the maritime claims involving the Canary Islands. The US recognition of Moroccan sovereignty over Western Sahara in December 2020, in exchange for Moroccan normalisation of ties with Israel, represents a watershed moment that challenged international legal norms surrounding self-determination and colonial borders. This recognition, reaffirmed during Trump's second term, not only solidified US strategic alignment with Morocco, but it also directly implicated Spain's diplomatic posture, natural resource interests and maritime claims in the Atlantic.

Furthermore, this analysis situates Trump's actions within a broader context of global resource competition, particularly the race for rare earth

elements and deep-sea mineral exploitation. The US interest in Morocco and Western Sahara is not solely diplomatic, but deeply economic and strategic, as evidenced by recent executive orders aiming to boost domestic access to critical minerals. As Spain asserts its maritime rights west of the Canary Islands (overlapping with Morocco's claims grounded in its assertion of sovereignty over Western Sahara), Trump's foreign policy complicates European Union (EU) and United Nations (UN) efforts to mediate the dispute. Through a legal, geopolitical and economic lens, this study explores the broader implications of US engagement in North Africa, focusing on how Trump's recognition policy reshapes not only bilateral relations but also the international legal and normative frameworks governing decolonisation and resource sovereignty.

The US and Morocco: A long history of friendship

254 The relationship between Morocco and the US is older than one might think. In fact, Morocco was the first country to recognise the independence of the American colonies in 1777, which led to the signing of a treaty of friendship in 1786 (The Adam Papers, 2016), the longest-standing treaty in history for the US (Pérez Triana, 2022; Vagni, 2009). However, it was not until World War II that relations between the two nations really began to grow closer.

During this war, Morocco was part of the French and Spanish protectorates, with the former comprising most of the territory, while the Spanish protectorate was limited to the northern part of the Rif Mountains. In 1942, when France was divided between Free France and Vichy France, Operation Torch took place, led by General Dwight Eisenhower, with the aim of liberating Morocco from Axis influence. The focus of the operation was the Moroccan cities of Safi and Casablanca, which resulted in the liberation of the Moroccan region. For its part, the United Kingdom, which also participated in this operation, focused on the regions belonging to Algeria and Tunisia, as it did not consider the liberation of Morocco a priority. This US intervention gave the American giant a wide popularity in Moroccan society that would last for years and decades to come. Moreover, one of the main consequences of this

intervention was the rise of nationalist and independence movements in Morocco, mainly led by the Istiqlal party. The enmity against a France that was absent and unconcerned about the interests and needs of the Moroccan population, as evidenced by its absence during the famine crisis of 1945, only grew over time, while friendship with the US only grew stronger (Valentin, 2018). In 1943, a year after Operation Torch, a conference was held in Casablanca to coordinate allied actions in the war effort. The event brought together the American (Franklin D. Roosevelt), British (Winston Churchill) and French (De Gaulle) leaders in the Moroccan city and was hosted by the Alawite monarch, Mohammed V.

Once the Second World War ended and the new Cold War period began, Morocco maintained a policy of neutrality, as did other African countries, such as Libya, Egypt, Ethiopia, Sudan and Ghana. This implied, therefore, the removal of five US military bases from Moroccan territory in 1959, which suggested that, despite the deep gratitude towards the US and the long-standing friendship between the two nations, the Alawi monarch preferred to maintain a neutral policy, far from the possibility of being involved in a war between the two superpowers (Valentin, 2018).

This policy of neutrality was to change completely with the accession to the throne of his son, Hassan II, who succeeded him as monarch after his father's death in 1961. From then on, Morocco's position in the Cold War became manifestly pro-Western, based on its intentions to improve relations with both France and the rest of the West. This was evidence of one of Morocco's main characteristics: an African country, but with an eye on Europe and the US, which also kept it away from membership of the African Union for several decades.

A decade later, in early November 1975, the Green March took place, a civilian mobilisation aimed at taking control of the then Spanish Sahara and its capital, El Aaiún (Weiner, 1979). A week later, a Tripartite Agreement was signed in Madrid between Spain, Morocco, and Mauritania, by which Spain undertook to withdraw from Western Sahara, thereby ending its responsibilities and powers over the territory. This agreement, however, did not foresee the transfer of sovereignty to Morocco or Mauritania, but an agreement had to be reached in which the opinion of the Sahrawi population was taken into account in this regard (United Nations Treaty

Series, 1975); that is, a process of self-determination was to be carried out so that the Sahrawi people themselves could decide on their future and the possible formation of an independent Sahrawi state. This, however, never happened, and Morocco became a colonising power that maintains its de facto administration over Western Sahara today. In the years following Morocco's occupation of the territory, the US acted as a provider of arms, military training and constant diplomatic backing. In return, Morocco would act as a supporter of US interests in North Africa and the Middle East, as manifested, for example, in Morocco's role in the conclusion of the Camp David Accords between Israel and Egypt (Valentin, 2018).

After the death of King Hassan II and the accession of his son, Mohammed VI, to the throne in 1999, US–Moroccan relations entered a new phase marked by the war on terror and the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001. On 16 May 2003, shortly after the invasion of Iraq in which Morocco participated, terrorist attacks took place in Casablanca, resulting in more than 100 wounded and 45 dead, including the twelve suicide bombers. Since 2001 and especially since 2003, Morocco has positioned itself as a geostrategic enclave of utmost importance for the US in terms of its influence in North Africa, the Sahel and the Middle East (Vagni, 2009). Thus, relations between the two countries were further strengthened in 2004 by two events: the inclusion of Morocco as a major non-NATO ally and the conclusion of a free trade agreement with the US.

In the years to come, the US considered Morocco a key strategic partner in the fight against terrorism and the maintenance of stability in North Africa, being included in November 2007 in the Middle East and North Africa Financial Action Task Force (MENAFATF), a regional body of the Financial Action Task Force (FATF), focused on combating money laundering and terrorist financing (FATF, n.d.). Morocco had proven to be the most stable of all the states in the region, especially after the events of 2011. In the context of the Arab Spring, Morocco was one of the few Arab states that remained stable; however, the Alawi monarch was forced to carry out a series of democratic and liberalising reforms, including a constitutional reform that limited the powers of the monarch and extended the powers of the Moroccan legislature. Subsequently, in the context of counterterrorism, the US and Morocco joined the Global

Coalition to Defeat ISIS in 2014 and jointly launched the Initiative to Address Homegrown Terrorism in September 2017, which aimed to bring together government officials, academics, criminal justice practitioners and non-governmental representatives from more than forty countries to share expertise and identify best practices in counterterrorism (Global Counterterrorism Forum [GCTF], n.d.).

Another sign of affinity between the two countries is their manifest enmity towards the state of Iran. In 2018, Morocco cut diplomatic ties with the Shiite country over its alleged financial and logistical support for the POLISARIO Front. In other areas, however, the two nations have not been entirely aligned, such as on the Israeli–Palestinian issue, where Morocco advocates the two-state solution and, in December 2017, criticised the Trump administration's decision to recognise Jerusalem as Israel's capital. Moreover, in 2013 and 2016, with Barack Obama at the helm of the US government, there were sporadic moments of tension between the two countries due to pressure exerted by the US on Morocco at the UN over the situation in Western Sahara.

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The latest sign of friendship between the two nations was the US president's decision in April 2025 to impose reciprocal tariffs on almost all countries in the international community. Of the list of countries presented, Lesotho ranks highest with 50 per cent tariffs, followed by Southeast Asian countries such as Cambodia (49 per cent), Laos (48 per cent), Vietnam (46 per cent) and Myanmar (44 per cent). The EU, for its part, imposed tariffs of 20 per cent, while Morocco is one of the countries to which the lowest percentage has been applied: 10 per cent (along with others such as Argentina, the United Kingdom and Ukraine). In contrast, its neighbour, Algeria, has imposed a tariff of 30 per cent (The White House, 2025c). This list demonstrates the state of US political and economic relations with the rest of the world, especially in terms of the closeness or remoteness of the different states towards China (to which tariffs of 34 per cent have been imposed).

Western Sahara and the US position

What is known today as Western Sahara was once a colony and later a

province belonging to the Spanish state, the capital of which was the city of El Aaiún (Gobierno de España, 1958). The coup d'état in Portugal in 1974, which resulted in Lisbon's decision to grant independence to its colonies, prompted King Hassan II to put pressure on Spain to do the same with Western Sahara and withdraw from the territory. In August 1974 the Spanish state notified the UN Security Council of its intention to hold a referendum on self-determination for Western Sahara, which Morocco opposed, considering that before colonisation, the territory was part of the Alawite Kingdom. Shortly afterwards, Mauritania also expressed its interest in the future of the Spanish territory, and in December 1974, the UN General Assembly requested the International Court of Justice (ICJ) to issue an advisory opinion on the sovereignty rights that both states might possess with respect to Western Sahara. On 16 October 1975, the Court ruled that the existing ties between Western Sahara and the states of Morocco and Mauritania did not give rise to the assertion of sovereign rights over the territory, even stressing the need to respect the principle of self-determination of the Saharawi people in accordance with General Assembly resolution 1514 (XV) (ICJ, 1975). However, ignoring the Court's ruling, Morocco went ahead and, in early November, mobilised large numbers of civil society in what would become known as the Green March, as a way of asserting its sovereign rights over the territory and forcing Madrid to leave.

A week later, Spain ended its domination of the territory and, through the Madrid Accords, handed over administrative responsibility to Morocco and Mauritania. These agreements were intended to fulfil the UN's objective of decolonising Western Sahara, putting an end to Spain's role as the territory's administering power by 26 February 1976. However, the text also offers some elements to bear in mind regarding the decolonisation process in Western Sahara. Firstly, it expressed the obligation to respect the opinion of the Saharawi people, in accordance with the principle of self-determination of peoples. Secondly, it established the creation of a temporary administration in which Morocco, Mauritania, and Yemen were to participate, the body through which the Saharawi people could express their opinions (United Nations Treaty Series, 1975). However, especially after Mauritania's withdrawal from possession

of part of Western Sahara following a coup d'état in 1978, Morocco took over two-thirds of the northern part of the territory and the phosphate reserves at Bou Craa. Mauritania, for its part, settled for control of the fishing industry in Dakhla (formerly known as Villa Cisneros) and iron ore reserves in Agracha (García Pérez, 2019). For its part, the POLISARIO Front announced the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic (SADR) on 27 February 1976. Today, SADR is internationally recognised by 82 states, most of them from the African continent. It has also been a full member of the African Union since 1982 (then the Organisation of African Unity).

During the negotiation of the Madrid Accords, the US played an important role in convincing Spain, and this is sometimes overlooked. Thus, the American giant pressured Spain to accede to Morocco's territorial demands, arguing that there was a possibility that King Hassan II would be deposed from the throne. Likewise, faced with the possibility of an independent state susceptible to Soviet-communist ideas from nearby countries such as Algeria, the US preferred the option of a Sahara close to Morocco. Through the interdiction of General Vernon Walters, the US combined Spain's need for cooperation with the renewal of contracts for US military bases on Spanish soil (Zunes, 1987).

The first two US administrations following Morocco's takeover of Western Sahara, the Carter administration (1977–1981) and the Reagan administration (1981–1989) increased military aid to Morocco, albeit moderately, due to their refusal to officially recognise Morocco's sovereignty over Western Sahara, as this could lead to a breakdown in relations with Algeria, an important US economic partner, and the internationalisation of the conflict. This arms trade was carried out in accordance with a ban passed in 1960, which prohibited the utilisation of US arms outside recognised borders, and the US Arms Export Control Act (1976), which prohibits their use in all non-defensive activities. By 1979, however, it became clear that the US knew of and tolerated the use of these weapons on Sahrawi territory (Zunes, 1987). All this took place in a historical context marked by the 1979 Iranian revolution and the increasing destabilisation of the Middle East.

The first state to recognise Moroccan sovereignty over Western Sahara was the US. In December 2020, then (and current) US President Donald

J. Trump announced the official US recognition of Moroccan sovereignty over the territory of Western Sahara and offered his support for the autonomy solution proposed by the Alawite Kingdom (The White House, 2020). This support was manifested in the visit of the US Ambassador to Morocco, Mr David T. Fischer, to the Saharawi town of Dakhla with the intention of initiating the process for the installation of a consular office (US Embassy and Consulates in Morocco, 2021). In return, Morocco would strengthen ties with Israel by signing a treaty normalising relations between the two countries (Pérez Triana, 2022; US Department of State, 2020) (which would form part of the so-called 'Abraham Accords' that also involved Bahrain, the United Arab Emirates and Sudan). This US position could set an important precedent in relation to actions aimed at limiting the right to self-determination of peoples and respect for the rule of intangibility of colonial borders, known as *uti possidetis iuris*, which is clearly rooted in African countries, and could provoke a domino effect in other parts of the continent.

260 On 6 November 2023, King Mohammed VI delivered a speech commemorating the 48th anniversary of the Green March, the peaceful invasion of the then Spanish Sahara that led to the signing of the Tripartite Agreements on 14 November 1975 between Spain, Mauritania, and Morocco. In the words of the Alaouite monarch, this event enabled Morocco to assert its territorial integrity, claiming the territory as the Moroccan Sahara. The monarch repeatedly stressed the need to continue development work in this area, not only for national purposes, but also for regional ones, thus enabling the other Sahel states to obtain an outlet to the Atlantic. He also referred to Western Sahara as an important area in relation to the exploration of offshore natural resources and the renewable energy agenda. Finally, Mohammed VI welcomed the fact that many countries recognised the Sahara as a sovereign Moroccan territory and that others have declared that the autonomy solution proposed by Morocco in 2007 is the best viable option for resolving the conflict (Kingdom of Morocco, Head of Government, 2023).

An important political shift in this direction came in a letter from Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez to Mohammed VI in which he stated that the autonomy solution proposed by the Kingdom of Morocco

(United Nations Security Council, 2007) was the most feasible solution for resolving the Western Sahara conflict. This event represented a complete reversal of the policy of neutrality maintained by the various Spanish governments since their withdrawal more than 45 years ago (Jiménez García-Carriazo, 2025). Other states that have backed Morocco's proposal have been the United Kingdom, France and Germany. Moreover, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) recently declared that its office in El Aaiún and Tindouf will close by the end of September 2025. This political context is paving the way for the recognition of Western Sahara as part of Moroccan territory and eliminating all chances of achieving independence.

The Spanish-Moroccan conflict over the waters off the Canary Islands: Why might it be important for the US?

On 17 December 2014, Spain submitted to the Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf (CLCS), in accordance with Article 76 and Annexe II of the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), a request for the extension of the outer limits of its continental shelf in the area west of the Canary Islands. In its request, Spain asserted that there were no disputes with another coastal state or states in the extension of its continental shelf, and that its submission did not prejudice or prejudice the rights of third states that might eventually be claimed.

By communication submitted on 10 March 2015, Morocco underlined that part of the area claimed by Spain concerns an area whose sovereignty had not yet been delimited between the two countries. The question of whether there is a dispute of sovereign rights in the enlargement area is important, as it would deprive the CLCS of any possibility of hearing the matter unless otherwise agreed. While Morocco did not object to the CLCS being able to hear the case, it argued that the principle that should govern the delimitation of the outer limits of the continental shelf should be that of equity and not that of equidistance. Consequently, based on the application of the first principle, Morocco would obtain a substantial advantage over Spain in the delimitation task. In its reply of 22 April 2015, Spain undertook to delimit the limits of its continental shelf in accordance

with the recommendations to be issued by the CLCS in the future and through an agreement with those states that have adjacent or opposite coasts. However, although Morocco's claims are based on the extent of the coastal waters of Western Sahara, Spain omitted any reference to this territory (CLCS, 2015).

This, however, changed when, in August 2015, in its presentation on the 2014 submission, the Spanish delegation spoke of a possible overlap with a future submission regarding the continental shelf beyond 200 nautical miles measured from Western Sahara, a non-self-governing territory pending decolonisation. In this case, Spain expressed its willingness to negotiate, not with Morocco, but with the entity that would have sovereign control over the coasts and territory of Western Sahara once its decolonisation process was completed (CLCS, 2015). In Figure 11.1, the area of overlap, to the south, can be seen with the potential area of Western Sahara.

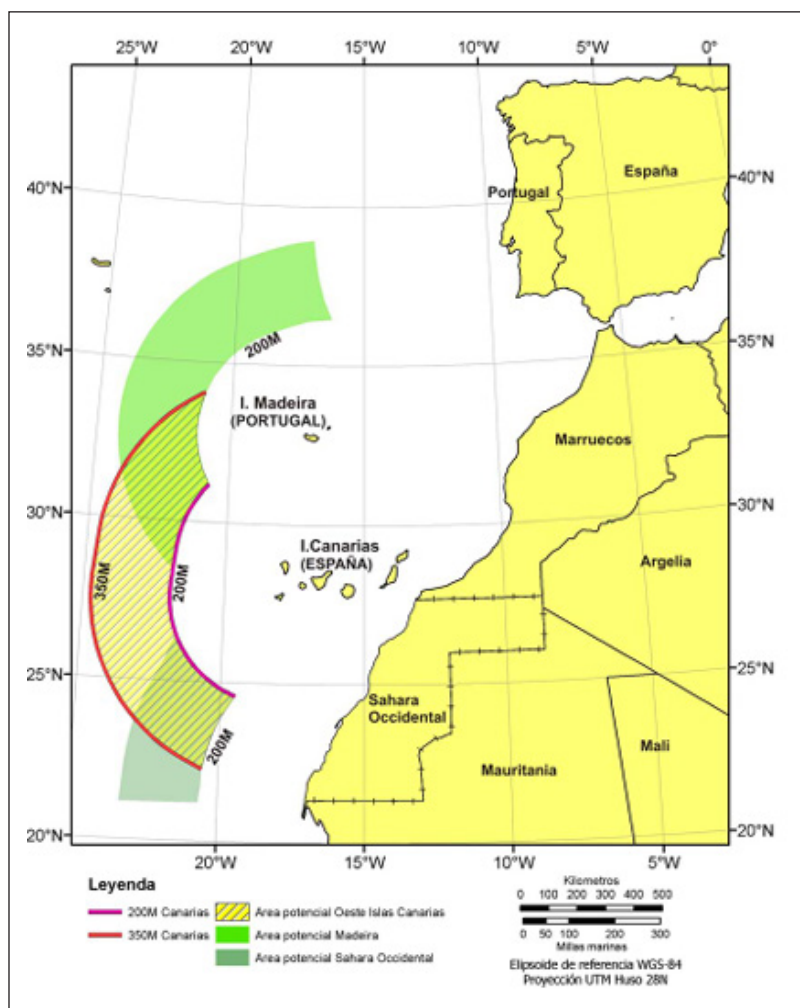


Figure 11.1. Overlapping areas of continental shelf extension to the west of the Canary Islands

Source: García Pérez, R. 2019. Canary Islands and the foreseeable expansion of its continental shelf: the difficult balance between Spain, Morocco and Western Sahara. *Revista de Estudios Internacionales Mediterráneos* (*Journal of Mediterranean International Studies*), 26: 125.

According to Morocco’s National Office of Hydrocarbons and Mines (ONHYM), the Alawi Kingdom is willing to extend the limits of its continental shelf both in its sovereign zone and in the maritime zone of Western Sahara (Jiménez García-Carriazo, 2025), as shown in the image below. These waters are considered by Morocco to be part of its sovereign territory, having enacted two laws that integrate them into its exclusive economic zone (Laws No. 37.17 and 38.17). The main reason why Morocco considers the extension of these limits important is related to the mining and energy industries.

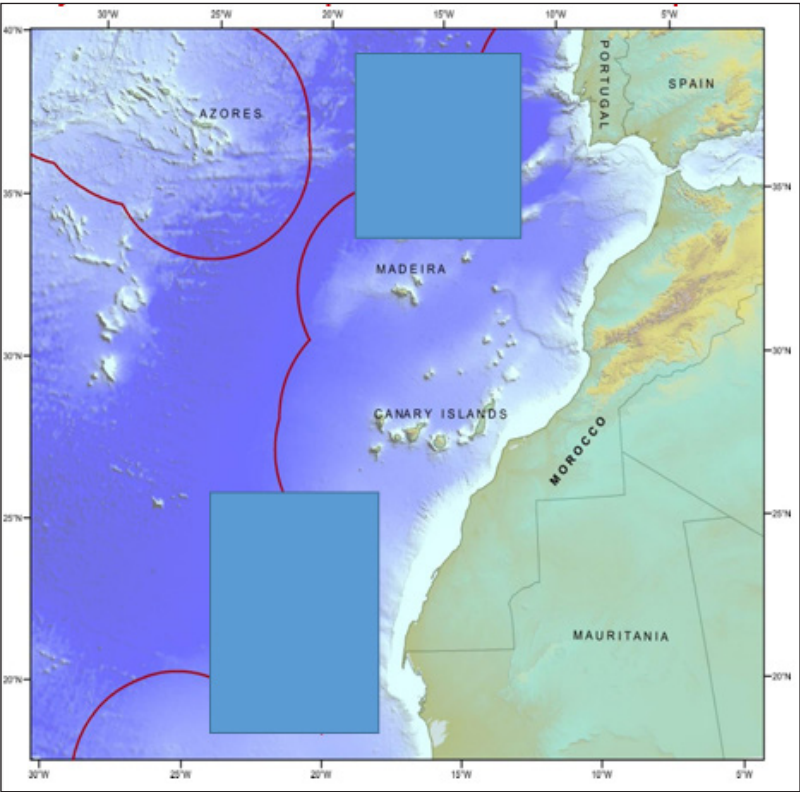


Figure 11.2 Moroccan Atlantic continental shelf extension project
Source: ONHYM. 2019. *Aperçu sur le rôle et les missions de l'ONHYM et état des lieux de l'exploration pétrolière en offshore au Maroc*, p. 17.

Figure 11.2 shows an overview of the role and missions of ONHYM and current status of offshore oil exploration in Morocco. A state having rights over its continental shelf may exercise its sovereignty for the purposes of exploration and exploitation of its natural resources in accordance with Article 77 UNCLOS. The continental shelf overlap area between Spain and Western Sahara includes a mountainous area within which seamounts rich in mineral resources have been found. Among these, the one known as Mount Tropic, where the highest concentration of polymetallic mineral deposits is found, stands out. Mount Tropic (Algora Weber, 2021) is known to be the world's largest tellurium deposit with up to 2 600 tonnes, which may represent up to 10 per cent of the world's reserves of tellurium, a key element in the manufacture of solar panels and thermoelectric generators. In addition, the extension of sovereign boundaries in this area could provide positive benefits for the oil and gas extractive industry. In 2005, the Saharawi Arab Democratic Republic (SADR) offered to grant licences for the exploration of oil and gas fields, both inland and offshore. The map below (Figure 11.3) shows that some of the areas affected by the licensing correspond to Moroccan aspirations. However, resolving the issue of Western Sahara's sovereignty remains a priority over the rights that either state may have to delimit its maritime zone.

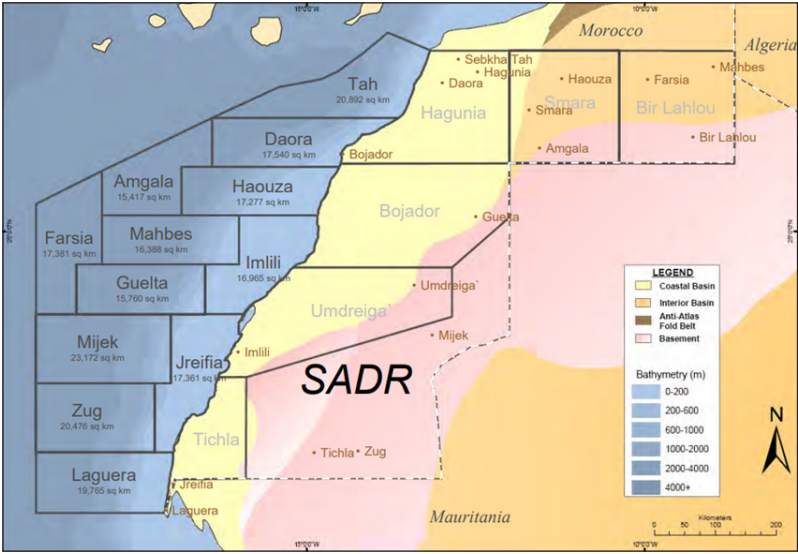


Figure 11.3. Saharawi Arab Democratic Republic ‘SADR’

Source: García Pérez, R. 2019. Canary Islands and the foreseeable expansion of its continental shelf: the difficult balance between Spain, Morocco and Western Sahara. *Revista de Estudios Internacionales Mediterráneos (Journal of Mediterranean International Studies)*, 26: 130.

Despite the existence of these minerals on the controversial seabed, it is necessary to point out that their future extraction is not assured, as there are many drawbacks and many factors to be considered when even considering the possibility of extracting them (García Pérez, 2019). Firstly, although it is a scarce element, tellurium can also be obtained from the earth’s surface, the process of obtaining it being less costly. While it is an important element for the renewable energy industry, in particular, for the manufacture of solar panels and offshore wind turbines, its viability and profitability are not assured. Secondly, the implementation of an extraction project on this scale could have serious impacts on the marine environment. There is currently a clear lack of knowledge about the environmental implications of such projects, particularly deep-sea mining projects, and numerous environmental impact assessments would need to be carried out to ascertain the best ways to mitigate the effects. Finally,

one must refer again to the fact that Western Sahara remains a non-self-governing territory whose decolonisation is still pending. Therefore, the opinion and consent of the Saharawi population itself should be sought when exploiting the natural resources located in this area. The Court of Justice of the EU ruled in 2024, that products obtained in Western Sahara and marketed by Morocco on the EU internal market could not be covered by EU–Moroccan trade agreements, since without the consent of the Sahrawi population, their right to self-determination would be violated (Court of Justice of the European Union, 2024).

The interest of the US and, specifically, the Trump administration in taking over the trade of these strategic elements for industries such as defence or renewable energy was made clear to the world, both with the negotiation with Ukraine for the signing of the famous rare earths agreement (whereby the US would continue to provide military aid to Ukraine and in exchange, would have rights over areas rich in Ukrainian rare earths), and with the signing of the executive order of 20 March 2025, which seeks to increase US production of these strategic minerals (The White House, 2025b) (thorium would fall under the definition of ‘critical mineral’ in 30 U.S.C. 1606). This executive order would later be complemented by the one signed on 24 April 2025, by which the US president intends to promote deep sea mining both in its own waters and abroad. Through this measure, Trump seeks to ‘establish the US as a global leader in seabed mineral exploration and development both within and beyond national jurisdiction’ (The White House, 2025a), thus bypassing the International Seabed Authority (ISA) and undermining multilateralism.

The Middle East and Maghreb region is home to 57 per cent of the world's oil and gas reserves, and the largest accumulation of rare earth elements is in Western Sahara. Morocco, for its part, has sovereignty over territory that is rich in phosphates, which are used for fertilisers, as well as radioactive elements such as uranium 238 (Algora Weber, 2021). All these elements not only make the Middle East and Maghreb region an ambitious territory in relation to the extractive industry, they also position Morocco and Western Sahara in the Trump administration's sights. The decision to recognise Moroccan sovereignty over Western Sahara in 2020

could be seen as a step forward in the trade of these elements between Morocco and the US.

Conclusion

The US–Moroccan relationship has always enjoyed a relative harmony, as the two nations’ common interests have always tended to coincide (security, migration, energy, diplomacy), to such an extent that the US has become, especially since Donald J. Trump’s arrival in the White House, a loyal ally when it comes to Western Sahara. The likelihood that this territory will be able to have an effective process of self-determination in the short term is dwindling. A possible move by Trump to reaffirm the 2020 US policy shift could involve opening a consulate in Dakhla and curtailing the role of the UN Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO), thereby reinforcing Morocco’s claims over the disputed territory. Nevertheless, the potential costs of this increased American backing for Morocco’s territorial ambitions remain uncertain. Also, having already normalised relations with Israel, Morocco may leverage its growing and strategic partnership with the Israeli government to strengthen its diplomatic influence, particularly regarding its regional priority—the Western Sahara.

The struggle for the strategic mineral resources needed to power certain industries and compete with other markets, such as China, means that the waters adjacent to the territory of Western Sahara are in the sights of both Morocco and the US. This will also have consequences for relations between the Kingdoms of Morocco and Spain, which have been strained at times over migration, security and Moroccan interests in the waters claimed by Spain. The executive orders signed by President Trump in March and April 2025 show his intention to undermine multilateralism and even bypass environmental protection legislation to promote and advance deep sea mining abroad. Pending a decision on the question of sovereignty over the waters claimed by Spain south of the Canary Islands, a reaction from the international community is needed on the process of self-determination in Western Sahara and the protection of the seabed.

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CHAPTER 12

The Changing Dynamics of United States Development Assistance and Its Implications for Security and Democratic Governance in West Africa

Benjamin Serebour

Introduction

The aftermath of the Cold War saw a wave of political reforms and democratisation across many African countries. This period marked intense domestic efforts led by pro-democracy forces, including civil society organisations, academics, student bodies, the media and religious groups, to pressure authoritarian leaders to embrace democratic governance (Aidoo, 2006; Makinda, 1996). These groups aimed to participate in the civic space and contribute to discussions and policies that drive socio-political and economic development, protect civil liberties and promote human rights. Internationally, the US emerged as a key supporter of these democratic movements. Although some scholars have described America's role in Africa's democratic transitions as minimal, Washington contributed to the political discourse and initial processes that laid the foundation for democracy in the region (Ngwafu, 2016; Owusu-Mensah, 2015). In response to the ongoing governance and security challenges on the continent, Washington has continued to implement initiatives that promote stability and democratic consolidation. For instance, in 2022, the US allocated US\$717 million for peace and security assistance (US\$446.5 million) and governance programmes (US\$270.5 million) (Arief, Ploch Blanchard and Cook, 2023).

These efforts have received mixed results. Whilst some countries have made great strides in building democratic governance systems, others have backslid, manifesting in the unconstitutional overthrow of

governments by the military, manipulation of election results to favour the incumbent and constitutional review by incumbent governments to prolong their stay in power (Gyimah-Boadi, 2021). Currently, West Africa epitomises this regression. Since 2020, the region has experienced six coup d'états in four countries which include Burkina Faso (two coups in January and September 2022), Guinea (2021), Mali (2020, 2021) and Niger (2023) (Hudson and Towriss, 2023). These takeovers reflect a legitimacy crisis as the failure by elected governments to improve security and reduce corruption fuelled public disillusionment towards the civilian leadership which led to the coups. Meanwhile, a 2024 Afrobarometer report indicates that more than half of Africans (53 per cent across 39 countries) are willing to accept a military takeover if elected leaders abuse power for their benefit (Afrobarometer, 2024).

274 All these developments are happening amidst dwindling Washington engagement in Africa as the issues in the Middle East, Ukraine and China have emerged as the main priorities of the US (Thurston, 2024). The dismantling and cancellation of several programmes under the US Agency for International Development, including those that promote the rule of law, democracy and human rights in Africa, demonstrate the decrease US presence in the region under Trump's administration (Lyngaas, 2025). The Kremlin, on the other hand, is increasing its political and military engagements and embarking on disinformation campaigns implemented through a coordinated network of local influencers, Wagner, and Russian state media (Clifford and Gruz, 2022; Hiebert, 2025). This is believed to be part of a broader strategy by Moscow to undermine democracy and promote authoritarian narratives in Africa. However, some scholars and policymakers have downplayed the extent of Russian disinformation, arguing that Western powers are using this narrative to divert attention from their shortcomings in the region (Warner and Duerksen, 2025).

Nevertheless, Moscow's growing influence has become a significant issue in discussions about democratic governance in West Africa. This should, however, not be analysed in isolation, as various complex internal and external factors shape governance outcomes in the region. Successive elected governments in West Africa have struggled to achieve socioeconomic objectives that address the people's needs due to several

factors, including weak governance structures, corruption and nepotism. This situation has made democracy less attractive, as the anticipated benefits remain unrealised (Gyimah-Boadi, 2021). Geopolitically, the US and Russia have economic, military and diplomatic interests in the region. While the US emphasises democracy and the rule of law in its engagements, Russia has supported military governments, and its partnerships remain silent on democratic principles, raising concerns about the implications of declining US support and the increased presence of the Kremlin for the future of democratic governance in the region.

The central problem the paper addresses is the apparent democratic backsliding in West Africa despite the US and other Western assistance which aims to promote democracy and security, particularly in the Sahel region. While the US and other Western partners have invested in governance reforms and institution-building, democratic institutions remain fragile, public trust in elected governments is diminishing and insecurity continues to escalate. Simultaneously, new geopolitical actors like Russia have expanded their influence by offering unconditional support to authoritarian and transitional regimes, appealing to governments and populations disillusioned with democracy. The complex interplay between internal governance failures, the shifting landscape of US development assistance, and the increasing influence of Russia on democratic consolidation in West Africa has received little attention. This chapter explores how these shifting dynamics, marked by both internal governance failures and external normative competition are reshaping the political landscape in the Sahel.

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Theoretical framework: Explaining the democratic setbacks in the Sahel

To analyse the current governance crisis and the evolving geopolitical landscape in West Africa, this study adopts a multi-theoretical framework that combines legitimacy crisis theory and norm diffusion theory. Legitimacy crisis theory emphasises that states derive their legitimacy from citizens' trust in the moral and functional credibility of the governance system to address their needs (Beetham, 1991; Lipset, 1959). Rotberg (2004) further emphasises that legitimacy is rooted in a state's

efforts to promote good governance and its ability to provide essential political goods such as security, freedom of speech, justice and quality public services. Among these, Rotberg (2004) considers security to be the most critical; a state unable to protect its citizens, secure its borders or maintain public order is deemed either failing or failed. Rotberg (2004) also notes that corruption is often both symptom and driver of state failure, eroding public trust and weakening institutional performance.

In the Sahel region, chronic insecurity and state incapacity have led to legitimacy crises as the military leaders in Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger accused the government of not providing enough resources for the armed forces to combat the spread of terrorism and violent extremism. These insecurities have killed many citizens, left millions displaced and forced the closure of schools, affecting millions of children (United Nations, 2023). The levels of insecurity in the Sahel undermined public confidence in civilian governments, as citizens perceived the administrations to be weak and inefficient in responding to the crisis (Mbulle-Nziege and Cheeseman, 2023). Steadman (2020) notes that corruption is a major factor that has contributed to the spread of terrorism in the Sahel. Armed groups have thrived in areas neglected by governments, where limited development and minimal state investment, often due to corruption, have created a vacuum that these groups exploit by positioning themselves as providers of basic services and security (Transparency International, 2023; Axelrod and Aning, 2020). These dynamics underscore how corruption is not only a by-product of fragility, but a key driver of the insecurity plaguing the Sahel.

Alongside internal legitimacy crisis, this study applies norms diffusion theory to assess the external dimension of the democratic decline in the Sahel. As outlined by Finnemore and Sikkink (1998), international norms such as democracy, the rule of law, and human rights are diffused through a lifecycle involving norm emergence, cascading, and internationalisation. Since the 1990s, the US and other Western actors have made efforts to promote liberal democratic norms through development assistance, diplomatic engagement, institutional capacity building and governance reforms (Carothers, 1999; Keck and Sikkink, 1998). Notwithstanding, the recent suspension of US aid in military-led governments and the rise

of geopolitical competitors like Russia and China, who offer support without normative conditions, have triggered a counter-norm diffusion dynamic. These emerging powers promote alternative governance models rooted in non-interference and strategic realism without any governance conditionalities (Cooley, 2015; Tolstrup, 2014). As a result, democracy promotion efforts by the US and other Western actors have not only lost traction but also faced legitimacy backlash when tied to the underperforming democratic regimes. These theoretical frameworks allow the paper to examine how internal governance failures and shifting global normative influences are contributing to the erosion of democracy and the rise of alternative political models in the Sahel.

Research methodology

This study employs a qualitative research design based on content analysis of secondary data sources to examine the evolving dynamics between US development assistance, security, democratic governance and geopolitical competition in West Africa. The research aims to unpack the complex and interlinked factors contributing to democratic backsliding and shifting international alignments in the region. The analysis draws from a wide range of materials, including peer-reviewed journal articles, Afrobarometer survey data, policy briefs, government reports, think tank publications and media articles. These sources were selected to ensure a broader coverage of regional political trends, US foreign policy approaches and the increasing strategic influence of non-Western actors, such as Russia. To enhance the reliability of the findings and minimise potential bias, the study triangulated perspectives from diverse institutional, geographic and ideological sources. This approach allows for a more nuanced understanding of the varied narratives shaping governance and security in the Sahel.

The chapter is structured into five sections. Following the introduction, the next section explores the political landscape in West Africa, focusing on the interplay between governance, insecurity and the rise of military coups. The third section assesses the US role and support for security and democratic governance in West Africa, highlighting the potential impact

of the Trump administration's actions on democracy in the region. In section four, the paper discusses the possible consequences of Russia's growing influence on the region's political environment. The final section examines political and governance developments in West Africa in relation to emerging global patterns and suggests policy recommendations to enhance security and governance in the region.

Democratic governance crisis in West Africa

West Africa is facing democratic setbacks following the recent military takeovers, with four affected countries currently under military rule. The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) responded to these coups by suspending the four countries, and in the case of Niger, the bloc threatened to use force to reinstate the ousted president and restore democracy (Mathur, 2024). Various West African heads of state and governments also engaged in bilateral talks with the junta leaders to return their countries to civilian rule; however, these efforts yielded no results. On 29 January 2025, Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger announced their withdrawal from ECOWAS, complicating efforts to restore democracy in the three countries (Ewokor, 2025). They have since established the Alliance of Sahel States (AES/ASS), a bloc which is working on deepening ties with Russia. The foreign ministers of AES held their first official meeting in Moscow on 3 April 2025, where Russia promised to continue supporting their fight against Islamic insurgency (Radio France International, 2025). The departure of the three countries, thus, reflects a combination of complex security challenges, shifting geopolitical alliances and institutional failures (Aboagye, 2025). But how did the region reach this point?

Since adopting democracy in the 1990s, many West African countries have made little progress in developing and implementing governance structures and processes that address their citizens' needs. A 2023 socio-economic profile of West Africa indicated that an estimated 32.47 per cent, amounting to 141.32 million people in the region live in extreme poverty (United Nations Economic Commission for Africa, 2023). Most constitutional reforms introduced in the 1990s either failed to tackle the

region's socio-economic challenges or lacked the robustness to resist authoritarian resurgence (Fombad, 2013). Consequently, successive governments have employed diverse tactics to undermine the legislature and judiciary, restrict active citizen participation in politics by arresting and detaining opposition leaders, show disregard for the rule of law, and in some cases, exert total control over government machinery, leading to state capture (Atta-Asamoah, 2020; Dulani and Tengtenga, 2019; Gerzso and Van de Walle, 2022). In Benin, for instance, President Talon has been accused of using the justice system to attack his political opponents, enabling him to consolidate power. Once considered one of the stable democracies in West Africa, the 2019 Freedom House report classified Benin as partly free, a rating that has remained to date (Freedom House, 2024). These developments, which have contributed to weak governance institutions, corruption and ineffective governance policies, are factors that have led to the ongoing crisis in the region.

While state weakness has been a dominant narrative in West African governance processes, the surge in violence exposed the depth of governance challenges in the region. The junta leaders in Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger said they acted because of poor governance, corruption, ineffective policies and lack of resources that inhibited their ability to counter the rising jihadist attacks (Diallo and Ross, 2020; Robertson, 2024). The military, civil society organisations and pressure groups blamed the elected leaders for the persistent violence in the Sahel. In Mali, opposition leader Soumaila Cisse criticised the government for betraying the army by not providing sufficient support for the military to fight the insurgents (Devermont, 2019). Popular youth activist Mohammed Youssof Bathily also pointed to corruption as the primary reason for the military's defeat by the terrorists. At the same time, there were reports that Mali's political and business classes had incentives to prolong the conflict because they benefited from international financial flows (Devermont, 2019). In Burkina Faso, many citizens expressed frustration with President Kabore's regime, which they accused of corruption, laxity and nepotism. Financial misappropriation led to persistent equipment and supply problems and limited operational capacity, which weakened the armed forces in their fight against the jihadists (Koné and Moderan,

2022). The coup d'état, therefore, highlighted the government's failure to meet the people's expectations and respond decisively to the deteriorating security challenges in the country.

Growing support for military rule

The poor performance of elected leaders has diminished the people's trust in democracy, as indicated by an Afrobarometer (2024) survey, which showed a decreased satisfaction with democracy in most African states. On the other hand, the military leaders have continued to enjoy support from a section of their citizens. Between the round 8 surveys of 2019/2021 and the round 9 surveys of 2021/2023, the rejection of military rule fell by ten points. In Mali, for instance, 39 per cent of respondents rated democracy above other forms of government in the 2021/2023 survey, down from the 62 per cent recorded in the 2011/2013 surveys, indicating a 23 per cent decline from 10 years ago. Meanwhile, the disapproval rating for authoritarian rule dropped from 58 per cent to 18 per cent. In a 2024 survey conducted by Mali meter, which is run by Germany's Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, nine out of ten respondents considered the country moving in the right direction (Bøås and Haavik, 2025). The figures indicate the support President Goita enjoys from the Malian populace.

Ibrahim Traore, the president of Burkina Faso, is courting the admiration of many people, not only in Burkina Faso, but among young Africans on the continent and in diaspora for what they perceive as the pursuit of a transformational agenda much needed for economic, social and infrastructural development in the region. On 30 April 2025, solidarity protests were organised across several countries in Africa and beyond, to rally behind Captain Traore and celebrate him for his Pan-Africanist stance and resistance to imperialism (Banchereau, 2025; Mwangi, 2025). The protest aimed to support Traore's leadership and efforts to assert Burkina Faso's sovereignty against perceived neo-colonial influences. This growing support for Traore not only boosts his popularity, but it also demonstrates a trend of tolerance for military rule in Africa, especially among the youth (Aikins, 2025).

Whilst the weak domestic governance structures have been the main drivers of these crises, geopolitical developments in the region have exacerbated the situation. After abandoning their historical and traditional alliance with France and the Western countries, Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger have embraced Russia as a key international partner, a development considered as a threat to the restoration of democracy in the Sahelian countries. These developments demonstrate the complexities influencing the future of West Africa's governance and politics.

US support for security and democracy in West Africa

Since 2012, West Africa, especially the Sahel region, has experienced an increase in terrorist and violent extremist activities, posing a significant threat to human rights, livelihoods and the very existence of the affected states. In 2024, Burkina Faso ranked first among countries most impacted by terrorism, recording 1 532 deaths, a 21 per cent decrease from the 1 935 deaths recorded in 2023 (Institute for Economics and Peace, 2024). Mali ranked fourth, with 604 deaths, a 21 per cent decrease from the data recorded in 2023. The US has thus, supported efforts to counter violent extremism and terrorism to improve regional security. The Biden administration prioritised peace and security in the Sahel and instituted diverse strategies to curb the growing instability in the region. In 2021, approximately US\$60 million was donated to support the Trans-Sahara counter-terrorism partnership programme. This programme, established by the US Senate, aimed to assist countries in North and West Africa to combat terrorism and violent extremism through a more coordinated interagency approach (US Congress, 2021).

However, the situation is not expected to remain the same under Trump's administration, as the president's actions and utterances suggest that security matters in Africa are of lesser importance to him. The region's counter-terrorism efforts have been adversely affected by the funding freeze announced by the US president. In Benin, a multi-year programme to train the army for counter-terrorism operations has been put on hold (Hourel et al., 2025). Similarly, in Côte d'Ivoire, a four-year programme to train local troops has been paused. Furthermore, there are reports that the

Trump administration is planning to dismantle the US Africa Command and transfer it under the European Command, a decision believed to be part of Trump's goal of withdrawing troops from certain parts of Africa (Oluwole, 2025). The jihadists, on the other hand, are increasing their assault. A recent terrorist attack on a military site in Benin, which led to the death of 54 soldiers, indicates the intensity of the crisis in West Africa's littoral states (Abubakar, 2025). Already, there are reports that the Jamaat Nusratul Islam wal-Muslimin (JNIM) Islamic group is seeking to expand its attacks and influence in the region, with Ghana and Côte d'Ivoire being part of their targets (Thompson, 2024). Trump's actions could undermine regional efforts to combat the expansion of Islamic jihadist activities from the Sahel to the coastal states of West Africa (Lozada, 2024).

The US support for democracy in West Africa aims to promote human rights, independent media, free and fair elections, and strengthen political institutions to ensure effective and efficient governance. Since the 1990s, Washington has supported elections, the rule of law, governance and civil society organisations that advocate for human rights, and political participation (Gyimah-Boadi, 2004; Owusu-Mensah, 2015). With initiatives such as the Open Government Partnership and the West Africa Cooperative Security Initiative, the US has assisted countries in the region in increasing citizen engagement and establishing structures for transparent and accountable governance processes (The White House, 2014). Additionally, in 2022, the US invested over US\$115 million to support economic and development assistance, focusing on democracy and governance (The White House, 2022). With the rising number of coup d'états in Africa, President Biden announced the creation of the African Democratic and Political Transitions (ADAPT) initiative at the 2022 US–Africa summit (US Department of State, 2023). This US\$75 million initiative aims to enhance America's political and technical support for democratic transitions in partnership with regional bodies, governments and civil societies. The ADAPT initiative, thus, demonstrates the Biden administration's interest in restoring democracy in military regimes in West Africa. Michael Heath, a former deputy assistant secretary of state for West African Affairs, stated, 'Our ADAPT programme is intended to demonstrate that there are still ways to get out of these situations. We are

not just going to give up on countries that have had coups. We want to continue to maintain open lines of communication and to let them know that if they do take this path back to restoration of democratic rule, there are substantial benefits.' (Pecquet, 2023: para. 12). President Trump, however, has shown little or no interest in supporting a democratic transition in West African states currently under military governments. His dismantling of aid programmes that support fragile democracies has diminished America's credibility as a supporter of human rights, the rule of law and media freedom (Lyngaas, 2025). The administration's attempt to close down *Voice of America*, a news outlet that has promoted US values of freedom of speech, human rights and the rule of law, further indicates Trump's disregard for free speech and democratic consolidation (Knauth, 2025). Even if the Trump administration decides to support democratic transition in West African countries currently under military rule, two issues could some present difficulties.

First, President Trump has not shied away from openly expressing interest in running for a third term in office (Baker, 2025). With such utterances coming from the president of a leading democracy, this could incentivise and embolden West African leaders who seek to entrench their authoritarian (military) rule or manipulate the constitution to extend their stay in power through what is popularly termed a constitutional coup (Abebe, 2022; Mbaku, 2020), aggravating the democratic setbacks in the region. Although the governance crisis in West Africa mainly stems from internal challenges such as bad governance and weak state institutions, Trump's actions could amplify the trend and weaken the US position in condemning authoritarian rule. Meanwhile, Trump's administration's actions, such as the breach of the justice department's independence and illegal detention of US citizens, have led political commentators to accuse the President of turning the US into an authoritarian state (Levitsky, 2025; Smith, 2025), questioning Washington's moral authority to condemn authoritarianism or military rule in West Africa.

Secondly, the US has upheld its relationships with undemocratic countries, a practice that has continued through both Democratic and Republican administrations. Factors such as security, energy investments, arms sales and critical minerals deals have shaped this strategy (Carothers

and Feldman, 2023). Of all these factors, security concerns, especially counterterrorism relating to Islamic extremists, remain the primary reasons for these relationships. For instance, the US has maintained close relationships with authoritarian countries, including Egypt, Bahrain and Saudi Arabia, since they are considered vital security partners in combating Islamic extremist activities. In its fight against terrorism in West Africa, the US constructed a US\$110 million drone base in Niger which hosted about 1 000 US troops (Bath, 2024). After the military takeover, the junta leaders revoked Niger's military cooperation deal with the US and requested the withdrawal of the US troops. The departure of the US saw the arrival of Russian military instructors and equipment, making Moscow a key partner in Niger's fight against terrorism and violent extremism (Stewart and Ali, 2024). In addition to Niger, Russia has military presence in Mali and Burkina Faso with the military junta in these countries severing ties and distancing themselves from Washington. As US–Russia geopolitical competition intensifies in the region, the US may have more reason to set aside its concerns for democracy and human rights to draw these countries closer to its camp (Carothers and Feldman, 2023). Although section 7008 of the Department of State prohibits assisting any government whose elected leader is deposed by military coup d'état, the Biden administration contemplated assisting Burkina Faso's government for two reasons. First, some officials raised concerns about Burkina Faso becoming a gateway for terrorism in the coastal states of West Africa and, therefore, suggested providing military assistance to the leaders (Chason and Hudson, 2023). However, others argued that assisting a regime that lacks democratic legitimacy and a poor human rights record could encourage army excesses and further inflame the insurgency. Secondly, some officials expressed worry about Russia or China filling the void should the US decide not to assist Burkina Faso. A senior official of the Centre for Strategic and International Studies said, 'If these governments lose battles or decide to call in the Russians, that has a serious and measurable effect on national security' (Chason and Hudson, 2023: para. 25). Currently, Russia has a security cooperation agreement with Burkina Faso, and the Kremlin has become a close ally of the junta

(Reuters, 2024). It remains to be seen how these dynamics will play out in the relationship between the US and military governments, especially in restoring democracy.

Russia's strategic engagements and influence in Africa

Russia's ambition to become one of the great powers in an emerging multipolar world has motivated the Kremlin to reinvigorate its engagement and influence on the African continent (Cooley, 2025). Moscow's relationship with Africa is rooted in Soviet-era ties established with the continent, which continue to drive engagements with various African states (Droin and Dolbaia, 2023). In the 1950s, the USSR became an important player in the African political landscape by supporting Marxist elements and pro-independence movements. They provided weapons, equipment and military training for the armed wings of pro-independence movements. Thus, having supported many African countries in their fight for independence, Russia has used these historical relationships to rekindle and strengthen ties in the region. Moscow's effort to re-engage the continent has culminated in high-profile visits by top-ranking Russian officials since the mid-2000s. President Vladimir Putin's visit to South Africa in 2006 was followed by his successor Dmitry Medvedev's trips to Egypt, Angola, Nigeria and Namibia in 2009 (Droin and Dolbaia, 2023). Russia's diplomatic re-engagement efforts have also seen the foreign minister, Sergey Lavrov, embarking on visits to several African countries to establish and strengthen bilateral security and economic ties (Africanews, 2024; Jalloh, Bushuev and Van Eyssen, 2022; The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, 2018).

Moscow's efforts to strengthen diplomatic, economic and political engagements in Africa have motivated the establishment of platforms to promote sustained dialogue with African countries. A key milestone in this effort was the inaugural Russia–Africa Summit held in Sochi on 23–24 October 2019, which brought together 43 African leaders to discuss issues of mutual interest in economics, trade, investment and security (Madden, 2019). The summit signified the beginning of a new

era of cooperation between Russia and African states. In line with its long-term objectives, Moscow has institutionalised platforms such as the International Youth Forum 'Russia–Africa' to entrench its interest in Africa. During the fourth forum held on 23 April 2025, Russia inaugurated and held the first Russia–Africa Young Diplomats forum (Klomegah, 2025a). The Kremlin established these platforms to facilitate dialogue between the young people of Russia and Africa, promote African studies, and cultivate a positive image of Russia on the African continent (Roscongress Foundation, 2025). In his opening speech, Sergey Lavrov stressed the need for Russia and Africa to oppose modern practices of neo-colonialism, amplifying the anti-French and anti-Western sentiments and narratives on the continent. He stated, 'We believe it is important to combine our efforts in order to create mechanisms for economic ties and international trade services that are beyond Western control' (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, 2025). Further in its agenda to strengthen its interest in Africa, Russia created the Department for Partnership with Africa in January 2025 under its Foreign Affairs Ministry (Klomegah, 2025b). This department is assigned to promote political, economic, scientific, educational and cultural ties with the African states. Moscow's aim of establishing these platforms is not just to strengthen engagement in Africa, but also to challenge Western dominance and, by so doing, assert itself as a key geopolitical and security actor on the continent.

Russia's security and political cooperation in the Sahel

Russia has emerged as a key ally of Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger in their fight against terrorism and violent extremism. Following the fallout between Col. Goita and France, which resulted in the withdrawal of the French troops, and the failure of Operation Barkhane to deliver security improvements, the military junta in Mali chose to collaborate with the Kremlin's paramilitary group, Wagner, to combat the Islamic insurgents (Faulkner and Parens, 2025). Wagner's arrival in Mali in 2021 was met with optimism by the military, as the Group's willingness to deploy alongside the Malian Armed Forces and employ heavy-handed tactics

resonated with the military junta's counterterrorism strategies (Faulkner and Parens, 2025). Similarly, after shifting bilateral assistance from Western partners, the junta leaders in Niger and Burkina Faso established ties with the Kremlin, leading to the deployment of Russian military personnel, instructors and equipment. Despite some success, such as recapturing Kidal (Roger, 2023), a stronghold of the rebel forces in Mali, Islamic insurgents continue to undermine security and stability in the Sahel. The Wagner and its successor Africa Corps, have also been accused of violating human rights by unlawfully killing and executing civilians during their counterinsurgency operations. Investigative reports confirm a pattern of deliberate violence against civilians, which further destabilises the region (Human Rights Watch, 2024).

Politically, Moscow has supported the AES military governments since they assumed power. After Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger withdrew from ECOWAS, Russia declared its support for the bloc and hosted the foreign affairs ministers of the AES countries in Moscow, where Sergey Lavrov stressed Russia's readiness to assist the Alliance in three priority areas: defence and security, the economy and diplomacy (The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, 2024). Furthermore, Lavrov reiterated Russia's commitment to strengthening the AES's counterterrorism capabilities by equipping and training the united armed forces of the three countries to enhance their combat readiness. The growing alliance between Moscow and the AES presents challenges to restoring civilian rule in the Sahel region, as Russia does not consider democracy a prerequisite in its partnerships and agreements. The Kremlin's deepening security and political ties with the AES regimes could reinforce military rule, undermine prospects for constitutional governance, and prioritise regime security over democratic institution-building. This development could impede efforts to restore democracy in the Sahel region.

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Disinformation campaigns: False narratives or the people's reality?

Another strategy employed by Moscow to promote its political interests on the continent is disinformation. According to the Africa Centre

for Strategic Studies (2022), disinformation refers to the intentional dissemination of false information with the intention of advancing a political objective. Africa has been a major target for disinformation campaigns, with Russia being a leading purveyor of such information on the continent (Africa Centre for Strategic Studies, 2022). Yevgeny Prigozhin, the former leader of the Wagner group, has been accused of exporting disinformation campaigns to every country where Wagner has operated, promoting anti-Western sentiments (Africa Centre for Strategic Studies, 2022). He carried out these campaigns by paying activists and influencers and using fake social media accounts to amplify Russia's propaganda (Africa Defence Force, 2021). Reports indicate that Russia's disinformation played a role in the military takeovers in the Sahel region. In Burkina Faso, an Israeli company, Percepto International, hired by President Kabore with the mission of providing him with intelligence information, advised the president to launch an online counteroffensive against Russian disinformation, or risk being removed from power by the military (Dwoskin, 2023). This was after they discovered the full scale of Russia's disinformation in the country. In the lead-up to the September 2022 coup d'état in Burkina Faso, there was a spike in pro-Russian messages. Some stories urged the Burkina Faso leadership to explore a Burkina–Russia coalition and encouraged the authorities to diversify their partnerships, considering Russia as a partner in the fight against terrorism instead of relying solely on France and its Western allies (African Digital Democracy Observatory, 2023). Thus, a coordinated campaign of false and misleading messages by Wagner and other groups denigrated democratically elected leaders, facilitating the military coups in the Sahel (Africa Centre for Strategic Studies, 2022).

Without doubting Russia's disinformation campaigns and their attempt to hamper efforts to consolidate democracy in West Africa, the poor performance of elected leaders has been a key factor that softened the ground for the military to wrest power. For instance, Ghana is one of the success stories of democracy in the region, having held successful elections and experienced a peaceful transition of power since adopting democracy in 1992. The country, however, loses US\$3 billion annually to corruption, an amount twice the yearly foreign direct investment inflow

of US\$1.5 billion (Agambila, 2025). While in opposition, the current president of Ghana cautioned that the country is not immune to the coup d'état happening in the Sahel, judging from the waning trust of the people in the country's democracy resulting from poor governance (Schumacher, 2025). Thus, Russian disinformation messages sometimes reflect realities and resonate with the grievances of the people, amplifying local sentiments and making the elected leaders unpopular. Moreover, platforms such as TikTok, Twitter and Facebook have made it easy to disseminate and access political information, enhancing citizens' political knowledge and understanding of governance issues (Akeusola, 2024). These platforms have created opportunities for citizens to examine the performance of their leaders and discuss governance challenges, including the impact of corruption on socio-economic development. Increased public scrutiny of their performance has created the imperative for elected leaders to implement policies that respond to the needs of the masses; failure to meet the demands of the citizens will not only delegitimise the leaders, but it will also create fertile ground for the military to take power, knowing that their actions will receive public support. If elected leaders refuse to implement people-centred policies, citizens could become disillusioned with democracy, making them susceptible to military governments.

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Conclusion

There is no doubt that West Africa, especially the Sahel region, is going to be an ideological battleground between the liberals and authoritarians. Whilst the US is decreasing its presence in the region, Russia has taken steps to strengthen economic, diplomatic and security ties with the junta leaders, casting doubt on the prospects of restoring democracy in the three Sahelian countries in the immediate future, as the Kremlin's support and engagement with AES is likely to encourage the junta leaders to hold on to power. Membership of ECOWAS could have facilitated the process of restoring democracy within the three countries. However, their withdrawal has closed the window for the regional bloc's intervention. Consequently, the US, as one of the key supporters of democracy in West Africa, must support the Sahel countries to address the political and

security challenges and restore civilian rule. According to norms diffusion theory, the US has promoted liberal democratic values in West Africa through aid, diplomacy and technical assistance. However, in the Sahelian context, these norms have failed to improve the living conditions of the citizens or strengthen institutional governance. As a result, democracy has struggled to gain legitimacy. Meanwhile, the rise of alternative partners, such as Russia, which support regimes without conditionalities, reflects a shift in normative alignment. America's failure to act will only entrench Moscow's influence in the Sahel and possibly other parts of West Africa over the long term.

As indicated in the Afrobarometer (2024) survey, citizens of West Africa are generally dissatisfied with democracy, because successive governments have failed to address the basic needs of the masses, resulting from corruption, poor government policies and nepotism, among other factors. While this may not suffice as justification for a military takeover, the direct impact of the government's actions and inactions on the security of the armed forces and civilian populations played a key role in the coup d'états. As posited by the legitimacy crisis theory, the failure of elected officials to deliver essential political goods, such as security, justice, and development, eroded the public's trust in the leadership and created an opening for the junta. The military's action, therefore, does not reflect the armed forces' dissatisfaction with the country's leadership but rather a general sentiment among the populace, enabling the military leaders to gain legitimacy and popularity. Instead of applying section 7008 to desist from assisting military governments, the US should engage with the Sahelian leadership to understand and appreciate the political and environmental context that contributed to the current situation. While restoring democracy remains the optimal outcome of US engagement, the process should not be rushed, as simply restoring civilian rule will not prevent future military takeovers. Rather, discussions and support during the transitional process should focus on addressing the root causes of the challenges and assisting countries in implementing governance reforms that will reduce corruption, promote accountability, enhance political participation, and drive socio-economic development and stability. Without addressing the legitimacy deficit, any democratic gain will likely

remain superficial and reversible.

US interest in the Sahel includes enhancing America's security by increasing the capacity of Sahel countries to counter violent extremist organisations and combat transnational organised crimes (US Department of State, 2022). Initially concentrated in the Sahel, West Africa has witnessed the expansion of terrorist activities to its coastal states, evident in increased attacks in Togo and Benin. A recent terrorist attack on a military site in Benin, which led to the death of 54 soldiers, indicates the intensity of the crisis in West Africa littoral states (Abubakar, 2025). The US should strengthen the capacity of security officials and implement interventions to prevent small arms and light weapons proliferation, not only in the Sahel but also in coastal West African states. Washington's disengagement will not only contribute to a decline in democracy, but also an increase in terrorists and violent extremist attacks, which can affect US national security, the security of its citizens and its economic interests in the region.

The suspension and withdrawal of US aid assistance should serve as a wake-up call for West African countries to build and strengthen state structures that reduce corruption, ensure efficient use of resources, and promote the conceptualisation and implementation of results-oriented policy initiatives that drive sustainable human development. President Trump's actions demonstrate that African countries cannot always rely on foreign support and assistance to address their internal challenges. Every year, Africa loses an average of US\$60 billion to illicit financial flows and more than US\$140 billion to corruption (DefenceWeb, 2023). This amount is three times more than the US\$59.7 billion received as overseas development assistance from the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) countries in 2023. Building robust anti-corruption institutions to cultivate a culture of transparency and accountability will ensure optimal use of resources, thereby reducing the region's reliance on international aid to address its social, economic, education, health, political and security challenges. Although aid can assist in responding to some of the challenges, the leaders and citizens are primarily responsible for addressing their issues and should acknowledge that no amount of foreign assistance can compare to building effective

structures that reduce inefficiencies and promote development. Instead of perceiving the withdrawal of US aid as a setback, it should rather challenge West African states to redefine their priorities and chart a path towards long-term prosperity.

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SECTION VI: GEOPOLITICS

CHAPTER 13

Trump 2.0, Forfeiting Global Leadership and Geopolitical Influence: Africa's Right to Look Left or Within

Neo Letswalo

Introduction

The real-estate business acumen and reality TV star Donald Trump, with no experience in government, entered politics advocating for draining the swamp in Washington and fixing a system that is rigged against Americans. He contended that the corrupt elites had sold out and prioritised the interests of foreigners, thereby compromising the interests of the American people. During his election campaign, Trump excoriated the United States (US) internationalism, labelling the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) outdated and US Western allies 'ripping off' the US through unjust trade practices and defence burden-sharing. More interestingly, Trump suggested that promoting the liberal international order would not be in America's interests (Wojczewski, 2020). Donald Trump's victory in the 2016 US presidential election was nothing short of a catastrophe for US global leadership status. Obama's foreign policy adviser Ben Rhodes spoke about a decline of the US-led global order (Schweller, 2018).

Since the end of communism in 1989, the US has acted as the global leader because of its sole unilateral hegemonic capabilities emanating from its soft and hard power. However, the US still retains its hard power attributes. For example, as of 2020, the US was still the largest economy in the world with a Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of approximately US\$21 trillion. Additionally, it is still the country with the largest military budget, with a total budget of all other states' budgets combined. Interestingly, notwithstanding the hard power, the US's soft power relied solely on liberal values and principles, such as democracy, a free market, and human rights.

Significantly, the US propelled its global leadership influence through making large material contributions to several multilateral entities such as the United Nations (UN) and its specialised agencies, the Bretton Woods Financial Institutions (World Bank and International Monetary Fund, International Monetary Fund [IMF]), the World Trade Organisation (WTO), NATO and others. The US intervened militarily in countries that experienced instability, such as the Balkans in the 1990s, the Middle East, specifically Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya and Syria throughout the 2000s and 2010s. In short, the US war on terror foreign policy provided the basis on which it acted as a global policeman, albeit with the concomitant controversies among its allies against its actions (Chung, 2020).

Despite the erstwhile administrations' efforts to retain and maintain the US global leadership position by providing a global public good in the global system, Trump 1.0 and 2.0 advanced retrenchment foreign policies to Make America Great Again (MAGA). The US has distanced itself from the world order it has immensely shaped. The MAGA foreign policy has questioned the worth of pre-existing US alliances and imposed tariffs on friends and foes. Additionally, it has severed ties with its human rights and democratic advocacy efforts worldwide and withdrawn from the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, the Trans-Pacific Partnership, the Paris Climate Agreement, the World Health Organisation (WHO), and the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty (Blackwill, 2020).

In summary, this retrenchment in foreign policy reverses years and decades of US investment in soft power, which has shaped and influenced the world. Interestingly, it does so in a context where China, the second largest economy in the world, actively engage multilateralism and Western allies and plays a preponderant role in the Global South, more especially Africa (Blackwill, 2020). This raises three fundamental research questions: Firstly, how have the Trump 1.0 and 2.0 foreign policies affected the US's global leadership position? More recently, Trump's return to the presidency in 2025 has been tumultuous, marked by a barrage of executive orders that further divide the US from the world it constructed and shaped under the liberal paradigm (Letswalo, 2025). Secondly, what are the implications of US-China geopolitical competition in Africa? The latter has vast economic potential and rich commodities, including gold,

diamonds, copper, oil reserves and cobalt, which attract major powers that establish strong links with the continent to exploit these coveted commodities and subsequently use them in the global market to enrich their respective economies (Qasim, 2023).

Finally, what could this mean for Africa's industrialisation and critical resources? The African continent possesses most of the critical minerals required for the transition to renewable energy, which constitutes the present global paradigm. Specifically, it holds 30 per cent of critical minerals, such as cobalt, copper, lithium, manganese and rare earth elements. It is significant for it to convert these commodities into resource-based industrialisation (Ouedraogo and Kilolo, 2024). The first and second questions are answerable through process tracing research design. The last question will utilise documentary analysis, specifically examining the African Green Mineral Strategy (AGMS) and African Mineral Development Centre (AMDC) as the panacea for its developmental complexities.

The chapter provides the historical background and a literature review on the role of US capabilities in maintaining a global leadership position. Secondly, it will succinctly discuss the methodology underpinning this study, focusing on the first research question: Trump 1.0 and 2.0 foreign policy and the US global leadership position. Next, the study will discuss the second research question, detailing the implications of Trump's 1.0 and 2.0 approaches to US–China geopolitical competition in Africa. Finally, it will discuss Africa's resource-based industrialisation opportunity.

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Literature review

Beeson (2004), Clark (2009: 25), Falkner (2005: 585), Jonev, Berisa and Saranovic (2016) and Rehman (2023) contend that the US possesses considerable hard and soft power capabilities, making it a political force unlike any other country in the world. Indeed, the US emerged as a powerful state following the end of the Cold War, with no peer competitor. Its global position is reminiscent of Britain in its mid-Victorian glory, but with a wider global reach (Newmann, 2011; Nye, 2002b). Moreover, the quest for global leadership has been integral to US strategy since 1945.

This strategy was embedded in the notion that the US must extend abroad both its power, specifically political and economic institutions and values. Although it provided public goods to Western European states and Japan to aid in their recovery from the Second World War. It suppressed further competing powers within its sphere of influence. It maintained tight political control over its allies to tame from becoming strong enough to challenge its leadership. The prime objectives of these allies were to contain the spread of Soviet Union influence in the world (Layne, 1997).

Great powers were conventionally assessed through material capabilities indexed in the national material capability index (the use of coercion and payment) to exert hegemony in the international system (Goddard and Nexon, 2016; Ivanov, 2020). Hard power strategies lament the use of military intervention, coercive diplomacy and economic sanctions to enforce national interests. The realist school of international thought advocates for hard power, whereas liberal institutionalists emphasise soft power as an intrinsic apparatus to persuade, rather than coerce others into doing what one wants (Wilson, 2008). In short, soft power involves obtaining preferred outcomes through attraction (Ivanov, 2020; Nye, 2002a). However, the former is in line with 'rule by force', whereas the latter is concerned with 'rule by consent'. Although one may possess the hard material capabilities to exercise power without the consent of the ruled, in the present day, it is significant to have intellectual and moral leadership over the ruled in the global society (Zahran and Ramos, 2010).

Letswalo (2022) posits the significance of assessing global leadership based on the 'role' because the above-mentioned capabilities are nothing until one puts them to good use. Significantly, foreign policy outlines an imperative articulation of the willingness and mission of global leaders in driving the global public good. Erstwhile US Presidents Clinton, Bush and Obama articulated their willingness in their foreign policy to accept the role as a global leader and obligation to maintain public good, peace and security and a liberal world order. However, US President Donald Trump took a different approach to this by resorting to nationalism in his retrenchment foreign policy, which prioritised national interests and prosperity, threatening pre-existing agreements that did not serve

America's interests (Letswalo, 2022). Concurrently, US Presidents George H.W. Bush and Bill Clinton stressed the significance of international collaboration and the use of global multilateral entities to promote a new world order orchestrated to replace the realist global system of bipolarity and balance of power, which dominated the Cold War era (Krahmann, 2005).

Over the course of eight decades, US policies have promoted the expansion of global trade, finance, and investment, broadly promoting the spread of democratic values and human rights. The US has led many of the multilateral entities associated with the international order, shouldering the predominant responsibility for upholding key norms such as nonaggression and serving as the primary provider of global stability and reassurance that a successful liberal order demands (Brands, 2016). In terms of global security, the US played a pivotal role in preserving its leadership position by exerting a preponderance as a stabiliser. The US has been willing to invoke intra-European defence initiatives as long as they remain subordinate to NATO obligations (Sheetz and Mastanduno, 1997).

The US provided most of the equipment and allowed free riding in its public interest. This was allowed because its global military imperialism is integral to the preponderance over other aspects, such as commerce. For example, the US would threaten to withdraw military assistance in the recipient countries in question, exposing them to instability soon. Recipient states comply with US prescriptions or interests to safeguard or secure their public good. Additionally, the US utilises its economic prowess to contribute to global multilateral entities and influence their decisions. Similar to economic imperialism, the US utilised multilateral entities founded at the post-war conference at Bretton Woods (the IMF and the World Bank), which played a significant role in preserving America's global leadership (Skerrit, 2019).

The US became the largest donor country in the world, providing bilateral financial assistance to countries in the Global South on the condition that they assent to neoliberal and democratic values. Moreover, the US global leadership status is also attributable to its pervasiveness and

benevolent agnosticism. Not only did US political elites and the upper class strive to entrench the US's global leadership and values through foreign policy against those who resisted the masses. Its culture played a phenomenal role in the adoption of American slang by young Britons and the idolisation of US celebrities and music artists globally. Interestingly, watching many 'US-based TV shows and films and absorbing their norms, values, and ideals in an osmosis-like fashion' (Skerrit, 2019). In non-English speaking countries, many learned through watching Western films and idolising protagonists such as John Wayne and Steve McQueen (Skerrit, 2019). However, the Great Recession had a pejorative effect on perceptions of US soft power. It damaged its status and ideational power. States in the global society have lost confidence in the Washington Consensus, based on free markets, democracy, and globalisation, as the only feasible economic and political development model (Layne, 2018).

Interestingly, soft power becomes successful if the global perception of a given country produces positive results; in this case, the US Pew Research Centre surveyed thirteen states in 2020 to evaluate whether the US yields a positive image or not. The results were poor, plummeting from twenty years earlier from 68 per cent to 31 per cent for France and from 68 per cent to 26 per cent for Germany. This decline is largely attributed to the Trump administration's handling of the COVID 19 pandemic. Additionally, America's withdrawal from its global obligations and pre-existing cooperation, such as blocking nomination for the appellate body in the WTO and withdrawing from the Paris Agreement on climate change (Schéré, 2021).

In recent decades, Blackwill (2020), Chase-Dunn et al. (2011), Fox (2014), He (2010) and Newmann (2011) discuss the decline in America's global leadership power, more specifically with the rise of emerging powers or regional powers in the Global South who act as regional leaders in their respective regions. The US struggled to construct and implement a grand strategy beyond the protection of the global liberal order. Although the George H.W. Bush administration contended that the US's 'strategy must now refocus on precluding the emergence of any potential future global competitor' (Blackwill, 2020: 6). However, no administration in

Washington consistently pursued or implemented such policies for that strategic purpose (Blackwill, 2020).

More recently, the US perceives the current international order it built following the Second World War as obsolete and constraining its national interests. Interestingly, the US is largely oblivious to the risks posed by rising new global and revisionist powers, such as China. The rise of China and the consequential shifts in the global balance of power are a considerable threat to the pre-existing world order. However, the US attempted to salvage this potential calamity. Yet, after the 2016 presidential elections, which inaugurated the Trump 1.0 foreign policy, the US did not effectively respond to geopolitical and geo-economic rationales underlying US global strategic interests, especially in the Global South (Scheffer et al., 2016).

This chapter will invaluablely add to the existing body of knowledge on global leadership and power politics scholarship. Firstly, this will be done by assessing how Trump 1.0 and 2.0 retrenchment foreign policy affected the US's global leadership position, looking at the increase or decline in hard and soft power, as well as the role of providing public goods in the global society. It will add to the existing knowledge by assessing the implications of Trump 1.0 and 2.0 retrenchment foreign policy on US–China geopolitical influence in Africa and what this could mean for Africa's industrialisation and critical resources.

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Trump 1.0 and 2.0 foreign policy affected the US's global leadership position

In 2016, Republican presidential candidate Donald Trump defied most polling predictions by defeating Democratic presidential candidate Hillary Clinton (Gill, 2021). According to Hill and Hurst (2020: 1), during the 2016 election campaign Trump declared NATO as 'obsolete' and alliance with Japan and South Korea were exorbitant, and that the free trade agreements were a 'disaster': that had only led to the US being ripped off (Hill and Hurst, 2020: 1). This position reflects Trump's narration from 1987 when he criticised the US public good commitment

to defend global democracy in three US newspapers. 'For decades, Japan and other nations have been taking advantage of the US' (Little, 2025: para. 14). Donald Trump further questioned, 'Why are these nations not paying the US for the human lives and billions of dollars we are losing to protect their interest? The world is laughing at America's politicians as we protect ships we don't own, carrying oil we don't need, destined for allies who won't help' (Little, 2025: para. 15).

In his first 100 days in office, President Trump heavily relied on military force as the primary, if not only, foreign policy tool. This manifested in a botched special operations raid in Yemen, the cruise missile strike against the Assad regime's airfield in Syria and other budget cuts to allocate more funds to increase military spending. In addition, Trump eased Obama's restriction on the use of force in Somalia and gave military commanders more liberty to attack the Al-Qaeda-affiliated Al-Shabaab terrorist group. In response to Pyongyang's ballistic missiles and nuclear weapon project, Trump threatened to use force against North Korea to pre-empt or retaliate for a missile or nuclear testing (Juul and Gude, 2017).

Considering exercising its economic capability to provide public good in 2017, Washington submitted a bloated proposed budget priorities for 2018, which would require an additional US\$487 billion in a climate where Trump proposed major tax relief to wealthy Americans and corporations. This developmental plan and foreign humanitarian assistance programmes, especially in Africa, did not make sense in the fiscal circumstances at the time. However, Trump did not tamper with the President's Emergency Plan for Aids Relief (PEPFAR) in Africa. He targeted US support for World Bank and United Nations Development Programmes (UNDP), which had the biggest operations in Africa, specifically initiatives established by his predecessors, 'Feed the Future', an agricultural programme in Africa and PowerAfrica, which were not included in his budget. Additionally, Trump stopped funding the UN Population Fund and reduced funding to the UN Children's Fund and the WHO. Moreover, the US State Department's Emergency and Migration Assistance was defunded and reversed the US\$3 billion pledge made by Obama to the Green Climate Fund to invoke the mitigation and adaptation in the Global South, especially Africa, which is heavily

impacted by climate change, irrespective of contributing minimally to this calamity (Stremlau, 2022).

More recently, Trump's 2026 fiscal year budget proposal included a US\$555 million cut to the African Development Fund (ADF) and the African Development Bank (AfDB) (Ekanem, 2025). Moreover, the end of the PEPFAR program in South Africa has pejorative implications on other African neighbouring states that depended on AIDS and TB medication from South Africa (Pecquet, 2025). The executive order on 20 January 2025 to pause foreign aid has placed millions of Africans who depend on US public goods at risk, especially those who rely on medication and life-saving humanitarian support in the Central African Republic, Chad, South Sudan, Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Uganda and Rwanda (Cilliers, 2025). Other funds within USAID were orchestrated to support agricultural productivity, economic growth, security, democracy, governance and improve access to quality education and social services are at risk (Cilliers, 2025).

From 2016 to 2020, the Trump 1.0 administration's domestic and foreign policy has led to the US's decline in soft power in the global system. This era was characterised by US unilateralism, tariff warfare, and political populism, as well as anti-immigration policies and tension with the media and political institutions. This has affected the US soft power image abroad due to its disregard for human rights, political institutions and media freedom, deteriorating the prestigious image the US enjoyed internationally (Mohagheghnia, 2021).

The US's soft power slipped from first to third place, yielding to France and Great Britain. The percentage was lower than during the Obama administration (Mukan and Saudabekova, 2020). In a Pew Survey conducted in 2017, six African countries indicated that they do not have confidence in Trump's administration; Senegal (-51 per cent), South Africa (-34 per cent), Ghana (-33 per cent), Kenya (-33 per cent), Tanzania (-27 per cent) and Nigeria (-5 per cent). The overall decline in positive poll image decreased from 64 per cent in Obama's administration to 49 per cent when Trump took office (Stremlau, 2022). Concurrently, the Portland Soft Power 30 index and opinion polls indicate a decline in US soft power since the inauguration of Trump's first term. This is mainly

because of Trump's disregard for public diplomacy and use of Twitter (Nye, 2019).

Donald Trump used Twitter to communicate directly and express views on sensitive topics that presidents usually refrain from addressing, often making statements and personal decisions that even amazed his staff. For example, the withdrawal of US troops from Northern Syria and various tariffs against China in the context of the US–China trade war. The outcome of Trump's unpredictability and policymaking through tweets was that 'no one was sure of what US policy was, leaving the impression that the US was an ill-disciplined, unreliable, and untrustworthy ally'. Trump's Twitter diplomacy left the overall impression that the world, and particularly American partners, could no longer assume anything about the (Rodríguez Peña, 2023).

Furthermore, despite its human rights abuses and democratic controversies worldwide, China has improved its image in global society from one perceived as a threat to one currently regarded as a benefactor. Attributable to its soft power lies the economic capability. The Chinese government operationalised its soft power by utilising coercive economic capabilities and diplomatic levers, such as aid, investment, and participation in multilateral organisations. Concurrently, President Xi Jinping conveyed that 'we should increase China's soft power, give a good Chinese narrative, and better communicate China's message to the world' (Tella, 2021: 17). Considering the statement, China launched several initiatives such as the Chinese Dream, the Silk Road Economic Belt, the 21st Maritime Silk Road, the Asia–Pacific Dream and the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) to propel Chinese global soft power (Tella, 2021).

Over the past few decades, since the Forum on China–Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) was established in 2000, China has increased its involvement in utilising its material capabilities and providing public goods in African countries. America's disinvestment in soft power has left a lacuna for China in Africa. China's investment in cultural exchange, media and educational programmes has promoted its language, culture and values. However, these soft power prospects are linked to China's economic interests in the region. It managed to gain the trust and support of African governments and citizens and assisted in securing contracts

for infrastructure and natural resources (Kulungu, 2023). Feng (2022) contends that China's economic assistance, contracts and to some degree, trade with African countries have a positive image of China in Africa. The findings show that, more especially in African countries with relatively smaller populations, poorer livelihood and less open economies and average governance, China tend to hold a positive political and economic influence. This is attributable to the execution of the BRI initiative.

US-China geopolitical implications for Africa

The economic competition is a direct aspect where the US–China tension over Africa's domination is explicit. Historically, the US was the largest foreign direct investor in Africa before China surpassed it, and it has maintained a dominant position in Africa since 2011. China's BRI investment in Africa's infrastructural projects, such as railways, highways, ports and power plants, has entrenched China's influence in West and East African coastal countries (Noor and Phil, 2024). Meanwhile, America's retrenchment in foreign policy could exacerbate China's entrenchment, potentially choking off its influence on the continent through debt-trap diplomacy. More interestingly, non-conditional loans that lack transparency provide China with the advantage of utilising the country's resources and influencing its economy (Steinberg, 2021). Ebner (2015) posits that despite being rich in resources, the African continent has not been able to fuel growth, prosperity and development. In short, its resource wealth has been more of a curse than a blessing.

Africa is home to approximately 30 per cent of the world's mineral reserves, including green or critical mineral resources (Al Jazeera, 2022). These are natural mineral resources used to produce green technology such as solar panels, wind turbines and batteries. Examples of green mineral resources include: graphite, lithium, cobalt, manganese and rare earth metals (Marais, 2022). China has strategically invested in refining capacity, refining over 60 per cent of the world's lithium and 85 per cent of its rare earth, while the US is playing catch-up. 'The US CHIPS and Science Act alongside the Mineral Security Partnership highlights a shift toward securing the supply chain through "friend shoring" and de-

risking dependence on Beijing' (Khumalo, 2025 para. 2). This has been the objective of the past few administrations, especially the critical role of mineral resources in national defence and military technologies (Burke, 2025).

Looking within - Africa's resource-based industrialisation

The weakening US soft power tactic, especially in the provision of public goods in Africa, presents an opportunity for Africa to build resilience away from external intervention that has destabilised the continent's development trajectory. This current moment requires the continent to look within and implement the Africa We Want – independent from foreign powers and reliance (Kuwali, 2025). This is an opportunity for the African continent to bridge the gap between vast mineral wealth and limited economic development. For example, the DRC, like many other African economies, depend on raw material exports, having failed to invest in meaningful value-added processing. This excessive dependency and lack of vertical integration, as well as economic diversification, result in the country's vulnerability to sharp downturns if global critical mineral resource prices remain low for an extended period (Canuto and Emran, 2025). In March 2025, the African Union (AU) launched the AGMS. This is a significant policy intervention that seeks to 'harness green mineral value chain for equitable industrialisation and electrification, creating green technologies and sustainable development to enhance the quality of life of its people' (Manjonjo, 2025: para.3). This strategy came at the best time when global trade and tariff rules are changing and the global demand for green critical minerals necessary for the energy transition is high (Manjonjo, 2025).

Furthermore, some countries were ahead of the AGMS, and numerous policies are being implemented to promote the development of the continent's domestic mineral value chain. For example, Zimbabwe promulgated a national ban on the export of unprocessed lithium resources (Brandcome Partner, 2023). Zimbabwe was losing approximately €1.7 billion from exporting lithium as a raw material and not processing it into batteries domestically (Africanews, 2024). Namibia subsequently

enacted a similar policy six months later, followed by the most recent announcement of the approval of Ghana's Green Mineral Policy that effectively bans the exportation of unprocessed mineral resources to retain value and promote the domestic supply chain. These efforts complement the AGMS's objective, which is to guide African countries on how to strategically exploit their green mineral resources for industrialisation (Brandcom Partner, 2023).

Moreover, the AU established the AMDC to ensure the global rush for green mineral resources translates into a prosperous future, curbing environmental damage and risk at the top of its agenda. Nearly a quarter of the continent's GDP depends on the environment, and this statute is meant to ensure the continent does not lose out (Kitaw, 2023). However, the slow pace of ratifying the statute could cost the continent's management of its green mineral resources on demand. Since its adoption in January 2016, three AU member states have ratified the statute (Mali, Zambia, and Guinea), while only eight member states have signed it. The AMDC statute needs a minimum of fifteen ratifications to be enforced. These policies hold the potential to break the resource curse and propel Africa's economic sovereignty along with coveted industrialisation (Kitaw, 2023).

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Conclusion and discussion of findings

Considering existing literature by Blackwill (2020), Chase-Dunn et al (2011), Fox (2014), He (2010) and Newmann (2011), the US global leadership status was in decline, however, Trump exacerbated this phenomenon. Although the US still has a grip on hard power capability, notably the largest economy and military spending. Its decline across multiple soft power indexes, namely the Pew Survey, the Portland Soft Power 30 index, and Opinion polls, has negatively impacted the US' global leadership image, specifically how other states perceive it in the international system (Stremlau, 2022). Trump's retrenchment foreign policy is based on the global hard power that the US possesses. He propels the idea of 'rule by force' as opposed to 'rule by consent'. However, as a global leader, especially in the present day, it is imperative to have

intellectual and moral leadership over the ruled in the global society, and this capability is anchored in the country's soft power (Zahran and Ramos, 2010).

Moreover, Trump 1.0 and 2.0 have regressed the US global leadership status in terms of the role it plays in providing a global public good. Letswalo (2022) contends that it is significant for a global leader to put the capabilities they possess to good use. Foreign policy serves as a guide to articulate a global leader's commitment to advancing the global public good. Trump 1.0 ended some humanitarian and development projects that were either sponsored or executed by the US in developing countries, especially in Africa. He ended programmes that assisted many lives in Africa, such as 'Feed the Future', PowerAfrica, reduced funding to the UN Children's Emergency Fund and the WHO and reversed the US\$3 billion pledge made by his predecessor Obama for climate mitigation and adaptation in the Global South (Stremlau, 2022). Similarly, Trump 2.0 withdrew humanitarian and multilateral organisation financial support and paused USAID operations in many developing countries. In short, Trump froze all US foreign assistance except for Israel and Egypt (Cilliers, 2025; Ekanem, 2025; Pecquet, 2025).

This lacuna that the Trump administration(s) have created is an opportunity for China to entrench its chokehold in Africa. China has won the hearts, pockets and security of many African countries (Ebner, 2015: 112; Noor and Phil, 2024; Steinberg, 2021). This entrenched its sphere of influence on the continent, thus having the advantage of extracting mineral resources in exchange for developmental assistance. This method positioned China to lead in having critical mineral resources supply and refining the largest share of these minerals, while the US is playing catch-up (Burke, 2025; Khumalo, 2025). The US' retrenchment in foreign policy is a lesson for many African states that overdependence on a strategic partner can be tricky. Perhaps someday, China, as Africa's best friend, may walk away or end the existing public good it provides to the continent.

African countries should take advantage of the high demand for critical mineral resources to boost industrialisation. The AGMS and AMDC are significant policies that African economies should implement

to realise this goal. Although some countries have already imposed an export ban on critical minerals, they should use this opportunity to condition investment, promoting beneficiation, economic diversification, and changing the continent's contribution to the global value chain. It is the right time for Africa to look within (Brandcom Partner, 2023; Canuto and Emran, 2025; Kitaw, 2023; Manjonjo, 2025).

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CHAPTER 14

Trump 2.0 and Africa: The Politics of Strategic Patience and Realignment

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Introduction

The United States' (US) relationship with Africa has historically oscillated between periods of strategic engagement and relative neglect (Malone and Khong, 2003). In other words, the African continent has been relegated to a peripheral role in US foreign policy (Bangura, 2007). Global security concerns, economic interests and ideological frameworks have all played key roles in shaping this relationship (Kalu and Kieh, 2013). The US's foreign policy toward Africa was traditionally marked by benign neglect, especially before World War II, when there was little interest in the continent (Malone and Khong, 2003; Owusu, 2020). Following the war, US involvement with African nations was largely shaped by efforts to counter Soviet influence, leading to selective engagement or disengagement with individual African countries (Cox and Stokes, 2018). A more consistent and meaningful US–Africa relationship began during President Clinton's administration, and this engagement grew stronger with significant bipartisan support (Falola and Njoku, 2020). The Clinton, Bush and Obama administrations maintained a largely consistent approach on key priorities on the continent (Kalu and Kieh, 2013).

In his first foreign-policy speech in 2015, the then Republican presidential frontrunner—Donald Trump, declared that 'America First will be the major and overriding theme of my administration, adding that his foreign policy will always put the interests of the American people and American security above all else' (Schultz and Fredericks, 2016). In line

with this declaration, under President Trump's first term between 2017 and 2021, the US–Africa relations experienced a notable departure from a multilateral and structured approach that had largely characterised previous US administrations such as particularly former President George W. Bush and Barack Obama (Iddris, 2018; Orefo, 2013). The 'America First' mantra, which prioritises economic opportunities over traditional aid-based partnerships, significantly deprioritised Africa in Trump's first term (Baruwa, 2025). Thus, relations with African countries deteriorated to unprecedented levels, primarily due to the administration's considerable contempt for international organisations and multilateralism, as well as its clear disinterest or arguable benign neglect of the African continent, and derogatory remarks allegedly directed at African states (Singh, 2024). Paying less attention to Africa resulted in diplomatic disengagement from the US's obligations to the continent (Owusu, 2020). Despite its growing population and wealth in critical minerals, it can be argued that Trump does not see sufficient opportunity for mutually beneficial ventures with Africa. This explains why he allegedly referred to African countries as 'shit-hole' in 2018 and why diplomatic relations between Washington and many African states were strained and generally characterised by mistrust, tension, and neglect between 2017 and 2021 (BBC, 2018; Watkins and Phillips, 2018).

President Trump made over 20 trips to approximately 23 countries during his first term, however, he never stepped into Africa (Uhrmacher and Shin, 2018; United States Department of State, n/d). This is a sharp contrast with previous US presidents, such as Bill Clinton, Barack Obama and George Bush, who visited some African countries during their administrations, with many observers seeing it as the administration's willingness to write off an entire continent (Olney, 2021; Toosi, 2025). This absence of top-level engagement was perceived by many African states as a signal of waning US interest in the continent (Olney, 2021). Despite Trump's protectionist policies and a shift in rhetoric, some traditional US engagements with Africa continued in Trump's first term. For instance, military cooperation with the continent remained strong, especially through US Africa Command (AFRICOM), which supported counterterrorism efforts in the Sahel and the Horn of Africa (Quessard,

Heurtebize and Gagnon, 2020). For instance, in 2017, President Trump bypassed the 2013 Presidential Policy Guidance, reduced interagency coordination and gave theatre commanders the authority to approve both manned and unmanned air strikes, leading to a doubling of strikes in Somalia. He also maintained efforts to disrupt al-Shabab forces through sustained air strikes, carried out in coordination with African Union and Somali ground troops (Haun, Jackson and Schultz, 2021). Furthermore, initiatives such as the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) and the African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA) were preserved (Hare, Manfredi-Sánchez and Weisbrode, 2023). These reflected a level of institutional continuity in areas of security, health and trade. In 2018, when a formal Africa strategy—*Prosper Africa*—was launched, it centred predominantly on challenging African governments to choose the US over Russia and China for their economic, political and security relationships (Signé and Olander, 2019). According to the then US National Security Advisor, John Bolton, this strategy was organised around three main principles: prosperity (advancing US trade and commercial ties with nations across the region to benefit both the US and Africa); security (countering the threat from radical Islamist terrorism and violent conflict) and stability (Schneidman and Signé, 2018). However, significant cuts to foreign aid and proposals to scale back peacekeeping contributions are poised to undermine US soft power in Africa. This raises concerns over long-term commitment to development and humanitarian support on the continent (Aljazeera, 2025; Mathiasen and Martinez, 2025). In 2024 alone, Sub-Saharan Africa received over US\$50 billion in US foreign assistance. However, following Trump's decision to dismantle the US Agency for International Development, with seven of the eight countries most affected by these cuts located in Africa, there are concerns over the potential impact on the continent (Yade, 2025).

Economic engagement also saw limited innovation during Trump's first term of presidency. While the administration launched the *Prosper Africa* initiative aimed at increasing two-way trade and investment, the programme struggled with clarity and lacked the robust funding enjoyed by earlier initiatives such as *Power Africa* (Campbell, 2024; Signé and Olander, 2019). Moreover, the emphasis on bilateral deals over

multilateral engagement conflicted with Africa's increasing orientation toward regional integration through mechanisms like the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA). Trump's second term, also marked by a foreign policy that favours bilateral treaties over multilateral ones, has already sparked cautious expectations among African leaders (Falola, 2025). For decades, many African countries have developed various security and economic partnerships with the US. Many of these unequal relationships have been reshaped over time, often in ways that did not favour the continent (Epps, 2012). This departure and Trump's transactional diplomacy in his first term often conflicted with Africa's preference for mutual respect and developmental cooperation. Additionally, his administration's limited engagement suggests that, like his first term, Africa may not be a priority in his second term (Baruwa, 2025).

328 As noted above, while certain long-standing programmes remained intact, the administration's broader foreign policy framework did not prioritise Africa as a strategic partner. While this remained the case, global powers such as China and Russia deepened their ties with Africa during Trump's first term and reduced America's influence and strategic focus on the African continent (Huang, 2024). Although President Trump's return to the White House is still in its early stages, some African observers fear he may once again diminish US engagement with the continent, as he did during his first term, while others believe his second term could bring both opportunities and challenges for Africa (Isike and Oyewole, 2024a). Consequently, this chapter aims to answer the following questions: How might a second Trump presidency influence the trajectory of US–Africa diplomatic and economic relations, particularly amid Africa's shifting global alliances? What role could strategic patience play in shaping a sustainable US foreign policy toward Africa in an increasingly multipolar world? How are African states recalibrating their foreign policy priorities in response to perceived inconsistencies or disengagement from the US during Trump's leadership?

This chapter employs a qualitative research approach to address these questions and examine the dynamics of US–Africa relations during Trump's second presidency. Focusing on strategic patience and geo-

political realignment, data will be collected through secondary sources, including policy statements, official government communications, Trump's social media engagements, campaign manifestos, and scholarly articles, since 2016. Drawing on Braun and Clarke's (2012) six-phase framework, Thematic Analysis will be employed to identify recurring themes, patterns and narratives related to diplomatic strategy and shifting alliances. The resurgence of a Trump presidency presents a critical juncture for US–Africa relations, particularly as African states increasingly assert autonomy through diversified global partnerships. Trump's previous unilateral and transactional approach left gaps in diplomatic engagement with Africa and raised questions about the US's long-term relevance on the continent. Thus, this chapter examines the implications of strategic patience by African states in a second Trump administration and explores how African states may recalibrate alliances in pursuit of mutual respect and geopolitical balance in an evolving international order. The next section of this chapter, therefore, examines the framework of understanding the subject.

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US–Africa relations and the framework of strategic re/alignment

This section provides theoretical, historical and empirical perspectives and frameworks of understanding US–Africa relations, and the continent's strategic patience and re/alignment. It examines perspectives on the US's African foreign policy, the evolution of US–Africa relations and shifts in global power dynamics, the growing influence of China and Russia in Africa as a counterbalance to the US, and Africa and the doctrine of strategic patience.

Perspectives on the US's African foreign policy

Scholarly discourse on US foreign policy towards Africa is often analysed through various theoretical lenses, providing a foundation for evaluating shifts in US–Africa relations under different administrations. Schraeder (1994) offers a comprehensive theoretical analysis of US foreign policy toward Africa in the post-war era. According to Schraeder (1994),

although it is commonly believed that US policymakers present a unified stance in African affairs, the reality is that Washington's foreign policy emerges from multiple centres of power, each capable of influencing policy in varying directions. The US foreign policy towards Africa has been historically influenced by the Presidents and their close advisors, the bureaucracies and Congress, and African affairs interest groups (Schraeder, 1994). This aligns with the pluralist perspective on foreign policy.

The US's security cooperation with Africa has expanded significantly over the past decade and a half due to Africa's growing strategic importance, with the most visible dimension of this engagement being the establishment of AFRICOM. This collaborates with the realists' perspective that the US engagement in Africa is driven by strategic interests, such as counterterrorism (Griffiths, 2016). In other words, this reflects the pursuit of US strategic goals without factoring in moral considerations. This approach aligns with what became known as the Nixon Doctrine—a revised containment strategy in which the US offered military and economic support to allied nations facing aggression, while refraining from taking on the main responsibility for defending the sovereignty of those states (Divon and Derman, 2017).

Similarly, some liberal scholars emphasise the role of institutions and trade in shaping the US–African relations (Cox, 2012). Over the past three decades, strengthening democratic institutions has become a significantly more prominent aspect of US foreign policy, gaining momentum in the years following the end of the Cold War. This emphasis on spreading democratic values stems from a longstanding tradition that views the export of American political ideals to advance US security and economic interests and counter the expansion of soviet military and political power (Bouchet, 2015; Diamond, 1995, US Congress, 1998).

Evolution of US–Africa relations and shifts in global power dynamics

Bangura (2007) believes that Africa has always been at the bottom of US foreign policy priorities. This collaborates with Malone and Khong's (2003) view that the US has paid little attention to Africa. Olney (2021)

suggests that the trend of benign neglect by the US was replaced with aggressive disdain during Trump's first term. However, it is necessary to observe that the US–Africa relations have historically oscillated between strategic engagement and peripheral interest, shaped largely by Cold War politics, global security concerns and humanitarian narratives (Falola and Njoku, 2020; Waters, 2009). In other words, since the end of World War II, US foreign policy has been guided by a threefold strategy focused on strengthening national security, broadening global economic prospects and advancing American values (Olympio, 2013).

During the Cold War, US involvement in Africa was primarily driven by ideological competition with the Soviet Union (Schraeder, 1994). After the Cold War, the US policy shifted towards promoting democratisation, economic liberalisation and counterterrorism, particularly after 9/11 (Bouchet, 2015). However, despite its noteworthy progress and rhetorical commitments, Africa has remained marginal in US foreign policy priorities, with US policymakers restricting the US politically and economically in areas of vital interest to the US (Laidi, 1990; Olsen, 2002; US Congress, 1980). Recently, the rise of China, Russia and other emerging powers has further reshaped Africa's global engagements (Van der Merwe, Taylor and Arkhangelskaya, 2016; Hamilton, 2023). The rise of these powers has prompted African nations to diversify partnerships and alignments beyond the US (Kagoro, Friesinger and Schlichte, 2024; OECD, ADB, UNDP and UNECA, 2011). This, in turn, has altered traditional power structures, challenged US influence on the African continent, and redefined Africa's role in global affairs (Kuznetsova, 2024).

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The growing influence of China and Russia in Africa as a counterbalance to the US

In trade and investment, security, humanitarian aid and geopolitical interests, China and Russia have significantly expanded their influence in Africa in recent years (Hamilton, 2023). They have increasingly positioned themselves as counterbalances to the US presence on the continent. According to Rotberg (2009), Africa and China are currently in their third and most impactful phase of deep engagement –an era

that holds greater potential for driving economic growth and reducing poverty than any previous efforts made through Western colonial rule or international aid initiatives. China, through its Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and the Forum on China–Africa Cooperation (FOCAC), has invested heavily in infrastructure, mining and energy projects, and at the same time, deepened bilateral ties across the African continent (De Kluiver, 2025). It also offers loans and development assistance with fewer or no conditions than the US or Western counterparts. It can be argued that this approach has appealed to many African states seeking bilateral engagements without the governance-related strings often attached to Western aid (Amusan and Oyewole, 2017; Falola and Achberger, 2013). These, among others, have created goodwill for China and enhanced its soft power in Africa.

332 Russia, meanwhile, has focused on security cooperation, arms sales and security partnerships in Africa (Okafor, 2025). For instance, the Wagner Group's activities in countries such as the Central African Republic, Mali and Sudan reflect Russia's strategic use of private military contractors to expand influence without direct state involvement in the domestic politics of African states, unlike the US (Inwood and Tacchi, 2024). Since 2015, Russia has signed military cooperation agreements with 43 African countries (Karabektas, 2024). Recently, French sources reported the establishment of a new Russian military base in Burkina Faso (Gebrewold, 2024). Russia's military involvement across the continent varies in scope, including training personnel, supplying arms, and offering counterterrorism support (Gebrewold, 2024). Due to worsening security, rising terrorist threats, and the frustration and anger with former colonial powers, some African countries are forming new alliances to protect their sovereignty (Banchereau and Donati, 2024). Recently, the Russia-backed Africa Corps was established to dislodge Western powers from Africa, serving as a clear example of this evolving shift (Inwood and Tacchi, 2024). In exchange, Moscow gains access to African military, civilian ports, air bases and strategically important natural resources (Inwood and Tacchi, 2024; Karabektas, 2024). Russia has also boosted its goodwill and soft power in Africa (Ogunnoiki, Ekpo and Oyewole, 2025).

Both China and Russia promote a model of engagement that

emphasises sovereignty and non-interference in domestic politics, and this approach challenges the US, which often prioritises democracy, human rights and governance reforms. In other words, Russia and China offer an alternative to the conditional aid frameworks traditionally promoted by the US and other Western donors (Falola and Achberger, 2013). This has also resulted in competition between non-African powers on the continent and a reduction in dependency on the US.

Africa and the doctrine of strategic patience

Strategic patience involves the deliberate choice to wait in order to achieve specific objectives. It is considered strategic because it results from carefully weighing available options within severe limitations and determining that patience offers the most effective path forward (Curato, 2019). This approach reflects an effort to exercise what limited control remains in shaping one's own future. In diplomatic terms, it involves refraining from direct military action and instead relying on careful diplomatic measures to persuade an adversary nation to shift from a strategically risky or unfavourable position to a more secure or advantageous one (Rilwan, 2021). As it concerns the US, the term 'strategic patience' was originally introduced by then-Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and most commonly describes President Obama's approach to North Korea. At the heart of this policy was the US position that it would refrain from entering negotiations with North Korea until the regime demonstrated clear and tangible steps toward denuclearisation (Binhong, 2018). The overarching objective of the policy was to achieve a verifiable end to North Korea's nuclear programme through multilateral diplomatic efforts (Zhu, 2023). This stems from the belief that maintaining the status quo, though not ideal, is preferable to many possible consequences of taking action. According to Kwak and Joo (2016), President Obama brought a different perspective to the White House, prioritising multilateral cooperation over unilateral action and favouring diplomacy over military force. Although Obama was often criticised for lacking strategic vision, the idea behind the concept of strategic patience is that sometimes it is more prudent to exercise patience and pursue a long-term strategy than to

resort to aggressive and short-term measures (Nakayama, 2015).

Strategic patience has been variously referred to as ‘wait and see’ or ‘watch and complain’. Most times, it exemplifies the saying that ‘good things come to those who wait’. Strategic patience requires one state to be stronger than another, and this power dynamic makes the doctrine of strategic patience effective. In other words, if two states are on parallel thresholds, none of them can be said to be indulging in strategic patience. Thus, in trade and multilateral relationships, strategic patience focuses on building long-term economic partnerships, maintaining consistent dialogue, and waiting for opportunities to open new markets, secure trade deals, or influence multilateral negotiations. The goal is often to ensure sustainable economic growth and integration into global systems, while striking a careful balance between national interests and regional development. Similarly, when applied to security and foreign policy, strategic patience typically involves focusing on long-term gains, relying on soft power, and waiting for the right moment to deter or avoid conflict escalation (Johnson, Kartchner, and Maines, 2018). Oftentimes, the policy of strategic patience is criticised by observers and policymakers as strategic passivity and an excuse for timidity (Goodby and Gross, 2010; Newsham, 2020). This accounts for why Trump favoured ‘strategic accountability’ in approaching North Korea in his first term (Zhu, 2023).

For African countries, strategic patience can involve a willingness to wait for favourable circumstances or changes in the geopolitical landscape before taking decisive actions, as it concerns their relations with the US. The underlying idea is that these African countries are likely to achieve better outcomes by exercising patience and avoiding unnecessary risks while Trump is still in the White House. This approach can create conditions that favour long-term stability and progress for the African continent. Under the second Trump presidency, African nations might navigate the evolving dynamics in US–Africa relations by leveraging strategic patience to balance their foreign policy decisions, avoid hasty alignments while waiting for favourable terms in US engagement. This approach aligns with the realist notion of long-term state interests in the face of shifting external pressures (Mearsheimer, 2003). It is on these bases that the next section examines the US–Africa relations under Trump.

Trump and the US–Africa relations

This section reflects on the US–Africa relations under Trump’s first administration, what changed under Biden and the situation for the new administration. In this process, this section also considers regional alignment and global power dynamics that influence the subject matter.

US–Africa relations in Trump’s first term

Trump administration’s most significant Africa policy during his first term was Prosper Africa, a policy aimed at assisting US companies seeking to do business in Africa (Campbell, 2020). Despite the Prosper Africa policy, the US–Africa relations experienced notable policy shifts characterised by reduced multilateral engagement, a preference for bilateral diplomacy, and decreased emphasis on democracy and development aid. In President Trump’s first term, his isolationist strategy and ‘America First’ foreign policy led him to advocate for the US Congress to reduce development programmes (Yade, 2025). Thus, his first term, marked by a foreign policy that favours bilateral treaties over multilateral ones, has already raised cautious expectations among African leaders (Falola, 2025).

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Although First Lady Melania Trump visited some African countries to promote the Women’s Global Development and Prosperity initiative, Trump did not consider it necessary to visit any African country during his first term or throughout his tenure in the White House. Rather, he welcomed only two African heads of state – Muhammadu Buhari and Uhuru Kenyatta of Nigeria and Kenya, respectively (Olney, 2021; Westcott, 2019). Scholars argue that Trump’s engagement with the continent revealed a limited understanding of the issues facing African countries (Harvey, 2024; Westcott, 2019). Trump’s limited engagement with African leaders and his hesitation to appoint key officials within the State Department were viewed as signs of America’s declining interest in the continent (Westcott, 2019). Similarly, his administration failed to host a US–African summit like his predecessors (Isike and Oyewole, 2024a; Yade, 2025). Programmes such as the PEPFAR and Power Africa were deprioritised, while trade and security cooperation became more

selective in line with Trump's 'America First' mantra.

It is also necessary to observe that discussion of the African continent was almost completely absent during Trump's second term presidential campaign, compared to his frequent mention of Russia, China and the Middle East (Schultz and Fredericks, 2016). It is safe to say that even though he launched the Prosper Africa policy, Trump was not personally involved in the initiative or other aspects of US–Africa policy, unlike his predecessors (Campbell, 2020). For instance, Ronald Reagan sponsored 'constructive engagement' to bring an end to apartheid in South Africa, while George Bush personally worked toward ending civil wars in Angola, Ethiopia, Mozambique and Somalia. Bush also launched PEPFAR and initiatives to fight malaria and to support girls' education (Campbell, 2020). Bush went further and established the Millennium Challenge Corporation to improve African infrastructure. President Bill Clinton sponsored the major trade and investment link between the US and Africa and AGOA, while President Obama's Power Africa and Feed the Future initiatives were designed to mitigate chronic electricity and food shortages on the continent (Maass, 2017). Considering his lack of interest in African affairs, Africans have come to see Trump's second term as 'business as usual' and expect nothing of substance from the new administration (Yade, 2024), with Trump's continued focus on economic self-interest and counterterrorism. These trends are expected to intensify and further marginalise Africa, or push for strategic re-engagement, depending on broader geopolitical considerations and domestic policy priorities of individual African states.

US–Africa relations: Continuity and change in the wake of Trump 2.0

Analysts believe that Trump inherited a declining US strength in Africa in his second term (Donati, 2024). The waning of US influence in Africa presents a challenge for Trump's second term, which must confront significant gaps in its understanding of a rapidly evolving continent that is increasingly aligning with China and Russia (Donati et al., 2024). Over the past few years, the US has faced a series of diplomatic setbacks in Africa, such as the loss of its key Sahel military base in Niger and the inability

to secure an agreement with another ally to relocate the operational base (Radar Africa, 2024). As a result, the US finds itself without a strategic presence in the Sahel, where Russia-supported military juntas now dominate, while the region emerges as a global hotspot for terrorism (Radar Africa, 2024). Again, the Central African Republic, a gold-rich nation growing increasingly authoritarian, relies on Russian mercenaries for security even as it continues to receive millions in US aid (Okafor, 2025)

In early 2021, the Biden administration sought to realign US–Africa relations by rebuilding trust, while also reaffirming the US commitment to addressing African priorities on the global stage (Singh, 2024). This shift was guided by a clearer and more coherent strategy for engaging with the continent, most notably outlined in the August 2022 *US Strategy Toward Sub-Saharan Africa*. The strategy identifies four key objectives to shape future relations with African nations: fostering open societies, strengthening democratic governance and security, advancing economic opportunities and supporting climate adaptation (The White House, 2022). Additionally, President Biden pledged significant political commitments to Africa, of which many remain unfulfilled (Isike and Oyewole, 2024b). Biden promised to visit the continent during his term, which he fulfilled when he visited Angola in December 2024 (Isike and Oyewole, 2024c). He also supported the unrealised two permanent seats for Africa on the United Nations (UN) Security Council and actualised the African Union’s (AU) inclusion in the G20 (Isike and Oyewole, 2024b; Lawal, 2024). Besides President Biden’s last-minute visit to Africa, the renewed focus on the continent during his tenure was reinforced through numerous high-level official visits to the region and the convening of the US–Africa Leaders’ Summit in December 2022 (Isike and Oyewole, 2024c; Singh, 2024). Biden also supported developmental aid to Africa, including the Lobito Train Corridor that will connect the Atlantic with the Indian Ocean (Isike and Oyewole, 2024b). However, these efforts were not enough to reverse a diminishing American presence on a continent that has historically been viewed as a low priority by US foreign policymakers.

In Trump’s second term, US–Africa relations may reflect both

continuity and change across diplomatic, economic, and security engagements. Currently, there has been sustained emphasis on counterterrorism cooperation. According to key members of Trump's administration, countering Islamist terrorist groups around the world is a top priority for the administration (Matibe, 2025). Similarly, limited development aid and transactional economic policies have characterised Trump's second presidency. President Trump's minerals-for-security deal with Ukraine and the proposed deal with the Democratic Republic of the Congo demonstrate the emerging transactional foreign policy approach of the US (Lawal, 2025). Trump's tariffs that are designed to address trade imbalances and pause on all US foreign aid obligations show a reduced internationalism and multilateral collaboration in Washington, DC (Buchwald and Liptak, 2025). Diplomatically, the US under Trump may continue its unpredictable rhetoric, while African nations increasingly seek alternative global partnerships. Economically, pressure may rise on the side of the US to counter China and Russia's growing influence in Africa. Overall, strategic patience will shape how these continuities and changes influence long-term relations between the US and Africa during and after Trump. Nevertheless, Africa's strategic realignment is likely to accelerate in a second Trump presidency.

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Trump 2.0 and Africa's realignment, partnerships and cooperation

This section addresses the options and strategies of African countries in political, economic and military alignment and realignment, partnerships and cooperation under Trump's second presidency. It explores (1) Africa's economic realignment, security partnerships and military cooperation, (2) Africa's strategic engagement with multilateral and global institutions and (3) strategic patience in Africa's waiting-out US diplomacy and strengthening other partnerships.

Africa's economic realignment, security partnerships and military cooperation

Following Donald Trump's victory, there has been much speculation on how the US government would either choose to intensify its rivalry with China in Africa or pursue selective cooperation to help offset Beijing's influence (Falola, 2025; Isike and Oyewole, 2024a). From dismantling the US Agency for International Development, to banning visitors from many African countries, Trump's second presidency appears to be abandoning these nations to deal on their own with development challenges ranging from battling AIDS to weak education systems. The US is also expected to close several embassies in Africa, and some reports suggest that Trump wants to scale back America's military operations on the continent (Toosi, 2025). As noted earlier, while the Trump administration is retrenching globally and imposing tariffs worldwide, no region appears to matter less to the White House than Africa. Trump's policies are likely to encourage African governments to invest more of their own funds in public services, thereby making them more responsive to citizens' needs (Toosi, 2025). In a second Trump presidency, Africa's strategic realignment is likely to accelerate, with trade, investment and security increasingly shifting toward China, Russia and perhaps Europe and emerging powers, such as India, Türkiye, Brazil and Arab countries. As US engagement remains transactional and unpredictable, many African nations are deepening economic ties with China and Russia.

These African nations are drawn by China and Russia's infrastructure financing, non-conditional aid and consistent diplomatic presence (Falola and Achberger, 2013). For instance, China's initiatives, such as the BRI, offer long-term partnerships that contrast with perceived US disengagement. This shift reflects Africa's pursuit of diversified partnerships that prioritise mutual benefit and development needs against one-sided and unequal relationships with the US. Thus, as noted earlier, the US risks further diminishing its influence unless it redefines its approach to African economic engagement. Some African officials have responded to Trump's transactional approach by increasing their interactions with other partners. China invests significantly in African

infrastructure and resource extraction and has been the most apparent gainer of this recalibration. As the world's largest bilateral lender, China has emerged as the leading provider of infrastructure financing and the second-largest source of foreign direct investment (FDI) in Africa (Bo, Lawal and Sakaariyahu, 2024). The Beijing Action Plan of 2025–2027, adopted at the close of the 2024 FOCAC summit, features a pledged investment of US\$50.7 billion to support various areas of Africa's development, including infrastructure projects and security cooperation (Think BRICS, 2025).

Russia has also become more visible, particularly by disseminating anti-Western sentiment, engaging in aggressive diplomacy and expanding Russian paramilitary forces and mercenary groups (Karabektas, 2024; Ogunoiki et al., 2025). Despite its relatively limited economic interests, Russia exerts significant political influence in Africa, with numerous bilateral military cooperation agreements in place with African countries that often result in the deployment of Wagner soldiers (Okafor, 2025). Russia's growing military footprint in Africa is reflected in its arms sales to African countries, which have increased to far outweigh other major arms suppliers to the continent. Between 2018 and 2022, Russia was the leading arms supplier to Africa, accounting for 40 per cent of the continent's weapons imports (Karabektas, 2024). Aside from Russia and China, Africa is likely to engage with multilateral institutions to mitigate the impacts of an unpredictable and transactional Trump administration.

Africa's strategic engagement with multilateral and global institutions

Global institutions and multilateral coalitions are filling the gaps left by weakening conventional power systems in Africa. In other words, they are promoting a multipolar world and lessening reliance on the US and the Western financial institutions. One of the ways African countries have traditionally sought to exert greater global influence is through collective action within the AU. However, African states may not see the possibility of engaging with the new US administration through the AU, since Trump generally prefers bilateral deals over multilateral ones. Additionally, most African institutions are not unified in their approach

to dealing with the Trump administration (Toosi, 2025). Recently, the AU has been strengthening its relations with international organisations with a focus on representing African interests on global platforms (Okeke, 2025). The AU's admission into the G20 in 2023 represented a major acknowledgement of the continent's growing influence in global economic governance (Delea, 2024). Similarly, the European Union (EU) is Africa's major trading partner—a partnership that focuses on investment, job creation, digital transformation and sustainable development (Adebajo, 2012). The AU–EU Partnership also supports the AfCFTA. In security, the EU also funds the African Peace Facility, which supports AU-led peace operations in conflict zones such as Somalia and the Central African Republic (European Commission, 2018). Additionally, the 2022 AU–EU Summit, which reinforced cooperation on global health, education and green energy transition, is backed by an over €150 billion investment plan under the EU's Global Gateway strategy (AU, 2022). In 2007, the European Commission noted that Africa has become central to international politics, a subject of development concern, and an independent political actor (European Commission, 2007). According to the European Commission (2007), Africa holds significant weight as a political voice, an economic powerhouse, and a source of human, natural, cultural, and scientific potential.

Like the EU, the growing influence of BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa) + (Egypt, Ethiopia, Indonesia, Iran and the United Arab Emirates) has made it an alternative economic bloc for Africa. The addition of new partner countries, including Algeria, Nigeria and Uganda, in the 2024 BRICS Summit in Kazan, Russia, demonstrates a fundamental shift in global economic power dynamics and presents African countries with unprecedented opportunities to diversify their international partnerships (Agbetiloye, 2024). The BRICS+ investments can unlock African entrepreneurial potential, stimulating additional investment across the continent, generating employment, driving economic growth and reducing poverty (Lo and Hiscock, 2014). Deepening ties with BRICS+ is also likely to encourage other global economic powers to reassess their engagement with Africa and boost their investments in the region (Lo and Hiscock, 2014). While

Trump's 'America First' approach (characterised by scepticism towards international institutions) may further marginalise Africa in US foreign policy, BRICS+ offers African countries an alternative platform for increased international status, economic cooperation and development (Sánchez and Brühwiler, 2016; Stuenkel, 2020). Institutions such as the New Development Bank, BRICS's financial arm, aim to provide an alternative and more flexible terms for African states seeking to escape the dollar-dominated global financial system (Ekanem, 2025). This shifting economic engagement demonstrates the geopolitical aspirations and growing desire of African countries for diversified global partnerships in an unpredictable and changing global order. It also reflects Africa's willingness to strengthen global partnerships while waiting out President Trump's era.

Strategic patience in African diplomacy - Waiting out US policies while strengthening other partnerships

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As noted earlier, Trump's second presidency is expected to closely mirror his first term, which was marked by unexpected developments and big announcements, producing volatile and unpredictable relations (Falola, 2025). Hence, African states must embrace this precarious international environment with a growing sense of common destiny and responsible regional engagements (Ogunnubi and Oyewole, 2020). Here, strategic patience is expected to play a crucial role in African diplomacy and relations with the US, enabling states in the region to navigate complex international dynamics while safeguarding their long-term national interests. Rather than reacting hastily and confrontationally to global shifts and pressures from Trump's administration, African nations are expected to adopt measured and deliberate approaches to foreign policy, such as waiting for favourable conditions, building coalitions and leveraging global partnerships to their advantage.

Faced with the potential for a continuation of transactional diplomacy and reduced multilateral engagement under a second Trump presidency, strategic patience will enable African countries to respond to US foreign policy shifts with caution, pragmatism and strategic recalibration. One

way to do this is to adopt a strategy of ‘waiting out’ US policies by maintaining minimal engagement with the US. They can also strengthen ties with alternative powers like China, Russia and emerging multilateral institutions such as the EU and BRICS+, while advocating for more respectful and mutually beneficial partnerships (Isike and Oyewole, 2023a). This will likely mitigate the uncertainties of US policy and maintain agency on the global stage. This approach will further enable African states to safeguard their interests without direct confrontation with the Trump administration. According to Falola (2025), the future of Africa is no longer solely dependent on the desires of a foreign superpower. In other words, it is time for a new phase in which Africa and the US recalibrate their connections within a bigger and more complex global context (Falola, 2025; Isike and Oyewole, 2023a).

Conclusion, policy implications and recommendations

President Trump’s return to the White House has ushered in a transformation of US domestic and foreign policies, especially as it concerns US relations with Africa. Africa’s rapid population growth, accelerating urbanisation, and emerging economic opportunities make the continent a focal point of increasing geo-economic interest in the face of these changes. Although the future remains uncertain for Africa in an ever-changing global economic order capable of shaping Africa’s development trajectory, African states navigating global power shifts under Trump’s second term should adopt strategic patience. First, these countries should continue to strengthen ties with emerging powers such as China, Russia and other regional blocs. This will largely ensure economic and security benefits while minimising dependence on the US as an economic and strategic partner. Second, African countries are expected to actively engage in multilateral institutions. Doing this will demonstrate Africa’s growing influence in the global arena. Third, by prioritising regional integration and leveraging Africa’s collective bargaining power, African states can maintain autonomy and resilience in an unpredictable geo-economic environment and ensure that their developmental needs are met, regardless of shifts in US policies.

With the rising international backlash against Trump's tariffs and other foreign policies, the administration may be compelled to appreciate the growing complexity of the international order, including relations with Africa. Besides, while Trump's transactional approach largely emphasises short-term gains, future US leadership may seek to rebuild multilateral engagement with African countries in traditional areas such as the promotion of democratic institutions, sustainable development and security partnerships. Till then, African countries are expected to continue to assert their relevance, strengthen ties with Europe, China and Russia and diversify alliances with emerging powers. They are also expected to leverage regional integration and collective action on the global stage. It is imperative to note that the evolving balance of power between the US and China will significantly shape Africa's diplomatic strategies during and after Trump's second presidency. And given the uncertainty surrounding US foreign policy under Trump, many African countries are likely to adopt a cautious, wait-and-see approach, prioritising strategic flexibility and strengthening ties with alternative global partners until the end of Trump's second term.

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SECTION VII: AFRICAN RESPONSES

CHAPTER 15

'America First' and African Agency in the new World order

Khouloud Abouri and Hiba Ouzaouit

Introduction

The relationship between the United States (US) and Africa has been defined by substantial power differences that stem from colonialism as well as Cold War politics and racial inequalities. Historical factors, especially the persistent effects of the transatlantic slave trade and racialised discourse, have created a major gap between African publics and US policymakers, which Ngcoya (2007: 713) calls the 'great continental divide'. US foreign policy has alternated between periods of active partnership and passive neglect and security-driven interests when engaging with African leaders who occasionally welcome US collaboration (da Cruz and Stephens, 2010; Owusu et al., 2019; Welch, 1996).

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During his presidency, Trump implemented protectionist trade measures and cut foreign aid while using derogatory language, which worsened African distrust. The Trump administration's isolationist policies during a period of increasing multipolarity and worldwide instability led several Global South nations to view the power vacuum created by a declining US as an opportunity to expand their influence (Igbatayo, n.d). African countries now function as strategic partners that Western nations, as well as emerging powers such as China, Russia, and India, actively pursue.

The emerging international situation creates vital issues regarding whether Trump's second administration will perpetuate Africa's current marginalisation or enable new strategic possibilities for African self-determination. The research aims to investigate this question by changing its focus from US policy goals to analysing Africa's status and possibilities within the current global order transformation. The existing body of

literature about US–Africa relations from past to present and Trump’s first term effects on trade and aid governance remains mainly focused on US actions.

African states receive minimal recognition as independent entities with the ability to make deliberate choices in foreign affairs. The analysis of African agency exists mainly as reactive behaviour, which scholars note, however, rarely study comprehensively and rarely make into the core of their analysis.

The research bases its analysis on African agency theory as its primary theoretical framework. The research borrows the agency definition attributed to Brown (2012), which views agency as ‘the faculty of acting or exerting power’ (Brown, 2012, as cited in Coffie and Tiky, 2021). Moreover, agency describes the ability of governments and regional institutions and bodies to affect external forces operating from positions of structural inequality (Coffie and Tiky, 2021). Trump’s ‘America First’ doctrine represents both a structural disruption to current global arrangements because of its transactional and normative withdrawal approach. The structural disruption caused by Trump may simultaneously provide new chances for African states to build alternative alliances or strengthen regional unity. This includes increasing strategic engagement with Eastern powers, such as China, Russia and India, as a deliberate exercise of agency that challenges Western-dominated models of development and partnership.

This chapter does not attempt to quantify how each nation would respond to Trump 2.0, since data about such reactions remains incomplete. The paper conducts a theory-informed and typology-based analysis of the potential transformations in African agencies’ strategic environment resulting from the disruptive conditions of Trump’s second term, as well as from certain structural factors of different countries. Through the examination of US–Africa relations development, the paper explores how African countries might be affected by the ‘America First’ policies. The primary inquiry concerns whether Trump’s second term will reinforce Africa’s position at the periphery or offer new opportunities for African entities to enhance their international influence. Central to this inquiry is the concept of African agency, understood not as passive reaction, but as

the ability of states to assert strategic priorities, resist marginalisation and redefine international alignments.

Literature review

Extensive research exists about Africa's relations with the US from multiple academic viewpoints. The study of foreign policy toward Africa is one aspect that allows for the analysis of US–Africa relations by understanding the shifts in US foreign policy throughout different administrations. The book by Schraeder (1994, as reviewed by Welch, 1996) analysed the dynamics between Africa and the US prior to 1990. The main argument defended by Schraeder is the historic neglect of the US towards Africa (Welch, 1996). This neglect was demonstrated during many international events, such as the pre-World War II era, where the US demonstrated little interest over the African continent (Owusu et al., 2019). The North African region gained temporary increased importance during World War II, because Allied forces, including the US, conducted military operations in the region (da Cruz & Stephens, 2010). After World War II, American engagement with Africa took the form of country-to-country engagement, depending on the US agenda and interests, primarily in relation to countering Soviet efforts to control the region (Owusu et al., 2019). Although the interest given to Africa was significant, it was less significant than the engagement of the US with other regions such as the Middle East and Asia, especially because of a lack of strategic alliances with the newly independent African countries (Nyang, 2005). However, Africa was a geopolitically important to the US because of its efforts to encourage the spread to democracy and counter the Soviets (da Cruz & Stephens, 2010). Moreover, individual countries held a strategic position within the US strategy during the Cold War; such was the case for Ethiopia that served as an important vessel to US military strategies during this period (Nyang, 2005). The post-Cold War involvement of the US in Africa was mainly determined by the 'politico-military' that attracted the interests of the US (Welch, 1996), making the continent a *selectively* important actor.

From the 1990s onward, however, US engagement in Africa

appeared to shift toward a more sustained and structured approach, beginning with the Clinton administration (Owusu et al., 2019). The Clinton administration initiated a more sustained and organised African engagement by the US when it came to Africa during the 1990s, according to Owusu et al. (2019). The combination of bipartisan support during the Clinton, George W. Bush, and Obama presidencies led to the establishment of notable programmes such as the African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA), the Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC), and the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR). Through these initiatives, the US advanced economic liberalisation as well as democracy and governance reforms throughout the entire continent (Owusu et al., 2019). These efforts marked a departure from Cold War-era disengagement, yet retained strategic and geostrategic considerations that preferred specific governance structures and market frameworks. The literature focuses extensively on how US foreign policy in Africa has become increasingly militarised through the creation and operation of the US Africa Command (AFRICOM). Research scholars have studied AFRICOM security reasons to demonstrate how these motivations serve US domestic interests at the expense of African sovereignty (Campbell, 2017; da Cruz and Stephens, 2010; Ngcoya, 2007).

Under the Trump administration, the US strengthened counterterrorism efforts, which led to an increase in military presence throughout the continent through 6 000 troops and multiple bases, according to Kohnert (2025). The growing security presence of China in Africa became more evident when the country established a military base near the US base in Djibouti, which demonstrated Africa's position in global geopolitical rivalries (Devermont, 2020). According to critics, these developments create a limited security-focused perspective of Africa, which uses military power to evaluate partnerships while ignoring development and democratic objectives (Conteh-Morgan, 2018; Ngcoya, 2007). The US has shown inconsistent dedication to human rights and governance across Africa, while letting politics influence its commitment levels. During its tenure, the Trump administration pursued a governance agenda which concentrated on efficiency anti-corruption, and US taxpayer value, while simultaneously downplaying human rights

concerns and multilateral participation (Devermont, 2019). Under the administration, support for authoritarian leaders combined with their withdrawal from the United Nations (UN) Human Rights Council, revealed an overall departure from normative leadership (Owusu et al., 2019). The changes in US policies resulted in reduced African democratic achievements, which harmed US soft power effectiveness.

The literature on US–Africa relations continues to portray Africa as a passive entity, while research primarily focuses on US presidential administration strategies. The international relations literature frequently depicts African states as entities which receive foreign aid and military intervention, while remaining outside the process of shaping their relationships (Devermont, 2020; Owusu et al., 2019). Current research sought to debunk the passive narrative of African agency by increasingly recognising the role of Africa and its institutions in international relations (Coffie and Tiky, 2021).

The literature continues to engage in an ongoing discussion about the nature and extent of African agency in international relations. Gwatiwa (2022) argues that most of the African agency observed in relation to dominant powers, including the US, is exaggerated. Such actions do not meet the criteria for full autonomous agency when evaluated against this standard. Gwatiwa (2022) proposes that African responses should be viewed as agency slack, which manifests through two mechanisms: limited engagement (shirking) and subtle policy shifts that diverge from external expectations (slippage). According to Gwatiwa (2022), these mechanisms operate primarily as survival mechanisms, instead of demonstrating strong influence. The research by Coffie and Tiky (2021) demonstrates that African agency takes a more forceful approach. The authors demonstrate how Tanzania opposes external norms, while regional institutions, such as the West African Health Organisation (WAHO) and the African Union Commission (AUC) use strategic bargaining to achieve their goals. The examples demonstrate intentional influence and strategic bargaining, according to the authors, rather than simple reactive positioning. According to Gwatiwa (2022), African agency operates through constraint and adaptation, however, Coffie and Tiky (2021) present African agency as a purposeful force which challenges

dominant narratives and transforms international engagements to meet African needs.

In addition to this contradiction, the literature also fails to examine how Trump-era policies may affect African countries in differentiated ways. Africa is frequently treated as a uniform geopolitical space, despite its deep variation in regime types, economic dependencies and diplomatic alignments. As a result, the possibility that Trump's foreign policy may simultaneously entrench vulnerability in some contexts while enabling manoeuvring or resistance in others remains unexplored. This paper addresses both gaps by placing African agency at the centre of analysis and by examining the structural, regional and geopolitical conditions that shape Africa's strategic positioning under Trump 2.0.

From Trump 1.0 to Trump 2.0

360 Between Donald Trump's first term (Trump 1.0) and his second term (Trump 2.0), there is a continuation and intensification of a more aggressive and transactional US stance, which has significant implications for Africa, particularly in trade, foreign aid, security cooperation, and diplomatic relations. During his first presidency, Donald Trump demonstrated a limited interest in Africa. The continent was marginal in US foreign policy priorities, and his administration maintained a relatively muted engagement with African states. Trump's focus was largely domestic, and foreign policy was marked by a disdain for multilateralism and scepticism toward foreign aid. Africa received minimal attention in his rhetoric and strategic planning, aside from isolated actions tied to counterterrorism or immigration (Nyantakyi Oti, 2025). Moreover, Trump's previous term was characterised by an erratic approach to governance, where Trump failed to fully entrench his power within the US political and bureaucratic system. As Scheppele (2025) notes, Trump 'floundered' in his first term, lacking both legal instruments and institutional control. While he had many ideas, they remained largely unstructured and poorly executed, leaving core institutions intact.

Trump's return to office in 2025 marks a decisive shift. Unlike in 2017, Trump now commands full control over the Republican Party and

has surrounded himself with a loyal, ideologically aligned bureaucracy. The Heritage Foundation has played a central role in staffing the administration, with tens of thousands of vetted individuals ready to execute a conservative agenda modelled after Reagan's presidency (Zogby, 2025). This institutional consolidation has allowed Trump to act more decisively. As Scheppele (2025) argues, Trump now 'has lawyers' and is pursuing policy through legal mechanisms to reshape the US state fundamentally. This includes executive orders aimed at reshaping the civil service, displacing or marginalising those unwilling to implement the administration's directives.

In the foreign policy domain, this newfound legal and institutional preparedness has translated into a more disruptive global posture. According to Patrick (2025), Trump is not merely reshaping US foreign policy, he is dismantling it. The second Trump administration is marked by an overt rejection of the institutional framework of post-1945 global cooperation, signalling what Patrick (2025) calls the 'destruction' phase as opposed to a moment of creation akin to the Truman Doctrine or the Marshall Plan. Trump's 'America First' policy has evolved into a systemic effort to withdraw the US from its own legacy of multilateralism. This includes exit from international organisations like the World Health Organisation (WHO), a move that has already sent shockwaves through African health sectors dependent on WHO-backed initiatives (Nyantakyi Oti, 2025). The broader disavowal of global development frameworks is also evident in the administration's decimation of USAID and its incorporation into the State Department, which threatens critical programmes in public health, food security, and climate resilience across the Global South (Patrick, 2025). The US has also adopted an openly antagonistic stance toward the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), portraying them as a threat to US sovereignty and opposing their inclusion in international documents and resolutions. There is even concern that Trump may initiate US withdrawal from the World Bank, International Monetary Fund (IMF), and other multilateral development banks (Patrick, 2025).

Trump 2.0, therefore, represents not only a revival of isolationist tendencies, but also a more ideologically coherent and institutionally

enabled disengagement from Africa. While in his first term, Africa was neglected, in the second term, it is being sidelined with strategic intent. His administration's reconfiguration of US foreign policy has deprioritised development aid, and programmes like PEPFAR, critical to HIV/AIDS response in Africa, may suffer drastic funding cuts (Amena Africa, 2025). Simultaneously, Trump's nationalist discourse and history of derogatory remarks about Africa have shaped the perception that US–Africa relations, under his leadership, are defined more by disdain than by partnership (Nyantakyi Oti, 2025). Nyantakyi refers to analysts like Etsey Sikanku, who argue that African leaders must prepare for engagement with a 'transactional Donald Trump' who will prioritise nationalist goals over any long-term strategic or moral commitments (Nyantakyi Oti, 2025). Trump's policies are not shaped by grand strategy, but by instinctive transactionalism and personal grievance; they are 'pecuniary, petulant, and patrimonial' rather than coherent geopolitical visions (Patrick, 2025).

362 The economic dimension of this shift is especially consequential. Patrick (2025) contends that Trump's foreign economic policy is dismantling the postwar trade regime. The multilateral system built around non-discrimination and reciprocity, embodied in institutions such as the World Trade Organization (WTO), is being rejected in favour of bilateralism and transactionalism. The principle of 'Most Favored (sic) Nation, which has been a cornerstone of global trade liberalisation, is being replaced with explicit tit-for-tat deals. For African economies integrated into global supply chains and reliant on fair trading rules, the erosion of the WTO's relevance has significant implications. One leading expert captured the gravity of this shift by asserting that under Trump, 'the WTO is toast' (Patrick, 2025).

In terms of security, Trump 1.0 maintained a significant US counterterrorism presence in Africa, especially in the Sahel and the Horn of Africa. However, Trump 2.0 may recalibrate that presence. While his 'America First' strategy could push for reductions in overseas military bases, there is also the possibility of deepening support for regional counterterrorism actors, especially in countries like Nigeria and Kenya, without establishing a direct US footprint (Amena Africa, 2025). Thus, the trend may be toward proxy security partnerships, rather than

traditional basing arrangements, reflecting a shift from physical presence to influence via alignment and selective cooperation.

At the same time, Trump's second administration appears poised to intensify efforts to counter China's influence in Africa. This may include investments or partnerships designed to rival Chinese initiatives, particularly under the framework of the G7's Partnership for Global Infrastructure and Investment (PGII) (Amena Africa, 2025). Yet, it remains unclear whether Trump will be committed to sustaining this multilateral initiative, given his scepticism toward alliances and global partnerships. As such, US efforts to compete with China in Africa may be undermined by the administration's broader ideological retreat from cooperative frameworks. Nevertheless, Africa remains caught in the crossfire of great power rivalry, with China continuing to offer large-scale infrastructure and trade deals through the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), while the US pivots away from long-term aid and multilateral engagement.

The potential consequences for Africa are profound. On one hand, Trump's aggressive disengagement from multilateral institutions and aid frameworks presents a challenge to development efforts and state capacity across the continent. On the other hand, this vacuum may catalyse introspection among African leaders, prompting efforts to reduce dependency and explore alternative models of growth and cooperation. This geopolitical rupture could offer African nations an opportunity to re-evaluate their reliance on US aid and craft more autonomous development strategies (Amena Africa, 2025). Yet, such an agency must be understood within the constraints imposed by a rapidly shifting international order in which Trump's America seeks to abandon the very architecture it once built.

In short, Trump 2.0 is not simply a repetition of his first term, but an escalation. The key difference lies not just in the aggressiveness of rhetoric or policy, but in Trump's increased institutional capacity to implement sweeping changes. His administration is no longer a floundering experiment, but a well-resourced ideological project. For Africa, the implications are sobering. Development aid is under threat, multilateral partnerships are crumbling and diplomatic engagement has given way to instrumental transactionalism. The continent, once marginal in Trump's

worldview, is now actively deprioritised—a casualty of a broader project to dismantle America’s global commitments. In response to this retreat, African states have not remained passive; instead, many have taken deliberate steps to renegotiate their positions within a fractured global order, reflecting varied forms of agency.

The differential effects of ‘America First’ policies

To analyse the differential effects of Trump 2.0’s ‘America First’ policies, this paper adopts a typological approach that selects a targeted set of African countries representing contrasting structural profiles. The typology is developed through three structural elements that determine each nation’s susceptibility to US foreign policy during Trump’s second term: political regime type, strategic importance and aid dependency. To clarify these dynamics, the typology introduced in this paper serves as a descriptive analytical tool, organising countries according to how the three structural features interact. Aid dependency is derived from *Financial Times* and USAID data for the year 2022, used as a baseline to assess vulnerability to funding withdrawals following Trump’s return to office. Aid dependency was classified as either high or low, based on whether a country received more or less than US\$1 billion in US foreign assistance during the reference year. Countries receiving over US\$1 billion were categorised as high aid-dependent, while those receiving less were considered low aid-dependent. The regime type is drawn from the 2025 Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem) report, which classifies countries as liberal democracies, electoral democracies, electoral autocracies, or closed autocracies (V-Dem Institute, 2025). Strategic value is assessed qualitatively through security relevance to US policies, control of key natural resources and geopolitical and regional influence, creating a classification of countries that takes into account the interests and orientations of ‘America First’: securing direct economic benefits for the US, natural resource investments and exploitation, foreign aid for the direct benefit of America (America First Agenda, n.d).

These features serve as fundamental characteristics that shape how African countries stand during Trump’s 2025 presidential return and

their subsequent handling of US foreign policy characterised by selective engagement, conditionality and transactionalism (Bukhari et al., 2025; Gwatiwa, 2022). This comparative analysis enables an understanding of the differences in the international and regional standing of African countries under Trump 2.0, and links them to the orientation of Trump 2.0 policies. This analysis also has a predictive component that can guide the understanding of future broader impacts of 'America First' policies on African countries based on their characteristics.

The selection of the countries is not intended to be exhaustive, but strategic: each case represented in Table 15.1 reflects a relevant combination of regime type, aid dependency and strategic value that influences its exposure to, or leverage within, the evolving US foreign policy framework. For example, Ethiopia and Egypt were chosen as high-aid states with contrasting political regimes, highlighting that regime type is not the sole determinant of aid. The Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) and Angola represent resource-rich states with varied aid levels, offering insight into how resource wealth can be used as a bargaining tool. South Africa and Botswana exemplify politically stable democracies with varying levels of aid dependency. Eritrea serves as an extreme case of a self-isolated regime with no US aid links, illustrating the outer edge of disengagement. This comparative selection ensures variation across all three structural dimensions and allows for a nuanced understanding of how Trump-era policies impacted African states not uniformly, but as a function of their structural position and strategic posture.

The strategic importance of each of these countries was determined in three categories: low, moderate and high strategic interest. The low strategic value of Botswana and Eritrea can be justified by the independence of Eritrea towards US aid (Wallis and Adeove, 2025), making it an unattractive partner for Trump's transactional foreign policy. The strategic position of Botswana can be attributed to modest trade values between the two countries. In 2024, US–Botswana goods trade totalled US\$509.5 million, with a trade deficit of US\$300.8 million (United States Trade Representative, n.d). Moreover, Botswana's democratic governance and limited role in great power rivalries do not align with the transactional priorities of Trump's 'America First' approach (Devermont,

2019; Kohnert, 2025; Owusu and Carmody, 2019). South Sudan, despite being historically important to US foreign policy due to its independence process and humanitarian crises, has had its strategic relevance under the 'America First' diminished significantly. There are significant aid cuts that accompany Trump 2.0, in addition to the accusations that South Sudan is taking advantage of the US (Ali, 2025; Čok, 2025).

Ethiopia and South Africa are classified as holding a moderate strategic value. Ethiopia is a powerful regional actor and holds significant importance on the continental and international level through the African Union (AU) and active engagement in the Horn of Africa (Klobucista, 2020). South Africa is also an important actor because of its regional and international influence (through its strong standing in the region and membership in BRICS and the G20). Moreover, trade relations between the US and South Africa are important as South Africa is the largest trading partner in Africa of the US (US Department of State, 2022).

Countries with high strategic importance for the US include Egypt, the DRC and Angola. The latter two countries have significant critical mineral and fossil fuel reserves. In the case of the DRC, American businesses are poised to invest in minerals to advance US economic interests and counter Chinese dominance in mineral exploitation (Wallis, Hook and Hodgson, 2025). The same logic would be applied to Angola, thanks to President Trump's fossil fuel expansion goals. In the case of Egypt and beyond resources, the country holds high strategic value under Trump 2.0 as the president has expressed his interest in maintaining free and unhindered access to the Suez Canal, a vital artery for global trade and US naval movement (Pollet, 2025). Trump also pushed Cairo to accept displaced Palestinians into the country (Harb, 2025), making Egypt a crucial actor for American strategies in the region.

Table 15.1: Typology of African states under Trump 2.0

Country	Regime type	Aid dependency	Strategic importance	Typology
Botswana	Democracy (electoral)	Low	Low	Independent country
Ethiopia	Democracy (electoral)	High	Moderate	Strategic dependent
South Africa	Democracy (liberal)	High	Moderate	Strategic dependent
Egypt	Autocracy (electoral)	High	High	Strategic partner
DRC	Autocracy (electoral)	High	High	Strategic partner
Angola	Autocracy (electoral)	Low	High	Strategic bargainer
South Sudan	Autocracy (closed)	High	Low	Vulnerable country
Eritrea	Autocracy (closed)	Low	Low	Independent country

This typological classification reveals that the degree of vulnerability to US disengagement and the ability to navigate in a changing geopolitical environment depend on the intersection of regime type, aid dependency and strategic importance. Low-aid, low-strategic-importance states such as Botswana and Eritrea are classified as independent countries. Eritrea, having not received any US assistance in 2024 and opting for a self-reliant development path, remained unaffected by shifts in US foreign aid. This outcome reflects a long-standing national strategy aimed at avoiding structural dependency, which has made the country largely immune to the shifting priorities and conditionalities of external donors (Wallis and Adeoye, 2025). These countries' aid independence strongly relates to agency. Eritrea's internal resource-based approach enables the country to steer its development without external conditions and donor-imposed agendas. This remains a crucial requirement for agency building as determined by Gwatiwa (2022).

Ethiopia and South Africa are strategic partners that have a moderate to high strategic value, but a high level of aid dependence. Both democracies

received US aid, however, their domestic priorities do not align with the interests of the Trump policies. Aid-dependent democracies such as Ethiopia, Sudan and Kenya faced sharp funding reductions, leading to devastating consequences like widespread layoffs of health workers and disruption of HIV and TB programmes (Wallis and Adeoye, 2025). For these two countries, especially South Africa, thanks to its international standing, its aid dependence can be reduced through diversification of partners. South Africa has leveraged the retreat of US influence to deepen its engagement with the BRICS and promote South–South cooperation, expressing dissatisfaction with US policies and asserting its position as a leading voice in a multipolar world (Igbatayo, n.d.; Kohnert, 2025). This reflects a proactive form of agency, where South Africa strategically leverages Trump’s disengagement to reinforce its realignment toward BRICS and assert a regional leadership role.

Egypt and the DRC are strategic partners that are authoritarian regimes, which have maintained or enhanced US ties due to their geostrategic utility. Egypt continued to receive military aid and political backing despite governance concerns because of its importance in regional security (e.g., Gaza border, Suez Canal access). The DRC, rich in critical minerals, actively exploited its resource wealth to offer mining concessions in exchange for US support, even amid ongoing conflict (Wallis et al., 2025). These cases illustrate how autocratic regimes can benefit from a transactional US approach when strategic alignment takes precedence over democratic conditionality. Moreover, the DRC’s offering of mining concessions in exchange for political support exemplifies strategic bargaining as a form of agency despite domestic constraints.

Angola is a strategic ‘bargainer’ and is classified as a resource-rich, low-aid autocracy that has used its oil and mineral wealth to maintain diplomatic flexibility. Angola is not dependent on US aid, has a valuable resource portfolio and thus, positions itself as a negotiator in a multipolar environment. This position puts Angola in a favourable position to leverage its resources and independence by taking control over its national matters and actively defending its interests. Angola’s use of its resource wealth to negotiate favourable partnerships illustrates resource-based agency within a multipolar order.

South Sudan, a vulnerable country, was one of the countries most affected by Trump's disengagement. Its high aid dependence, coupled with its low strategic relevance under 'America First', meant reduced leverage and exposure to neglect. South Sudan's reliance on humanitarian assistance offers no bargaining power in a climate of growing conditionality and indifference to the US' governance or human rights.

While this typology offers a structured way to assess the differential impacts of Trump 2.0 on African states, it is not without limitations. Notably, it does not incorporate the colonial histories of the selected countries, despite their profound influence on institutional development, foreign alignments, and strategic perceptions. This exclusion is not a denial of colonialism's significance, but a methodological choice aimed at maintaining analytical focus on contemporary structural features, namely regime type, aid dependency and strategic importance, which directly shaped countries' vulnerability or leverage in relation to US foreign policy under Trump 2.0. Integrating colonial legacy as a fourth typological dimension would require a different analytical framework, including historical institutionalism and potentially different country groupings. Nonetheless, colonial histories are acknowledged where relevant in the narrative analysis and remain crucial to understanding long-term patterns of agency and alignment.

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Navigating the opportunities

African agency operates within an evolving international environment shaped by the 'America First' policy, which produces both structural barriers and emerging opportunities. The Trump administration's foreign policy received negative reactions from many African leaders and publics who saw it as a combination of neglectful behaviour and transactional diplomacy with a primary focus on American–Chinese competition (Devermont, 2020; Kohnert, 2025). This selective and disengaged approach (Igbatayo, n.d.; Kohnert, 2025) and the weakening of multilateral commitments (Owusu et al., 2019; Kohnert, 2025) inadvertently created political space for African actors to assert their interests more proactively.

One notable dimension of this assertiveness is the strategic turn

toward Eastern powers, particularly China and India. In response to reduced US engagement and growing conditionality, several African countries have sought alternative partnerships that offer development financing, infrastructure investment and security cooperation. For example, Ethiopia have deepened economic ties with China through large-scale infrastructure projects such as the Addis-Djibouti Railway (Global Infrastructure Hub, 2020). Nigeria and China have also signed agreements focusing on economic cooperation and nuclear energy development, reinforcing their collaboration under the BRI framework (Onuah and Lee, 2024). Moreover, India is the third-largest trade partner of Africa, after the EU and China, according to 2024 data, reflecting the increasing importance of non-traditional partners and the growing ties to Eastern partners (Pilling, 2024). These engagements demonstrate that African states are not merely substituting one dependency for another but are exercising agency by diversifying their partnerships and leveraging great power rivalries to serve national and regional interests.

370 Aid dependence throughout Africa has started to decrease, especially after Trump issued his 2025 executive order to reassess US foreign assistance (Van Rooyen and Cilliers, 2025). The emerging global circumstances have enabled Africa to establish its strategic role through proactive initiatives rather than limited adaptive responses. Van Rooyen and Cilliers (2025) contend that Africa will determine its global position through three essential elements: leadership, regional integration and strategic partnerships with emerging powers. African actors face the difficult task of moulding worldwide developments, instead of receiving direction from them. The unanticipated nature of Trump 2.0 foreign policy could drive Africa toward stronger South–South relations and pan-African organisation (Igbatayo, n.d.). As US influence declines, several African countries have deepened engagement with China and other Eastern partners to fill gaps in infrastructure investment and strategic financing, illustrating the continent’s adaptive and pragmatic exercise of agency.

The ability of African states to influence international relations through goal-oriented external engagement while upholding domestic priorities, has emerged as a dynamic international force (Coffie and Tiky, 2021).

African actors have strategically adjusted their approach by redefining their relations with Western partners, while strengthening continental institutions and building new connections with emerging powers (Coffie and Tiky, 2021). African countries have actively transformed their foreign relations through increased integration under AfCFTA and AU institutional reforms and active participation in international climate and development meetings (Coffie and Tiky, 2021; Devermont, 2020). These transformations present varying chances for states to benefit from them.

The ability of South Africa and Nigeria, along with the DRC, to handle multipolar competition stands higher than that of smaller and aid-dependent states, which remain exposed to severe external threats. When nations diversify their alliances, it does not automatically bring autonomy, since new dependencies emerge through extractive sectors and digital governance frameworks. African countries' new partnerships raise questions about whether their realignment represents authentic interest-based agency or a movement within current global power structures.

African agency has not been stifled by Trump's return, but the circumstances of its exercise have undergone change. African states have made increased investments in regional self-help mechanisms as well as home-grown solutions and institutional development because of the declining US normative leadership (Coffie and Tiky, 2021). The 'America First' policy has both compromised US international reputation and decreased specific forms of US–African collaboration, however, it has simultaneously compelled African countries to become more forceful in defending their national and regional interests (Igbatayo, n.d.). African agency functions as an adaptive strategic practice which develops through regional institutional frameworks and bilateral partnerships within a growing multipolar world order (Coffie and Tiky, 2021; Igbatayo, n.d.; Kohnert, 2025).

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Conclusion

This study examines the effects of Donald Trump's return under the 'America First' agenda through a typology developed from three structural dimensions: political regime type, aid dependency and strategic value to

the US. The typology presents a detailed analysis of how different African states interacted with Trump's foreign policy, because it goes past general assumptions about US–Africa relations. The analytical framework serves two purposes: it explains the current era and provides tools for future strategic planning regarding similar international dynamics. The typology serves scholars and policymakers to understand African state vulnerabilities and opportunities because it focuses on structural realities within these countries, regardless of the political approach used by administrations, including those adopting isolationist, transactional or conditional engagement.

The evaluation shows that strategic utility, rather than normative democracy concerns, guided Trump's US foreign policy decisions. Democratic regimes were not systematically favoured, nor were the autocratic regimes. Strategic alignment through military positioning, mineral wealth and geopolitical leverage set the conditions for US engagement with other nations. The country cases show that autocratic governments, including Egypt, are considered to have an affinity with Trump's America, while democratic states like Ethiopia might face aid cuts and a disinterest in their internal political affairs from the US. Resource-rich states, including the DRC and Angola gain benefits from their ability to leverage the resources that are prioritised by the US, which allows them to negotiate new forms of international engagement through their strategic assets, regardless of their political regimes. These results reveal an opportunity for African countries to move beyond dependence and potential interference from the US and other powers.

The typology also provides essential guidance for African nations to enhance their resilience as their foreign policies evolve. This classification enables countries to evaluate their national dependencies in conjunction with their institutional capacity and bargaining power. African states should focus on building autonomy, because this will enable them to become stronger global negotiators, leading to a more proactive role within the international system and a more active agency. The acquisition of agency through regional integration, partnership diversification, and aid independence reduction functions as a defensive strategy, which leads to active global engagement.

While structural factors shaped exposure to US policy shifts, the paper also highlights how African states exercised different forms of agency, ranging from strategic disengagement to assertive bargaining and alliance diversification, to navigate a disrupted global order.

Although Trump's second term remains limited to four years, his foreign policy structure, based on strategic choices with diminished international cooperation and conditional financial assistance, will produce enduring effects. This chapter will prove useful for analysis beyond Trump 2.0. The analysis provides an interpretive framework for studying external African relations, through which great power rivalries, climate change, and international alliance shifts will test African capabilities.

The lessons from African countries' interactions with Trump during his presidency demonstrate how these nations can shape their future paths in an evolving global system through independent approaches and tailored plans that cater to each country's specific needs and strengths. The diversity of these responses affirms that African agency is not only possible, but already underway, complex, strategic and adaptive.

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CHAPTER 16

Global South's Reaction to Trump 2.0's Return: South Africa's Case Study

Buhle Mnyanda

Introduction

Trump's first term in office (2017–2021) has placed certain United States (US)–Africa matters at unambiguous relief. It exposed the deep racial divisions that underlie Trump's home success and have impacted US relations with Africa, even other parts of the Middle East region (Usman and Carrol, 2025). Trump's administration continued from the previous administration to support African countries with developmental aid, trade benefits, health funding and security aid (Tupy, 2018). Even though Trump's relations with African countries were cordial during his first term, there have been some altercations with some African countries, for instance, South Africa's Land Expropriation Act. In 2018, President Trump warned the South African government that if its constitution were to be amended in such a way that it allows the Expropriation Act without compensation to be passed, it would have no choice but to suspend South Africa from the African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA) (Ahluwalia, 2017).

Again, in his second term as the 47th president, Trump still stands on the same stance about South Africa's Land Act. However, the US must consider that its heydays as the economically dominant, influential and powerful state are coming to an end. Other important actors are starting to emerge. As a result, Africa has options to choose from. For instance, China is one of the emerging states that has provided Africa with several opportunities from the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) to the Forum on China–Africa Cooperation (FOCAC). Many argue that the US is losing

soft power to China in Africa (Bond, 2019; Gopaldas, 2024; Motala, 2017; Ndabula et.al, 2025; Ryan, 2025; Tupy, 2018).

This chapter seeks to examine South Africa's reaction to the Trump 2.0 administration. The chapter will first examine the applicable methods of this study, followed by the theories of international relations, namely Neoliberal Economic theory and Populist Conservatism theory. These two theories will help provide a framework for understanding one's study. Secondly, it analyses the US's first altercation with South Africa during its first term, drawing from the US–South Africa trade relations. It will then explore Trump's return to office as the US president and how his relationship with SA has been affected. The paper will explore whether South Africa has a solid plan to repair its relations with the US and its temporary strategy/plan on the health programmes affected by the USAID. It will then conclude by stating some of the solutions that US–South Africa could work on to repair their foreign relations.

Methods

This chapter uses exploratory qualitative analysis; it provides a contextual insight into the Global South's reaction to the return of Trump's administration. South Africa is used as a case study to explore the shift in diplomatic relations between the US and South Africa during the Trump 2.0 administration. It is important to use a case study, simply because it is an experiential review that helps investigate a modern-day phenomenon within a real-life context (Varela, Lopes and Rodrigues, 2021). A case study helps answer the question of one's research by providing past events and phenomena using several data sources. It also contributes to a better understanding of the individual's phenomena and the political procedures of the society.

The study uses document analysis and discourse analysis, which includes primary and secondary sources such as journal articles, books, media articles, government statements and speeches. The purpose of using this study method is that it creates better understanding of complex processes and it provides opportunity to identify and explain complex relationships, it has the capacity to develop detailed understanding and

profuse description of the phenomenon of interest, which in this case, is Global South's reaction to the return of the president of the US, Donald Trump (Barr, 2004). The limitation of this study is that not much has been published about the new Trump administration. However, even though the study has some limitations, they can be overcome by carefully planning the study, meaning one needs to carefully consider their research design, ensuring that the qualitative research is integrated in a significant way.

Neoliberal economics and populist conservatism

Neoliberalism is a political and economic theory which stresses the value of free market capitalism, which seeks to transfer control of economic factors from government to the private sector (Longley, 2021). The theory stresses the welfare-maximising consequences of market exchange, which critically favours lowering government spending, globalisation, free trade, deregulation, minimal state intervention, and privatisation (Evans and Sewell, 2013).

Populist conservatism, on the other hand, is a political ideology which links conservative principles with populist ideas and strategies. It stresses social order, cultural identity and national sovereignty. It emphasises 'the people' and is against the elites. The theory criticises multiculturalism, political institutions, and globalisation (Mudde, 2007). The theory highlights politics as a struggle between the minority and the elites. For instance, leaders like President Trump often frame globalisation as a zero-sum game, prioritises national interests by putting America first, and challenge liberal economic beliefs (Mudde, 2007). Trump has threatened to withdraw the AGOA from some of the Global South countries, putting American workers and industries first over free trade principles. These theories will explore in depth this act, also looking at Trump's discourse on South Africa's land expropriation act, aid and trade relations, reflecting on neoliberal economic values and populist conservative values.

US-South Africa trade relations during Trump 1.0

The US has been a longstanding and important ally of South Africa, from being an important trading partner to aiding development. The US has absorbed large volumes of South Africa's minerals and agricultural exports, whilst it is also a major source of direct foreign investment and official development assistance (Van Rensburg, 2012). South Africa, on the other hand, imports substantial quantities of machinery equipment and other value-added products from the US. These products support South Africa's economic growth and other development efforts (Schraeder, 2018). For instance, the largest US market in Africa is in South Africa, where they have about 600 companies operating (Bond, 2019). Traditionally, the two countries, South Africa and the US, have enjoyed cordial relationships over the years, with each observing the other as a strategically important entry into a possibly vast and important market on the other side of the world (Lubbe and Du Plessis, 2021). However, in modern years, the relationship between South Africa and the US has become somewhat fractious (Tupy, 2018).

South Africa has been grumbling over what it perceives to be the US, which is being overbearing in its attempts to secure greater access into the South African market. A particular disagreement for South Africa has been the alleged dumping of US chicken products on the local market, with inflated penalties for South African chicken farmers (Van Rensburg, 2012). The US, in turn, has become increasingly outspoken about the need for South Africa which currently enjoys duty and quota free access for a large percentage of its US-bound exports within the generalised system of preferences and AGOA scheme combined to commit to a more mutual trade partnership (Soer, 2025). Indeed, several US representatives under the Trump administration have, over the years, stated that South Africa is 'too developed' to still be benefiting from AGOA which is proposed as a temporary measure to inspire beneficiary countries to improve their export competitiveness across numerous industrial sectors (Hart, 2020; Ngcobo, 2025; Stremlau, 2022; Vega Zamudio, 2021). With the new Trump administration, South Africa stands at a bit of a crossroads when it comes to its trade relations with the US, especially with AGOA,

which is scheduled to expire in 2025. The question is, will the US renew this act with South Africa? Or should South Africa consider exploring other options with the US, such as a free trade agreement? A free trade agreement between the two countries could bring a greater balance in their trade relations.

US-South Africa relations during Trump 2.0

South Africa's relationship with the Trump 2.0 administration has been marked by trade strains and diplomatic rifts. The Trump administration's protectionist trade policies and uncertainty towards multilateralism have affected South Africa, a vital US trading partner in Africa (Joselit and Lee, 2025). Trump criticised South Africa's land reform policies together with his administration threatened to review South Africa's trade benefits under AGOA, creating uncertainty. In 2018, Trump tweeted distortions about South Africa's land reform efforts, claiming that white farmers were being targeted and killed (Kachur and Foley, 2024).

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Recently, Trump accused the South African government of what he called 'unjust and immoral practices' against the white Afrikaner community (Kohnert, 2025:11). This sparked tension after the Land Expropriation Act was passed by President Ramaphosa in January 2025. President Cyril Ramaphosa signed into law the Expropriation Act 13 of 2024, replacing the Expropriation Act 63 of 1975. This new act provides the framework for the expropriation of property to serve public interests (Miah and Sheppard, 2025). This act has created diplomatic tensions and shown how Trump's bombast could worsen existing racial and political rifts in a country. Trump threatened to cut future funding to South Africa with no solid explanation; all Trump says is that there are 'terrible things' the South African government is doing in the country. Trump accuses the South African government of stealing land as well as worse acts than that (Narsiah, 2025). He continued to accuse the SA government of unbearable contempt for the rights of its citizens and of adopting aggressive positions against the US and its friend Israel in its case before the International Court of Justice (ICJ).

Trump's moves have brought shock and fear to experts; many fear

that Trump may utilise this opportunity to end preferential access to the US market through the US–Africa trade market AGOA (Tsanni, 2025). Trump’s accusations have resulted in him signing an executive order to freeze aid in South Africa. He then offered to assist Afrikaner refugees, specifically the white descendants of early Dutch and French settlers, to settle in the US (Ngcobo, 2025). Trump cut the President’s Emergency Plan for Aids Relief (PEPFAR) funding to South Africa; this funding has been the biggest contributor to South Africa’s HIV and AIDS programme with approximately 5.5 million people receiving anti-retroviral drugs from this aid. As a result, this calls for the South African government to explore other alternative options. The Minister of Health, Aaron Motsoaledi, began negotiations with local and international foundations to assist in raising around US\$440 million that has been lost due to the US cutting aid in SA (Ndabula et al., 2025). The aim is to secure funding that will continue supplying antiretroviral medication to the people.

Elon Musk on US–South Africa relations

After Trump’s return to office, Elon Musk, a South African-born billionaire, emerged as President Trump’s informal advisor; this is after he contributed over US\$270 million to Trump’s presidential campaign (Narsiah, 2025). Musk has been informally involved in Trump’s administration through a mission called Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE). DOGE is an executive order established in January 2025. Its aim is to reduce federal spending and remove wasteful programmes. Musk has also shared some of the views Trump has about the South African government land act, and he supported the view that white people are being discriminated against by the South African government. Musk even went on X to say why President Ramaphosa has ‘openly racist property laws’ ((Kohnert, 2025: 12). It is believed that Musk is set to play a very influential role in Trump’s new administration, and his relationship with the South African president could take on enormous importance. Some Scholars say the complexity of South Africa’s relationship with the US is because of the growing ties South Africa has with Russia and China (Tsanni, 2025).

South Africa's plan to repair relations with the US

South Africa's plan to repair its relations with the US is through strengthening diplomatic efforts to address misinformation by Trump and Elon Musk, and it is trying to provide accurate information about its policies. Former International Relations Minister, Dr Naledi Pandor, highlighted the prominence of fixing false narratives and engaging with the US administration and allies to shed light on South Africa's positions on land reform and foreign policy matters (Usman and Carroll, 2025). President Ramaphosa went on and appointed a new ambassador to the US after Ebrahim Rasool was expelled by President Trump. This response of replacing Ebrahim Rasool with another ambassador shows that South Africa is indeed willing to repair and restore diplomatic and economic relations with the US (Ryan, 2025). The new ambassador of South Africa to the US is Mcebisi Jonas, who is a former minister of finance.

President Ramaphosa has voiced a request to reach an agreement with President Trump to resolve disagreements over South Africa's land reform policies and its legal action against Israel at the ICJ. Ramaphosa aims to address these issues through discussion and negotiation to avoid further weakening of their relations with the US (Narsiah, 2025). The Deputy President of South Africa, Paul Mashatile, also took it upon himself to engage in the reparations of the US–South Africa relations. He emphasised the importance of strong connections between the US and South Africa, stressing the role of AGOA which supports South Africa's agricultural and manufacturing sector. Paul Mashatile also highlighted the efforts South Africa should take to diversify export markets and lower reliance on external assistance, especially in the health sector (Primorac, 2024). These initiatives by the South African government reflect their commitment to trying to repair their relations with the US under Trump's administration.

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South Africa's temporary strategies/plan on health programmes

The South African government implemented several plans after aid being cut by the US president. One of the strategies South Africa implemented

was to increase domestic health funding, aiming to address the HIV/AIDS population. A budget of about ZAR28.9 billion was added to the health department (Soer, 2025). The government's plan for this health funding was through the increase of value-added tax, which was initially said to increase by 0,5 per cent in 2025 and another 0,5 per cent in 2026 (Usman and Carroll, 2025). However, this plan may have failed due to the reversal of the tax. Nonetheless, the health department is also exploring other strategies, such as negotiating with local and international foundations to raise funds for the PEPFAR programmes, especially the HIV/AIDS programme.

The Western Cape government has also put some temporary measures in place for its people, ensuring that they receive their treatment during this difficult period. These measures include a six-month antiretroviral treatment dispensation and a 28-day late collection allowance for clients refilling their treatment (Dyer, 2025). It has also implemented an automatic chronic dispensing unit script renewal to reduce the need for facility visitation. This is to reduce pressure on both clients and clinics during the funding gap (Miah and Sheppard, 2025). These are some of the strategies that the South African government has implemented towards the PEPFAR beneficiaries. Not all the programmes under PEPFAR have been given attention; the HIV/AIDS programme is, thus far, the only one that has been receiving funding.

Conclusion and recommendations

Elon Musk and Donald Trump's evaluations of South Africa's land reform strategies are embedded in neoliberal economic doctrines and populist conservatism. They highlight the protection of private property rights, market-driven policies and uncertainty toward state-led redistribution efforts. Elon Musk's liberal leanings and Trump's populist rhetoric congregate in their description of South Africa's policies are economically negative and racially discriminatory. It is imperative that the South African government educate Musk, together with Trump, about their Land Expropriation Act, as it is the driving factor behind the cutting of aid in South Africa. South Africa's Land Expropriation Act aligns with

the South African constitution of 1996. Section 25 of the Constitution, known as the property clause, states under which conditions land can be expropriated. It does state that no one should be deprived of property, and property should only be expropriated for a public purpose or interest. Compensation may be granted if agreed upon by those affected or approved by the court. However, compensation must reflect an equitable balance between the public interest and the interests of those affected. Public interests may include the nation's commitment to land reform, bringing about equitable access to all South African resources.

To avoid US–South Africa tension, South Africa should urgently take initiatives and negotiate with Trump's administration on their Land Act, before it escalates to cutting South Africa from the AGOA Act. The AGOA Act is scheduled to expire in 2025 for South Africa; thus, urgent negotiations with the US are imperative. South Africa should also explore other alternatives and stop relying on the US. It should start negotiating with other allies such as Russia, China and the BRICS plus countries and should ensure it strengthens its diplomatic ties with other international actors, exploring other trade and aid funding opportunities.

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AFRICAN PERSPECTIVES ON

TRUMP 2.0:

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

VOLUME I

EDITED BY CHRISTOPHER ISIKE AND SAMUEL OYEWOLE

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 path-breaking milestone, and it is certain that students, policymakers and citizens will learn from it.

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