THE COST OF TRUMP'S FOREIGN POLICY:

Damage and Consequences for U.S. and Global Security

Senator Bob Menendez
Ranking Member
Committee on Foreign Relations
United States Senate

October 21, 2020

The Cost of Trump's Foreign Policy:

Damage and Consequences for U.S. and Global Security

Letter of Transmittal

UNITED STATES SENATE
COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN RELATIONS
Washington, DC, October 21, 2020

DEAR COLLEAGUES: This report by the Committee's Democratic staff examines the extensive damage President Trump's foreign policy has exacted on the United States' international interests and global security. I thought it important to assess the impact of President Trump's engagement with the world from a Congressional perspective, looking at some of the starkest examples and what his administration's actions have meant for the American people.

Given the importance of the topic, I directed members of my staff, Lowell Schwartz, Megan Bartley, and Nina Russell, to examine President Trump's conduct of foreign policy and the consequences for U.S. foreign policy and national security. My staff interviewed dozens of former U.S. officials, many of whom served in senior positions in the Trump administration. They also traveled and met with foreign government officials and foreign policy experts, speaking to individuals from more than 20 countries.

What we found is troubling. President Trump's words and actions have levied a toll on our foreign policy, the future prospects for the U.S. role in the world, and the health and security of Americans.

As democracy is declining and authoritarianism is on the rise around the world, our diplomats report they cannot effectively champion human rights or promote good governance, in part because the power of the President's example undermines their efforts. Despite his bluster, North Korean nuclear and missile programs are larger and more capable than before Trump's presidency. Iran is closer to a nuclear bomb today than when President Trump took office. This Administration has neglected pressing global problems, including the COVID-19 pandemic and climate change. The President has repeatedly bullied and threatened our closest allies and partners, when what we need are strong coalitions to promote U.S. interests and address urgent challenges that endanger the health and security of Americans.

This report takes stock of these profound challenges facing us. It also provides practical and timely recommendations for Congress and future administrations to begin to repair the damage of four years of "Trump First." We need to rebuild U.S. foreign policy institutions, mend relations with allies and partners, and adjust our foreign policy for a new era to address global challenges. I hope this report can serve as a roadmap for what needs rebuilding, where the damage lies, and as a reminder of the consequence of an incoherent, chaotic foreign policy. For those of us who care deeply about this country, and the role we play in the world, there is a lot of work ahead.

Sincerely,

ROBERT MENENDEZ
Ranking Member

Executive Summary

Over many decades, the United States has built up international influence by using its unrivaled diplomatic, military, economic, and ideological power. American leaders combined this power with a foreign policy vision based upon a robust defense of democratic values. In addition, the United States forged alliances and built international institutions to assist in maintaining our domestic and global security, manage relations with other major economies, and garner political support for critical U.S. foreign policy objectives. These efforts enabled the United States to become a global power with the unique ability to shape and guide international affairs.

The Trump administration has damaged the foundations that undergird U.S international strength and influence. Under President Trump, the United States has neglected and deliberately ignored pressing global challenges, making it a bystander in international efforts to confront these collective threats. U.S. national security decisions have been driven by President Trump's ego, his domestic political considerations, and his relationships with foreign leaders, not the vital interests of the United States. He has transformed U.S. foreign policy into a vehicle for the pursuit of his own personal and financial interests. President Trump has ignored and neglected key issues that threaten the United States because they do not fit into his narrow vision of how the world functions.

To date, the COVID-19 pandemic has claimed more than 1 million lives worldwide, of which more than 215,000 are Americans. Unlike previous crises, the United States is barely participating in the global response, much less leading it, and given Trump's history, few in the international community expected us to. President Trump has claimed that North Korea is no longer a nuclear threat, yet its nuclear and missile programs are larger and more capable than when he took office. His administration withdrew from the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), with President Trump claiming he would work to find a "real, comprehensive, and lasting solution to the Iranian nuclear threat." Instead, his approach has resulted in an Iran that is closer to a nuclear weapon than when Trump took office, and has left the United States isolated, with no viable strategy or solution in sight.

Past U.S. presidents sought to showcase the United States as a model for what a society can achieve when it is based upon democracy and freedom. President Trump, on the other hand, has consistently shown disdain for pluralism, human rights, civil society, the press, and rule of law. His domestic policies, including family separation, reducing the number of refugees into the U.S., attacking the rule of law and the freedom of the press, and failing to stand up for racial equality, have led U.S. allies to question the values of the United States. Authoritarian leaders have seized upon the abandonment of these values, seeing it as an opportunity to consolidate their rule.

Former senior U.S. government officials interviewed by Committee Democratic staff reported that President Trump's rhetoric and actions undermined the ability of U.S. officials to promote or influence democracy abroad. Diplomats reported that foreign counterparts did not take them

seriously when they tried to raise human rights or adherence to the rule of law. Others recalled the embarrassment of attempting to promote freedom of the press abroad, weighed down by "baggage in Washington." Officials who worked in the Trump administration, forced to explain "America First" around the world, found there was "no Trump doctrine," but rather, a "malign neglect of relationships, indifference to values, [and an] insidious thematic message…me first—I am putting my interests before yours."

This report takes stock of the damage President Trump's foreign policy has inflicted on U.S. and global security, as well as the immediate and long-term consequences for the safety and security of the American people. It finds that the state of the United States in the world hangs in a tenuous balance. Our allies are weary and alienated; our own diplomats struggle to uphold the values we have promoted to the world for decades; and a U.S. president's eschewing of democracy has helped to fuel autocratic trends abroad.

The report is based in large part on interviews and discussions with former U.S. and foreign government officials and foreign policy experts who shared their candid assessments about foreign policy under President Trump. For over a year, Committee Democratic staff conducted more than 80 interviews, including dozens of interviews with U.S. officials who served in the Trump administration. Committee staff sought a wide range of viewpoints and regional perspectives, speaking with officials and experts from nearly 20 countries.

Chapter One finds that, while President Trump may have termed his approach to foreign policy "America First," in practice, it should be called "Trump First," with America's interests overshadowed by the President's own interests and style. It catalogues how President Trump's foreign policy has been characterized by chaos, neglect, and diplomatic failures, rather than a cohesive strategy, and examines the damage these factors have had on U.S. national security.

Chapter Two shows how President Trump has alienated allies and isolated the United States from international efforts to confront global threats. It examines the consequences of Trump's decisions to undermine decades-long partnerships, which have historically been force multipliers for U.S. efforts to achieve national security objectives.

Chapter Three examines President Trump's impact on U.S. adversaries and autocrats. It shows how autocrats around the world have seen the Trump administration as an opportunity to consolidate their power through repressive means, and how U.S. adversaries have been empowered by a foreign policy that isolates the United States from its allies, disengages from multinational organizations, and ignores human rights abuses. It also recounts how, in a previously undisclosed phone call, President Trump called Senator Menendez to defend Prime Minister Orbán.

The report concludes with a series of recommendations aimed at addressing the damage President Trump has inflicted on U.S. foreign policy, and to chart a path forward for how the United States engages with the world. These recommendations focus on the need to rebuild U.S. foreign policy institutions, uphold our own democratic values at home, heal U.S. relations with allies and partners, and adjust our foreign policy for a new era.

PRINCIPAL FINDINGS:

- **President Trump's foreign policy has been marked by chaos, neglect, and diplomatic failures.** Former Trump administration officials admit the President's impulsive, erratic approach has tarnished the reputation of the United States as a reliable partner and led to disarray in dealing with foreign governments. Foreign officials are often uncertain about who speaks for the United States. Critical neglect of global challenges has endangered Americans, weakened the U.S. role in the world, and squandered the respect it built up over decades. Sudden pronouncements, such as the withdrawal of U.S. troops from Syria, have angered close allies and caught U.S. officials off-guard. U.S. officials keep their heads down in the hopes that President Trump won't upend U.S. policy in a tweet.

> **According to one former U.S. official, there is "no Trump doctrine"; the only constant is "Trump's impulsive, convulsive, intuitive approach."**

- **President Trump's narrow and transactional view of international relations has alienated U.S. allies and partners.** U.S. allies have been the targets of President Trump's transactional approach to foreign policy and are increasingly asking how the U.S. approach to international relations differs from that of Russia and China. The Trump administration's use of tariffs against allies has led them to halt or reconsider cooperation with the United States in a number of critical areas. U.S allies are increasingly ignoring U.S. objections to their policies because they believe the United States is deliberately undermining their interests.

> **"You can't deal with us as though we are North Korea."**
>
> **– Foreign Official**

- **International allies and partners of the United States have begun to move on, viewing the United States not as the democratic leader of the free world, but rather as a destabilizing global force they need to manage.** President Trump's abuse of power in the conduct of U.S. foreign policy is causing our allies to take steps to insulate themselves. They are hedging against the United States by pursuing trade agreements with other countries to reduce their dependence on the United States, and forming alternative security partnerships in case the United States abandons them. They are pursuing international engagement, including new multilateral agreements, without U.S. participation or influence.

> **"Trump has demonstrated that everything is reversible, so other countries feel they need to find their own way."**
>
> **– Former Senior U.S. Official**

- **The Trump administration's domestic policies, including separating families at the border, sharply reducing refugee admissions, attacking the rule of law and free press, and failing to promote racial equality, have damaged the United States credibility and standing in the world.** U.S. presidents in the past have sought to showcase the United States as a model for what a society can achieve when it is based upon democracy and freedom. President Trump, on the other hand, through his rhetoric and domestic policies, has consistently shown his disdain for pluralism, human rights, civil society, the press, and rule of law. These policies have caused traditional U.S. allies to question the values of the United States, and provided authoritarian leaders an opportunity to consolidate their power.

> **"They just didn't take us seriously anymore," said one former Foreign Service Officer, on her interactions with foreign counterparts.**

- **Countries with authoritarian and autocratic leaders are less concerned about violating the human rights of their citizens because they know the United States under President Trump will ignore their repressive activities.** Authoritarian leaders in Europe, Asia, Africa, and the Middle East have seen very little, if any, pushback from the highest levels of the Trump administration when they take antidemocratic steps and suppress dissent. Instead, some of these leaders have been welcomed to the White House, which enhances their legitimacy at home. State Department efforts to promote democracy and human rights are dismissed by foreign officials because they are completely at odds with President Trump's own behavior.

> **"The President's actions have . . . limited our ability to promote or influence democracy."**
>
> **– Former Senior U.S. Official**

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS:

- **The United States should restore democracy, rule of law, human rights, and cooperation with allies, partners, and multilateral institutions as key principles of U.S. foreign and national security policy.** The U.S. should reinvest in the alliances and partnerships that are vital for protecting it from international threats. It should also re-engage with international institutions that assist the United States in promoting inclusive economic growth, democracy, and a stable international environment.

- **The United States must confront the serious dangers Americans and the world face from global threats, including climate change, pandemics, authoritarianism, and nuclear proliferation, which the Trump administration has ignored.** The COVID-19 crisis has been a profound example of the world's interconnectivity and the need to prevent, confront, and contain threats. To secure Americans and ensure domestic prosperity, the United States needs to engage and lead global efforts to combat global threats.

- **The United States should achieve bipartisan agreement on key foreign policy and national security policies, to alleviate international fears that the United States is an unreliable partner.** The next administration should seek Congressional approval for its foreign policy efforts as a way to build lasting bipartisan consensus for its policies. Although difficult, it would demonstrate to international partners that U.S. policies and positions will endure from one administration to the next.

- **Congress must reassert its oversight role of the Executive branch and invest in its capacity to legislate and oversee U.S. foreign policy.** The U.S. system of government relies on checks and balances, and requires a robust legislative branch. Congress must be an effective partner and counterbalance to the Executive in charting a whole-of-government path forward to reestablishing the United States as a credible ally and principled world power.

- **Congress and the next administration must work together to revitalize and improve key foreign policy institutions, such as the State Department, to reflect a commitment to a 21st-century foreign policy strategy.** The U.S. must build a 21st-century diplomatic corps empowered to address increasingly complex global challenges, such as climate change, cybersecurity, and global health issues. In restoring U.S. global leadership and high standards of competency and professionalism in its diplomatic engagements, the U.S. must address long-standing vacancies at the State Department, promote more career servants into senior leadership positions at the Department to provide more stability in foreign policy across administrations, and increase diversity at all levels of foreign policy leadership.

Introduction

Foreign policy has been central to the security and prosperity of the United States from its inception.[1] Adroit diplomacy played a critical role in the American Revolution by securing French support for the American cause, and helped to ensure a Union victory in the Civil War by keeping European powers sidelined during the conflict. After World War II, the United States decided its economic well-being and safety depended upon forging a new international system that would rein in conflict and promote positive economic engagement between world powers. The alliances the United States forged during this period and the international institutions that emerged from these alliances have endured long after the collapse of the Soviet Union.[2]

Until January 2017, alliances and international institutions formed the backbone of U.S. foreign policy. They played a vital role in maintaining U.S. security, managing relations with other major economies, and building political support for critical U.S. foreign policy objectives. The unrivaled diplomatic, military, and economic power of the United States after World War II was another central factor in protecting the nation.

While there has been a great deal of continuity in the American approach to the world, the United States has repeatedly adjusted its policies to account for the rise of new threats and shifts in global conditions. U.S. foreign policy has also been altered in response to the American people's views on the role the United States should have in global affairs.

On the eve of President Trump's inauguration, it was becoming increasingly apparent that U.S. foreign policy needed to adapt to meet and address new and pressing global challenges. The difficulties in confronting these challenges, including the rise of populism and authoritarianism and decline in democracy and freedom around the world, was compounded by an international environment that was becoming more hostile to U.S. values and interests.

Emerging Power Competition

Chief among the challenges the United States faced was the reemergence of great power competition, particularly with Russia and China. After a sustained period of more positive and cooperative relations, these countries had become more threatening and hostile.[3] Russia and China each seek to control key global regions vital for U.S. security, including Europe and the Indo-Pacific.[4] Russia has been more openly aggressive, using direct military intervention in attempts to compel its neighbors to

[1] George Herring, *From colony to superpower: U.S. foreign relations since 1776*, Oxford University Press, 2008.
[2] John Ikenberry, *Liberal leviathan: the origins, crisis, and transformation of the American world order*, Princeton University Press, 2011.
[3] Thomas Wright, *All Measures Short of War: The Contest for the 21st Century & The Future of American Power,* Yale University Press (May 23, 2017).
[4] *See* U.S. Department of Defense, *Summary of the 2018 National Defense Strategy of the United States of America: Sharpening the American Military's Competitive Edge*, Jan. 2018.

adhere to Russia's policies. This was seen most visibly in Russia's invasion of Georgia in 2008, illegal occupation of Crimea, and military aggression in eastern Ukraine starting in 2014.[5] China is using a different set of tools in its pursuit of a sphere of influence. It has sought to limit freedom of navigation in the Asia Pacific with its assertive claims of sovereignty over the South China Sea and it has used its increased economic power as leverage to reward or punish neighboring states.[6]

Since the 2008 financial crisis, Russian and Chinese leaders have put forward a vision of authoritarianism that they argue is a superior method for organizing society in comparison to liberal democracy. They promote their model of authoritarian capitalism as an option for countries that seek economic development while preserving their independence from the strings attached to U.S. development assistance.[7] This ideological competition plays out in the global arena through Russian and Chinese support for their fellow authoritarian leaders, their efforts to reshape international norms and institutions in ways more friendly to authoritarian priorities, and their activities to weaken, corrupt, delegitimize, and distort the political systems of liberal democracies, including the United States.[8]

The return of great-power rivalry poses a challenge to the United States, at both a regional and global level. Russia and China work to weaken global institutions that constrain and challenge their power and that question the internal legitimacy of their authoritarian systems. They also use a range of tools, from inducement to intimidation to military coercion, to alter the international environment into one more receptive to their ambitions and less responsive to U.S. values and concerns.

Transnational Challenges

The reemergence of great-power competition makes it more difficult to address the second set of challenges that faced the United States in January 2017: transnational and global problems, including climate change, the risk of pandemics, terrorism, and nuclear proliferation. All of these challenges require a high degree of international cooperation and consensus-building around potential solutions. At a time of heightened tensions, collaborating to solve collective problems requires balancing geo-strategic concerns with the urgent need to address these global challenges. Effective responses require all hands on deck, including governments, civil society, and the private sector.

The United States has long recognized the need to work with strategic competitors to address global challenges. American cooperation with China and Russia has been critical to mitigate some of the world's greatest threats in recent decades. After the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, Russia

[5] *See* Congressional Research Service, *Russia: Background and U.S. Policy*, Aug. 21, 2017.
[6] This includes through the Belt and Road Initiative, China's strategy to increase its influence through extensive infrastructure investments. Congressional Research Service, *U.S.-China Relations*, Aug. 8, 2019.
[7] *See* Kevin Rudd, "The Rise of Authoritarian Capitalism," *The New York Times*, Sept. 16, 2018; John Lee, "Western vs. Authoritarian Capitalism," *The Diplomat*, June 18, 2009.
[8] Hal Brands, "Democracy vs. Authoritarianism: How Ideology Shapes Great-Power Conflict," *Survival*, Oct.-Nov. 2018, at 61-114.

supported U.S. and NATO efforts to remove the Taliban and prevent their return to power, and China supported several U.S. counterterrorism efforts through the United Nations Security Council. A joint agreement in 2014 between China and the United States, the world's biggest emitters of greenhouse gases, helped pave the way for the Paris Agreement on climate change.[9] Even in the midst of great-power competition, the world remains interdependent. This unavoidable interdependence in a globalized world has its costs but it also creates opportunities to achieve benefits for multiple countries rather than none.[10]

Democracy in Decline Worldwide

A third major factor confronting the United States as President Trump took office was the decline in the level of democracy and freedom around the world, including the rise of populist movements and authoritarianism.[11] Annual indices tracking global democracy found that 2019 marked a 14-year decline, including benchmarks that fared worse than the previous low in 2010 following the global financial crisis.[12] These factors create new dynamics for how the United States chooses to engage with states that are becoming more repressive and less democratic.

The decline in global freedom and democracy has several consequences for U.S. foreign policy, and in turn, for U.S. security and safety. The United States historically has found democratic states to be more reliable and trustworthy international partners.[13] Thus, a decline in the quantity of democratic states limits the number and effectiveness of potential partners with which the United States can pursue common interests.

Democratic backsliding also undermines the effectiveness of international institutions based upon democratic principles, such as NATO and the EU. Backsliding in Turkey and Hungary has troubling

---

[9] The White House, "U.S.-China Joint Announcement on Climate Change," Nov. 11, 2014; Joanna Lewis, "The U.S.-China Climate and Energy Relationship," Chapter in Parallel Perspectives on the Global Economic Order, Center for Strategic and International Studies, Sept. 22, 2017.

[10] *See, e.g.*, Anne-Marie Slaughter, foreword to Wayne Porter & Mark Mykleby, *A National Strategic Narrative*, Woodrow Wilson Center, 2011; Jim Dwyer, "A National Security Strategy That Doesn't Focus on Threats," *The New York Times*, May 3, 2011.

[11] The decline in freedom and democracy is demonstrated in several annual indices that measure global levels of democracy and freedom. For example, the annual Freedom House report, *Freedom in the World 2020: A Leaderless Struggle for Democracy*, found that 2019 was the 14th consecutive year of decline in global freedom. Freedom House, *Freedom in the World 2020: A Leaderless Struggle for Democracy*, Mar. 2020. *See also* "Global democracy has another bad year: But popular protests show potential for democratic renewal," Daily Chart, *The Economist*, Jan. 22, 2020; V-Dem Institute, *Autocratization Surges—Resistance Grows: Democracy Report 2020*; Chapter 3.

[12] Freedom House, *Freedom in the World 2020*, Mar. 2020; Democracy Index 2019: A year of democratic setbacks and popular protest, *The Economist Intelligence Unit*, Jan. 2020, at 4.

[13] For example, in a 1993 speech to the United Nations, President Clinton announced that the United States' "overriding purpose must be to expand and strengthen the world's community of market-based democracies. During the Cold War we sought to contain a threat to the survival of free institutions. Now we seek to enlarge the circle of nations that live under those free institutions. For our dream is of a day when the opinions and energies of every person in the world will be given full expression, in a world of thriving democracies that cooperate with each other and live in peace." President William J. Clinton, Address to the UN General Assembly, Sept. 27, 1993.

implications for NATO, which was founded upon the defense of democratic principles. The EU faces a similar challenge with Hungary, now classified by Freedom House as an electoral authoritarian regime, which as an EU member gets to fully participate in all EU decision making.[14]

Finally, the decline in the number of democratic states and the rise of more authoritarian ones provides Russia and China with new partners for their efforts to expand their influence.[15] For example, in Eastern Europe and the Balkans, long-standing Russian efforts to discredit democracy reinforce the effects of major infrastructure investments from China in cultivating potential partners.[16] In offering no-strings-attached financial aid and weapons, both China and Russia dilute U.S. leverage to press for human rights and rule-of-law reform.[17]

Scope of the Report

The objective of this report is not to conduct a systematic review of the Trump administration's conduct of U.S. foreign policy, nor to examine how President Trump has approached every international crisis during his presidency.

Instead, this report seeks to take stock of the damage President Trump's foreign policy has done to U.S. and global security, as well as the immediate and long-term consequences this has had on the safety and security of the American people. It examines some of the starkest examples of how President Trump's approach to foreign policy has resulted in a chaotic process, and how abrupt decisions, which take close allies by surprise have thrown our alliances into disarray. It also reviews how President Trump's hostility toward multilateral alliances has left the U.S. withdrawn and isolated from combatting pressing global challenges. Finally, it reviews the effect of President Trump's rhetoric, actions, and inaction on authoritarian regimes and autocratic leaders.

The report, a culmination of interviews and discussions Democratic Committee staff conducted with dozens of U.S. and foreign government officials and foreign policy experts over more than a year, finds that the state of the United States in the world hangs in a tenuous balance. Our allies are weary and alienated; our own diplomats struggle to uphold the values we have promoted to the world for decades; and a U.S. president's eschewing of democracy has helped to fuel autocratic trends abroad.

---

[14] Celeste A. Wallander, "NATO's Enemies Within: How Democratic Decline Could Destroy the Alliance," *Foreign Affairs*, July/Aug. 2018; Norman Eisen & James Kirchick, "Yes, Russia is a threat to NATO. So are the alliance's anti-democratic members," *The Washington Post*, July 11, 2018.

[15] Bruce Jones & Torrey Taussig, *Democracy & Disorder: The Struggle for Influence in the New Geopolitics*, Brooking Institute (Feb. 2019).

[16] Andrea Kendall-Taylor & David Shullman, "How Russia and China Undermine Democracy: Can the West Counter the Threat?" *Foreign Affairs*, Oct. 2, 2018.

[17] *Id*.

Chapter 1

The Trump Doctrine: Chaos, Neglect, and Diplomatic Failures

There is no question that President Trump has brought a markedly different approach to foreign policy than previous administrations. Termed "America First" by President Trump, this approach is supposedly defined by putting the interests of the American people first. In practice, however, there is little evidence that this is the driving force. As numerous interviews confirmed, and as the events of the last four years have shown, President Trump's brand of foreign policy is characterized by chaos, driven by ego and personal interests, and heavily influenced by catering to a political base on domestic issues. It has also notably neglected a host of critical international threats, with tragic consequences, and left a string of diplomatic failures in its wake. The result is few measurable achievements, and considerable damage to U.S. interests.

Today, North Korea remains a nuclear threat, Iran is closer to a nuclear bomb, and U.S. efforts to support a democratic transition in Venezuela are frozen. Respect for the United States has dropped precipitously around the world. American foreign policy has been run like a wayward vessel—not following a charted course, but subject to abrupt shifts and near-collisions at the whims of a reckless captain. While there are Americans who share the President's desire to be less engaged in the world, Americans are less safe when the United States is less respected and its leadership is seen as capricious and untrustworthy.

America First?

President Trump contends that his "America First" foreign policy "will always put the interests of the American people and American security above all else."[18] The term "America First" is meant to capture President Trump's view that the United States is in decline and that previous administrations allowed other nations to take advantage of the United States—a position he has more or less espoused for decades.

President Trump's approach is grounded in three key ways he views the world: the United States is overextended abroad, the global economy disadvantages the United States, and authoritarian leaders are sympathetic friends.[19] He has been highly critical of U.S. military alliances, believing the United States is overextended and "subsidiz[ing] the armies of other countries."[20] He has also argued that the United States is disadvantaged by the structure of the global economy. Trump has generally opposed

[18] "Transcript: Donald Trump's Foreign Policy Speech," *The New York Times,* April 27, 2016.
[19] *See, e.g.*, Thomas Wright, "Trump's team of rivals, riven by distrust," *Foreign Policy*, Dec. 14, 2016.
[20] The White House, "The Inaugural Address: Remarks of President Donald J. Trump, As Prepared for Delivery," Jan. 20, 2017.

trade agreements and supported using tariffs to protect U.S. industry and punish economic malfeasance by other countries.[21]

President Trump's views on foreign policy coincided with a growing sense of disillusionment among a significant segment of the American population about the U.S. role in world. This populist backlash reflected a number of factors, including perceptions about the unequal distribution of benefits the American people receive from our global engagement, and what many saw as major failures in U.S. foreign policy. Among other things, the Iraq War and the lack of progress in Afghanistan eroded and undermined the American people's confidence in the current course and direction of U.S. policy.[22]

Administration supporters argue Trump's foreign policy takes into account the views of many Americans whose opinions on foreign affairs have been neglected. For example, some argue that his approach to the world is a necessary corrective to "the uncomfortable truth that visions of benevolent globalization and peace-building liberal internationalism have failed to materialize leaving in their place a world that is increasingly hostile to American values and interests."[23]

While President Trump may have termed his approach to foreign policy "America First," in practice, his policy should be called "Trump First." Interviews with former Trump administration officials confirm what has been widely reported in the press: Trump's approach is driven more by his own whims and ego than a sense of commitment or duty to pursue American interests. One former senior U.S. official compared President Trump's administration to a "royal court" where "everyone is jockeying for favor"; instead of a "functioning cabinet, he has courtiers."[24] In this official's view, there is "no Trump doctrine, no Trump government or administration"; the only constants in White House decision-making are "Trump's impulsive, convulsive, intuitive approach, and the fact that, if something's important, he has to do it himself."[25]

Beyond an ego-driven approach, Trump's foreign policy has been characterized by:

- Chaos instead of process;
- Domestic policies that undermine the democratic principles the U.S. espouses to the rest of the world;
- Neglect of key global threats;
- Diplomatic failures; and,
- Efforts to advance his own personal and political interests.

---

[21] *See, e.g.*, Thomas Wright, "Trump Takes Allies Back to 19th Century Global Order," Brookings, Mar. 21, 2017; The White House, "The Inaugural Address: Remarks of President Donald J. Trump, As Prepared for Delivery," Jan. 20, 2017; Jim Tankersley & Mark Landler, "Trump's Love of Tariffs Began in Japan's '80's Boom," *The New York Times*, May 15, 2019.
[22] *See, e.g.*, Nikolas K. Gvosdev, "Misconnecting with the U.S. Public: Narrative Collapse and U.S. Foreign Policy," Interim Report of the project on U.S. Global Engagement, *Carnegie Council*, Dec. 5, 2018.
[23] Nadia Schadlow, "The End of American Illusion," *Foreign Affairs*, Sept./Oct. 2020.
[24] Interview of Former Assistant Secretary of State, May 2019.
[25] *Id*.

This chapter will examine each of these in turn, along with the consequences for U.S. national security.

Foreign Policy by Chaos

As has been well-documented, Trump's governing style has been marked by chaos, abrupt and inconsistent decision-making, and an often dysfunctional process, which is also true of his foreign policy.[26] One former senior U.S. official put it this way: "The Trump administration does not have a foreign policy strategy. There is often total misalignment between Trump's instincts and the policy those in his administration want to or are trying to carry out. There is only the veneer of process."[27]

From the beginning of the Administration, there has been confusion about who in the U.S. government represents the President's views, and whether there is agreement within the administration on them. Indeed, when the Trump administration unveiled its first National Security Strategy (NSS), it laid out principles such as the need to "lead and engage in multinational arrangements" and the important role allies and partners play in "magnifying our power"—views diametrically opposed to those often expressed by President Trump.[28] The document labeled Russia as a "revisionist power" that seeks "spheres of influence" in Europe and is antithetical to U.S. values and interests.[29] Yet, on unveiling the strategy, President Trump spoke about building a "great partnership" with Russia and China and went into detail recounting recent cooperation between the United States and Russia foiling a terrorist attack.[30] Some wondered if President Trump disagreed with his own national security strategy, or just hadn't read it.[31]

"[Former Secretary of State] Tillerson said there was an interagency process. It was he and Mattis having breakfast."

– Former U.S. Official

Former officials reported that, the lack of real process led to poorly vetted results. One former U.S. official said: "[former Secretary of State Rex] Tillerson said there was an interagency process. It was he and [former Secretary of Defense Jim] Mattis having breakfast."[32] For example, when Trump announced in June 2018 that the U.S. would suspend joint military exercises with South Korea, there was "no paper,

[26] *See, e.g.*, Greg Jaffe, "A dangerous confusion at the heart of Trump's foreign policy," *The Washington Post*, June 21, 2019; Simon Tisdall, "Trump's new world disorder: competitive, chaotic, conflicted: With John Bolton dismissed, Taliban peace talks a fiasco and a trade war with China, US foreign policy is ever more unstable and confrontational," *The Guardian*, Sept. 14, 2019; Thomas Wright, "A bigger foreign policy mess than anyone predicted," *The Brookings Institution*, Jan. 2, 2020; Daniel Drezner, *The Toddler in Chief: What Donald Trump Teaches Us about the Modern Presidency* (2020), at 68.

[27] Interview of Former Senior U.S. Official, Apr. 2019.

[28] President Donald Trump, National Security Strategy of the United States of America, Dec. 2017, at 4, 40.

[29] *Id.* at 25.

[30] President Donald Trump, Remarks by President Trump on the Administration's National Security Strategy, Dec. 18, 2017.

[31] *See, e.g.*, Daniel Vajdich, Opinion, "Trump Should Abide by His Own National Security Strategy," *Foreign Policy*, Jan. 24, 2018; Interviews of Multiple Former Senior Officials, May and June 2019.

[32] Interview of Former Acting Assistant Secretary of State, May 2019.

no pros and cons, no analysis of consequences."[33] Indeed, coverage of the decision noted that it surprised "allies, military officials, and lawmakers from his own Republican Party."[34]

President Trump also famously seeks to foment competition within his team. He would ask three people to do the same thing, or write a version of the same speech—and no one knew which speech he would choose to read.[35] This infighting by design, particularly in the early days of the Administration, only added to the policy-making chaos; it also incentivized staff to self-censor in order to be included in briefings.[36] Trump was known for not paying close attention to policy, but would undermine those not doing what he wanted them to.[37] Former U.S. officials reported that many would hope the issue or region they covered would stay "under the radar," so as not to get noticed by Trump—and potentially upended in a tweet.

The most public aspect of President Trump's chaotic approach is also how allies, and even parts of the U.S. government, often learned of major decisions. "Abrupt," "disruptive" "reckles[s]," "unpredictable," and "erratic" are among the adjectives used to describe Trump's sudden pronouncements, often through Twitter, to announce a new policy or shift.[38] President Trump's sudden pronouncements have left foreign leaders struggling to take him seriously—not merely because he professed his "love" for Kim Jong-un, but because his tweets and statements often directly contradict or upend the official U.S. government position, or are later reversed.[39] Even those in the U.S. government who are responsible for implementing the President's announcements have often been in the dark on what Trump intended or how to carry out his policy whims.

Trump's foreign policy has been described as "abrupt," "disruptive" "reckless," "unpredictable," and "erratic."

The following box demonstrates some of the President's announcements that have taken U.S. officials by surprise, did not reflect official U.S. policy, or were ultimately not carried out.

---

[33] Interview of Former Acting Assistant Secretary of State, May 2019. *See also* Josh Smith & Phil Stewart, "Trump surprises with pledge to end military exercises in South Korea," *Reuters*, June 12, 2018.
[34] Steve Holland et al., "In surprise summit concession, Trump says he will halt Korea war games," *Reuters*, June 11, 2018.
[35] Interview of Former Senior Director, National Security Council, May 2019.
[36] *Id*.
[37] Interview of Former U.S. Official, Feb. 2019.
[38] *See* Jeffrey Prescott, "Trump Doesn't Deserve Any Credit for His Disruptive Foreign Policy: There's no substance behind arguments that the U.S. president is using his unpredictability to the country's advantage," Opinion, *Foreign Policy*, Mar. 14, 2019; Jackson Diehl, "Trump's foreign policy has devolved into chaos," Opinion, *The Washington Post*, Sept. 16, 2018; Glenn Thrush & Mark Landler, "Bold, Unpredictable Foreign Policy Lifts Trump, but Has Risks," *The New York Times*, Apr. 20, 2017.
[39] *See, e.g.*, Philip Rucker & Josh Dawsey, "'We fell in love': Trump and Kim shower praise, stroke egos on path to nuclear negotiations," *The Washington Post*, Feb. 25, 2019; Jessica Taylor, "Trump Tweets Give a Glimpse Into Foreign Policy Approach," *NPR*, Dec. 28, 2016; Frida Ghitis, "This Is What Happens When Trump Makes Foreign Policy by Tweet," *Politico*, Jan. 14, 2019; Shawn Snow & Leo Shane III, "Trump says tweet serves as 'notification' to Congress that US may 'quickly & fully strike back' against Iran," *Military Times*, Jan. 5, 2020; Emily Birnbaum, "Trump tests Twitter policies with Iran threats," *The Hill*, Jan. 7, 2020; Jack Nassetta, "Want to influence Trump's foreign policy? Just reply to his tweets," *The Week*, Aug. 14, 2019.

Unpredictable Foreign Policy by Tweet

Jan. 2018: Trump tweeted that his "Nuclear Button" is "much bigger & more powerful" than that of North Korean dictator Kim Jong Un.[40]

May 2018: Announced that he would work with Chinese leader Xi to save Chinese jobs and help ZTE (a Chinese company).[41]

July 2018: Threatened Iranian President Rouhani: "NEVER, EVER THREATEN THE UNITED STATES AGAIN OR YOU WILL SUFFER CONSEQUENCES THE LIKES OF WHICH FEW THROUGHOUT HISTORY HAVE EVER SUFFERED BEFORE."[42]

Dec. 2018: Announced U.S. withdrawal from Syria through a tweeted video.[43]

Jan. 2019: Threatened to economically "devastate" Turkey if it harms the Kurds.[44]

May 2019: Tweeted that he was unconcerned by North Korea having "fired off some small weapons" because of his "confidence that Chairman Kim will keep his promise."[45]

May 2019: Threatened a 5% tariff on Mexico unless they stop "illegal migrants coming through Mexico, and into our Country."[46]

June 2019: Announced the withdrawal of the threatened tariffs on Mexico.[47]

Aug. 2019: Denied American involvement in a mysterious explosion at an Iranian space center. Included a high-resolution image that some thought was a classified image from his morning intelligence briefing.[48]

Jan. 2020: Threatened 52 Iranian cultural sites[49]

Jan. 2020: Threatened Iran that the U.S. military will "quickly & fully strike back, & perhaps in a disproportionate manner," if the country attacks Americans, and claimed that the tweet served as a notification to Congress[50]

[40] Donald Trump, Jan. 2, 2018, https://twitter.com/realDonaldTrump/status/948355557022420992.
[41] Donald Trump, https://twitter.com/realdonaldtrump/status/995680316458262533?lang=en.
[42] Donald Trump, July 22, 2018, https://twitter.com/realDonaldTrump/status/1021234525626609666.
[43] Donald Trump, Dec. 19, 2018, https://twitter.com/realdonaldtrump/status/1075528854402256896?lang=en.
[44] Donald Trump, Jan. 13, 2019, https://twitter.com/realDonaldTrump/status/1084584259510304768.
[45] Donald Trump, May 25, 2019, https://twitter.com/realDonaldTrump/status/1132459370816708608.
[46] Donald Trump, May 30, 2019, https://twitter.com/realDonaldTrump/status/1134240653926232064.

The President's sudden announcement in December 2018 that the U.S. would withdraw troops from Syria demonstrates the consequences of governing by chaos. President Trump effectively upended U.S. official policy in one phone call, and then announced it on Twitter in a series of convoluted tweets.[51] The move was made over the recommendations of his advisors, and was a reversal of the policy that administration officials had just reiterated to U.S. allies.[52] As a result, U.S. troops were left vulnerable to "unreliable" militias as they sought to withdraw.[53]

Despite an attempt by the President's advisors to engage in the traditional policymaking process across the national security agencies, including developing an agreed-upon policy and talking points, when President Trump spoke with Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan on December 14, 2018, he essentially threw the talking points out the window.[54] By the end of the call, Trump had effectively pledged to Erdoğan that the U.S. was getting out of Syria. "OK, it's all yours. We are done," Trump reportedly said.[55]

Only hours earlier, the United States had reassured allies that no such thing would occur. The team was stunned.[56] Trump's announcement led to the resignation of Defense Secretary Jim Mattis and Special Presidential Envoy for the Global Coalition to Counter the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) Brett McGurk.[57] Key officials, including the commander of U.S. Central Command, acknowledged they had not been notified in advance.[58]

---

[47] Donald Trump, June 7, 2019, https://twitter.com/realDonaldTrump/status/1137155056044826626?s=20, https://twitter.com/realDonaldTrump/status/1137155057667989511?s=20.
[48] Donald Trump, Aug. 30, 2019, https://twitter.com/realDonaldTrump/status/1167493371973255170.
[49] Donald Trump, Jan. 4, 2020, https://twitter.com/realDonaldTrump/status/1213593975732527112?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw%7Ctwcamp%5Etweetembed%7Ctwterm%5E1213593975732527112%7Ctwgr%5E&ref_url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.aljazeera.com%2Fnews%2F2020%2F01%2Ftrump-tweets-international-law-200107064935688.html.
[50] Donald Trump, Jan. 5, 2020, https://twitter.com/realDonaldTrump/status/1213919480574812160.
[51] Karen DeYoung et al., "As Trump withdraws U.S. forces from northern Syria, his administration scrambles to respond," *The Washington Post*, Oct. 13, 2019.
[52] Mark Landler et al., "Trump to Withdraw U.S. Forces From Syria, Declaring 'We Have Won Against ISIS,'" *The New York Times*, Dec. 19, 2018; Anne Gearan et al., "'They screwed this whole thing up': Inside the attempt to derail Trump's erratic Syria withdrawal," *The Washington Post*, Jan. 13, 2019. Following Trump's strategy shift in Syria, McGurk wrote a letter to Pompeo saying, "I just reassured all of our coalition partners that this is the U.S. government's policy. I can't be the face of the reversal." Interview of Former Senior U.S. Official, Apr. 2019.
[53] Karen DeYoung et al., "As Trump withdraws U.S. forces from northern Syria, his administration scrambles to respond," *The Washington Post*, Oct. 13, 2019.
[54] Matt Lee & Susannah George, "Trump call with Turkish leader led to US pullout from Syria," *AP*, Dec. 21, 2018,; Interview of Former Senior U.S. Official, Apr. 2019.
[55] Jeremy Diamond & Elise Labott, "Trump told Turkey's Erdoğan in Dec. 14 call about Syria, 'it's all yours. We are done'," *CNN*, Dec. 24, 2018.
[56] Interview of Former Senior Official, Apr. 2019.
[57] Matt Lee & Susannah George, "Trump call with Turkish leader led to US pullout from Syria," *AP*, Dec. 21, 2018; Shannon Van Sant, "U.S. Envoy To The Coalition Against ISIS Resigns Over Trump's Syria Policy," *NPR*, Dec. 22, 2018; Paul Sonne, "Mattis resigns after clash with Trump over troop withdrawal from Syria and Afghanistan," *The Washington Post*, Dec. 20, 2018.
[58] Rebecca Kheel, "Top general says he wasn't consulted before Trump announced Syria withdrawal," *The Hill*, Feb. 5, 2019.

Trump's December 2018 Syria announcement was also characteristic of his approach because it was not the final word. After a number of shifts, walk-backs, subsequent announcements, and pushback, Trump's pledge to withdraw became effective in October 2019, nearly a year later.

Undermining Democratic Values at Home

President Trump's 2017 National Security Strategy said, "America's commitment to liberty, democracy, and the rule of law serves as an inspiration for those living under tyranny."[59] This statement expresses the traditional view America has of itself, a beacon of liberty to all those living under oppression. President Trump has presented an entirely different vision of America to the world, including one that sees moral equivalence between groups promoting white nationalism and white supremacy and those seeking racial equality.[60]

The Trump administration's domestic policies, including family separation, immigration raids, limiting the number of refugees who can come into the U.S., attacking the rule of law and the freedom of the press, and failing to stand up for racial equality while appearing to coddle white supremacists have had a profoundly negative impact on the United States' credibility and standing in the world.[61] U.S. presidents in the past have sought to showcase the United States as a positive model for what a society can achieve when it is based upon democracy and freedom. President Trump, on the other hand, has consistently shown disdain for pluralism, human rights, civil society, the press, and rule of law. These policies have caused traditional U.S. allies to question the values of the United States, and provided authoritarian leaders an opportunity to consolidate their power.

Multiple foreign officials of countries with which the U.S. is closely allied emphasized to Committee staff that when the U.S. struggles with fundamental democratic principles, it only helps Russia and China make a stronger case for their systems. A former Foreign Service Officer said, "Our international partners aren't all seeing this as an anomaly. Many see it as proof that they were right all along."[62]

As a former Acting Assistant Secretary of State observed, the United States has "always stood proud and acknowledged our mistakes"—but "now, so it would seem, not only do we compromise on

[59] President Donald Trump, National Security Strategy of the United States of America, Dec. 2017, at 4.
[60] *See* Jonathan Karl & Jordyn Phelps, "Trump's failure to condemn white supremacy at debate part of well-established pattern," *ABC News*, Sept. 30, 2020; Rachael Levy, "Who Are the Proud Boys? Trump Tells Far-Right Group to 'Stand Back and Stand By,'" *The Wall Street Journal*, Sept. 30, 2020; James Hohmann, "The Daily 202: False moral equivalency is not a bug of Trumpism. It's a feature." *The Washington Post*, Aug. 16, 2017.
[61] *See* Richard Wike et al., "U.S. Image Plummets Internationally as Most Say Country Has Handled Coronavirus Badly," *Pew Research Center,* Sept. 15, 2020; Dan Balz, "America is at a low ebb, shaken by multiple blows, and Trump adds to the distress," *The Washington Post*, May 31, 2020; Alex Ward, "How the world is reacting to Trump's family separation policy," *Vox*, June 20, 2018.
[62] Interview of Former Foreign Service Officer, Apr. 2019.

values—we clearly now don't even believe in them."[63] Foreign governments are saying "'Yeah, we know who you really are.'"[64]

President Trump's disdain for traditional U.S. values and priorities will have a long-lasting legacy. His attacks on freedom of the press are just one example. As a report by the Committee to Protect Journalists showed, between January 2017 and May 2019, 26 countries enacted or introduced laws or rules restricting online media and journalistic access in the name of preventing "fake news."[65] The leaders of Poland, Hungary, Turkey, China, the Philippines, and Cambodia are among those who have cited Trump and "fake news" as they criticize and restrict the press in their countries.[66]

Neglect of Pressing Global Challenges

One the most notable features of President Trump's foreign policy is his neglect, perhaps intentional, of pressing global problems, including the COVID-19 pandemic, climate change, and global forced migration. Under President Trump, the United States has severely curtailed its domestic efforts to slow our emission of greenhouse gases, and the United States has completely abandoned the Paris Climate Agreement. In the face of an unprecedented crisis of global migration, the United States has retreated from our humanitarian obligations and international cooperation and dealt a grave blow to the international system set up to manage displaced people.[67]

The result of these policies is that the United States has become a bystander, as dangerous threats to the American people have emerged overseas and struck the United States. The most pressing example of this is COVID-19, the worst global pandemic the world has faced in over a century. Despite the stark, urgent wording of the Trump administration's 2018 National Biodefense Strategy, pandemic preparation and coordination were a low priority for the Trump administration.[68] Previous administrations understood that international efforts to monitor and combat health threats abroad are a central element in protecting the United States from pandemics. The Trump administration, in contrast, sought to cut funding for the key U.S. and international organizations involved in monitoring and preparing for an infectious disease outbreak.

Instead of leading international efforts to confront the virus, the Trump administration has deliberately undermined them, particularly through the United States' announced withdrawal from

---

[63] Interview of Former Acting Assistant Secretary of State, July 2019.
[64] *Id*.
[65] Leonard Downie Jr. & Stephanie Sugars, *The Trump Administration and the Media: Attacks on press credibility endanger US democracy and global press freedom*, Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ), Apr. 16, 2020, https://cpj.org/reports/2020/04/trump-media-attacks-credibility-leaks.php (citing Sarah Repucci, Vice President for Research and Analysis, Freedom House).
[66] *Id*.
[67] *See generally* Senate Foreign Relations Committee Democratic Staff, *Global Forced Migration: The Political Crisis of Our Time*, June 18, 2020.
[68] *See* The White House, "The potential to cost thousands of American lives, cause significant anxiety, and greatly impact travel and trade," *National Biodefense Strategy*, Sept. 8, 2018.

the World Health Organization.[69] The result has been a chaotic international response to the pandemic that has harmed U.S. efforts to manage the health impacts of the pandemic and has set back efforts to restore the American economy.

Every budget under the Trump administration has called for cuts to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).[70] In 2018, the CDC was forced to scaled back work in 39 countries to prevent and respond to future epidemics.[71] Also in 2018, the Administration diverted funds from the CDC, NIH, and FEMA to pay for the increased number of detained children due to the Trump administration's policy of separating children from their parents at the southern border.[72] In July 2019, the Trump administration recalled the last remaining CDC official in China, leaving an intelligence vacuum when COVID-19 emerged, and President Trump disbanded the global health security team on the NSC, which, in previous administrations, coordinated U.S. pandemic strategy and preparation.[73] According to a previous director of the organization, disbanding the office "left an unclear structure and strategy for coordinating pandemic preparedness and response."[74]

During the crisis, U.S. support for countries in need of resources and expertise to protect their citizens and help bring an end to the global pandemic has been scattered and inconsistent.[75] The United States has been largely absent from international efforts to marshal a coordinated response.[76] The Trump

---

[69] U.S. Department of State, "Update on U.S. Withdrawal from the World Health Organization, Sept. 3, 2020; Zachary Cohen et al., "Trump administration begins formal withdrawal from World Health Organization," *CNN,* July 8, 2020; Zachary Cohen, "Republicans urge Trump not to terminate relationship with World Health Organization," *CNN,* June 15, 2020; *see also* Lara Jakes, "Despite Big Promises, U.S. Has Delivered Limited Aid in Global Virus Response: The State Department and U.S.A.I.D. have spent a fraction of the humanitarian assistance that Congress approved in March to help curb the coronavirus," *The New York Times*, June 7, 2020.

[70] In 2017, President Trump's first budget proposal called for a 17 percent cut to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) budget. In 2018, he called for a 19 percent cut; in 2019, a 10 percent cut, and in 2020, a 9 percent cut to the CDC. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS): CDC, "Congressional Justification of Estimates for Appropriation Committees," for FY 2018-FY20201; *see also* Emily Baumgaertner, "Trump's Proposed Budget Cuts Trouble Bioterrorism Experts," *The New York Times*, May 28, 2017.

[71] Ashley Yeager, "CDC to Drastically Cut Efforts to Prevent Global Disease Outbreaks: The agency's plan to scale back work in 39 foreign countries could hamper its ability to rapidly respond to future epidemics," *The Scientist*, Feb. 1, 2018.

[72] Caitlin Dickson, "Exclusive: With more immigrant children in detention, HHS cuts funds for other programs — like cancer research," *Yahoo News*, Sept. 18, 2018; Camila Domonoske, "Trump Administration Transferred $9.8 Million From FEMA To ICE," *NPR*, Sept. 12, 2018.

[73] Marisa Taylor, "Exclusive: U.S. axed CDC expert job in China months before virus outbreak," *Reuters*, Mar. 22, 2020; Editorial, "Reviving the US CDC," *The Lancet*, May 16, 2020; Josh Michaud et al., "The U.S. Government and Global Health Security," *Kaiser Family Foundation*, Dec. 17, 2019, https://www.kff.org/global-health-policy/issue-brief/the-u-s-government-and-global-health-security/; Lena H. Sun, "Top White House official in charge of pandemic response exits abruptly," *The Washington Post*, May 10, 2018; Natasha Bertrand et al., "America's national security machine stares down a viral threat" *Politico*, Mar. 12, 2020.

[74] Beth Cameron, "I ran the White House pandemic office. Trump closed it," Opinion, *The Washington Post*, Mar. 13, 2020.

[75] *See* Lara Jakes & Pranshu Verma, "At U.S.A.I.D., Juggling Political Priorities and Pandemic Response," *The New York Times*, Sept. 13, 2020.

[76] *See, e.g.*, Lara Jakes, "Despite Big Promises, U.S. Has Delivered Limited Aid in Global Virus Response: The State Department and U.S.A.I.D. have spent a fraction of the humanitarian assistance that Congress approved in March to help curb the coronavirus," *The New York Times*, June 7, 2020.

administration sat out a May 2020 EU-led summit that raised $8 billion for vaccine research, and torpedoed a strong G7 response by insisting the novel coronavirus be called the "Wuhan" virus in the official statement.[77] Unlike global crises of the past, the United States is not leading the global response or setting the example for other countries to follow, but lagging far behind in its own efforts to contain and combat the virus, and one of the leading global drivers of cases and deaths from COVID-19.[78]

Diplomatic Failures

Despite his signature bluster, President Trump's limited international engagements have been marked by diplomatic failures and ineptitude that have damaged U.S. credibility. Diplomatic initiatives that could have improved U.S. national security have failed—for example, addressing long-standing foreign policy challenges such as North Korea's nuclear and missile capabilities, and the instability and humanitarian crisis caused by the regime of Nicolás Maduro in Venezuela.

Despite bipartisan and widespread support in Congress and among U.S. allies and international institutions for some objectives sought by the administration, Trump's efforts resulted in failure, undermined by a lack of a clear strategy, unrealistic expectations of what could be achieved, and inconsistent attention. Yet, when faced with these failures, the President, instead of recalibrating his approach, claims victory and seeks to distract the public from what has occurred.

North Korea: All Bluster, No Breakthrough

Early on in his presidency, Trump set his sights on North Korea as the "deal" that he would bring to fruition. After more than a year of heated rhetoric, military-saber rattling, and insults, in March 2018, President Trump agreed to meet with North Korean dictator Kim Jong-un in Singapore. Several months after the summit, President Trump stated that North Korea—despite having taken no steps to roll back its programs—was "no longer a nuclear threat."[79] Although multiple working-level meetings occurred in 2018 and 2019, by late 2019, it had become clear that the Trump administration's diplomatic initiative with North Korea was falling apart.[80]

---

[77] *See* William Booth et al., "The world came together for a virtual vaccine summit. The U.S. was conspicuously absent," *The Washington Post*, May 4, 2020; John Hudson & Souad Mekhennet, "G-7 failed to agree on statement after U.S. insisted on calling coronavirus outbreak 'Wuhan virus,'" *The Washington Post*, Mar. 25, 2020.

[78] As of October 15, 2020, the United States had the most deaths and cases of any country in the world, the 11th highest number of cases per 100,000, and the 2nd-highest number of new cases and number of deaths in the last 7 days. Coronavirus Map: Tracking the Global Outbreak, *The New York Times* (last visited Oct. 15, 2020, 11:36pm).

[79] Veronica Stracqualursi & Stephen Collinson, "Trump declares North Korea 'no longer a nuclear threat,'" *CNN*, June 13, 2018.

[80] Julia Masterson & Kelsey Davenport, "North Korea, United States Issue Threats as Deadline Approaches," Arms Control Association, Dec. 11, 2019, https://www.armscontrol.org/blog/2019-12-11/north-korea-denuclearization-digest; Choe Sang-Hun, North Korea Says U.S. Sought More Talks, but Calls It a 'Trick, *The New York Times*, Nov. 11, 2019.

[80] Ryan Hass, "Trump did not solve the North Korea problem in Singapore—in fact, the threat has only grown," *The Brookings Institution*, Aug. 13, 2019.

Negotiations collapsed for several reasons. First, the Trump administration never had a strategy or plan for how to convert international economic pressure into diplomatic gains, or how establishing better relations with North Korea would lead to denuclearization. On even the most basic questions, such as the meaning of "denuclearization," it failed to undertake the rigorous and consistent diplomacy necessary to reach an agreement with North Korea on exactly what this term constituted. Second, the Trump administration consistently oversold what North Korea had agreed to.

Third, the Trump administration failed to make clear, either internally or with its negotiating partners, what concessions the United States was willing to make if North Korea started the denuclearization process. Fourth, the administration failed to adequately consult with allies, including the Republic of Korea and Japan, about its diplomacy, creating challenges for building a sustainable diplomatic approach. Finally, when it became clear that a quick break-through on denuclearization was unrealistic, President Trump lost interest in the negotiations. Instead, he simply declared the problem had been solved.[81]

U.S.-DPRK denuclearization diplomacy essentially has been frozen since February 2019, when Trump and Kim's Hanoi summit ended without an agreement.[82] In spite of President Trump's misleading rhetoric, North Korea's nuclear and missile programs are larger and more technically capable than when he took office, and they pose a direct nuclear threat to the U.S. homeland as well as our allies and partners.[83] While the international sanctions regime remains in effect, many countries blame both the United States and North Korea for the breakdown in negotiations. And some, such as China and Russia, are enforcing international sanctions against the DPRK less rigorously, including by allowing North Korea to evade sanctions through ship-to-ship transfers of oil and coal in their waters, and failing to enforce UN Security Council Resolutions on forced labor.[84]

Unilateral U.S. steps pursued during President Trump's slap-dash diplomacy, often without prior consultation, such as suspending military exercises, have also created additional risk for the Peninsula and alliance pressures. The legitimacy of Kim Jong-un's rule over North Korea and his international standing have been enhanced through his summits with President Trump, and have provided Kim an enhanced ability to maintain his brutal hold over the North Korean people.

Venezuela: Sanctions without Strategy

The Trump administration has also squandered an opportunity to capitalize on a bipartisan consensus and international support for a strong response to the authoritarian regime of Nicolás Maduro in

[81] Veronica Stracqualursi & Stephen Collinson, "Trump declares North Korea 'no longer a nuclear threat,'" *CNN*, June 13, 2018.
[82] Ankit Panda and Vipin Narang, *The Hanoi Summit Was Doomed From the Start*, *Foreign Affairs*, Mar. 5, 2019.
[83] *See, e.g.*, Summary of North Korea WMD Threats, Nuclear Threat Initiative, https://www.nti.org/learn/countries/north-korea/ (last visited Oct. 2020); Jon Herskovitz, "How Kim Jong Un Keeps Advancing North Korea's Nuclear Program," *The Washington Post*, Oct.12, 2020.
[84] David Brunnstrom, *China appears to relax North Korea sanctions: report to U.S. Congress, Reuters*, Nov. 14, 2018; United Nations Security Council, *Report of the Panel of Experts Established Pursuant to Resolution 1874*, S/2020/151, Apr. 13, 2020.

Venezuela, which has created a humanitarian crisis that has forced more than 5 million Venezuelan migrants and refugees to flee their homeland.[85] In early 2019, Democratic and Republican members of Congress supported the Trump administration's decision to join a diplomatic coalition of more than 50 countries in recognizing the president of the Venezuelan National Assembly, Juan Guaidó, as the Interim President of Venezuela.[86] Yet rather than harness this formidable diplomatic coalition to advance shared objectives, the Trump administration has increasingly adopted a go-it-alone approach that has undermined the effectiveness of U.S. policy.

While the Trump administration initially used targeted sanctions effectively to address the Maduro regime's criminality, it has become increasingly clear that these actions were not part of a broader diplomatic strategy to alleviate Venezuela's crisis.[87] U.S. sanctions are an incredibly effective tool when matched by similar actions by partners in Europe and the Western hemisphere and leveraged to forge a diplomatic solution to a protracted political crisis. However, by 2019, the Trump administration had come to rely on sanctions as the sole instrument of its foreign policy toward Venezuela. In January 2019, the Trump administration imposed sectoral sanctions across the Venezuelan oil industry, starting with state oil company Petroleos de Venezuela, S.A. (PDVSA).[88] This was followed by sanctions on a Venezuelan-Russian bank and a holding company affiliated Russian oil giant Rosneft.[89] In mid-2020, against a backdrop of dwindling targets, the Trump administration resorted to sanctioning individual Iranian tankers and their captains for transporting gasoline to Venezuela.[90]

Although these targets were appropriate at a tactical level, a larger message had emerged: the Trump administration had no strategy and relied on sanctions as a public demonstration of U.S. resolve, despite an inability to articulate a clear goal for U.S. policy in Venezuela or how its sanctions advance U.S. foreign policy objectives. Additionally, repeated rounds of U.S. sanctions have not been matched by similar sanctions by governments in Canada, Europe, or Latin America, highlighting the Trump

---

[85] "Venezuela Refugee and Migrant Crisis," International Organization for Migration, https://www.iom.int/venezuela-refugee-and-migrant-crisis#:~:text=Overview,in%20Latin%20America's%20recent%20history (last visited Sept. 28, 2020).

[86] "Strong Support Message from US Congress for Guaidó, Present at Trump's State of the Union Speech" *Merco Press*, Feb. 5, 2020, https://en.mercopress.com/2020/02/05/strong-support-message-from-us-congress-for-guaido-present-at-trump-s-state-of-the-union-speech.

[87] These actions, which including sanctioning 100 officials for their involvement in human rights abuses, corruption, and criminality, sent an important message to the international community about the need to hold Maduro accountable. Additional sanctions limited the Maduro regime's ability to drown Venezuela in debt as it pilfered state coffers to pay for its expansive corruption schemes. *See* Congressional Research Service, *Venezuela: Overview of U.S. Sanctions*, Aug. 20, 2020.

[88] Congressional Research Service, *Venezuela: Overview of U.S. Sanctions*, Aug. 20, 2020.

[89] Press Release, U.S. Department of the Treasury, Treasury Sanctions Russia-based Bank Attempting to Circumvent U.S. Sanctions on Venezuela, Mar. 11, 2019, https://home.treasury.gov/news/press-releases/sm622; Press Release, U.S. Department of the Treasury, Treasury Targets Russian Oil Brokerage Firm for Supporting Illegitimate Maduro Regime, Feb. 18, 2020, https://home.treasury.gov/news/press-releases/sm909.

[90] Press Release, U.S. Department of the Treasury, Treasury Sanctions Five Iranian Captains Who Delivered Gasoline to the Maduro Regime in Venezuela, June 24, 2020, https://home.treasury.gov/news/press-releases/sm1043; Press Release, U.S. Department of Justice, "U.S. Seizure of Three Websites Used by Iranian Front Company that Was Shipping Fuel on Four Tankers to Venezuela," Aug. 28, 2020, https://www.justice.gov/opa/pr/us-seizure-three-websites-used-iranian-front-company-was-shipping-fuel-four-tankers-venezuela.

administration's inability to coordinate effective multilateral diplomacy and diminishing the impact of U.S. efforts.[91]

At the same time, Venezuela's humanitarian crisis has pushed more than 5 million Venezuelan refugees and migrants to flee abroad, marking the second largest displacement crisis in the world, behind Syria.[92] As the crisis has accelerated, the international community has failed to keep pace. While the United States has played a critical role as the largest international donor responding to the Venezuelan crisis, the Trump administration has failed to marshal a coordinated international humanitarian response and provide protections to vulnerable Venezuelan migrants and refugees.[93]

The most glaring omission from the Trump administration's policy is its unwillingness to designate Venezuela for Temporary Protected Status and regularize the status of an estimated 200,000 Venezuelan nationals currently in the United States.[94] It also has shuttered U.S. land borders to asylum seekers, leaving many Venezuelans stranded in dangerous regions of Mexico.[95] These refusals have ignored a moral obligation to victims of the Maduro regime. Moreover, these actions undermine U.S. foreign policy objectives to encourage countries across Latin America and the Caribbean to provide millions of Venezuelan refugees and migrants with protection and legal status.

The United States also has been unable or unwilling to leverage other governments' support for humanitarian access, and shown tepid interest in mobilizing greater assistance from other government donors. In May 2020, when presidents, foreign ministers, and senior UN officials held a donors conference that raised $2.7 billion to respond to the Venezuelan crisis, the Trump administration had no discernible leadership role and was represented by a mid-level official from the U.S. Department of State.[96]

The Trump administration's inability to help Interim President Guaidó break through the stalemate with the Maduro regime is characteristic of other Trump diplomatic initiatives. The administration relied on the misguided belief that economic sanctions alone would facilitate a democratic transition, and it underestimated the willingness of its adversaries to sustain themselves under pressure. It engaged

[91] *See* Moises Rendon, "Are Sanctions Working in Venezuela?" *Center for Strategic & International Studies*, Sept. 3, 2019, https://www.csis.org/analysis/are-sanctions-working-venezuela.
[92] "Venezuela Refugee and Migrant Crisis," International Organization for Migration, https://www.iom.int/venezuela-refugee-and-migrant-crisis#:~:text=Overview,in%20Latin%20America's%20recent%20history (last visited Sept. 28, 2020).
[93] Teresa Welsh, "Virtual Venezuela Pledging Conference Raises 2.79B" *Devex*, May 27, 2020.
[94] Press Release, Washington Office on Latin America, Trump Administration's Inaction on TPS Puts Venezuelans at Risk, Apr. 15, 2020, https://www.wola.org/2020/04/trump-administration-inaction-tps-venezuela-migrants/.
[95] Molly O'Toole, "Venezuela, Now a Top Source of U.S. Asylum Claims, Poses a Challenge for Trump," *Los Angeles Times*, June 5, 2019.
[96] European Extended Action Service, "International Donors Conference in Solidarity with Venezuelan Refugees and Migrants, List of Participants," https://eeas.europa.eu/sites/eeas/files/list_of_participants.pdf (last visited 9/28/20); *see also* Teresa Welsh, "Virtual Venezuela Pledging Conference Raises 2.79B" *Devex*, May 27, 2020.

in reckless rhetoric rather than prioritizing multilateral diplomatic pressure.[97] The Administration's policy on Venezuela also points to the vacillating nature of President Trump's attention span. When it appeared the Maduro regime was faltering and it would be an easy win for the Trump administration, the President was actively engaged.[98] However, as soon as it was clear the administration's goal would not be an easy "win," Trump changed course, questioning his own administration's strong support for Guaidó.[99]

Ego-Driven Diplomacy

Another key element of Trump's brand of foreign policy is the direct linkage between his personal relationships with foreign leaders and the resulting treatment of that leader's country. It has not been lost on foreign leaders that flattering the President may increase the chances of positive foreign policy outcomes. While personal relationships between leaders always play a role in foreign policy, no other U.S. President has tied foreign policy decisions so directly to whether a foreign leader is willing to play to his ego.

U.S. officials who have met with Trump comment that he appears "needy, insecure, and hyper-personal."[100] Officials noted that his ego needs constant attention, which exacerbates his difficult relationship with European allies. European allies are less willing to flatter and cater to him, unlike authoritarian leaders like President Erdoğan of Turkey and Crown Prince Mohammad bin Salman of Saudi Arabia. Trump also views himself as a uniquely agile and capable international negotiator, and his constant need to re-enforce this impression is one explanation for his efforts to reach international agreements that have eluded previous presidents.

Former Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe sought to establish strong diplomatic relations through flattery early on. He was the first foreign leader to meet with Trump, arranging a hasty meeting just a week after the election, and quickly laid on the praise, calling President Trump a "trustworthy leader" and later praising Trump's golf game.[101] The move was tactical: Japan was nervous about its

[97] *See, e.g.,* Brian Ellsworth, "Trump Says U.S. Military Intervention in Venezuela 'an Option;' Russia Objects," *Reuters*, Feb. 3, 2019; Sonam Sheth, "Trump Said It Would Be 'Cool' to Invade Venezuela Because the Country Is 'Really Part of the United States,' According to John Bolton's New Book," *Business Insider*, June 18, 2020.
[98] *See. e.g.,* "Strong Support Message from US Congress for Guaido, Present at Trump's State of the Union Speech" *Merco Press*, Feb. 5, 2020, https://en.mercopress.com/2020/02/05/strong-support-message-from-us-congress-for-guaido-present-at-trump-s-state-of-the-union-speech.
[99] Anne Gearan et al., "A frustrated Trump questions his administration's Venezuela strategy," *The Washington Post*, May 8, 2019.
[100] Interview of Former Acting Assistant Secretary of State, May 2019.
[101] Steve Holland & Kiyoshi Takenaka, "Japan's PM Abe meets Trump, says confident can build trust," *Reuters*, Nov. 16, 2016; Dan Merica, "World leaders have a go-to tactic with Trump: Flattery, and lots of it," *CNN*, May 4, 2017. Abe said of Trump, "My scores in golf is not up to the level of Donald at all, but my policy is never up, never in, always aiming for the cup." *Id*.

relationship with the United States, which is critical to its security, and Abe's approach was the result of intensive study by the Japanese to figure out what made him tick.[102]

Russian President Vladimir Putin, no stranger to such tactics, praised Trump as "bright and talented" in 2015 during the Republican presidential primary.[103] South Korean President Moon Jae-in said that Trump deserved a Nobel Peace Prize for getting North Korea to agree to come to the bargaining table in 2018.[104]

It remains an open question as to whether such efforts have paid off. Despite all of Abe's efforts, Japan did not receive the steel exemptions it sought in a trade deal—while others, such as Mexico and Australia—did.[105] As former Obama administration national security official noted, "[w]ith Mr. Trump everything is personalized, but it is also transactional."[106]

On the other hand, the absence of flattery clearly has a detrimental effect. Trump's rocky relationship with German Chancellor Angela Merkel is demonstrative. Trump has personally attacked Merkel on a number of occasions, and when she visited Washington, Trump was filmed ignoring calls to shake her hand in the Oval Office.[107] Trump previously had called Merkel a "catastrophic leader" and the "person who is ruining Germany."[108] He also denigrated his former Democratic opponent Hillary Clinton as "America's Angela Merkel."[109]

President Trump's personal dislike of Chancellor Merkel may be partially behind shifts in U.S. policy that negatively affected Germany's economic and security interests, including repeatedly threatening auto tariffs.[110]

Throughout President Trump's diplomacy, one thing has been clear: personal flattery seems to improve a country's chances of desirable outcomes. That fact has significant consequences for U.S. foreign policy: it leads to volatility, and sets an improper precedent for the conduct of international relations.

---

[102] Michael Crowley, "'Absolutely Unprecedented': Why Japan's Leader Tries So Hard to Court Trump," *Politico Magazine*, May 24, 2019. *See also* Steve Holland & Kiyoshi Takenaka, "Japan's PM Abe meets Trump, says confident can build trust," *Reuters*, Nov. 16, 2016.
[103] Jeremy Diamond & Greg Botelho, "Putin praises b'right and talented' Trump," *CNN*, Dec. 15, 2015.
[104] Song Jung-a, "Trump deserves Nobel Peace prize, says South Korea president," *Financial Times*, Apr. 30, 2018.
[105] *See* Edward Luce, "Tickling Trump: World leaders use flattery to influence America," *Financial Times*, May 4, 2018.
[106] Edward Luce, "Tickling Trump: World leaders use flattery to influence America," *Financial Times*, May 4, 2018 (quoting Tom Donilon).
[107] Rick Noack, "What's with Trump and female world leaders?" *The Washington Post*, Nov. 30, 2017.
[108] *Id*.
[109] *Id*.
[110] Silvia Amaro, "Trump's tariffs on European autos could potentially be 'very damaging,'" *CNBC*, June 25, 2018; Jack Ewing and Ana Swanson, "Trump May Punt on Auto Tariffs as European Carmakers Propose Plan," *The New York Times*, Nov. 11, 2019; Jacob Pramuk, "Trump says he is serious about slapping tariffs on European cars if he cannot strike a trade deal," *CNBC*, Jan 21, 2020; *see also* Susan B. Glasser, "How Trump Made War on Angela Merkel and Europe: The German Chancellor and other European leaders have run out of patience with the President," *The New Yorker*, Dec. 17, 2018.

Trump First

President Trump is the first president in modern history to bring into the White House a cascade of financial interests around the world, and to retain them while serving in office. In just his first two years in office, he earned $73 million from Trump Organization interests in foreign countries.[111] His refusal to divest from those interests or provide any meaningful details about his investments and liabilities has led to considerable concern that his actions as president, and in particular, toward certain foreign leaders or countries, may be influenced either directly by his financial stakes, or indirectly through past relationships or other leverage. Although he holds financial interests and has potential active conflicts around the world, President Trump's engagement with Turkey and Saudi Arabia has drawn considerable scrutiny, as did his attempt to host the G7 summit at a Trump Organization property in Miami.

Questionable Motivations

Before becoming president, Trump acknowledged having a "conflict of interest" due to his private business interests in Turkey, including Trump Towers Istanbul.[112] President Trump's relationship with Turkish President Erdoğan has been marked by a series of interactions that have led many to question Trump's motivations. After being personally lobbied by Erdoğan, President Trump told the Treasury Department and Justice Department to look into the impact of U.S. sanctions on a Turkish state-owned bank, Halkbank, accused by U.S. federal prosecutors of one of the largest Iranian sanctions violations in U.S. history.[113]

Trump also suddenly announced the U.S. withdrawal of troops from Syria—something long sought by Turkey and opposed by most U.S. national security officials, as well as U.S. allies—following a one-on-one call with Erdoğan. After U.S. officials walked back the withdrawal, Trump again pledged to follow through after another private conversation with Erdoğan.

Trump's relationship with Saudi Crown Prince Mohammad bin Salman may be driven in part by past business practices, and in part through close ties with his son-in-law Jared Kushner. Throughout Trump's presidency, there have been questions about prior Saudi investments, the basis for the Administration's unusual siding in a Gulf Cooperation Council rift in 2017, willingness to turn a blind eye following the murder of U.S. resident Jamal Khashoggi, and other events.

In India, where President Trump had more active real estate ventures than in any other country during his presidency, his travel, as well as his son's, led to questions about whether U.S. foreign policy was

[111] Grace Panetta, "Trump earned $73 million in revenue from foreign business deals during his first two years in office, according to a review of the president's tax returns," *Business Insider*, Sept. 28, 2020.
[112] Richard C. Paddock et al., "Potential Conflicts Around the Globe for Trump, the Businessman President," *The New York Times*, Nov. 26, 2016; Donald J. Trump, Interview with *Breitbart News Daily*, Dec. 1, 2015, starting at minute 1.01.
[113] Joe Light, "Trump Ordered Review of U.S. Sanctions on Turkey's Halkbank," *Bloomberg*, Nov. 25, 2019.

being mixed with private commercial gain.[114] Unavoidably, every time President Trump made a detour or a stop at a property abroad from which he receives a financial benefit, the question had to be asked: was he there to promote his own business and boost struggling properties? It is a shadow that has hung over his presidency, and hampered U.S. diplomatic efforts to chide foreign governments about mixing personal financial gain with official conduct of foreign policy.

In another dubious episode, President Trump initially decided to host the 2020 G7 summit of world leaders at his own resort, Trump Doral National Miami.[115] Although he then revised the location to Camp David in response to public outcry, before deciding to delay the summit until after the November 2020 election, his clear disregard for the appearance of a conflict of interest was on display, to the world.[116]

Encouraging Foreign Interference in U.S. Elections

President Trump has openly requested and courted the direct interference of foreign powers in U.S. elections.[117] When his requests become public, he has shown no contrition for his actions.

The clearest example of President Trump's use of U.S. foreign policy for his own gain was his withholding of U.S. security assistance to Ukraine unless the country launched an investigation into former Vice President Biden, at the time, a potential campaign opponent.[118] (He has also asked China for a similar investigation, reportedly tying aspects of the U.S.-China trade deal to his own electoral prospects.[119]) Withholding the assistance to Ukraine ran counter to the fact that it helped a key U.S. ally in the region, to counter Kremlin aggression. It seemed to disregard the fact that Ukraine's armed forces were fending off Russian forces and needed that assistance for equipment and other security

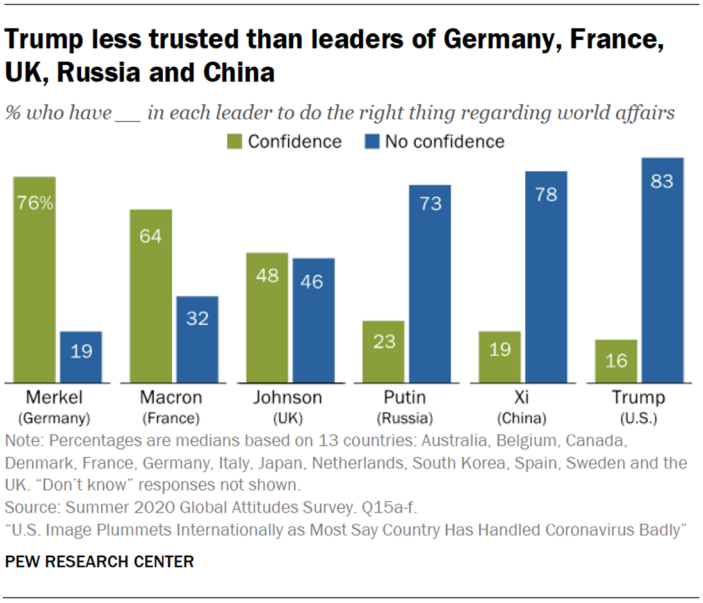
[114] *See* Annie Gowan, "Trump Jr. to give foreign policy speech while on 'unofficial' business trip to India," *The Washington Post*, Feb. 19, 2018; "Trump Jr.'s foreign policy speech in India boosts concerns," *AP*, Feb. 23, 2018.
[115] Toluse Olorunnipa & David A. Fahrenthold, "Trump has awarded next year's G-7 summit of world leaders to his Miami-area resort, the White House said," *The Washington Post*, Oct. 17, 2019.
[116] Sarah Westwood, "Trump postpones G7 summit until after US election," *CNN*, Aug. 10, 2020; Maggie Haberman et al., "Why Trump Dropped His Idea to Hold the G7 at His Own Hotel," *The New York Times*, Oct. 20, 2019; Aaron Rupar, "Trump's move to host the G7 at his Doral resort takes self-dealing to new levels," *Vox*, Oct. 17, 2019.
[117] Lucien Bruggeman, "'I think I'd take it': In exclusive interview, Trump says he would listen if foreigners offered dirt on opponents," *ABC News*, June 13, 2019; Peter Baker & Eileen Sullivan, "Trump Publicly Urges China to Investigate the Bidens," *The New York Times*, Oct. 3, 2019; Josh Dawsey, "Trump asked China's Xi to help him win reelection, according to Bolton book," *The Washington Post*, June 17, 2020.
[118] *See, e.g.*, House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence, *The Trump-Ukraine Impeachment Inquiry Report*, Dec. 2019.
[119] Peter Baker & Eileen Sullivan, "Trump Publicly Urges China to Investigate the Bidens," *The New York Times*, Oct. 3, 2019; Josh Dawsey, "Trump asked China's Xi to help him win reelection, according to Bolton book," *The Washington Post*, June 17, 2020

needs.[120] It ignored that U.S. national security agencies had determined that such assistance directly supported U.S. national security interests.[121]

The Trump-Ukraine scandal showed in stark terms President Trump's willingness to use U.S. foreign policy for his own benefit—namely, to improve his prospects in the 2020 presidential election. Though the Senate acquitted him in February 2020, the impeachment process brought to the forefront the President's tactics, including in a now-infamous July 25, 2019, phone call between President Trump and the Ukrainian President Zelensky, in which Trump asked Zelensky to "do us a favor though," referencing Biden.[122] It also showed that his administration (and Congressional Republicans) were willing to defend Trump's tactics as "normal" execution of foreign policy.

International Views of the United States under Trump

Not surprisingly, President Trump's chaotic approach, undermining of democratic values, indifference to pressing challenges, and injecting of his own interests into foreign policy, have contributed to steep declines in how the U.S. is viewed and respected around the world.



Survey data of global public opinion reflect a sharp decline in international views of the United States and President Trump. Among key U.S. allies, Pew Research Center found a significant decline in the share of respondents saying the United States respects its people's personal freedom in a 2018 survey, down 35 percentage points from a decade earlier.[123] This mirrors a 50 percent decline since 2016 in the world's trust and confidence in the United States.[124] In several countries, the share of the public with favorable views of

[120] *See* U.S. Department of Defense, "DOD Announces $250M to Ukraine," June 18, 2019. Funds were aimed at providing supporting training and operational needs, including "the defensive capacity and survivability of Ukraine's Land and Special Operations Forces" by providing "sniper rifles, rocket-propelled grenade launchers, and counter-artillery radars." *Id*.
[121] *See* House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence, *The Trump-Ukraine Impeachment Inquiry Report*, Dec. 2019, at 69-70.
[122] Memorandum of Telephone Conversation, July 25, 2019, President Trump and President Zelenskyy of Ukraine, Declassified Sept. 24, 2019, *available at* https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/Unclassified09.2019.pdf; House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence, *The Trump-Ukraine Impeachment Inquiry Report*, Dec. 2019.
[123] Richard Wike et al., "Trump's International Ratings Remain Low, Especially Among Key Allies," *Pew Research Center*, Oct. 1, 2018, https://www.pewresearch.org/global/2018/10/01/trumps-international-ratings-remain-low-especially-among-key-allies/.
[124] Kevin Drew, "U.S. Suffers Greatest Global Decline in Trust," *US News*, Jan. 15, 2020.

the United States is as low as it has been at any point since Pew began polling on the topic almost two decades ago.[125] President Trump's personal ratings are also extremely low—he received the lowest confidence ratings among five world leaders, below both Putin and Xi—and the highest marks for "no confidence" in Pew's Summer 2020 Global Attitudes Survey, which conducted surveys in 13 countries.[126] Among the 13 nations surveyed, a median of just 15% say the United States has done a good job dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic, the lowest rating given to any nation on the survey.[127]

Conclusion

Over the last four years, President Trump has chipped away at the United States' international strength and influence. President Trump's chaotic decision-making has debilitated U.S. diplomacy. International partners have found it difficult to work with the United States because they cannot rely on the Trump administration for stable and predictable decision-making. He has neglected and deliberately ignored pressing global challenges. U.S. national security policy decisions during his administration have been driven by his ego and his relationship with foreign leaders, not the vital interests of the United States. And he has turned U.S. foreign policy into a vehicle for his own personal and financial interests.

Perhaps the most damaging aspects of President Trump's tenure have been his attacks on the democratic institutions of the United States. Overseas, these attacks have called into question the stability of the United States and made traditional U.S. allies wonder whether the United States still represents the values of liberty and democracy.

[125] Richard Wike et al., "U.S Image Plummets Internationally as Most Say U.S. Has Handled Coronavirus Badly," *Pew Research Center*, Sept. 15, 2020, https://www.pewresearch.org/global/2020/09/15/us-image-plummets-internationally-as-most-say-country-has-handled-coronavirus-badly/.
[126] *Id*.
[127] *Id*.

Chapter 2

The Cost of Going It Alone: America Withdrawn and Isolated

President Trump's "America First" foreign policy has alienated allies and isolated the United States from international efforts to confront global threats. President Trump has turned his back on years—and, in some cases, decades—of U.S. efforts, undertaken alongside our closest allies, to build multilateral solutions to complex global challenges.

To date, the administration has withdrawn from more than 10 international and multilateral agreements that coordinate critical global efforts tackling nuclear proliferation, terrorism, climate change, and forced migration. These withdrawals—coupled with the Trump administration's failure to offer any alternative strategy to confront these threats—have left the United States vulnerable, weakened global efforts to mitigate and combat these threats, and deeply angered U.S. allies and partners.

Under President Trump, the U.S. relationship with longstanding allies has been marked by insults, bullying, and threats, with the United States even labeling some allies as threats to national security. Although many allies and partners initially tried to influence President Trump, and mitigate his damaging tendencies, many have begun to move on.[128] Some are starting to view the U.S. not as the democratic leader of the free world, but a destabilizing global force they need to manage. They continue to pursue international engagement, such as by brokering and implementing multilateral agreements, but without the United States at the table.

Further, while the Trump administration claims that beating up on allies and threatening actions that penalize other countries will help Americans' bottom lines, the reality shows otherwise. A short-sighted trade policy, empty threats, and vacillating positions have shown our allies that Trump doesn't always mean what he says, and left Americans waiting for the results that Trump promised.

Abandoning International Commitments

Strong international institutions, led by a capable and confident United States, have been at the core of a successful U.S. foreign policy for decades. None of the significant global challenges the United States faces, ranging from a global pandemic, destabilizing conflicts, the threat of terrorism, and the proliferation of nuclear weapons, can be met successfully by any one nation acting alone. Yet President Trump, whether out of sincere belief or political convenience, is content to ignore this reality.

[128] According to Ivo Daalder, the President of the Chicago Council on Global Affairs and former U.S. Ambassador to NATO, this happened by the end of the 2018: "The allies spent all of 2017 trying to figure out how they could entice him into more of a traditional relationship, and they collectively absolutely failed. By 2018, they were starting to realize this was the real Trump." Susan B. Glasser, "How Trump Made War on Angela Merkel and Europe," *The New Yorker*, Dec. 17, 2018.

Since in office, President Trump has withdrawn or reneged on a series of agreements and commitments with nations around the world, including the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), Paris Climate Agreement, Global Compact on Migration, and the World Health Organization, among others.

Yet, instead of making America stronger or increasing our leverage, these withdrawals have kept the United States away from the negotiating table, absent from discussions that will shape American lives and interests in the coming decades. The U.S. withdrawal from the World Health Organization (WHO), as the COVID-19 pandemic rages across the globe, sent a clear message that the United States is uninterested in collective action to confront global crises. It also threatens to exclude Americans from the benefits of international efforts to find and distribute a vaccine, as well as other potential elements of a coordinated international response to the worst pandemic in a century. As public health experts note, U.S. research and response efforts for global pandemics as well as cancer, HIV/AIDS, polio, and others, are closely intertwined with the WHO.[129] Withdrawal creates an uncertain future for joint efforts to stay ahead of future global health threats and protect the world's population, including Americans.

The United States Versus Its Allies

One of the hallmarks of the Trump administration's foreign policy has been its "maximum pressure" campaign against Iran. As part of this effort, President Trump withdrew from the JCPOA, terminating commitments made along with close allies (the United Kingdom, France, Germany, and the European Union), as well as Russia, China, and Iran.[130]

President Trump argued that by withdrawing, the United States would be in a better position to prevent Iran from obtaining a nuclear weapon, and "would assemble a broad coalition of nations" to achieve that aim.[131] The Trump administration also argued that getting rid of the JCPOA would improve the United States' ability to combat Iran's regional aggression.[132] However, by unilaterally withdrawing from the deal, the United States upended a delicate balancing act to which other nations and U.S. allies had linked critical security interests.

Predictably, decisions to withdraw the United States from hard-fought and carefully negotiated agreements and arrangements aimed at addressing some of the hardest-to-solve global challenges,

---

[129] *See, e.g.*, Matthew M. Kavanagh & Mara Pillinger, "Leaving the WHO Will Hurt Americans' Health," *Foreign Policy*, July 7, 2020.

[130] Donald J. Trump, "Remarks by President Trump on the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action," *The White House*, May 8, 2018. The agreement was also unanimously approved by the UN Security Council in UN Resolution 2231.

[131] The White House, Fact Sheets, "President Donald J. Trump is Ending United States Participation in an Unacceptable Iran Deal," May 8, 2018.

[132] White House, Fact Sheets, "President Donald J. Trump is Ending United States Participation in an Unacceptable Iran Deal," May 8, 2018, https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/president-donald-j-trump-ending-united-states-participation-unacceptable-iran-deal/.

including Iran's nuclear program and climate change, were met with disappointment and condemnation by U.S. allies and partners.

All the other participants in the JCPOA opposed the U.S. withdrawal.[133] Former U.K. Conservative Party leader William Hague urged Trump not to withdraw from the Iran nuclear deal, saying it would "broadcast a message that Washington does not honor its word."[134] A U.K. Labour spokesperson called the JCPOA withdrawal a "reckless, senseless and immoral act of diplomatic sabotage."[135] The European Union issued a statement that said, "As we have always said, the nuclear deal is not a bilateral agreement and it is not in the hands of any single country to terminate it unilaterally."[136]

Despite the U.S. withdrawal, European leaders sought to maintain the deal, but their efforts have been continuously undermined by Trump administration rhetoric and actions.[137] While the sanctions that President Trump has imposed since withdrawal have taken a severe economic toll on Iran, there is no indication that they are part of a serious or viable diplomatic strategy that could once again lead to a peaceful resolution of the Iranian nuclear problem. In addition, as a result of the United States walking away from the JCPOA, other international actors such as Russia and China gained increased influence over the future of multilateral efforts toward Iran.[138]

Leaving the deal unilaterally itself was unwise in its own right, but leaving it without any kind of serious multilateral diplomatic strategy in place left both the United States isolated and Iran emboldened. European parties to the agreement, such as France, repeatedly expressed interest in a broader framework to address Iran's ballistic missiles, malign regional activities, and the sunsets in the JCPOA.[139] The Administration, however, completely wasted this opportunity to build a coalition, deliberately undermining other countries' collective efforts to constrain Iran's destructive ambitions.

Since the U.S. withdrawal, Iran has moved closer to developing a nuclear weapon: in July 2019, the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) announced that Iran had increased its stockpile of low-

[133] The other parties to the JCPOA were China, Russia, the United Kingdom, France, and Germany.
[134] "Ripping up Iran nuclear deal would be a great error, says William Hague," *Express*, May 8, 2018.
[135] "Iran nuclear deal: UK won't walk away, says Boris Johnson," *BBC*, May 9, 2018.
[136] European External Action Service, European Union, "Iran deal: EU remains committed to the continued implementation of the nuclear deal, Mogherini says," May 8, 2018.
[137] *See, e.g.*, Loveday Morris, "E.U. leaders rally behind tattered Iran deal, ignoring Trump's call to ditch it," *The Washington Post*, Jan. 10, 2020; Samantha Pitz and Ryan Fedasiuk, "International Support for the Iran Nuclear Deal, *Arms Control Association*, May 9, 2018, https://www.armscontrol.org/blog/2018-05-09/international-support-iran-nuclear-deal.
[138] *See* Emily Tamkin, "Why Russia is the big winner of the Iran deal fallout," *The Washington Post*, May 8, 2019; Farnaz Fassihi and Steven Lee Myers, "Defying U.S., China and Iran Near Trade and Military Partnership" *The New York Times,* May 11, 2020.
[139] *See, e.g.,* "French President Emmanuel Macron for broader Iran deal," *Deutsche Welle*, May 9, 2018.

enriched uranium.[140] One week later, Iran announced it was increasing uranium enrichment capacity.[141] In November 2019, Iran announced it was working on a new centrifuge.[142]

Additional evidence of the profound failure of the Trump administration's approach was demonstrated by a series of votes and actions at the UN in August 2020. First, the United States sought to extend the UN arms embargo against Iran, which was set to expire in October 2020.[143] European states agreed on the desirability of extending the embargo but hoped to find a compromise with China and Russia, who could veto a resolution if they did not agree with it. The Trump administration ignored these concerns and barreled ahead with a vote to indefinitely extend the arms embargo.[144] The result was a stunning defeat. Among the 15 countries on the UN Security Council, including close U.S. allies, whose historical cooperation had been integral in constraining Iran's nuclear program, the U.S. position received only one additional vote—from the Dominican Republic.[145] Britain, France, and Germany all voted against the United States.

Then, despite having already withdrawn from the JCPOA, the United States sought to end the nuclear deal entirely by insisting that the United States retained the power to "snapback" certain United Nations sanctions in response to Iranian noncompliance with the deal. Even before it was formally announced, this maneuver was rejected by 13 members of the UN Security Council, with Britain, Germany, and France writing in a joint letter that "[a]ny decisions and actions which would be taken based on this procedure or on its possible outcome would also be devoid of any legal effect."[146]

The vote and rebuff of months-long diplomatic efforts by the U.S. demonstrated, by some accounts, the "depth of U.S. isolation."[147] Following the vote, Secretary Pompeo accused the United States' European allies of "sid[ing] with the ayatollahs."[148] As one foreign diplomat said, "The Americans were actually being over the top in their ridiculousness."[149]

The end result of the Trump administration efforts was total defeat. All paths to extend the UN arms embargo against Iran, a bipartisan goal of Congress, appear blocked and the JCPOA remains in effect. The maneuver also deepened U.S. international isolation on Iran policy, and may have permanently

---

[140] *See* Ryan Pickrell, "Iran announces its second nuclear deal violation in a week as it threatens to enrich weapons-grade uranium," *Business Insider*, July 7, 2019.
[141] *See id*.
[142] *See* "Iran announces more violations of nuclear deal," *CNBC*, Nov. 4, 2019.
[143] Lara Jakes, "U.S. Heads to United Nations to Demand 'Snapback' of Sanctions Against Iran: Without European support, it is not clear how the United States alone would enforce U.N. sanctions to punish Iran for violating the 2015 nuclear deal that world powers are trying to save," *The New York Times*, Aug. 19, 2020; Michael R. Pompeo, Secretary of State, "Remarks to the UN Security Council on the Iran Arms Embargo," Washington, DC, June 30, 2020.
[144] Matthew Lee, "Pompeo: US to call UN vote on Iran arms embargo extension," *AP*, Aug. 5, 2020.
[145] Edith M. Lederer, "UN soundly defeats US demand to extend arms embargo on Iran," *AP*, Aug. 14, 2020.
[146] Michelle Nichols, "Thirteen of 15-member U.N. Security Council oppose U.S. push for Iran sanctions," *Reuters*, Aug. 21, 2020; Kelsey Davenport, "Nations Rebuff U.S. on Iran," *Arms Control Today*, Sept. 2020.
[147] Julian Borger, "Iran sanctions: nearly all UN security council unites against 'unpleasant' US," *The Guardian*, Aug. 21, 2020.
[148] Statement of Michael R. Pompeo, Secretary of State, Press Availability, Aug. 20, 2020.
[149] Julian Borger, "Iran sanctions: nearly all UN security council unites against 'unpleasant' US," *The Guardian*, Aug. 21, 2020.

damaged long-standing UN efforts to curtail Iran's nuclear program, and further cements allied skepticism and disdain for President Trump's unilateral use of sanctions.

Part of the Problem, Not the Solution

On June 1, 2017, President Trump announced his intention to withdraw the United States from the Paris Climate Agreement.[150] Two and half years later, on the earliest date legally possible, the U.S., the second-largest emitter of greenhouse gases in the world, initiated the year-long process of withdrawing from the Paris Agreement.[151] In doing so, it rescinded the commitment made along with every other country to reduce emissions to mitigate the increase in global temperatures, and ceded control of the issue to China and other countries.[152]

Allies and foreign leaders sought, unsuccessfully, to keep the U.S. in the agreement.[153] Swedish Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Environment and Climate Isabella Lövin called it a "very negative signal for global cooperation."[154] Former Czech Prime Minister Bohuslav Sobotka tweeted, "It is a shame that the US is isolating itself in a matter so important to the whole planet."[155] French President Emmanuel Macron called the move "an actual mistake" and called on the French people to "Make our planet great again."[156] Former French Prime Minister Édouard Philippe said "Trump has made a calamitous decision. It's calamitous for the planet...by choosing to withdraw from this landmark climate agreement, Mr. Trump is telling the world that he intends to fix problems alone."[157]

"Trump has made a calamitous decision. It's calamitous for the planet...by choosing to withdraw from this landmark climate agreement, Mr. Trump is telling the world that he intends to fix problems alone."

– Former French Prime Minister Édouard Philippe

[150] President Donald Trump, "Statement by President Trump on the Paris Climate Accord," June 1, 2017.
[151] Michael R. Pompeo, Secretary of State, "On the U.S. Withdrawal from the Paris Agreement," U.S. Department of State, Nov. 4, 2019.
[152] Christina Nunez, "China Poised for Leadership on Climate Change After U.S. Reversal," *National Geographic*, Mar. 28, 2017.
[153] *See, e.g.*, Anne-Sylvaine Chassany et al., "EU leaders seek to charm Trump over climate deal," *Financial Times*, May 25, 2017; *see also* Yoichi Funabashi, "In America's absence, Japan takes the lead on Asian free trade," Opinion, *The Washington Post*, Feb. 22, 2018.
[154] "Trump's climate agreement withdrawal 'deeply regrettable': Swedish Deputy PM," *The Local SE*, June 2, 2017, https://www.thelocal.se/20170602/trumps-climate-agreement-withdrawal-deeply-regrettable-swedish-deputy-pm.
[155] Dominik Jůn, "Pm Sobotka Joins Global Chorus Of Condemnation Against Trump Climate Agreement Withdrawal," *Czech Radio*, June 2, 2017, https://www.radio.cz/en/section/curraffrs/pm-sobotka-joins-global-chorus-of-condemnation-against-trump-climate-agreement-withdrawal
[156] Carla Herreria, "French President To U.S. Scientists: Come Work With Us On Climate Change," *Huffington Post,* June 1, 2017.
[157] Romina Mcguinness, "French PM blasts Trump's decision to pull US out of Paris climate accord as 'calamitous,'" *Express*, June 2, 2017.

The U.S. absence, however, has not diminished the resolve of other countries to press forward. President Trump's announced plan to pursue a "better deal," meanwhile, was not achieved and there is no evidence that any effort went into realizing this pledge. Moreover, world leaders made it clear that another deal was both unrealistic and unfounded. At a June 2018 meeting co-hosted by Canada, China, and the EU, more than 30 countries agreed that "the Paris Agreement is irreversible and is not to be renegotiated," providing another marker of the United States' isolation on the issue.[158]

The Administration's abandonment of international efforts to combat climate change leaves Americans even more vulnerable to the devastating effects of climate change.[159] As an unprecedented number of fires rage on the West Coast in 2020, and insurance companies are beginning to balk at insuring those in coastal flooding zones vulnerable to rising sea levels, President Trump offers little in the way of solutions and fails to acknowledge any sense of responsibility to help.

In conversations with Committee staff, foreign officials acknowledged that these withdrawals, particularly the withdrawal from the JCPOA, will make countries think twice before reaching future agreements with the U.S. As Richard Haass, President of the Council on Foreign Relations, wrote in 2020, "For friends and allies, the possibility of withdrawal can leave them to question their decision to place their security in American hands."[160]

Our Closest Allies: Alienated and Abused

President Trump has eschewed traditional U.S. foreign policy relationships, which emphasized enhancing and preserving the longstanding ties between allied countries, rooted in shared values, security, and aspirations. Instead, his transactional approach seeks to elicit something from the other side, regardless of the long-term consequences, and uses insults and bullying tactics along the way. As a former U.S. Ambassador to Canada put it, Trump's method rests on two key questions: "What can I get from the other country? And, what are their pain points to make them give it to me?"[161]

> **"What can I get from the other country? And, what are their pain points to make them give it to me?"**
>
> **– Former U.S. Ambassador, on Trump's approach**

Supporters have argued that Trump's transactional approach enables the President to strike deals for the United States that provide concrete results for the American people.[162] But, characterized by short-

[158] European Commission, "Ministerial on Climate Action: Chairs' Summary" Brussels, Belgium, June 21, 2018, *available at* https://ec.europa.eu/clima/sites/clima/files/news/20180621_moca_en.pdf.
[159] In September 2020, the Commodity Futures Trading Commission, led by Trump appointees, released a report which found that climate change threatens U.S. financial markets due to the impact of wildfires, storms, droughts, and floods on insurance and mortgage markets. Commodity Futures Trading Commission, Market Risk Advisory Committee, *Managing Climate Risk in the U.S. Financial System: Report of the Climate-Related Market Risk Subcommittee*, Sept. 2020.
[160] Richard Haass, "Trump's foreign policy doctrine? The Withdrawal Doctrine," Opinion, *The Washington Post*, May 27, 2020.
[161] Interview of Former U.S. Ambassador, May 2019.
[162] *See, e.g.*, Leon Hadar, "The Limits of Trump's Transactional Foreign Policy," *The National Interest*, Jan. 2, 2017.

sightedness, Trump is content to rip up agreements that protect global and U.S. interests alike, even if it means fraying the foundational fabric of U.S.-multilateral alliances. He has made steep tariff threats, weaponized economic tools, and blindsided foreign governments with announcements of unilateral U.S. policy changes—toward countries long considered close allies and partners.[163]

"We are sticking out our foot to trip our allies."

– Former Senior U.S. official

As a former senior official who served in the Trump administration put it to Committee staff, "We are sticking out our foot to trip our allies."[164] Another former senior official observed that the Trump administration takes a punishment-based approach, saying, "Everything in this administration is about sticks, with no carrots."[165]

Canadians, Germans, and others have expressed disbelief that the United States is using tools on them usually reserved for rogue regimes, not allies. As one foreign official told Committee staff, "You can't deal with us as though we are North Korea."[166]

Canada: A National Security Threat?

President Trump's preferred method of using tariffs as a stick has had the unusual consequence of declaring close U.S. allies, such as Canada, to be deemed a national security threat. In March 2018, he did just that, invoking national security authorities to impose steel and aluminum tariffs against the United States' northern neighbor, close security partner, and principal trade partner.[167]

Canadian officials were outraged by Trump's action. Canada's then-Foreign Minister Chrystia Freeland called it "absurd."[168] Prime Minister Justin Trudeau called it "inconceivable" that Canada could be a national security threat, and emphasized, "This decision by the U.S. administration will hurt Canadians. It will hurt Americans. And we regret that deeply."[169]

---

[163] *See, e.g.*, Thomas Wright, "Trump's Foreign Policy is No Longer Unpredictable," *Foreign Affairs,* Jan. 18, 2019.
[164] Interview of Former Acting Assistant Secretary of State, July 2019.
[165] Interview of Former U.S. Ambassador, June 2019.
[166] Interview of Foreign Official, Mar. 2019.
[167] Ana Swanson, "Trump to Impose Sweeping Steel and Aluminum Tariffs," *The New York Times*, Mar. 1, 2018. Congress created the Section 232 process in the Trade Act of 1962 to ensure that U.S. imports do not cause undue harm to U.S. national security. Congressional Research Service, *Section 232 Investigations: Overview and Issues for Congress*, Apr. 7, 2020. 1986 was the last time a president imposed trade restrictions under Section 232. Congressional Research Service, *Section 232 of the Trade Expansion Act of 1962*, June 3, 2020. The U.S. and Canada have long-standing mutual security commitments and maintain close intelligence and law enforcement ties and have engaged in a variety of initiatives to strengthen border security and cybersecurity in recent years. *See* Congressional Research Service, *Canada-U.S. Relations*, June 14, 2018.
[168] Brian Mann, "Canada Responds To Tariffs," *NPR*, June 2, 2018.
[169] Justin Trudeau, Prime Minister of Canada, "Justin Trudeau's speech in response to Donald Trump's tariff announcement," May 31, 2018; Brian Mann, "Canada Responds To Tariffs," *NPR*, June 2, 2018.

When Prime Minister Justin Trudeau asked President Trump how Canada could be a national security threat to the United States, President Trump invoked the War of 1812.[170] (Trump said to Trudeau, "Didn't you guys burn down the White House?").[171]

In retaliation, Canada filed an appeal with the WTO and imposed tariffs on more than $16 billion worth of American products.[172] The dispute threw the G7 Summit in 2018 into "disarray."[173] Following the summit, Trudeau made clear that Canada would protect its interests, prompting one of President Trump's top trade advisers to accuse Trudeau of trying "to stab [President Trump] in the back on the way out the door," and remarked there was a "special place in hell" for leaders like Trudeau—a comment for which he subsequently apologized.[174]

Although the United States ultimately removed tariffs on steel and aluminum imports from Mexico and Canada during the final phase of United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement (USMCA) negotiations, the damage had already been done to U.S.-Canada relations.[175] Polling of the Canadian public confirms what SFRC Democratic staff heard from current and former diplomats and officials. Seventy percent of Canadians reported an unfavorable view of the United States in 2020, a record high from when the Pew Research Center started tracking such responses in 2000.[176] Canadian confidence in the U.S. president to do the right thing regarding world affairs was down to 20% in 2020, compared to 83% in 2016.[177] When Canadians were asked by Pew to describe the United States in one word, after common words like "Trump" and "President," the next most used words were "chaos," "confused," "bully," and "disappointing."[178] As a former U.S. Ambassador to Canada told Committee staff, "Trump is causing existential damage to the U.S.-Canada relationship."[179]

---

[170] Jordan Weissman, "When Justin Trudeau Asked How Canada Could Be a National Security Threat to the U.S., Trump Brought Up the War of 1812," *Slate,* June 6, 2018.
[171] *Id*. This did happen in the War of 1812, but it was the British who torched Washington.
[172] The tariffed products included soup, beer, toilet paper, whiskey, ketchup, lawn mowers, yogurt, and dishwasher detergent. "Canada hits US with retaliatory tariffs: 'We will not back down': Country announced taxes on items including ketchup, lawnmowers, whiskey and yoghurt amounting to $12.6bn," *The Guardian*, June 29, 2018. *See also* Brian Mann, "Canada Responds To Tariffs," *NPR*, June 2, 2018.
[173] "G7 summit ends in disarray as Trump abandons joint statement," *BBC*, June 10, 2018.
[174] Comments of Peter Navarro, *Fox News Sunday*, June 10, 2018; Alan Rappaport, "Navarro Apologizes for 'Special Place in Hell' Comments About Trudeau," *The New York Times*, June 12, 2018.
[175] Congressional Research Service, *Section 232 Investigations: Overview and Issues for Congress*, Apr. 7, 2020.
[176] Richard Wike et al., "U.S Image Plummets Internationally as Most Say U.S. Has Handled Coronavirus Badly," *Pew Research Center*, Sept. 15, 2020; Shannon Schumacher & J.J. Moncus, "The U.S. in One Word: Canadians Say 'Trump,' Mexicans Point to 'Money' and 'Work,'" *Pew Research Center*, Apr. 6, 2020.
[177] Richard Wike et al., "U.S Image Plummets Internationally as Most Say U.S. Has Handled Coronavirus Badly," *Pew Research Center*, Sept. 15, 2020; Richard Wike et al., "Trump Ratings Remain Low Around Globe, While Views of U.S. Stay Mostly Favorable: Little trust in Trump's handling of international affairs," *Pew Research Center*, Jan. 8, 2020.
[178] Shannon Schumacher & J.J. Moncus, "The U.S. in One Word: Canadians Say 'Trump,' Mexicans Point to 'Money' and 'Work,'" *Pew Research Center*, Apr. 6, 2020.
[179] Interview of Former U.S. Ambassador, May 2019.

Weaponizing Tariffs for Non-Trade Issues with Mexico

President Trump has also sought to use the threat of tariffs against another strategic economic partner, Mexico, currently the United States' largest trading partner, with trading between the countries amounting to more than $600 billion.[180] Relations between the United States and Mexico have grown closer over the past three decades, making significant progress from the time when the two countries were called "distant neighbors."[181] In the wake of 9/11, Mexican and U.S. security services built a strong mutually beneficial relationship, including the sharing of sensitive counterterrorism information.[182] U.S.-Mexican relations before President Trump entered office were in what one expert deemed the "best shape they have ever been in," with intensive economic, social, and security connections and cooperation between the two governments and societies.[183]

The U.S.-Mexico relationship has benefited from a barrier between the normal commercial disputes that occurred between the economically intertwined countries, and other, non-trade issues, such as migration and security. Before Trump, it was understood that it would be damaging if commercial and trade disputes were allowed to contaminate other parts of the relationship. Trump, on the other hand, has directly mixed migration and trade policy together, which has hurt all aspects of U.S-Mexican relations.[184]

In May 2019, Trump surprised Mexico and members of his own Cabinet by announcing via Twitter a tariff on goods imported from Mexico that would increase steadily unless Mexico stopped the flow of migrants into the United States.[185] Trump then extended his demands against Mexico beyond immigration, insisting Mexico stop an "invasion" of drug dealers and cartels.[186] In response to

---

[180] Ken Roberts, "It's Official: Mexico Is No. 1 U.S. Trade Partner For First Time, Despite Overall U.S. Trade Decline," *Forbes*, Feb. 5, 2020; U.S. Census Bureau, "Top Trading Partners – December 2019," Foreign Trade, 2019, https://www.census.gov/foreign-trade/statistics/highlights/top/top1912yr.html.

[181] Franklin Foer, "Mexico's Revenge," *The Atlantic*, May 2017; Andrew Martinez, "Distant Neighbors: The massive misunderstandings that plague the relationship between the United States and Mexico," *Slate*, Apr. 14, 2009

[182] Franklin Foer, "Mexico's Revenge," *The Atlantic*, May 2017.

[183] Dan Restrepo et al., "Preserving and Strengthening the U.S.-Mexico Relationship," *Center for American Progress*, Jan. 30, 2017.

[184] Interview of Former U.S. Ambassador, June 2019. Seven former U.S. ambassadors to Mexico who served Democratic and Republican administrations wrote a letter expressing concern about the Trump administration's approach. Open letter from former U.S. ambassadors to Mexico (John Negroponte, James Jones, Jeffrey Davidow, Antonio Garza, Carlos Pascual, Earl Anthony Wayne and Roberta Jacobson), June 5, 2019; Frederick Kempe, "Trump is playing a risky game by weaponizing US economic power with tariffs," *CNBC*, June 8, 2019.

[185] @realDonaldTrump, "On June 10th, the United States will impose a 5% Tariff on all goods coming into our Country from Mexico, until such time as illegal migrants coming through Mexico, and into our Country, STOP. The Tariff will gradually increase until the Illegal Immigration problem is remedied,...at which time the Tariffs will be removed. Details from the White House to follow." May 30, 2019, https://twitter.com/realDonaldTrump/status/1134240653926232064. *See also* Tracy Wilkinson, "Mexico begins trying to talk its way out of Trump's latest tariff threat," *Los Angeles Times*, June 3, 2019, https://www.latimes.com/nation/la-na-pol-us-mexico-tariffs-lobbying-trade-20190603-story.html.

[186] President Donald J. Trump, Statement from the President Regarding Emergency Measures to Address the Border Crisis, The White House, May 30, 2019, https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/statement-president-regarding-emergency-measures-address-border-crisis/.

President Trump's tweet, Mexican president Andrés Manuel López Obrador wrote him a letter, urging him to engage in diplomatic dialogue.[187] Obrador said that he did not want confrontation and that Mexico was doing as much as possible to stem the flow of migrants "without violating human rights."[188] He wrote that people do not leave their homes unless it is truly necessary, and posed a poetic plea to President Trump to consider those who seek, through effort and work, to live free from misery: "The Statue of Liberty is not an empty symbol."[189]

President Trump's threat subsided a month later when the two countries announced an agreement on migration, but it did not erase the sting.[190] Under pressure from the Trump administration to stop the flow of migrants from Central America to the U.S. southern border, Mexico's protection of vulnerable migrants has suffered. Mexico's National Guard used brutal force to turn back a migrant caravan at its southern border, and Mexican immigration authorities and police have failed to protect asylum seekers from violent crime in Mexico's northern border region since tens of thousands have been pushed back by U.S. policies.[191]

Well before President Trump's tariff threats, the U.S.-Mexico relationship had already suffered severe consequences. The President's insistence that Mexico pay for a border wall, inflammatory rhetoric on migration and insults against Mexicans, along with his repeated attempts to end Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) took a considerable toll.[192] Security cooperation between the two countries dropped following President Trump's inauguration, and priority U.S. extradition requests declined during Trump's first two years.[193] After a "testy" call in 2018 with then-President Enrique Peña Nieto in which Trump refused to drop his unsuccessful attempts to get Mexico to pay for the wall, Peña Nieto cancelled plans for his first visit to the White House.[194] As Arturo Sarukhan, a former Mexican ambassador to the United States said of Trump: "His relationship with Mexico isn't

---

[187] Letter from President of Mexico Andrés Manuel López Obrador to President Donald Trump, May 30, 2019, *available at* https://lopezobrador.org.mx/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/30-05-2019-Carta-al-presidente-Trump.pdf (English translation: https://embamex.sre.gob.mx/eua/index.php/en/recent/1543-letter-to-president-trump).

[188] Ana Swanson, "Trump's Tariff Threat Sends Mexico, Lawmakers and Businesses Scrambling," *The New York Times*, May 31, 2019.

[189] Letter from President of Mexico Andrés Manuel López Obrador to President Donald Trump, May 30, 2019.

[190] U.S.-Mexico Joint Declaration. U.S. Department of State, June 7, 2019.

[191] *See, e.g.*, Maureen Meyer & Gina Hinojosa, "Mexico's Human Rights Landscape During President López Obrador's First Year in Office," WOLA, https://www.wola.org/analysis/mexico-human-rights-lopez-obrador/.

[192] *See, e.g.*, Jesús Velasco, "The Future of U.S.-Mexico Relations: A Tale of Two Crises, *Center for the United States and Mexico Baker Institute for Public Policy*, Aug. 2018; Monica Verea, Anti-Immigrant and Anti-Mexican Attitudes and Policies during the First 18 Months of the Trump Administration, *Norteamérica, Revista Académica*, Vol. 2, Issue 3, 2018, https://doi.org/10.22201/cisan.24487228e.2018.2.335.
Fareed Zakaria, "Trump is destroying three decades of hard work with Mexico," Opinion, *The Washington Post*, June 6, 2019.

[193] CRS, *Mexico: Background and U.S. Relations*, May 12, 2020, at 18; Interview of Former U.S. Ambassador, June 2019.

[194] Philip Rucker et al., "After testy call with Trump over border wall, Mexican president shelves plan to visit White House," *The Washington Post*, Feb. 24, 2018.

strategically driven. It's not even business; it's personal, driven by motivations and triggers, and that's a huge problem. It could end up with the U.S. asking itself, 'Who lost Mexico?'"[195]

A former U.S. ambassador posited that the real question for Mexico in dealing with the United States is: What does good behavior get you?[196] The former ambassador noted that Mexico has more trepidation now because it does not know what the Trump administration will do.[197] Mexican public opinion reflects that reality. Mexican public confidence in the U.S. president has hovered in the single digits under Trump's presidency, down approximately 40 points from 2009-2017.[198] When the Mexican public was asked to describe the United States in one word, after words such as "money" and "work," the next most commonly mentioned words included "discrimination," "racism," and, simply, "bad."[199]

A Strained Relationship: Germany

Perhaps no other close U.S. relationship has experienced greater strain than the one between the United States and Germany. Chancellor Angela Merkel, who forged a close relationship with President Obama, has been the recipient of repeated scorn and attacks by President Trump.[200] While Merkel can clearly withstand a few petty insults, it is an open question whether the U.S.-German relationship will continue to suffer after Trump.

The Germans have maneuvered carefully to maintain strong commercial and defense ties, although President Trump's penchant for treating Germany as a distant foe rather than a close ally continues to put those ties to the test. He pulled U.S. forces from Syria with no warning to Germany, despite Germany's role as a NATO ally that has provided longstanding support for the U.S.-led coalition against ISIL.[201] He also imposed or threatened steep tariffs on European products, and, most recently, pursued a dramatic partial withdrawal of U.S. troops from a country that has been home to one of the largest U.S. military contingents since World War II. These unilateral moves have chipped away at the longstanding sense of trust and cooperation. As the U.S. later prepared to withdraw troops from Syria,

---

[195] *Id*.
[196] Interview of Former U.S. Ambassador, June 2019.
[197] *Id*.
[198] "Confidence in the U.S. President," Global Indicators Database, *Pew Research Center*, https://www.pewresearch.org/global/database/indicator/6/country/MX (updated Mar. 2020).
[199] Shannon Schumacher & J.J. Moncus, "The U.S. in One Word: Canadians Say 'Trump,' Mexicans Point to 'Money' and 'Work,'" *Pew Research Center*, Apr. 6, 2020, https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2020/04/06/the-u-s-in-one-word-canadians-say-trump-mexicans-point-to-money-and-work/.
[200] *See, e.g.*, Soraya Sardhaddi Nelson, "Obama Calls German Chancellor Angela Merkel 'His Closest Ally,'" *NPR*, Nov. 17, 2016. Carl Bernstein, "From pandering to Putin to abusing allies and ignoring his own advisers, Trump's phone calls alarm US officials," *CNN*, June 30, 2020; Jake Lahut, "Trump was 'near-sadistic' in phone calls with female world leaders, according to CNN report on classified calls," *Business Insider*, June 29, 2020.
[201] Alexandra Ma, "French President Macron dunked on Trump for pulling out of Syria without telling his NATO allies," *Business Insider*, Nov. 7, 2019.

U.S. Special Representative for Syria Engagement James Jeffrey asked Germany for ground troops to partially replace U.S. soldiers (which Germany declined to do).[202]

While even close allies have conflict and disagreement, what sets these moves apart is that the U.S. acted without consultation or prior warning—treating a close ally as it might any other country, or worse, an adversary. As Norbert Röttgen, the head of the foreign affairs committee in the German parliament, put it, the "troop withdrawal from northern Syria constitutes another abrupt and destabilizing foreign policy move by the United States."[203] Regarding the tariffs, Merkel said "the measures carry the threat of a spiral of escalation that will result in damaging everyone."[204] One German parliamentarian in the Social Democratic Party said of the U.S. troop withdrawal from Germany, "capriciousness and pressure" could not be "the basis for working together in partnership."[205]

Before President Trump, allies had come to expect consultation on key decisions, particularly those related to defense or sanctions policy. President Trump, on the other hand, has gone out of his way to ignore allies' concerns.

Navigating and Hedging Against a Less-Engaged United States

U.S. inconsistency under President Trump has led U.S. partners and allies to try to diversify risk and hedge against the United States. U.S. partners and allies continue to hope the United States will return to its previous role in world affairs, but they are preparing for a world without U.S. leadership, or where other global powers compete for the lead role. Many are making these short-term and long-term decisions knowing they run counter to U.S. desires, but they feel they have no choice but to attempt to protect themselves and pursue their own national interests independent of an erratic, unreliable, and often counterproductive United States under President Trump.[206]

As the U.S. has torn up agreements and issued threats, some countries have developed backup plans in case relations with the United States do not work out. As a former senior U.S. official put it, "Trump has demonstrated that everything is reversible, so other countries feel they need to find their own way."[207]

The United Kingdom's engagement in various degrees of hedging is remarkable given the "special relationship" between it and the United States. In July 2019, Britain declined to join a U.S. naval

[202] Ben Knight, "US calls for German ground troops in Syria," *Deutsche Welle*, July 7, 2019; "Syria: Germany rejects US demand for ground troops," Aug. 7, 2019.
[203] James McAuley & Rick Noack, "Withdrawal of U.S. troops from northern Syria angers, worries Europeans," *The Washington Post*, Oct. 7, 2019.
[204] Ana Swanson, "White House to Impose Metal Tariffs on E.U., Canada and Mexico," *The New York Times*, May 31, 2018.
[205] "German defense minister: Planned US troop withdrawal 'regrettable,'" *Military Times*, Aug. 2, 2020.
[206] Interview of Former U.S. Ambassador, June 2019.
[207] Interview of Former Assistant Secretary of State, May 2019.

coalition in the gulf following Iran's seizure of a British-flagged ship.[208] Instead, Britain said it sought to create a European-led group. Jeremy Hunt, U.K. Foreign Secretary at the time, told Parliament of the prospective European naval group: "It will not be part of the U.S. maximum pressure policy on Iran because we remain committed to preserving the Iran nuclear agreement."[209] Then-Foreign Secretary Hunt also called for Britain to "decisively increase" its defense spending to cope with future threats from all over the globe, including the danger of an "accidental" U.S.-Iran war.[210] The move would have been unthinkable a few years earlier, but demonstrated how much the ground had shifted due to the U.S. withdrawal on JCPOA.

Another form of allied hedging is increasing investments in a country's own defense, partly to show the U.S. they are committed to defense spending, but also because Trump might not be a passing phase. U.S. allies are increasingly worried about their security dependence on the U.S. and looking for ways to defend themselves if the United States further withdraws from the world. As Committee staff heard from foreign officials, some countries are working to ensure that they do not end up with systemic dependence, unable to defend themselves without U.S. assistance. As European allies in particular eye a second term Trump presidency warily, Europe could chart a more independent course, further diminishing U.S. influence.

Some countries are waiting, expectantly, for when and if the U.S. re-engages. For example, Committee staff heard from officials in the Asia-Pacific region they are holding the door open for U.S. re-engagement. Meanwhile, U.S. allies in Europe are trying to manage and preserve the trans-Atlantic alliance and multilateral organizations. A former senior official emphasized to Committee staff that the idea that the United States is an outside power, like Russia and China, is a real problem for U.S. allies.[211] Experts and officials in Europe have begun to imagine what was once unthinkable: in ten to twenty years, the transatlantic alliance might not be there, and there might also be nothing to replace it.[212]

Circumventing U.S. Unilateral Actions

The Trump administration's unilateral actions are also causing allies to take steps to insulate themselves and reduce their vulnerability to U.S. economic influence.[213] European countries were incensed by U.S. re-imposition of sanctions and addition of new sanctions on Iran following Trump's

[208] Greg Myre, "U.K. Says It Won't Join The U.S. In Maximum Pressure Campaign Against Iran," *NPR*, July 22, 2019.
[209] *Id*.
[210] Gordon Rayner & Con Coughlin, "Jeremy Hunt 'wants to double defence spending' as he calls on UK to project more hard power," *The Telegraph*, May 13, 2019.
[211] Interview of Former Acting Assistant Secretary of State, May 2019.
[212] Interviews of Foreign Think Tank Experts, Mar. 2019.
[213] Fareed Zakaria, "The dollar won't always be king of currency. Other countries want to topple it," *The Washington Post*, June 13, 2019.

May 2018 withdrawal from the JCPOA.[214] In response, they developed a special purpose vehicle, termed the Instrument in Support of Trade Exchanges (INSTEX), to allow certain transactions with Iran to move forward without any connection to the dollar or other nexus U.S. jurisdiction.[215]

Despite Trump administration opposition, nine European countries have joined INSTEX.[216] On March 31, 2020, INSTEX completed its first transaction, for over $500,000 worth of medical equipment.[217] INSTEX is a costly signal from Europe to the United States that it is prepared to pursue greater independence in its foreign policy.

Notably, since President Trump's withdrawal from the JCPOA, China has continued engagement with Iran's economy, despite the threat from re-imposed U.S. sanctions. China and Iran are reportedly negotiating a long-term strategic agreement that would provide for vast amounts of investments by China in Iran's economy.[218] In contrast, companies in other countries, including Japan and South Korea, have curtailed economic ties with Iran in order to avoid U.S. sanctions that could restrict their access to the U.S. market.[219]

During Trump's presidency, the European Union has also sought to boost the role of the Euro in international transactions and its use as a reserve currency to challenge the dominance of the dollar.[220] U.S. foreign policy has long been underpinned by the status of the U.S. dollar as the dominant global currency.[221] The success of U.S. sanctions depends on the U.S. dollar as the dominant currency for global trade.[222] As some observers have noted, it should serve as a warning sign for the United States that there are growing efforts to transform dissatisfaction with a dollar-dependent system into action.[223] U.S. economic and financial diplomacy depends in part on trust that the United States will

---

[214] Stephanie Zable, "INSTEX: A Blow to U.S. Sanctions?" *Lawfare*, Mar. 6, 2019, https://www.lawfareblog.com/instex-blow-us-sanctions.

[215] Congressional Research Service, *Iran Sanctions*, July 23, 2020. At a February 2019 conference convened by the United States to build greater international support for U.S. efforts to pressure Iran, Vice President Pence called the effort "an ill-advised step that will only strengthen Iran, weaken the EU, and create still more distance between Europe and the United States." James Shotter et al., "Mike Pence attacks European allies on 'ill-advised' Iran strategy," *Financial Times*, Feb. 14, 2019.

[216] "Six more countries join Trump-busting Iran barter group: Belgium, Denmark, Finland, Netherlands, Norway and Sweden sign up to Instex mechanism that sidesteps US sanctions," *Reuters*, Nov. 30, 2019.

[217] "Europe's trade system with Iran finally makes first deal," *AP*, Mar. 31, 2020; Laurence Norman, "EU Ramps up Trade System with Iran Despite U.S. Threats: Officials believe the export of medical equipment using the EU's trade mechanism will be the first of many," *The Wall Street Journal*, Mar. 31, 2020.

[218] Alam Saleh et al., "Iran's Pact with China Is Bad News for the West," *Foreign Policy*, Aug. 9, 2020.

[219] *See, e.g.*, Julian Ryall, "South Korea responds angrily to Iran threats over frozen assets," *Deutsche Welle*, July 23, 2020; Garrett Nada & Alex Yacoubian, "Iran and Japan Struggle Over Ties and Trade," *The Iran Primer*, U.S. Institute of Peace, updated Dec. 20, 2019, https://iranprimer.usip.org/blog/2019/dec/17/iran-and-japan-struggle-over-ties-and-trade.

[220] Francesco Guarascio, "EU pushes for broader global use of euro to challenge dollar," *Reuters*, Dec. 5, 2018.

[221] *See* Congressional Research Service, *The Dollar and the U.S. Trade Deficit*, Feb. 14, 2020.

[222] *See* Stephanie Zable, "INSTEX: A Blow to U.S. Sanctions?" *Lawfare*, Mar. 6, 2019, https://www.lawfareblog.com/instex-blow-us-sanctions; Ben Bernanke, "The dollar's international role: An "exorbitant privilege"?" *The Brookings Institution*, Jan. 7, 2016, https://www.brookings.edu/blog/ben-bernanke/2016/01/07/the-dollars-international-role-an-exorbitant-privilege-2/.

[223] *See* Stephanie Zable, "INSTEX: A Blow to U.S. Sanctions?" *Lawfare*, Mar. 6, 2019.

champion fair and cooperative rules, meaning that it is poised to be a casualty of President Donald Trump's "America First" approach.[224]

Re-enforcing Fears about U.S. Unpredictability

Trump's actions have also caused many allies to question the long term reliability of the United States as an international partner. After the unilateral actions of the George W. Bush administration, many international actors feared the United States was unbound by the law and rules of the international system, despite the outsized U.S. role in developing these norms. These concerns have multiplied under President Trump, leaving many wondering if they can ever trust the United States again. As one foreign policy expert abroad told Committee staff, President Trump is an illustration of the instability and partisanship of the U.S. political system.[225] By this line of thinking, the United States went from Bush to Obama to Trump—what's next?

Flip-flops from one administration to the next are not new. U.S. allies clearly remember that President George W. Bush withdrew the United States from the Kyoto Protocol to curb greenhouse gas emissions and the Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) Treaty with Russia.[226] Since President Reagan, every change in party in the White House reverses or re-implements the harmful Global Gag Rule (also known as the Mexico City policy), which restricts access and funding for abortion services.[227] While foreign officials acknowledged that they have become accustomed to some shift in positions when there are changes in the U.S. presidency, many noted that the unreliability under Trump has been remarkable. Allies have been able to count on the U.S. to consult or notify them before making significant changes. Now, however, they never know when the President will suddenly change his mind or reverse a prior approach, and, like members of his administration and the public, they learn of groundbreaking developments via President Trump's tweets.

As a former senior State Department official told Committee staff, other countries are right to have newfound concerns with U.S. unpredictability.[228] The damage caused by a withdrawal from a singular body or agreement goes beyond the immediate implications for that set of issues: withdrawing from international agreements has broader implications.[229] And other countries watching the U.S. swing

---

[224] Christopher Smart, "The Future of the Dollar—and Its Role in Financial Diplomacy," *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, Dec. 16, 2018, https://carnegieendowment.org/2018/12/16/future-of-dollar-and-its-role-in-financial-diplomacy-pub-77986.

[225] Interview of Foreign Think Tank Expert, Mar. 2019.

[226] Interview of Former Acting Assistant Secretary of State, May 2019; Stefan Kornelius et al., "Merkel: Europe must unite to stand up to China, Russia and US: German chancellor also shares views on Brexit and climate crisis in interview," *The Guardian,* May 15, 2019; Julian Borger, "Bush kills global warming treaty," *The Guardian*, Mar. 29, 2001.

[227] President Trump reinstated and expanded the Mexico City policy on January 23, 2017, just days after taking office Kaiser Family Foundation, "The Mexico City Policy: An Explainer," Jan. 28, 2019, https://www.kff.org/global-health-policy/fact-sheet/mexico-city-policy-explainer/; Planned Parenthood Global, *Assessing the Global Gag Rule: Harms to Health, Communities, and Advocacy,* Jan. 23, 2019.

[228] Interview of Former Deputy Assistant Secretary of State, July 2019.

[229] *Id*.

from one position to the next are taking note. As the same U.S. official noted, "there's no telling what's on the back end."[230]

Navigating U.S. Disarray

President Trump's erratic policies have also forced countries to adopt creative workarounds to manage the unpredictability and maintain good relations with a volatile president who eschews traditional forms of communication and channels. Foreign governments seeking to navigate U.S. policy have adopted a number of strategies, ranging from flattering the President to working through his immediate family. These strategies also highlight the breakdown of traditional U.S. diplomatic interactions and the sidelining of professional diplomats who normally manage U.S. foreign relations.

As a former senior official who served in the Trump administration told Committee staff, foreign counterparts have frequently used nontraditional channels of diplomacy, bypassing the normal channels, because there are only a couple people in the Trump administration who actually know what is going on.[231] Foreign officials confided in U.S. officials in the Trump administration that they were trying in vain to find a whisperer or policy advisor who was a clear conduit to the President.[232] It often proved futile, as officials came and went, and fell in and out of favor with him.

A common strategy is cultivating relationships with Trump family members like Jared Kushner, the President's son-in-law and senior advisor. The Mexican government reportedly pursued a strategy of ignoring President Trump's tweets and relying instead on information from Kushner.[233] The Mexican government even awarded Kushner one of the country's highest honors, the Order of the Aztec Eagle, for his "significant contributions in achieving the renegotiation of the new agreement between Mexico, the United States and Canada."[234]

As one former senior U.S. official told Committee staff, "Jared is conducting amateur foreign policy and he moonlights extensively, without any expertise, and the results have severely damaged our national interests."[235] It was reported that officials in at least four countries—United Arab Emirates, China, Israel, and Mexico—had privately discussed ways they could manipulate Jared Kushner by

[230] *Id*.
[231] Interview of Former Senior U.S. Official, July 2019.
[232] Interview of Former Assistant Secretary of State, May 2019.
[233] Erin Banco & Asawin Suebsaeng, "Mexican Officials Have a Trick for Navigating Trump: Ignore the Tweets and Go to Jared: As the president threatened to inflict economically painful tariffs, his son-in-law made more diplomatic overtures," *The Daily Beast*, June 12, 2019.
[234] Erin Banco & Asawin Suebsaeng, "Mexican Officials Have a Trick for Navigating Trump: Ignore the Tweets and Go to Jared: As the president threatened to inflict economically painful tariffs, his son-in-law made more diplomatic overtures," *The Daily Beast*, June 12, 2019.
[235] Interview of Former Senior U.S. Official, July 2019.

taking advantage of his complex business arrangements, financial difficulties, and lack of foreign policy experience.[236]

Another strategy is avoiding engagements with President Trump, working instead with lower-ranking officials. As a *Politico* piece summarizing interviews with foreign diplomats noted, a White House visit had gone from "the ultimate prize" to "something to be avoided."[237] Some cited the visit by the Finnish President Sauli Niinistö, which became an awkward joint press conference when Trump turned it into "a rally-style tirade against the Ukraine scandal whistleblower and the media."[238] According to one State Department official, when foreign embassies and leaders meet with President Trump, "every single one walks out disappointed."[239]

Conclusion

Today, the United States is more isolated and less trusted by other global actors. Trump has demonstrated to the world that everything that the United States does is reversible and, therefore, countries may need to find their own way. Withdrawing from existing international arrangements also undermines our allies' sense of stability and increases unpredictability in the global environment.

The President's version of diplomacy—part bullying, part shaming, part stick—contains little incentive for cooperation. Countries that have invested time and energy in partnerships have been as equally burned as those who have thumbed their nose at our demands. U.S. diplomats and foreign officials have remarked that the United States has made it "harder to be friends." Countries have seen that the United States may not be a trusted partner, and even close allies can be relegated to treatment more closely resembling that of an adversary, regardless of shared security, borders, or values. As a former Assistant Secretary of State who served in the Trump administration put it, "the moorings have been detached."[240]

Trump's maxim when it comes to important international agreements has amounted to "repeal, and don't replace." While some have tried to hold a place for the United States to return, it is clear that it will need to reengage with besieged multilateral institutions, reestablish trust with our abused allies, and assert a consistent global approach if the world is to once again view the United States as a serious and responsible power.

---

[236] Shane Harris et al., "Kushner's overseas contacts raise concerns as foreign officials seek leverage," *The Washington Post*, Feb. 27, 2018.
[237] Ryan Heath, "Foreign diplomats brace for 4 more years of Trump: US president's reelection would be a geopolitical earthquake," *Politico*, Jan. 3, 2020.
[238] *Id*.
[239] *Id*.
[240] Interview of Former Assistant Secretary of State, May 2019.

Some Americans may be content to see a President play tough with foreign leaders. But the full costs of alienating close allies remain to be seen. Will close partners, such as those who came to the U.S. defense in the wake of 9/11, be as eager and committed to come to our defense again? Will other countries take the political risk of engaging and negotiating with the United States after it has abandoned so many international agreements?[241]

U.S. foreign policy moving forward will need to recognize that other international actors will be skeptical of the staying power of the United States and it will take time to rebuild U.S. alliances and partnerships.

[241] *See* Joshua Keating, "Why Would Any Country Trust America Again? Thanks to Trump, any agreement made with a U.S. president is likely to be broken by the next one," *Slate*, May 24, 2019.

Chapter 3

Empowering Adversaries and Autocrats

President Trump has empowered U.S. adversaries by isolating the United States from its allies, disengaging from multinational organizations, and ignoring or downplaying human rights abuses. Autocrats around the world have seized the opportunity to consolidate their power through repressive means. Under President Trump, it has become clear that the United States will not push back when authoritarian leaders expel an academic institution, carry out a judicial power grab, or assassinate a U.S.-based journalist.

Despite leading the most powerful and influential democracy in the world, President Trump has undermined efforts to promote democracy and defend human rights, at home and abroad.[242] He appears to dislike the give-and-take of the democratic process and instead admires displays of strength that demonstrate power and crush dissent. He has been hostile to and critical of democratic leaders such as German Chancellor Angela Merkel and Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, and appears more willing to say positive things about authoritarian leaders like Vladimir Putin, Xi Jinping, and Kim Jong-un.[243] Trump has rewarded leaders such as Erdoğan and Orbán with military support, Oval Office meetings, and lavish praise, despite their increasingly anti-democratic policies.[244]

The Trump administration has accelerated the decline in global freedom in three ways. First, his domestic attacks on U.S. democratic institutions and constitutional principles have provided a roadmap and given cover to autocrats' efforts to roll back civil liberties and domestic checks on their power. As President Trump deployed military force against peaceful anti-racism protesters in front of the White House, our allies and proponents of democracy responded in horror, while governments with poor human rights records celebrated.[245]

---

[242] *See, e.g.*, John Bellinger & Richard Fontaine, "To Strengthen Trump's National Security Approach, Promote Human Rights," *Lawfare*, Jan. 10, 2018, https://www.lawfareblog.com/strengthen-trumps-national-security-approach-promote-human-rights; Thomas Carothers & Frances Z. Brown, "Can U.S. Democracy Policy Survive Trump?" *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, Oct. 1, 2018.

[243] *See, e.g.*, Philip Rucker, "'Dictator envy': Trump's praise of Kim Jong Un widens his embrace of totalitarian leaders," *The Washington Post*, June 15, 2018; Nahal Toosi, "It's 'Dictator Day' at the U.N. — with Trump in the middle: From Bolsonaro to Sisi to Erdogan, the early speaking lineup at the U.N. General Assembly is replete with autocratic leaders," *Politico*, Sept. 24, 2019; Domenico Montanaro, "6 Strongmen Trump Has Praised — And The Conflicts It Presents," *NPR*, May 2, 2017.

[244] Deirdre Shesgreen et al., "'A big fan': Trump welcomes Turkey's Erdogan despite bipartisan concern over Syria attack," *USA Today*, Nov. 13, 2019; Aime Williams & Valerie Hopkins, "Trump praises Hungary's Orban in White House visit," *Financial Times*, May 13, 2019.

[245] Uki Goñi et al., "'Trump is tearing apart America': how the world sees the US protests: The racial tensions in the US have emboldened both President Trump's allies and his enemies," *The Guardian*, June 7, 2020 ("I think Americans are not aware, or don't have the experience, to realise what it means for the military to be out on the streets in charge of domestic security," said a survivor of an Argentine death camp); Ciara Nugent & Billy Perrigo, "'The Edge of an Abyss.' How the World's Newspapers Are Responding as the U.S. Descends Into Chaos," *Time*, June 2, 2020; Oliver Holmes & Daniel Boffey, "'Abuse of power': global outrage grows after death of George Floyd: Protests spread to Sydney and Paris, as diplomats question use of force in US," *The Guardian*, June 2, 2020.

Second, President Trump has embraced autocratic rulers and belittled democratic leaders. This has legitimized the rule of some of the world's most brutal dictators and undermined efforts by U.S. allies to counter autocratic tendencies.

Third, President Trump has diminished the role that supporting democracy and defending human rights plays in U.S. foreign policy.[246] President Trump has replaced a foreign policy that champions U.S. values with one focused primarily on short-term self-interest. This desire for "quick wins" has come at a cost.

Four years of President Trump's foreign policy have weakened the United States' ability to push back against Chinese and Russian efforts to gain influence on the world stage. The Trump administration's disdain for multilateral organizations has accelerated China's efforts to gain leadership in key international institutions, moving them in a direction more favorable to Chinese interests. China has worked hard to present itself as championing "multilateralism, the United Nations, the World Health Organization, free trade and international cooperation," while undermining these organizations from within.[247]

A Roadmap for Repression

As discussed in Chapter 1, the domestic policies of the Trump administration have damaged the international credibility and standing of the United States. The illiberal policies of the Trump administration have had another profound effect: they have provided an example to autocratic states for their own repressive policies. Two important illustrations include how Trump's attacks on freedom of the press and the rule of law have been emulated by autocratic governments.

Breaking Democratic Norms: the "Fake News" Refrain

One of President Trump's frequent refrains is that the media broadcasts and publishes "fake news."[248] This goes hand-in-hand with Trump's repeated attacks on the media and individual reporters who cover him.[249] As a January 2019 analysis by the Committee to Protect Journalists showed, from the

---

[246] *See, e.g.,* John Bellinger & Richard Fontaine, "To Strengthen Trump's National Security Approach, Promote Human Rights," *Lawfare*, Jan. 10, 2018, https://www.lawfareblog.com/strengthen-trumps-national-security-approach-promote-human-rights; Thomas Carothers & Frances Z. Brown, "Can U.S. Democracy Policy Survive Trump?" *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, Oct. 1, 2018.

[247] Wang Yi, State Councilor and Foreign Minister, People's Republic of China, Speech, Special Video Conference of China and Latin American and Caribbean Countries' Foreign Ministers on COVID-19, July 23, 2020.

[248] *See, e.g.,* Committee to Protect Journalists, *The Trump Administration and the Media*, Apr. 16, 2020, https://cpj.org/reports/2020/04/trump-media-attacks-credibility-leaks/.

[249] Four hundred of Trump's tweets referred to more than 100 individual journalists at 30 news organizations. Committee to Protect Journalists, *The Trump Administration and the Media*, Apr. 16, 2020, https://cpj.org/reports/2020/04/trump-media-attacks-credibility-leaks/. In 2016, CBS reporter Lesley Stahl, who conducted Trump's first interview as president-elect, said Trump admitted to her, shortly before the 2016 election, that Trump's goal in attacking the press is to reduce their credibility: "He said, 'You know why I do it? I do it to discredit you all and demean you all, so when you write negative stories about me, no one will believe you.'" Jon Levine, "Lesley Stahl: Trump Said He Wants to 'Discredit' the Media 'So No One Will Believe'

summer of 2015 when Trump announced his candidacy for president until the end of 2018, Trump sent more than 1,300 tweets that were "critical, insinuating, condemning, or threatening" about the media.[250]

Trump's rhetoric and threats toward the media have influenced how other leaders deal with their own domestic press.[251] As a spokeswoman for Reporters Without Borders noted, "authoritarian regimes all over the world can now take full advantage of Trump's war with the media by discrediting mainstream news coverage and calling it 'fake news.'"[252]

A former U.S. Assistant Secretary who served in the Trump administration told Committee staff, "I never heard the word 'fake news' in Africa before Trump. African heads of state now talk about fake news."[253] In March 2017, the Cambodian government justified attacks on journalists by saying that Trump rightly, like them, felt that "news published by [international] media institutions does not reflect the real situation."[254] A former Obama administration official described the undermining effect of President Trump's attacks on the media: "The fact that the president is willing to attack the media so explicitly and so directly makes it harder to point out and to stand up for those attacks in other parts of the world, including China."[255]

The "Fake News" Refrain

Syria, Feb. 2017: Syrian President Bashar al-Assad used the term "fake news" to try to discredit Amnesty International's 2017 report on torture and mass hangings in military prisons.

Cambodia, Mar. 2018: At a ceremony, Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Sen pointed out *New York Times'* journalists in the crowd and noted the paper had been given "fake news" awards by Trump. He then warned that if *The Times'* reporting was not suitably positive, "the Cambodian people will remember your faces."

Indonesia, Jan. 2019: President Joko Widodo called a report on missing ballot boxes for the upcoming election: "a hoax" and "fake news."

Tunisia, April 2019: Then-Prime Minister Youssef Chahed noted the threat of fake news,

---

Negative Stories (Video)," *The Wrap*, May 22, 2018, https://www.thewrap.com/lesley-stahl-trump-target-media-discredit-bad-stories/. *See also* Joel Simon & Alexandra Ellerbeck, "The president's phantom threats: Trump so far has failed to follow through on his promised press assault. Could it still come?" *Columbia Journalism Review*, Winter 2018, https://www.cjr.org/special_report/president-threats-press.php.

[250] Stephanie Sugars, "From fake news to enemy of the people: An anatomy of Trump's tweets," *Committee to Protect Journalists*, Jan. 30, 2019, https://cpj.org/2019/01/trump-twitter-press-fake-news-enemy-people/. Interestingly, Trump did not use the "fake news" refrain until after he was elected president. *See id*.

[251] *See, e.g.*, Spencer Feingold, "'Fake news' and Trumpian rhetoric echo around the world: President Trump's rhetoric has been used to justify human-rights abuses, attacks on the press and more," *Salon*, Nov. 27, 2018.

[252] *Id*.

[253] Interview of Former Assistant Secretary of State, May 2019.

[254] Samuel Osborne, "Cambodia threatens foreign news media citing Donald Trump's example: 'Freedom of expression must respect the law and the authority of the state' spokesman warns," *The Independent*, Mar. 1, 2017.

[255] David Nakamura, "As China blocks U.S. media, Trump denounces the same companies on Twitter," *The Washington Post*, June 9, 2019.

Trump's attacks on the media, according to a former State Department official, also "legitimize the threat environment for journalists."[256] Trump's own repeated attacks on journalists provide cover for foreign leaders to threaten journalists, such as President of the Philippines Rodrigo Duterte's threats and politically motivated prosecution of journalist Maria Ressa.[257] At a photo opportunity with President Putin, Trump said about the media, "[G]et rid of them. Fake news is a great term, isn't it? You don't have this problem in Russia but we do."[258]

Trump's attacks on journalists also provide an excuse for foreign leaders to censor and intimate domestic critics. For years, Hungary's Prime Minister Viktor Orbán closed space for civil society and pro-democracy advocates, and undermined the independent media.[259] Orbán's government has picked up Trump's rhetoric of fake news, using it as weapon to attack any reporting on his rollback of democracy and civil society in Hungary.[260]

Rule of Law

The rule of law is one of the fundamental principles of American democracy and foreign policy. It is based on the idea that all persons, institutions, and entities are accountable to the law and that the laws the legislative branch passes must be underpinned by the powers laid out in the U.S. Constitution. At its heart is the idea that every person is equally subject to the laws of a society.[261] The United Nations emphasizes the importance of rule of law to international peace and security and political stability, to economic and social progress and development, and to protection of people's rights and fundamental freedoms.[262]

For decades, U.S. foreign policy has sought to promote the rule of law as a vital mechanism to promote democracy, serve as a check on government overreach, and strengthen protections for human rights. The United States promotes the establishment of the rule of law in other countries, such as by training foreign lawyers and judges.

---

[256] Interview of Former Acting Assistant Secretary of State, May 2019.
[257] *Id*.; Philippine Journalist Maria Ressa: 'Journalism Is Activism,'" *NPR*, Aug. 6, 2020.
[258] Since Putin became president, twenty six journalists have been murdered many of them investigative reporters examining governmental abuses. Julian Borger, "Trump jokes to Putin they should 'get rid' of journalists," *The Guardian,* July 28, 2019.
[259] Zack Beauchamp, "It happened there: how democracy died in Hungary: A new kind of authoritarianism is taking root in Europe — and there are warning signs for America," *Vox*, Sept. 13, 2018. By 2017, 90 percent of all media in Hungary was owned by the government or an ally of Orban's Fidesz party. *Id*.
[260] Andraw Gergely & Veronika Gulyas, "Orban Uses Crisis Powers for Detentions Under 'Fake News' Law," *Bloomberg*, May 13, 2020; Vlagyiszlav Makszimov, "Hungarian PM Orbán accuses EPP of spreading fake news," *Euractiv*, May 5, 2020, https://www.euractiv.com/section/future-eu/news/hungarian-pm-orban-accuses-epp-of-spreading-fake-news/; Benjamin Novak, Hungary Moves to End Rule by Decree, but Orban's Powers May Stay:
Legislation to drop the state of emergency prompted by the coronavirus was seen by some as effectively codifying Prime Minister Viktor Orban's extended authority," *The New York Times*, June 16, 2020.
[261] *See, e.g.*, "Overview - Rule of Law: US Courts Educational Program," Federal Courts, https://www.uscourts.gov/educational-resources/educational-activities/overview-rule-law (last visited Sept. 24, 2020).
[262] "What is the Rule of Law," United Nations, https://www.un.org/ruleoflaw/what-is-the-rule-of-law/ (last visited May 28, 2020).

President Trump, far from promoting the rule of law, has shown astounding contempt for it. He has tried to influence judicial proceedings by attacking judges, calling on prosecutors and judges to reward his friends and punish his enemies.[263] He has obstructed and questioned the fundamental legitimacy of Congressional oversight and Special Counsel Mueller's inquiry.[264] He has sought to stretch executive privilege beyond its recognized limits, using it in an attempt to shield him and anyone in the White House from accountability.[265] He has attacked U.S. elections and even questioned the peaceful transfer of power, a fundamental pillar of democracy.[266]

The nationalist conservative governments in Central Europe have also seen Trump's rhetoric and conduct as a vote of support for their own attempts to enhance their power at the expense of the judiciary.[267] In Poland, for example, the government has been seeking for years to exert control over its judicial branch.[268] The European Union has repeatedly expressed concern about the erosion of the rule of law inside the country and threatened to punish the Polish government if it pushed through attempts to enshrine executive control over the judiciary.[269]

The State Department, as is customary, put out a series of statements in support of the rule of law and expressing concern about attacks on the rule of law in Poland.[270] Despite this, President Trump has praised the Polish government and, early in his administration, visited Poland, during which he gave a

---

[263] *See, e.g.*, @realDonaldTrump, "'Sotomayor accuses GOP appointed Justices of being biased in favor of Trump.' @IngrahamAngle @FoxNews This is a terrible thing to say. Trying to 'shame' some into voting her way? She never criticized Justice Ginsberg when she called me a 'faker'. Both should recuse themselves," Feb. 24, 2020, https://twitter.com/realDonaldTrump/status/1232155591537254400; @realDonaldTrump, "There has rarely been a juror so tainted as the forewoman in the Roger Stone case. Look at her background. She never revealed her hatred of "Trump" and Stone. She was totally biased, as is the judge. Roger wasn't even working on my campaign. Miscarriage of justice. Sad to watch!" Feb. 25, 2020, https://twitter.com/realDonaldTrump/status/1232395209125707776; @realDonaldTrump, "There are a lot of CRIMINALS in the Caravan. We will stop them. Catch and Detain! Judicial Activism, by people who know nothing about security and the safety of our citizens, is putting our country in great danger. Not good!" Nov. 21, 2018, https://twitter.com/realDonaldTrump/status/1065359825654169600.

[264] *See* Letter from Pat A. Cipollone to Rep. Jarrold Nadler, Chairman of the House Judiciary Committee, May 15, 2019; Paul Rosenzweig, "Trump's Defiance of the Rule of Law," *The Atlantic*, June 3, 2019.

[265] *See* Richard Lempert, "All the president's privileges," *The Brookings Institution*, Dec. 19, 2019.

[266] Joshua Chaffin, "US election in danger: Trump seeks to undermine legitimacy of vote," *Financial Times*, Sept. 30, 2020; "US election: Trump won't commit to peaceful transfer of power," *BBC*, Sept. 24, 2020.

[267] *See, e.g.,* Freedom House, *Freedom in the World 2019: Democracy in Retreat*, 2020, https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2019/democracy-retreat; Al Jazeera, "Hungary's PM Orban endorses Trump's re-election bid," Sept. 21, 2020.

[268] Marc Santora and Joanna Berendt, "Poland Overhauls Courts, and Critics See Retreat From Democracy," *The New York Times*, Dec. 20, 2017; "In Poland, the rule of law is under ever greater threat," Opinion, *Financial Times*, Feb. 9, 2020

[269] *See* Press Release, European Parliament, "Rule of Law in Poland: concerns continue to grow among MEPs", May 25, 2020, https://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/press-room/20200520IPR79509/rule-of-law-in-poland-concerns-continue-to-grow-among-meps; Alicja Ptak, "EU's top judge warns Poland over overhaul of judiciary" *Reuters*, Jan. 9, 2020.

[270] U.S. Department of State, 2018 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Poland, Section 1-E: Denial of Fair Public Trial, March 13, 2019, https://www.state.gov/reports/2018-country-reports-on-human-rights-practices/poland/; U.S. Department of State, 2017 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Poland, Section 1-E: Denial of Fair Public Trial, April 20, 2018. https://www.state.gov/reports/2017-country-reports-on-human-rights-practices/poland/. Interview of Senior Staff Member, International Human Rights Organization, July 2019.

speech that was seen as supportive to the conservative government.[271] Committee staff heard from a U.S. human rights advocate that the perception in Poland is "if Trump's on your side, things should be okay" and there is no need to worry about what the State Department says.[272]

Some observers contend that respect for the rule of law is declining in many EU member states, with the World Bank's Worldwide Governance Indicators showing deterioration of rule of law in 17 EU member states from 2009 to 2018.[273] Concerns about rule of law persist and have increased toward Poland, Hungary, Romania, Slovakia, the Czech Republic, and Malta.[274]

Embracing Autocrats

It is no secret that President Trump appears to have a profound affinity for dictators and autocrats. He praises authoritarian leaders such as Vladimir Putin of Russia, Mohammed bin Salman of Saudi Arabia, and Kim Jong-un of North Korea, even going so far as to defend their repressive anti-democratic methods for holding power.[275] President Trump on numerous occasions has sided with Putin's account and dismissed Russian interference in U.S. elections, despite the unambiguous findings by the U.S. intelligence community and Special Counsel Robert Mueller that the Russians did so.[276] Trump said in February 2019 that he believed North Korean dictator Kim Jong-un's claim that he did not have prior knowledge of the mistreatment of Otto Warmbier, an American college student who died days after being released, in a coma, from 17 months in captivity.[277]

[271] Christian Davies et al., "Trump says west is at risk, during nationalistic speech in Poland," *The Guardian*, July 6, 2017.
[272] Interview of Senior Staff Member, International Human Rights Organization, July 2019.
[273] *See, e.g.,* Ian Bond & Agata Gostyńska-Jakubowska, "Democracy and the Rule of Law: Failing Partnership?" *Centre for European Reform*, Jan. 20, 2020, https://www.cer.eu/publications/archive/policy-brief/2020/democracy-and-rule-law-failing-partnership.
[274] Congressional Research Service, Memo for Committee Staff, Aug. 26, 2020.
[275] *See* Chris Cillizza & Brenna Williams, "15 times Donald Trump praised authoritarian rulers," *CNN Politics,* July 2, 2019.
[276] *See* John Bowden, "Trump's evolving remarks on Russian election interference," *The Hill*, June 1, 2019; Anne Gearan & Karoun Demirjian, "Trump dismisses new report on 2016 election interference as his allies continue to pursue theories it debunks," *The Washington Post*, Aug. 19, 2020; Jonathan Lemire & Zeke Miller, "Like old pals, Trump, Putin make light of election meddling," *AP*, June 28, 2019; "Assessing Russian Activities and Intentions in Recent US Elections," Office of the Director of National Intelligence (ODNI), Jan. 6, 2017.
[277] Josh Dawsey, "'He tells me he didn't know': Trump defends Kim Jong Un over death of Otto Warmbier," *The Washington Post*, Feb. 28, 2019.

At the same time, Trump has criticized, attacked, and demeaned the leaders of democratic countries that have historically been our most steadfast allies. Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau has endured a constant stream of insults from Trump, who accused him of being "very dishonest and weak" and of making up "false statements."[278] In July 2019, President Trump issued a volley of insults at then-British Prime Minister Theresa May, calling her "foolish" and saying her Brexit plan had been a disaster because she ignored his advice.[279] Trump also has called German Chancellor Merkel a "catastrophic leader" and the "person who is ruining Germany."[280]

"He tells me he didn't know about it, and I take him at his word."

– Trump on Kim Jong-un and the death of Otto Warmbier

"Maybe he did and maybe he didn't!"

– Trump on whether Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman knew of the plan to kill Jamal Khashoggi

"President Putin was extremely strong and powerful in his denial today."

– Trump on whether Russia interfered in the 2016 U.S. election

The juxtaposition of Trump's conduct toward authoritarian versus democratic leaders is not lost on global audiences. The rest of the world has noted President Trump's abandonment of the United States' traditional support for democracy and observed that the President sees no inherent difference between the conduct of authoritarian and democratic states.[281]

Trump's affinity for authoritarian leaders dovetails with his tendency to ignore and downplay human rights violations and rollbacks of democracy. Countries with authoritarian, autocratic, or otherwise unsavory leaders know they can disregard with impunity human rights and the rule of law because President Trump prizes his personal relationship with them. An Assistant Secretary of State who served in the Trump administration told Committee staff, "People like Erdoğan and Orbán feel a lot freer to be dictators because we embrace them."[282] After all, President Trump complimented Chinese leader Xi Jinping on becoming president for life; he complimented North Korean dictator Kim Jong-un; he congratulated Russian president Putin on his reelection despite his staff including in his briefing materials a plea: "DO NOT CONGRATULATE."[283]

---

[278] Dan Bilefsky & Catherine Porter, "Trump's 'Bully' Attack on Trudeau Outrages Canadians," *The New York Times*, June 10, 2018.
[279] Rowena Mason et al., "Trump lashes out at 'foolish' May as crisis over ambassador grows: US commerce secretary pulls out of trade talks as president calls envoy 'very stupid,'" *The Guardian*, July 9, 2019.
[280] Rick Noack, "What's with Trump and female world leaders?" *The Washington Post*, Nov. 30, 2017.
[281] *See* Jonathan Chait, "Trump Is Failing at Governing But Winning at Authoritarianism," *NY Mag Intelligencer,* May 20, 2020.
[282] Interview of Former Assistant Secretary of State, May 2019.
[283] Carol Leonnig et al., "Trump's national security advisers warned him not to congratulate Putin. He did it anyway," *The Washington Post*, March 20, 2018.

The following case studies illustrate the consequences of President Trump's approach to authoritarian leaders and how it has further enabled them to consolidate their rule.

Saudi Arabia: No Consequences for Brutal Repression

U.S.-Saudi relations for decades have reflected deep economic, diplomatic, energy, and security cooperation along with profound concerns about Saudi Arabia's governance and human rights record.[284] The Trump administration has swung in one direction, ignoring and excusing brutal and barbaric human rights violations while pursing arms sales and close ties with the Kingdom.

An early indication of President Trump's decision to pursue a close relationship with Saudi Arabia was his decision to make the country his first overseas visit.[285] Since World War II, presidents have chosen a North American neighbor such as Canada or Mexico, or a European democratic ally such as Great Britain.[286] In bucking this tradition and choosing Saudi Arabia, Trump sought to emphasize U.S. economic and defense ties with the Gulf. Yet he ignored any concerns about human rights abuses or authoritarianism. The personal and sometimes financial relations of President Trump and his son-in law Jared Kushner with Mohammed bin Salman Al Saud (MBS), the Crown Prince, have also hovered in the background of the President's desire to establish close ties early in his presidency.[287]

The extent of President Trump's willingness to excuse any level of human rights abuse was demonstrated by his reaction to the murder of Jamal Khashoggi, a Saudi journalist, U.S. resident, and columnist for *The Washington Post*. On October 2, 2018, Jamal Khashoggi entered the Saudi Consulate in Istanbul and never re-emerged.[288] On October 6, Turkish investigators concluded Khashoggi was killed by a 15-member team of Saudi agents while inside the consulate.[289] The U.S. government reportedly later reached a similar conclusion, including that Khashoggi was killed on the orders of Crown Prince bin Salman.[290]

President Trump did not publicly acknowledge the U.S. government's conclusion that Khashoggi killing was authorized by the Saudi government. Instead, he went out of his way to repeatedly defend the Crown Prince.[291] On November 20, 2018, President Trump issued a statement, "On Standing

---

[284] *See* "U.S.-Saudi Arabia Relations," *Council on Foreign Relations,* Dec. 7, 2018.
[285] Karen DeYoung, "First stop on Trump's first official trip overseas signals Saudi Arabia's importance," *The Washington Post*, May 19, 2017,
[286] Eliza Mackintosh, "How Trump's first foreign trip compares with past presidents," *CNN*, May 20, 2017.
[287] *See* David D. Kirkpatrick et al., "The Wooing of Jared Kushner: How the Saudis Got a Friend in the White House," *The New York Times*, Dec. 8, 2018; Mohammad Bazzi, "The heart of the US-Saudi relationship lies in the Kushner-prince friendship," *Financial Times*, Mar. 10, 2019.
[288] Joyce Lee & Dalton Bennett, "The assassination of Jamal Khashoggi," *The Washington Post*, April 1, 2019.
[289] *Id*.
[290] Shane Harris et al., "CIA concludes Saudi crown prince ordered Jamal Khashoggi's assassination," *The Washington Post*, Nov. 16, 2018.
[291] Joyce Lee & Dalton Bennett, "The assassination of Jamal Khashoggi," *The Washington Post*, April 1, 2019; Shane Harris et al., "CIA concludes Saudi crown prince ordered Jamal Khashoggi's assassination," *The Washington Post*, Nov. 16, 2018.

with Saudi Arabia," in which he speculated that maybe the Crown Prince had knowledge of Khashoggi's killing—or "maybe he didn't!"[292] Over the ensuing months, not only did the Trump administration fail to condemn the Crown Prince for Khashoggi's killing, it worked assiduously to remove his "pariah status" and rehabilitate his global image.[293] Two months after Khashoggi's death, Trump was exchanging pleasantries with the Crown Prince at the Group of 20 (G20) summit and was encouraging U.S. business to invest in Saudi Arabia.[294] Six months later, his administration pushed through $8 billion in arms sales to Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE), over the strenuous objections of Congress, and despite increasing ties between the countries and China.[295]

Hungary: Embraced in the White House

Since 2010, Prime Minister Orbán has overseen Hungary's democratic backsliding. The Obama administration grew critical of the Hungarian government over these concerns, despite Hungary's status as a member of the EU and NATO.[296] As a result, the Obama administration did not engage in high-level, bilateral meetings, and sought to support press freedom through grants to independent media outlets and support to civil society groups.[297]

The Trump administration, in contrast, has set aside prior U.S. concerns about the state of democracy in Hungary and embraced the Orbán government. The Administration claims that its strategy of working with Orbán is to prevent him from forging closer ties with China and Russia. Yet the result has been the opposite. Russian influence in Hungary during the Trump administration has grown as Orbán has pursued his "Eastern Opening" foreign policy approach, cultivating economic cooperation with Russia and China and seeking to position Hungary for a more multipolar world order.[298] Hungary's "Eastern Opening," which started before Trump became president, has included the movement of Russian money into Hungary, intelligence sharing, increasing commercial ties and a decision to move the Moscow-based International Investment Bank (IIB) to Budapest.[299] Observers

---

[292] Statement from President Donald J. Trump on Standing with Saudi Arabia, Nov. 20, 2018, https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/statement-president-donald-j-trump-standing-saudi-arabia/.
[293] Aaron David Miller & Richard Sokolsky, "Opinion: Trump And Pompeo Have Enabled A Saudi Cover-Up Of The Khashoggi Killing," *NPR*, Oct. 2, 2019.
[294] David Herszenhorn. "Trump praises Saudi crown prince, ignores questions on Khashoggi killing," *Politico,"* June 29, 2019; Sonam Sheth and John Haltiwanger, "'I saved his a—': Trump boasted that he protected Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman after Jamal Khashoggi's brutal murder, Woodward's new book says," *Business Insider*, Sept. 10, 2020, https://www.businessinsider.com/trump-woodward-i-saved-his-ass-mbs-khashoggi-rage-2020-9.
[295] Sonam Sheth and John Haltiwanger, "'I saved his a—': Trump boasted that he protected Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman after Jamal Khashoggi's brutal murder, Woodward's new book says," *Business Insider*, Sept. 10, 2020; *see also* Nicolas Parasie & Robert Wall, "Russia and China Target Middle East Arms Deals," *The Wall Street Journal*, Apr. 6, 2019.
[296] *See* Joanna Kakissis, "In Trump, Hungary's Viktor Orban Has a Rare Ally in the Oval Office," *NPR*, May 13, 2019.
[297] *See* Patrick Kingsley, "Hungary's Leader Was Shunned by Obama, but Has a Friend in Trump," *The New York Times*, Aug. 15, 2018.
[298] Congressional Research Service, Memorandum: Hungary: Political and Economic Environment and U.S. Relations, June 24, 2019.
[299] International Investment Bank (IIB) Press Release, "International Investment Bank headquartered in Budapest will focus on further sustainable development of member states economies and integration," June 25, 2019. András Rácz, "A foot in the door?

have expressed concerns that this arrangement poses counterintelligence and economic security threats to Hungary, NATO, and the EU.[300] Additionally, Hungary has considerable ties to Russia in the energy sector: Russia provides all of the natural gas imported by Hungary, accounting for nearly one third of the country's primary energy supply.[301] In 2018, Hungary denied a U.S. request to extradite two Russian arms dealers accused by the U.S. of conspiring to sell Russian-made military grade weapons including anti-aircraft missiles. The Orbán government instead sent them back to Russia.[302]

Orbán's "Eastern Opening" foreign policy approach also includes deepening ties with China. Hungary has ignored U.S. warnings about the national security dangers presented by Chinese telecommunications companies, allowing Huawei to build its largest service center in Europe outside of Budapest.[303] Further, Hungary's proposed $3 billion high-speed rail link between Budapest and Belgrade is reportedly financed in large part by China's export-import bank, with a consortium of Chinese and Hungarian companies expected to perform the construction.[304] China views the proposed railway as an important means for transporting Chinese goods into Central European markets.[305]

In the last three years, Hungary's retreat from democracy and embrace of authoritarian practices has continued. After years of noting Hungary's downward trend, in 2019, Freedom House concluded that Hungary was only a partially free country, placing it in the same category as Pakistan and Zimbabwe, and marking the first time an EU country has been designed "partly free" by Freedom House.[306] This was based in part on the "sustained attacks on the country's democratic institutions by Prime Minister Orbán's Fidesz party, which has used its parliamentary supermajority to impose restrictions on or assert control over the opposition, the media, religious groups, academia, NGOs, the courts, asylum seekers, and the private sector since 2010."[307]

Russia's International Investment Bank moves to Hungary," *European Council on Foreign Relations*, Mar. 18, 2019," *Financial Times*, Mar. 26, 2019; Interview of Senior Staff Member, International Human Rights Organization, July 2019.

[300] András Rácz, *A foot in the door? Russia's International Investment Bank moves to Hungary*, European Council on Foreign Relations, Mar. 18, 2019. *See also* Congressional Research Service, Memorandum: Hungary: Political and Economic Environment and U.S. Relations, June 24, 2019.

[301] Congressional Research Service, *European Energy Security: Options for EU Natural Gas Diversification*, Feb. 26, 2020.

[302] U.S. Department of State, Hungary: Lyubishin Extradition, Nov. 27, 2018; *see also* "U.S. says Hungary refuses to extradite suspected Russian arms dealers," *Reuters*, Nov. 27, 2018; Michele Kelemen, "Trump Welcomes Hungary's Authoritarian Prime Minister, Viktor Orban, At White House," *NPR*, May 13, 2019.

[303] *See* Michele Kelemen, "Trump Welcomes Hungary's Authoritarian Prime Minister, Viktor Orban, At White House," *NPR*, May 13, 2019; "Hungary Sees Huawei as Strategic Partner Despite Security Concerns," *Reuters*, Apr. 9, 2019. *See also* Congressional Research Service, Memorandum: Hungary: Political and Economic Environment and U.S. Relations, June 24, 2019.

[304] Jonathan Gorvett, "Hungary Ponders Pitfalls of Chinese Rail Line," *Asia Times*, Apr. 14, 2019. *See also* Congressional Research Service, Memorandum: Hungary: Political and Economic Environment and U.S. Relations, June 24, 2019.

[305] *See* Congressional Research Service, Memorandum: Hungary: Political and Economic Environment and U.S. Relations, June 24, 2019.

[306] Freedom House, *Democracy in Decline: Freedom of the World Report*, 2019.

[307] Freedom House, *Democracy in Decline: Freedom of the World Report*, 2019, at 13.

President Trump ignored all these concerns and has embraced Orbán. The capstone was an official White House meeting between the two leaders, the first White House visit by a Hungarian prime minister since 2005.[308] The visit prompted delegates from the opposition coalition in Hungary to travel to Washington, DC, to meet with Congress and speak up against repression under Orbán. At the time of Trump's meeting with Orbán, Hungarian human rights lawyer Marta Pardavi expressed concern about her country's direction, citing Orbán's attacks on groups like hers, the Hungarian Helsinki Committee, which provides legal services for asylum-seekers and for Hungarians.[309]

In an Oval Office press conference following the meeting, President Trump ignored a question about democratic backsliding in Hungary, and praised Orbán as a tough but respected leader.

Before the Trump-Orbán White House meeting, the Chairman and Ranking Member of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee led a bipartisan letter to President Trump expressing concerns about the erosion of democracy in Hungary, Hungary's embrace of Russia, and the implications for U.S. interests in Central Europe if President Trump did not raise these concerns.[310] In an Oval Office press conference following the meeting, President Trump ignored a question about democratic backsliding in Hungary, and praised Orbán as a tough but respected leader.[311]

Following the Trump-Orbán meeting, President Trump called Ranking Member Menendez—an extremely rare occurrence. President Trump told Senator Menendez that he had received the letter from him and Chairman Risch, just met with Orbán, and thought that Senator Menendez had got it all wrong. President Trump told Senator Menendez that Orbán is a "good guy" and Hungary was agreeing to buy a lot of U.S. military equipment.

Hampering Efforts to Promote Democracy and Human Rights

President Trump has also empowered those seeking to tighten autocratic grips on power by weakening U.S. efforts to promote democracy and transparency around the world. In addition to embracing autocratic rulers, President Trump has attacked and weakened U.S. anticorruption tools and refused to support critical anti-corruption efforts. And,

"The President's actions have . . . limited our ability to promote or influence democracy."

– Former Senior U.S. Official

[308] Layla Quran, "Why Trump is meeting the Hungarian prime minister Bush and Obama shunned," *PBS*, May 13, 2019.
[309] Michele Kelemen, "Trump Welcomes Hungary's Authoritarian Prime Minister, Viktor Orban, At White House," *NPR*, May 13, 2019.
[310] Letter from Senators Robert Menendez, James Risch, Marco Rubio, and Jeanne Shaheen to President Trump, May 10, 2019, https://www.foreign.senate.gov/press/ranking/release/menendez-risch-rubio-shaheen-express-concern-for-democratic-erosion-in-hungary-ask-trump-to-raise-issues-with-orban.
[311] Michele Kelemen, "Trump Welcomes Hungary's Authoritarian Prime Minister, Viktor Orban, At White House," *NPR*, May 13, 2019.

regardless of the official messages that U.S. diplomats carry to their foreign counterparts, they cannot overcome the example President Trump sets through his own bully pulpit.

As a former senior U.S. official told Committee staff:

> Democracy promotion is relevant to other countries either because they need our help to resolve problems within their democracies, or they understand how important democratic practice is to us and recognize that we will limit our engagement with countries that do not match our values. The President's actions have, over time, undermined both, and therefore limited our ability to promote or influence democracy.[312]

President Trump has long disparaged the Foreign Corrupt Practices Act, a post-Watergate 1977 U.S. law that bars payoffs to foreign officials by companies, as a "horrible law" and wanted to repeal it once in office.[313] He repeatedly sought a nearly 40 percent cut to a U.S. government program dedicated to fighting global corruption.[314] One of the first significant pieces of legislation that President Trump signed rescinded a key U.S. tool for combatting corruption abroad: an SEC rule to prevent bribery, which required oil and gas companies to disclose payments made to other governments.[315] Trump also withdrew the U.S. from the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI), an international effort to fight corruption in oil, gas, and mineral extraction.[316]

President Trump also failed to stand up for internationally-backed anti-corruption efforts, including in Guatemala. In August 2018, Guatemalan President Morales declared he was abolishing the International Commission against Impunity in Guatemala (CICIG), which supported corruption probes that resulted in the indictment of Guatemala's former president and vice president; the prosecution of dozens of prominent government officials; the ouster of more than a dozen corrupt judges and thousands of police officers; and the detention of powerful drug traffickers.[317] The CICIG

---

[312] Interview of Former Senior U.S. Official, Sept. 2020.

[313] Jeanna Smialek, "Trump Tried to Kill Anti-Bribery Rule He Deemed 'Unfair,' New Book Alleges: The president asked administration officials to help kill the Foreign Corrupt Practices Act, according to a new book from two Washington Post reporters," *The New York Times*, Jan. 15, 2020. *See also* Renae Merle, "Trump called global anti-bribery law 'horrible.' His administration is pursuing fewer new investigations: The Justice Department has touted record fines, including a $3.9 billion penalty against Airbus announced Friday," *The Washington Post*, Jan. 31, 2020.

[314] In FY2019 and FY2020, President Trump sought slashes to the International Narcotics Control and Law Enforcement (INCLE), which combat weak rule of law and widespread corruption by strengthening law enforcement capacity. FY2020 Congressional Budget Justification, Department of State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs, https://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/documents/1868/FY_2020_CBJ.pdf. *See also* Congressional Research Service, *Countering Corruption Through U.S. Foreign Assistance,* May 27, 2020.

[315] Steven Mufson, "Trump signs law rolling back disclosure rule for energy and mining companies," *The Washington Post*, Feb. 14, 2017; Trevor Sutton, "The Trump Administration's Dangerous Indifference to Corruption," Center for American Progress, Apr. 24, 2017.

[316] Julia Simon, "U.S. withdraws from extractive industries anti-corruption effort," *Reuters*, Nov. 2, 2017.

[317] Griff Witte et al., "Around the globe, Trump's style is inspiring imitators and unleashing dark impulses," *The Washington Post*, Jan. 22, 2019; WOLA, "Fact Sheet: the CICIG's Legacy in Fighting Corruption in Guatemala," Aug. 27, 2019, https://www.wola.org/analysis/cicigs-legacy-fighting-corruption-guatemala/.

has previously received strong bipartisan support and was investigating Morales for corruption.[318] In stark contrast to previous administrations, the Trump administration was largely silent about Morales' move against the CICIG.[319]

Committee staff heard from former U.S. diplomats who served in the Trump administration that U.S. diplomats on the ground saw first-hand how President Trump's actions undermined the U.S. government's ability to promote democracy. "They just didn't take us seriously anymore," said one former Foreign Service Officer, on her interactions with her foreign counterparts.[320] "It was hard to lobby the Somali government for free, fair, more representative electoral process and for human rights when Trump and Tillerson were saying that human rights weren't important."[321] As a former U.S. official told Committee staff, "Promotion of human rights and democratic values are not being carried out with the same vigor by our diplomats, partly because the example the U.S. is setting undermines their credibility on these issues, partly because the administration does not care about these issues, partly because there are not ambassadors in relevant positions."[322]

"Promotion of human rights and democratic values are not being carried out with the same vigor by our diplomats...."

– Former U.S. Official

Some diplomats have had Trump's rhetoric thrown back at them.[323] A former senior U.S. official told Committee staff, "It is difficult to raise human rights in meetings with foreign counterparts when the President could contradict you at any point. You don't want to drop the hammer on someone for democracy or human rights issues, and then have Trump say, 'He's my buddy.' That hurts the State Department."[324]

"They just didn't take us seriously anymore," said one former Foreign Service Officer, on her interactions with foreign counterparts.

For example, as a former U.S. Ambassador to Mexico recounted, Mexican officials were not subtle in communicating that the United States could no longer lecture them on conflicts of interest, given the ways that the Trump administration was short-circuiting processes and institutions in favor of direct access to the White House and President Trump's family.[325]

---

[318] Mary Beth Sheridan, "How U.S. apathy helped kill a pioneering anti-corruption campaign in Guatemala," *The Washington Post*, June 14, 2019.
[319] *Id*.
[320] Interview of Former Foreign Service Officer, Apr. 2019.
[321] *Id*.
[322] Interview of Former Director, National Security Council, July 2019.
[323] Interview of Former Acting Assistant Secretary of State, May 2019.
[324] Interview of Former Senior U.S. Official, May 2019.
[325] Interview of Former U.S. Ambassador, June 2019.

It is also harder—if not impossible—for the U.S. to credibly promote values like transparency and good governance given President's Trump behavior as well as that of other senior administration officials. As one former Assistant Secretary of State told Committee staff, "How do you tell a country to be more transparent about its finances when your President isn't releasing his tax returns? It sends a very bad signal and is having an impact."[326] Another former Acting Assistant Secretary of State put it this way: "Our diplomats go in to make demarches on anti-corruption, rule of law, or freedom of the press, and they know the person they are talking to is quietly laughing at them on the inside over the hypocrisy of the message. It is embarrassing to go in with a demarche when you have all of that baggage in Washington."[327]

Ceding Ground to Adversaries

Both Russia and China recognize the strategic opportunity presented by the disarray of the Trump administration and its chaotic approach to foreign policy, and are eager to capitalize on U.S. wavering to expand their global influence.[328] When the United States withdraws from diplomatic agreements and is absent from multilateral fora, when the United States abandons its allies and partners, and when the United States walks away from upholding democratic principles, it creates opportunities for China and Russia to advance their interests at the expense of both the United States and a sustainable liberal international order. Diminished U.S. credibility and leadership on human rights has allowed China to build a coalition at the United Nations that has enabled genocide in Xinjiang and defended China's actions in Hong Kong.

Providing Openings to China

The growing power of China at the United Nations and the United States' unwillingness to stand up to Chinese human rights abuses has been apparent in a series of clashes at the UN over Xinjiang. In 2018, the United States withdrew from the UN Human Rights Council (UNHRC), citing "political bias," particularly towards Israel, noting there had been more resolutions passed against Israel than North Korea, Iran, and Syria combined.[329] The byproduct of the United States' withdrawal is that China is able to more easily build a coalition of "like-minded" countries to defend its repressive actions.[330]

---

[326] Interview of Former Assistant Secretary of State, May 2019.
[327] Interview of Former Acting Assistant Secretary of State, Sept. 2020.
[328] *See* Bobo Lo, "Global Order In The Shadow Of The Coronavirus: China, Russia And The West: It's time to rethink global governance and its priorities," *Lowy Institute*, July 29, 2020, https://www.lowyinstitute.org/publications/global-order-shadow-coronavirus-china-russia-and-west#_ftn13.
[329] Nikki Haley, U.S. Permanent Representative to the United Nations, and Michael R. Pompeo, Secretary of State, "Remarks on the UN Human Rights Council," U.S. Department of State, June 19, 2018.
[330] *See* Dave Lawler, "The 53 Countries Supporting China's Crackdown on Hong Kong," *Axios*, Jul. 3, 2020.

For example, China has amassed sufficient support for its actions and policies in Xinjiang, hampering the ability of the UN to address the issues in a substantial way.[331] It also recently received support from 53 countries for its new, abusive national security law for Hong Kong, while only 27 criticized it.[332]

In July 2019, more than 20 ambassadors wrote to the UNHRC calling on China to refrain from the arbitrary detention and restrictions on freedom of movement of Uyghurs and other Muslim and minority communities in Xinjiang.[333] The United Kingdom, Canada, and Germany joined the letter, but not the United States.[334] In response, China marshaled 37 countries to write four days later in support of its policies in Xinjiang.[335] The pro-China letter commended China's "remarkable achievements in the field of human rights," and was signed by countries with poor human rights records, including Saudi Arabia, Russia, North Korea, Venezuela, Cuba, Belarus, and Myanmar.[336]

While a dozen United Nations Special Rapporteurs issued an unprecedented and devastating assessment of the Chinese government's counterterrorism law in November 2019, showing the way the law is being used to justify gross violations of basic rights and freedoms in Xinjiang, China's diplomacy enabled by the lack of U.S. leadership has rendered these international institutions unable to act.[337]

A similar story of dueling statements at the UNHRC played out in 2020: 27 countries signed a statement criticizing China's national security law for Hong Kong and its abhorrent policies in Xinjiang.[338] The United States was, once again, not a signatory. And, again in an echo of the July 2019

---

[331] Lindsay Maizland, "Is China Undermining Human Rights at the United Nations?" Council on Foreign Relations, July 9, 2019; Sheena Chestnut Greitens et al., "Understanding China's 'preventive repression' in Xinjiang," *Lawfare*, Mar. 1, 2020; Sophie Richardson, "China's Influence on the Global Human Rights System," Global China: Assessing China's Growing Role in the World, *The Brookings Institution*, Sept. 2020.

[332] Dave Lawler, "The 53 Countries Supporting China's Crackdown on Hong Kong," Axios, Jul. 3, 2020.

[333] Roie Yellinek & Elizabeth Chen, "The "22 vs. 50" Diplomatic Split Between the West and China Over Xinjiang and Human Rights," *The Jamestown Foundation*, Dec. 31, 2019, https://jamestown.org/program/the-22-vs-50-diplomatic-split-between-the-west-and-china-over-xinjiang-and-human-rights/.

[334] Tom Miles, "Saudi Arabia and Russia among 37 states backing China's Xinjiang policy," *Reuters*, July 12, 2019. Catherine Putz, "Which Countries Are For or Against China's Xinjiang Policies? Last week, two coalitions sent competing letters to the UN Human Rights Council criticizing or backing China's Xinjiang policies," *The Diplomat*, July 15, 2019, https://thediplomat.com/2019/07/which-countries-are-for-or-against-chinas-xinjiang-policies/.

[335] Tom Miles, "Saudi Arabia and Russia among 37 states backing China's Xinjiang policy," *Reuters*, July 12, 2019.

[336] "37 countries defend China over Xinjiang in UN letter," *Channel News Asia*, Jul. 13, 2019, https://www.channelnewsasia.com/news/asia/37-countries-defend-china-over-xinjiang-in-un-letter-11716668; Tom Miles, "Saudi Arabia and Russia among 37 states backing China's Xinjiang policy," *Reuters*, July 12, 2019. In 2020, the total number of signatories in support of China to 50. Roie Yellinek & Elizabeth Chen, "The "22 vs. 50" Diplomatic Split Between the West and China Over Xinjiang and Human Rights," *The Jamestown Foundation*, Dec. 31, 2019.

[337] UN Special Rapporteur, Comments on the Effect and Application of the Counter-Terrorism Law of the People's Republic of China, the 2016 Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region Implementing Measures, Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, OL CHN 18/2019, Nov. 1, 2019, https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/Terrorism/SR/OL_CHN_18_2019.pdf.

[338] Julian Braithwaite,UK Ambassador to the WTO and UN in Geneva, "UN Human Rights Council 44: Cross-regional statement on Hong Kong and Xinjiang, " June 30, 2020, https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/un-human-rights-council-44-cross-regional-statement-on-hong-kong-and-xinjiang. The full list of countries that signed the statement criticizing China was: Australia, Austria, Belgium, Belize, Canada, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Iceland, Ireland, Germany, Japan, Latvia,

events, Cuba led 53 countries in signing a joint statement supporting China's actions in Hong Kong.[339] The signatories in support of China included at least 40 countries that have signed onto China's Belt and Road infrastructure project, and many of the African signatories are trying to renegotiate debt payments to China amid sharp COVID-related downturns.[340]

Keith Harper, who served as the U.S. representative to the UNHRC from 2014 to 2017, says America's absence is one major reason why the balance tipped so dramatically in China's favor, noting that for countries who decide to side with China, "there's no detriment … because the U.S. isn't at the table."[341] Meanwhile, as China has become the third-largest contributor to the UN regular budget and second-largest specifically to UN peacekeeping missions, China is starting to steer allocation of the UN budget away from human rights, including recent efforts to cut funding for key human rights positions as well as the Human Rights Up Front initiative.[342]

As one former senior State Department official observed, the Trump administration's attempted bullying of the international community before the U.S. withdrawal from the UNHRC demonstrated a lack of understanding of diplomacy. The U.S. negotiating position was effectively "Do what we say or we leave."[343] The former official pointed out that "[o]f course autocrats' response to that was, "Great!"[344] In a remarkable twist in the story of U.S. withdrawal from the UNHRC, then-Ambassador Nikki Haley decided to lay the blame for the U.S. withdrawal on NGOs, asserting that human rights groups like Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch were no different from Russia and China.[345] Nearly 20 human rights organizations sent a letter in response protesting Haley's attempt to deflect blame.[346]

Failing to Promote Democratic Values Abandons a Critical Policy Tool for Countering Russian and Chinese Influence

The Trump administration, while allegedly seeking to position U.S. foreign policy to compete with Russia and China, has in fact unilaterally disarmed a critical weapon in the "arsenal of democracy:" our values in the competition between democracy and authoritarianism.[347] This competition, based upon the ideas around which societies organize themselves, and between the forms of government they

---

Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Marshall Islands, Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Palau, Slovakia, Slovenia, Sweden, Switzerland, and the U.K. *Id*.

[339] Dave Lawler, "The 53 countries supporting China's crackdown on Hong Kong," *Axios*, July 3, 2020.

[340] *Id*.

[341] *Id*.

[342] Colum Lynch, "At the UN, China and Russia Score Win in War on Human Rights," *Foreign Policy*, Mar. 26, 2018.

[343] Interview of Former Deputy Assistant Secretary of State, July 2019.

[344] *Id*.

[345] Stephanie Murray, "Nikki Haley casts blame on NGOs for U.S. withdrawal from rights council," *Politico*, June 20, 2018.

[346] *See, e.g.*, Joint NGO letter to Ambassador Haley, June 22, 2018, *available at* https://www.amnesty.org/download/Documents/AMR5186752018ENGLISH.pdf. Brent Griffiths, "NGOs to Nikki Haley: Not our fault U.S. left U.N. Human Rights Council," *Politico*, June 24, 2018.

[347] President Donald Trump, National Security Strategy of the United States of America, Dec. 2017.

adopt, is critical for U.S. global leadership and influence. While the United States has long stood for the promise and success of democracy—a "shining city on a hill," as President Reagan, channeling John Winthrop, so memorably put it—China and Russia are now seeking to show the allure of authoritarian political systems.[348]

The Trump administration's unwillingness to promote or defend democratic values, at home or abroad, and its embrace of a transactional foreign policy have damaged U.S. efforts to combat authoritarian powers in three ways. First, neglecting the ideological component of the competition provides powers like China and Russia with an opportunity to promote their systems at the United States' expense. In the past, promoting human rights and democracy has been a powerful tool in successful U.S. efforts to contain and defeat hostile powers.[349] The Trump administration's abandonment of democratic values limits the United States ability to draw a stark contrast between a society governed by liberal democracy and the repressive authoritarian systems of China and Russia.

With the United States absent, China has shown itself to be more than ready to step in to support anti-democratic actions in other countries. For example, after the U.S. and the EU withdrew support for the Cambodian July 2018 general election following the dissolution of the main opposition party, jailing of critics, and shuttering of dissenting media outlets, China supported the "election," providing equipment including ballot boxes and voting booths.[350] The irony and risk of China providing equipment for elections was not lost on observers.[351]

Second, failing to frame the ideological component of the struggle has weakened U.S. alliances, which area key strategic advantage the United States holds over Russia and China. The alliances that the United States has built over the past seventy years are based on interests, to be sure, but they are animated by shared values, and are embedded in a broader effort to promote an international order that serves global stability, security and prosperity. Under the Trump administration, however, U.S. allies see themselves as victims of a self-interested and transactional U.S. approach, and not partners contributing to a joint campaign to protect the free world from malign influence. Allies are increasingly asking what distinguishes the predatory way the United States practices international relations from Russia and China.

---

[348] Hal Brands, "Democracy vs. Authoritarianism: How Ideology Shapes Great-Power Conflict," *Survival*, Oct.-Nov. 2018, at 61-114.

[349] During other global struggles with authoritarian powers, the United States sought to distinguish its foreign policy from the pure power politics that other states practiced. U.S. efforts to promote democratic values weakened communist leaders' hold on their own people and played an important role in ending the Cold War. *See, e.g.*, Lowell Schwartz, *Political Warfare against the Kremlin: U.S. and British Propaganda Policy at the Beginning of the Cold War*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2009.

[350] "China believes Cambodia's election will be fair, confirms support," *Reuters*, Jan. 4, 2018. *See also* Philip Heijmans, "Hun Sen—and China—Win Cambodia Elections," *Newsweek*, July 29, 2018; James Hookway, "Cambodian Strongman Claims Victory in Election Widely Criticized as a Farce: Hun Sen extends rule but there are growing questions over the 65-year-old's durability," *The Wall Street Journal*, July 30, 2018.

[351] *See, e.g.,* Hannah Beech, "Embracing China, Facebook and Himself, Cambodia's Ruler Digs In," *The New York Times*, Mar. 17, 2018.

Third, a short-term transactional approach fails to recognize the benefits the United States receives in a world with more democracies and fewer authoritarian states and where countries abide by international law, norms and institutions. A world with fewer and less stable democracies is a world that is less free and fair, and that provides Russia and China (as well as other bad actors) more opportunities to expand their influence at the expense of the United States. As a July 2020 Lowy Institute report on global order in the wake of COVID-19 argued, we are in "a growing strategic, political, and normative void—a new world disorder," dominated by narrow self-interest and the steady de-universalization of norms.[352]

Conclusion

President Trump's abandonment of democratic values at home and abroad will likely rank as one of the most consequential components of his foreign policy. The decline of U.S. power has already reduced the United States' leverage to curtail human rights abuses by autocrats. Trump's public embrace of autocratic leaders and disregard for the importance of democratic norms has accelerated this process. His attacks on U.S. democratic institutions have been seen as a green light by authoritarian leaders for their efforts to consolidate power and rollback civil liberties. Many authoritarian leaders have welcomed a U.S. president who is unwilling to stand up against and, in the worst cases, embrace their tactics to suppress democratic opposition. Anti-democratic forces have become more entrenched during Trump's time in office, which will make the reversal of the downward slide in global freedom more difficult.

Now more than ever, for the United States to champion the ideals that set American democracy apart, it must first live up to those ideals at home. The undermining of basic democratic principles by an American president threatens not just a vibrant U.S. democracy, but the strength of democracies around the world.

Meanwhile, as the United States withdraws and fails to take up the mantle of democracy, China has made significant international strides during the Trump administration. As the United States seeks to compete with China, according to his own National Security Strategy, President Trump has abandoned a number of levers that should be assisting us: U.S. alliances, democratic values, and the international institutions the United States was pivotal in creating. As a former Japanese official told Committee staff, the Asia-Pacific region would like China to emulate the very norms, rules, and values that the U.S. is casting off.[353]

Yet, officials abroad are not uniformly negative about the United States' ability to regain the upper hand. In conversations with Committee staff, foreign observers and policy experts maintained that the U.S. still is, or has the potential to be, the de facto world leader, and is still the only country who can

[352] Bobo Lo, "Global Order in the Shadow of the Coronavirus: China, Russia and the West: It's time to rethink global governance and its priorities," *Lowy Institute*, July 29, 2020.
[353] Interview of Former Japanese Official, June 2019.

wave the flag for human rights, democracy, and values. Similarly, one foreign official told Committee staff that the United States' greatest argument over China has been the values that it embodies and stands for, drawing a contrast to China's brute economic force.[354] This provides some hope that, if the United States is active abroad and true to its principles, it has a chance of unifying our allies and rebuilding a more free and fair world.

[354] Interview of Foreign Official, Mar. 2019.

Chapter 4

The World Ahead: Conclusion, Findings, and Recommendations

Today, after nearly four years of President Trump at the helm of U.S. foreign policy, America's closest allies are alienated, and our adversaries have gained influence. The U.S. role as the guardian of democracy has slipped; instead, the U.S. president provides implicit encouragement to those seeking to strengthen an autocratic grip. U.S. diplomats have little credibility when demanding that foreign governments respect the rule of law and a free press.

President Trump's "America First" approach has damaged relations with key allies and deepened mistrust of the United States. U.S. withdrawal from international institutions has exacerbated global threats and left the United States isolated. President Trump's failure to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic at home and abroad has called into question whether the United States is still able to respond to and manage major international crises. His neglect of climate change will only exacerbate the challenges facing the United States, from unprecedented fires to coastal flooding. The divisive tone set by President Trump on racism and injustice has called into question how the United States can lead in the world when it has yet to heal its own deep divisions.

In short, President Trump's foreign policy has made Americans less safe and secure. The next U.S. president will face a radically altered international landscape. While many of the challenges from January 2017 remain, the global environment is more unstable and hostile, and the United States is in a weakened state to address them. The world has adjusted to a United States less interested and less able to influence world affairs. Setting the clock back to January 2017 will not be an option for a new administration. Instead, the United States in January 2021 will need to concentrate on rebuilding U.S. foreign policy institutions such as the State Department, healing the damage the Trump administration has inflicted on U.S. relations with allies and partners, and adjusting our foreign policy for a new era.

With these challenges in mind, this report makes the following findings and recommendations:

FINDINGS:

- **President Trump's foreign policy has been marked by chaos, neglect, and diplomatic failures.** Former Trump administration officials admit the President's impulsive, erratic approach has tarnished the reputation of the United States as a reliable partner and led to disarray in dealing with foreign governments. Foreign officials are often uncertain about who speaks for the United States. Critical neglect of global challenges has endangered Americans, weakened the U.S. role in the world, and squandered the respect it built up over decades. Sudden pronouncements, such as the withdrawal of U.S. troops from Syria, have angered close allies and caught U.S. officials off-guard. U.S. officials keep their heads down in the hopes that President Trump won't upend U.S. policy in a tweet.

- **President Trump's decision-making is highly personalized and ego-centric.** Key foreign policy choices and actions are often undertaken that are advantageous for Donald Trump personally, financially, and politically, regardless of their impact on American interests. This is most apparent when Trump's decisions directly contradict his own administration's policy documents and are opposed by his national security staff.

- **The Trump administration neglected a variety of serious global threats that threaten Americans' security and prosperity, including climate change, pandemics, and nuclear proliferation.** The tragedy of neglecting these issues and the need for international efforts to combat them has been demonstrated by the utter failure of the U.S. and global response to COVID-19. Trump's approach to climate change is one of deliberate neglect, with the United States abandoning international climate efforts and fostering the increasing use of fossil fuels at home.

- **President Trump's narrow and transactional view of international relations has alienated U.S. allies and partners.** U.S. allies have been the targets of President Trump's transactional approach to foreign policy and are increasingly asking how the U.S. approach to international relations differs from that of Russia and China. The Trump administration's use of tariffs against allies has led them to halt or reconsider cooperation with the United States in a number of critical areas. U.S allies are increasingly ignoring U.S. objections to their policies because they believe the United States is deliberately undermining their interests

- **International allies and partners of the United States have begun to move on, viewing the United States not as the democratic leader of the free world, but rather as a destabilizing global force they need to manage.** President Trump's abuse of power in the conduct of U.S. foreign policy is causing our allies to take steps to insulate themselves. They are hedging against the United States by pursuing trade agreements with other countries to

reduce their dependence on the United States, and forming alternative security partnerships in case the United States abandons them. They are pursuing international engagement, including new multilateral agreements, without U.S. participation or influence.

- **Foreign governments have pursued a variety of strategies to navigate President Trump's chaotic and impulsive decision-making.** In order to protect their interests, foreign governments and other overseas actors have developed a number of methods to attempt to manage the President, including flattering him, and working through his immediate family. Some have also chosen to avoid engaging with him if possible, working instead as best they can with lower ranking officials.

- **The Trump administration's domestic policies, including separating families at the border, sharply reducing refugee admissions, attacking the rule of law and free press, and failing to promote racial equality, have damaged the United States' credibility and standing in the world.** U.S. presidents in the past have sought to showcase the United States as a model for what a society can achieve when it is based upon democracy and freedom. President Trump, on the other hand, through his rhetoric and domestic policies, has consistently shown his disdain for pluralism, human rights, civil society, the press, and rule of law. These policies have caused traditional U.S. allies to question the values of the United States, and provided authoritarian leaders an opportunity to consolidate their power.

- **Autocratic leaders, on the other hand, have seen President Trump's conduct and behavior as a green light for their own anti-democratic efforts.** Trump's attacks on the news media have been picked up around the world and have legitimized foreign leader's efforts to censor and intimidate domestic critics. His attacks on the rule of law inside the United States have been mirrored by authoritarian leaders as they seek to cement their power and avoid prosecution for abuses of office.

- **Countries with authoritarian and autocratic leaders are less concerned about violating the human rights of their citizens because they know the United States under President Trump will ignore their repressive activities.** Authoritarian leaders in Europe, Asia, Africa, and the Middle East have seen very little, if any, pushback from the highest levels of the Trump administration when they take antidemocratic steps and suppress dissent. Instead, some of these leaders have been welcomed to the White House, which enhances their legitimacy at home. State Department efforts to promote democracy and human rights are ignored and laughed at by foreign officials because they are completely at odds with President Trump's own behavior.

- **Countries such as Russia and China have capitalized on the absence of U.S. leadership.** The United States' diplomatic withdrawals and absences have created opportunities for China and Russia to advance their own interests, at the expense of U.S. interests. Chinese leadership at the UN provides it with prestige and influence inside the organization, allowing China to steer UN policy away from criticism of its human rights record.

- **Failing to promote democratic values abandons a critical policy tool for countering Russian and Chinese influence.** The Trump administration, while acknowledging the centrality of great-power competition in global affairs, has unilaterally disarmed the United States in response to the ideological challenge posed by China and Russia. Its failure to provide an effective democratic contrast to authoritarian political systems assists Chinese and Russian efforts to globally promote their system of governance.

- **Resetting U.S. foreign policy back to what it was in 2016 is not possible.** World events and President Trump's foreign policy have fundamental altered the global situation. Moving forward, the United States must adjust to the new international environment and change its policies accordingly.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- **The United States should restore democracy, rule of law, human rights, and cooperation with allies and partners as key principles of U.S. foreign and national security policy.** The U.S. should reinvest in the alliances and partnerships that are vital for protecting it from international threats.

- **The United States should communicate to democratic allies and partners that its relations with them are based upon shared interests and values.** While there will always be economic competition between the United States and its allies, the United States should return to a policy that sees allies' success as positive for the United States. The United States should make clear that democratic values are a pillar of our foreign policy, and nations that adhere to these principles will be preferentially treated in comparison to autocratic states and leaders.

- **Halting the decline of global freedom and democracy should be a critical objective for U.S. foreign policy.** Increasing the number of democracies around the world and the degree of freedom foreign citizens enjoy improves U.S. safety and security. A policy of promoting democracy will help check Chinese and Russian influence, increase the reliability of U.S. partners, and improve the effectiveness of international institutions based upon democratic principles.

- **Autocratic leaders should be put on notice that the United States will hold them accountable for violations of human rights and efforts to repress their citizens.** The United States must make it clear, through rhetoric and actions, to autocrats around the world that there will be consequences for violating human rights, and repressive power grabs. The U.S. government should never be seen as failing to condemn or defending anti-democratic methods of holding onto power.

- **The United States should hold the Trump administration accountable for its attacks on democratic norms and values.** While the U.S. will need to move forward and set a strong example, it cannot ignore the damage done by the Trump administration to democratic institutions and values. Our country must engage in some accounting of the damage done and take steps to protect our democracy from future abuses.

- **The United States should prioritize engagement with multilateral institutions.** It should re-engage with international institutions that assist the United States in promoting inclusive economic growth, democracy, and a stable international environment.

- **The United States must confront the serious dangers Americans and the world face from global threats, including climate change, pandemics, authoritarianism, and nuclear proliferation, which the Trump administration has ignored.** The COVID-19 crisis has been a profound example of the world's interconnectivity and the need to prevent, confront, and contain global threats. To secure Americans and ensure domestic prosperity, the United States needs to engage and lead global efforts to combat global threats.

- **Effectively competing against Russia and China should be one of the United States central foreign policy goals.** This can best be accomplished by working closely together with our allies. The United States should embrace all of our national tools to combat the growing influence of China and Russia on global affairs. This should include working in close coordination with our democratic allies and promoting democratic values as a contrast to the repressive and authoritarian systems of Russia and China.

- **The United States is strongest in the world when it is addressing its domestic flaws, including inequality and racial discrimination.** The United States was founded on the principle that all people are equal. Its failure to live up to this principle, especially its long history of racial discrimination, is well understood both at home and abroad. The United States should return to a foreign policy that emphasizes equality, democracy, and human rights, and should communicate to other nations that the United States understands its deep flaws and is working to address them.

- **The United States should achieve bipartisan agreement on key foreign policy and national security policies, to alleviate international fears that the United States is an unreliable partner.** The next administration should seek Congressional approval for its foreign policy efforts as a way to build lasting bipartisan consensus for its policies. Although difficult, it would demonstrate to international partners that U.S. policies and positions will endure from one administration to the next.

- **Congress must reassert its oversight role of the Executive branch and invest in its capacity to legislate and oversee U.S. foreign policy.** The U.S. system of government relies on checks and balances, and requires a robust legislative branch. Decades of Congress underinvesting in its own structures, expertise, and personnel have left it unprepared to effectively stand up to the Trump administration's rampant disregard for laws and norms, and overt circumventing of Congress. Congress must be an effective partner and counterbalance to the Executive in charting a whole-of-government path forward to reestablishing the United States as a credible ally and principled world power.

- **The United States should return professionalism, competency, and high standards to the conduct of U.S. foreign policy.** Restoring overseas confidence in the United States requires highly qualified diplomats who conduct themselves in a predictable and transparent manner. A national security establishment with clear and consistent policy guidance will be able to consistently and confidently communicate the views of the United States. The next administration must reduce politicization of foreign policy by nominating highly qualified and experienced individuals to serve as Ambassadors and in other leadership positions at the Department, and enhancing accountability at the Department for misconduct and mismanagement.

- **Congress and the next administration must work together to revitalize and improve key foreign policy institutions, such as the State Department, to reflect a commitment to a 21st-century foreign policy strategy.** The U.S. must reinvest in diplomacy, building a 21st-century diplomatic corps empowered to address increasingly complex global challenges, such as climate change, cybersecurity, and global health issues. In restoring U.S. global leadership and high standards of competency and professionalism in its diplomatic engagements, the U.S. government must address long-standing vacancies at the State Department, promote more career servants into senior leadership positions at the Department to provide more stability in foreign policy across administrations, and increase diversity at all levels of foreign policy leadership. To recalibrate resources, workforce planning, the budget, and priorities at the State Department, Congress must pass robust State Department authorization legislation.