

[United States](#) | From the gilded age to the golden age

Text 1 -The new American imperialism

Donald Trump is the first president in more than 100 years to call for new American territory—including Mars

The Economist, Jan 21st 2025

THE TRADITIONAL point of an inaugural address is to transcend the politics of the campaign and draw the country together. Donald Trump's second inaugural was not that. But it stuck with tradition in other ways—it's just that the traditions in question were much older.

The only one of his predecessors President Trump spent any time discussing—other than excoriating the administration of the outgoing Joe Biden—was William McKinley, in his telling “a great president”, though he is not one many Americans would put in their pantheon. The reference came in a passage about restoring the 25th president's name to Mount Denali, an idea that combines two Trump obsessions. America's tallest mountain was officially given its koyukon (native Alaskan) name in 2015—which he considers a rewriting of history in deference to liberal sensibilities that is evidence of a woke mind virus. And the president who signed that change into law was Barack Obama, so reversing it undoes an Obama achievement too. But Mr Trump's homage to McKinley, a fellow Republican, did not end there.

McKinley, who was inaugurated in 1897, presided over the negotiations that created the Panama Canal. He loved tariffs, both as a way to fund the government and to protect domestic industry. And he courted, and was courted by, robber barons of the Gilded Age.

President Trump has a thing about the Panama Canal. He thinks the terms of the treaty signing it over to its host country have been broken, and that it is controlled by China (it is not, though the Chinese government has gained influence in Panama). The single most attention-grabbing line in the speech, at least for those who are used to having an American president who respects other countries' sovereignty, was: “we are taking it back.”

The treaty ceding the Panama Canal was drawn up during Jimmy Carter's presidency in 1977. Even back then this was opposed by conservatives as an unpatriotic

betrayal by naive liberals, a perennial theme of Mr Trump's (it is not just his taste in music that regularly defaults to the era of the Village People). To Panama, where the 82nd Airborne Division dropped in a decade later, when Mr Trump was in his 40s, this line sounds more menacing than many Americans realise.

So does the talk of territorial expansion, a theme no president has pursued seriously in over a century. The last president who increased America's acreage substantially, as it happens, was William McKinley. Territories including Cuba, Hawaii and the Philippines were added to America in his first term, the latter as a consequence of a victory over Spain. “The truth is I didn't want the Philippines,” McKinley said, “and when they came to us, as a gift from the gods, I did not know what to do with them.” America got bogged down fighting an insurrection there. For Mr Trump the point of territorial expansion is clear. (And extraterrestrial too—he thinks it is the country's manifest destiny to plant its flag on Mars.) America must be “a growing nation” once again.

Back in the present day, America's greatest foreign-policy challenges are managing the competition with China, conflict and instability in the Middle East and Russia's occupation of Ukraine—not the fees paid by American warships to sail through the canal. But Mr Trump mentioned China only in the context of the canal. The Middle East made an appearance in a self-congratulatory passage about hostages. He did not mention Ukraine at all, except to allude to America providing “unlimited funding” to protect foreign borders while refusing to defend its own (claiming that “millions” of criminal migrants were crossing into the country). Even what he means by taking “back” the canal is uncertain. Would he actually settle for lower transit fees? Mr Trump has been president for four years, has been campaigning for the past four, has a reputation for blunt speaking—and on the biggest questions he is opaque.

The same applies to tariffs, where his worldview overlaps with McKinley's. The 25th president signed the Dingley Act in 1897, which sent tariffs above 50%. In his first inaugural address McKinley said that this was to preserve the domestic market for American manufacturers, among other things. In an address to a joint session of Congress that he convened to pass tariffs, he presented them as a prudent act to fund the government without raising tax. Mr Trump thinks the same way. "We will tariff and tax foreign countries to enrich our citizens," he said. "It will be massive amounts of money pouring into our treasury, coming from foreign sources." Here too, it is not yet clear what Mr Trump will actually do.

After McKinley was assassinated by an anarchist, that approach to protecting manufacturing became associated with the Democratic Party. The McKinley formula combined what is now seen as a left-leaning policy with a closeness to big business associated with the right. Mr Trump, like McKinley, brings them back together in his Republican Party. McKinley's 1896 campaign received a \$250,000 donation from J.P. Morgan and the same amount from Standard Oil (approaching \$10m apiece in 2025 money). Mr Trump's inauguration reserved prominent seats for Jeff Bezos, Elon Musk and Mark Zuckerberg, all of whom gave money to the inaugural committee. The president announced the arrival of a new "golden age". But on tariffs, territorial expansion and a fixation with Panama what he seems to want is a return to the gilded one. ■

Text 2 - Trump hates 'globalism.' But he seems to like imperialism.

Ahead of his second term, an emboldened Trump has articulated a vision of hemispheric expansionism. What's he playing at?

The Washington Post, January 10, 2025- Column by [Ishaan Tharoor](#)

"The future does not belong to the globalists," declared then-President Donald Trump at the dais of the U.N. General Assembly in 2019. The audience of dignitaries in New York and most analysts were already accustomed to the key pillars of the Trumpist stump speech: A coterie of jet-setting global elites with no allegiance to the lands of their birth, aligned with liberal technocrats, were the source of all societal ills. Multilateral international institutions were an impediment to national interests. America must always come first.

Ahead of his second term, an emboldened Trump has not dropped his scorn for "globalists." But in recent weeks, his populism has been overshadowed by something else: a newfangled 21st century imperialism.

Much to the bemusement of U.S. allies, Trump has articulated a vision of hemispheric expansionism. He called for the U.S.'s acquisition of Greenland, an autonomous Danish territory. He has repeatedly suggested Canada should become the U.S.'s 51st state. He raised forcefully retaking control of the Panama Canal, complaining about fees for passage and Chinese influence over the strategic waterway. In perhaps the mildest provocation of the bunch, he said the Gulf of Mexico should be renamed the Gulf of America.

Trump's hectoring has drawn immediate rejection. At a news conference, Mexican President Claudia Sheinbaum pointed to a 17th century map of the New World, where the bulk of the North American landmass was labeled "America Mexicana." The Gulf of Mexico, for what it's

worth, was named as such by cartographers well before the United States had won independence.

And while the president-elect cast his country's northern border as an "artificially drawn line" that can be erased to create a continental superpower, few in Canada are going along with the joke. "That's not going to happen," Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau told CNN on Thursday, adding that a cornerstone of Canadian identity is that they are not American. He suggested Trump was trying to distract from the conversation about the harm his proposed tariffs on Canadian exports may cause U.S. consumers.

José Raúl Mulino, the president of Panama, responded that "every square meter of the Panama Canal and its adjacent zone belongs to Panama and will remain so." Diplomats stressed that there was no truth to claims by Trump and his associates that Chinese troops are controlling the pivotal waterway.

"We know how they treat the Inuit in Alaska," Lynge said. "Make that great before trying to invade us."

After Trump refused to rule out using economic or military force to achieve his goals in Greenland, a number of European leaders issued their own statements of concern. German Chancellor Olaf Scholz said there was a "certain incomprehension" about Trump's statements. "The principle of the inviolability of borders applies to every country no matter whether that's in the east or the west," he said, gesturing to Western opposition to Russia's landgrabs in Ukraine.

So what's Trump playing at? The Wall Street Journal's conservative editorial board argued that Trump is, in the instance of Canada, simply "trolling." But his designs over Greenland may have more substance, and tap into a long-standing U.S. fascination with Greenland, which U.S. officials also eyed at the time they purchased Alaska in the mid-19th century. Its mineral resources and strategic position in the Arctic make it all the more geopolitically relevant in the 21st century. On Wednesday, Trump's son, Donald Trump Jr., took an entourage on a private visit of the island, replete with photo-ops with Greenlanders wearing MAGA-style red hats.

For Trump, talk of annexation and expansion is part of his brand of populism. "It makes America dream again, that we're not just this sad, low-testosterone, beta male slouching in our chair, allowing the world to run over us," Charlie Kirk, a far-right influencer who accompanied Donald Trump Jr. on his trip to Greenland, said in a recent podcast. "It is the resurrection of masculine American energy. It is the return of Manifest Destiny."

Some analysts have offered a less metaphoric interpretation of Trump's recent moves. John Bolton, Trump's former national security adviser turned vocal critic, told the Associated Press that Trump's strategy is "transactional, ad hoc, episodic and really viewed from the

prism of how it helps Donald Trump." Analysts have long mused over the efficacy of Trump's "madman" approach to foreign affairs, his hectoring of allies and frequent use of threats. But it's not clear what he stands to gain from this latest episode.

"When you do things that make it less likely you're going to achieve the objectives, that's not master bargaining, that's crazy," Bolton said.

There's arguably no contradiction between Trump's neo-imperialist belligerence and the America First, anti-globalist populism he has voiced for much of his political career. After all, 19th century mercantilism — the antecedent of the economic worldview that seems to grip Trump and advocates of tariffs and other protectionist measures in his camp — was a core element of 19th century imperialism. And the president-elect's recent demands appear to signal that the putative gloves are coming off.

"Trump, [Elon] Musk, and their minions appear to be convinced that they can bully the entire world," wrote Stephen Walt in *Foreign Policy*, adding. "This approach goes well beyond quid-pro-quo transactionalism; it's a blatant attempt to blackmail, bully, and cow others into preemptive concessions, based on their fear of what Trump might do to hurt them."

Text 3 - Trump's tariffs make the 'post-American world' a reality

President Donald Trump and right-wing Republicans have accelerated the arrival of a "post-American world," surpassing any vision of past anti-globalization activists.

The Washington Post, April 9, 2025, Column by [Ishaan Tharoor](#)

For a generation, analysts and commentators have been discussing the advent of a "post-American world."

The term, popularized by journalist and broadcaster Fareed Zakaria in a 2008 book, was a warning to the Washington establishment not to be too comfortable with the peerless status of the United States as the world's superpower. China was on the rise, the U.S. share of global wealth and power was growing smaller and the old certainties of the Pax Americana were on the wane.

Western leftists, aligned with counterparts in the Global South, who for years decried the imperial overreach and sprawling military footprint of the United States, yearned for the shift. They bridled at the confluence of U.S. corporate interests and Washington lawmaking. And they wished the United States would strike a humbler pose in an increasingly "multipolar" world, while doing more to address the yawning inequities spawned by free-trading globalization.

It's one of the ironies of the moment that President Donald Trump and right-wing Republicans have done the most to accelerate the arrival of a "post-American world,"

sounding a death knell anti-globalization activists of decades past would have struggled to envision.

Trump's usage of emergency powers to impose sweeping, blanket tariffs on foreign goods has roiled global markets and spread havoc. The uncertainty and confusion he has provoked — including through dozens of new "reciprocal" tariffs that the administration calculated through metrics rejected by most economists — could reshape the global economic order. As they express outrage over Trump's methods, U.S. allies and adversaries alike are plotting their response. China's foreign ministry invoked the legacy of Ronald Reagan, who spoke famously against tariffs.

"The turn toward unilateralism by the Trump administration does not suddenly make everyone else a protectionist. It only leads them to want to protect themselves from the United States," Jeffry Frieden, a political science professor at Columbia University and author of "Global Capitalism," told my colleagues. "Whatever international economic order emerges from the

current chaos, the role of the United States in it will be fundamentally transformed.”

Trump wants to reset the table on trade

For Trump and his allies, what's happening now is necessary “medicine.” Trump views global trade in zero-sum terms: He appears to think trade deficits are a sign of American weakness (rather than, say, a reflection of the power of the U.S. consumer). He believes U.S. purchases of foreign goods are “subsidies” to other countries with money that should be spent at home. And he sees tariffs as a tool to raise funds and bring back manufacturing to the hollowed-out industrial heartlands of the United States.

There are plenty of reasons to be skeptical of Trump’s economic rationale. But the White House is also overhauling a status quo that long undergirded U.S. primacy on the world stage.

“The United States spent eight decades building an international system of rules, norms and values that has produced the longest period of great power peace and global prosperity in human history,” Zakaria wrote last month. “Its alliances are the greatest force multiplier for its influence around the world. The United States has been the greatest beneficiary of this system, even now, decades later, still setting the agenda and dominating the world economically, technologically and militarily.”

On Tuesday, Singaporean Prime Minister Lawrence Wong echoed the point. “What the U.S. is doing now is not reform. It is rejecting the very system it created,” he said in a speech before the city-state’s parliament. “These measures will accelerate the fracturing of the global economy,” he added. “Instead of flowing based on economic efficiency, capital and trade will increasingly be diverted based on political alignment and strategic considerations.”

Even as the tariffs were set to take effect, the Trump administration appeared locked in numerous bilateral negotiations with countries eager to scale back the levies slapped on their exports. Those deals could lead to agreements Trump will tout as victories, though the deeper damage done can’t be overlooked. Trump “may eventually roll back tariffs for those countries that negotiate with him ... But the erratic and arbitrary nature of the policies, and the willingness to exploit U.S. economic might to extort concessions, will undermine American standing nearly everywhere,” wrote the Atlantic’s Michael Schuman.

Tesla cars burned in Verden, Germany, on March 29, a day of global anti-Elon Musk protests. Police said investigations into what caused the fire are ongoing. (Video: Reuters)

There are signs the rest of the world is recalibrating in the face of Trumpian disruption. Foreign arrivals at U.S. airports dramatically declined in the past weeks, per data

compiled by Goldman Sachs. European officials are contemplating their own payments platform that would break their reliance on Visa, Mastercard and PayPal. Amid new restrictions and revocations of student visas, Indian university applicants are weighing options for education in countries like Germany or Australia, rather than the United States — whose universities, as hotbeds for global talent, were long cast as a major factor in the U.S. competitive edge.

A full-blown trade war with China is imminent, with Trump’s 104 percent tariff on many Chinese exports going into effect at midnight. China’s leadership takes his desire to wean the United States off Chinese-made goods and Chinese-dominated supply chains seriously and are hunkering down for a long, bruising fight.

“Chinese leaders know the ultimate goal [for Trump] is decoupling, so the game is to steel themselves for that ultimate outcome,” Yanmei Xie, an independent expert on Chinese politics, told my colleagues. “If the U.S. is not even in a dealmaking mindset, then caving doesn’t bring you anything. The only choice is to adapt.”

Trump’s Commerce Secretary Howard Lutnick singled out China as a target of U.S. strategy, suggesting companies such as Apple would eventually decide to relocate their manufacturing back in the United States to avoid tariffs.

“The army of millions and millions of human beings screwing in little, little screws to make iPhones, that kind of thing is going to come to America,” Lutnick said on Sunday during an interview with CBS’s “Face the Nation.” “It’s going to be automated and great Americans — the tradecraft of America, is going to fix them,” he added.

This vision has drawn criticism from across the political spectrum in the United States. Writing for MSNBC, sociologist Jessica Calarco argued that Trump’s nostalgia for the mid-20th century — when American factory workers could live out stable, middle-class lives — ignored the strength of unions, the relative high tax rates and other strong social policies that helped secure the “good life.” Those protections don’t exist in the same fashion now and Trump’s measures, she wrote, “risk putting us all in a more precarious position — pushing us back to Gilded Age levels of inequality, and to a time when the ‘good life’ was accessible only to the robber barons.”

Economic historian Niall Ferguson saw the tariffs as a precursor to American decline and retreat. “Americans will come to miss globalism and policing the world,” he wrote in the right-wing Free Press. “They will belatedly realize that there is no portal through which the United States can return to the 1950s, much less the 1900s.” Ferguson cast the moment as the “end of American empire.”

The New York Times, Podcast, March 1, 2025 [HERE](#)

Text 5 - The 'Donroe Doctrine': Trump's Bid to Control the Western Hemisphere

President Trump has tightened the U.S. grip on the Americas by rewarding allies and punishing rivals. That has upended the region's politics.

The New York Times, By [Jack Nicas](#), Nov 17, 2025 Leer en español [AQUÍ](#)

Jack Nicas has been a lead correspondent across Latin America since 2021.

President Trump opened the year with pledges to seize the Panama Canal, take control of Greenland and rename the Gulf of Mexico as the Gulf of America.

He is ending it by bombing boats from South America, stationing the world's largest aircraft carrier in the Caribbean and exploring military options against Venezuela's autocratic leader.

In a sharp shift of decades of U.S. foreign policy, the Western Hemisphere has become the United States' central theater abroad. In addition to military threats and action, the White House this year has carried out punishing tariffs, severe sanctions, pressure

campaigns and economic bailouts across the Americas.

Mr. Trump has said he is seeking to stop drugs and

migrants from entering the United States. But, in other moments,

top administration

officials have been explicit that their overarching goal is to assert American dominance over its half of the planet.

"He believes this is the neighborhood we live in," said Mauricio Claver-Carone, Mr. Trump's special envoy to Latin America until June, who continues to advise the White House. "And you can't be the pre-eminent global power if you're not the pre-eminent regional power."

The United States has long tried to tip the scales around Latin America, where it has supported military coups, conducted covert operations and invaded Panama.

That U.S. foreign policy was often tied to ideology. During the Cold War, there was the effort to champion capitalism — even if it meant backing dictators. In recent decades, as attention drifted to wars and competition in the other hemisphere, the focus was on democracy and free trade in Latin America.

Mr. Trump's approach appears purely pragmatic: What is in it for the United States?

Stronger control of the hemisphere, and particularly Latin America, promises major benefits. Ample natural resources, strategic security positions and lucrative markets are all in play.

Backed by a team of hawks with a long history in Latin America, most prominently Secretary of State Marco Rubio, Mr. Trump is overhauling U.S. policy in the region to try to extract those prizes.



The busy port in Panama. Mr. Trump rewards leaders who fall in line, but Panama has staved off his threats. Credit...Alejandro Cegarra for The New York Times

The effect has been a reordering of politics up and down the Americas. Many leaders have twisted themselves to align with Mr. Trump — often winning major benefits in return — or bet their governments on defying him.

Many observers have begun calling the new U.S. approach "the Donroe Doctrine" — a term that appeared on a January cover of The New York Post — a Trumpian twist on a 19th-century idea.

In 1823, President James Monroe aspired to stop European powers from meddling in the hemisphere.

In 2025, the competing power is China, which has built up enormous political and economic power in Latin America over the past several decades.

Some foreign policy analysts believe that Mr. Trump would like to divide the world with China and Russia into spheres of influence. In recent months, top U.S. officials have explained their strategy in those terms.

"The Western Hemisphere is America's neighborhood — and we will protect it," Secretary of Defense Pete Hegseth wrote Thursday, in the latest example.

To a president who grew up in New York — where businessmen, politicians and mob bosses battle for turf — controlling a neighborhood is common sense, former officials and analysts say.

“He translates that very parochial New York view to a global view,” said John Feeley, a former U.S. ambassador to Panama. “And if you put it in the current context, the Americas are his sphere of influence.”

So how to secure the block?

The White House has killed many of the aid programs devised to foster influence and good will across Latin America. Instead, Mr. Trump appears focused on assembling a roster of allies in the region, or at least acquiescent governments.

To do so, he has rewarded leaders who have fallen in line with his demands and punished those who have not.

President Javier Milei of Argentina, for instance, campaigned to “Make Argentina Great Again” and questioned Mr. Trump’s 2020 election loss. When his government was wobbling on the edge of an economic crisis last month, the Trump administration arrived with a \$20 billion bailout, and in midterm elections days later, Mr. Milei’s party won big.

The next day, Mr. Trump took credit. “We’re getting a real strong handle on South America,” he told reporters. On Thursday, Mr. Trump and Mr. Milei announced the framework of a trade deal that should give the United States more access to Argentina’s critical minerals.

In El Salvador, President Nayib Bukele agreed to take more than 200 Venezuelan deportees into his nation’s maximum security prison when no other nation wanted them.

Mr. Trump promptly praised Mr. Bukele to the cameras in the Oval Office and, in a critical boon for El Salvador’s tourism industry, the State Department removed its travel warning for the country.

Mr. Bukele, who has overseen a sweeping crackdown at home, also got something else he wanted: the return of MS-13 gang leaders in American custody. U.S. officials had previously found evidence of secret negotiations between Mr. Bukele’s government and gang leaders; he has denied having any pact with them.

For many, playing ball with Mr. Trump has been a winning strategy.

El Salvador, Ecuador and Guatemala last week secured new trade deals. Panama has staved off Mr. Trump’s threats. The positive relationship with Washington has helped some Latin American leaders remain among the most popular in the region, and more right-wing figures appear to be ascending in their wake.

Image



President Nayib Bukele of El Salvador, with Mr. Trump at the White House in April. He agreed to imprison Venezuelan deportees when other nations declined. Credit...Eric Lee/The New York Times

Bolivia ended two decades of leftist rule last month, an election celebrated by U.S. officials. Chile appears poised to elect a right-wing president who has embraced Mr. Trump. And Trump officials sought to aid a leading candidate for Peru’s presidency, a right-wing mayor known as Porky, just as he held a memorial for Charlie Kirk, the conservative activist assassinated in September.

On the other side, there have been consequences for those who do not cooperate.

The White House has worked to punish Latin America’s three leftist, autocratic governments, threatening 100 percent tariffs on Nicaraguan imports, further isolating Cuba and beginning an intense pressure campaign against Venezuela.

U.S. officials have called Venezuela’s authoritarian leader, Nicolás Maduro, a fugitive and offered a \$50 million reward for his capture. In recent weeks, Mr. Trump has been considering land strikes and the use of Special Operations forces there.

At the same time, the U.S. military has built up its largest presence in the hemisphere in decades, with more than 15,000 troops. Last week, the Navy moved its largest carrier within striking distance of Venezuela.

Since September, the U.S. military has carried out 21 strikes against speedboats it says are ferrying drugs, killing 83 people. U.S. officials have not presented evidence the boats were smuggling drugs.

That highly unusual campaign, which has raised concerns in Congress and elsewhere about its legality, has also been used to pressure other nations.

In Colombia, for instance, President Gustavo Petro has become one of Mr. Trump’s most prominent critics — and targets.

After Mr. Petro, a leftist, criticized the boat strikes, the United States halted aid, and its military struck a boat hailing from Colombia. Then the Treasury Department hit Mr. Petro with sanctions, accusing him of being a drug trafficker. Mr. Petro’s popularity has fallen, and analysts believe the nation could swing right in next year’s election.

In one sign of Mr. Trump's impact, the premier diplomatic forum for the hemisphere, the Summit of the Americas, was abruptly canceled this month for the first time in its 31-year history. Organizers cited "deep divisions that currently hamper productive dialogue."

When it has come to the hemisphere's largest players, Mr. Trump has found limits to his strategy of pressure and threats.

As the United States' two largest trading partners, Mexico and Canada retain enormous leverage. Each has found ways to comply with some of Mr. Trump's demands while holding firm on others. And the nations' leaders, each from left-leaning parties, have benefited politically from their approach to Mr. Trump.

But Brazil represents the strongest test case for Mr. Trump's approach. In July, he hit the nation with 50 percent tariffs and sanctions in an effort to stop the Brazilian government's criminal prosecution of former President Jair Bolsonaro, a Trump ally.

Brazil's current president, Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, quickly criticized Mr. Trump and watched his poll numbers rise. Brazil then convicted Mr. Bolsonaro of trying to stage a coup and sentenced him to 27 years in prison.

Weeks later, Mr. Trump abruptly changed course. He met with Mr. Lula and said he liked him, and now the two nations are negotiating an end to the tariffs.

Text 6 - Ingérences et incohérences de Donald Trump sur le continent américain

Editorial *Le Monde*, le 01 décembre 2025

Le président des Etats-Unis ne duplique pas seulement en Amérique latine la virulence et les menaces dont il use à profusion à l'intérieur des frontières de son pays envers ses adversaires politiques. Il y multiplie également les incohérences, qui rendent difficilement lisibles ses orientations politiques.

Menaces militaires, intimidations verbales, ingérences électorales : Donald Trump se comporte avec l'ensemble du continent américain avec une rudesse sans guère de précédents pour un président des Etats-Unis. Après le Canada, qui a fait les frais de velléités expansionnistes dès le retour du républicain à la Maison Blanche, c'est désormais sur l'Amérique latine, traitée comme une arrière-cour, qu'il fait peser son agressivité.

Les élections générales organisées au Honduras, le 30 novembre, ont ainsi été l'occasion d'un nouveau chantage. Le président des Etats-Unis ne s'est pas contenté d'appeler à voter pour le candidat représentant la droite dans ce petit pays qui compte parmi les plus violents de la région et qui est gangrené par le trafic de drogue et le crime organisé. Il a également laissé entendre qu'il mettrait fin à l'aide américaine en cas de défaite de ce dernier. Lors des élections législatives en Argentine, en octobre, le locataire de la Maison Blanche avait déjà conditionné l'octroi d'une aide massive de 20 milliards de dollars à la victoire des candidats du président Javier Milei.

Tout en insultant régulièrement le président de la Colombie, Gustavo Petro, classé à gauche, Donald Trump a également accentué sa pression sur le Venezuela en annonçant unilatéralement, le 29 novembre, qu'il considérait l'espace aérien vénézuélien comme « *entièrement fermé* ». Cet avis de création d'une zone d'exclusion aérienne, en toute illégalité internationale, s'ajoute au déploiement de la plus importante armada dans la mer des Caraïbes depuis la crise des missiles à Cuba, en 1962. Alors que l'armée américaine multiplie les exécutions extrajudiciaires en ciblant des bateaux présentés comme utilisés par des cartels de la drogue, sans jamais en apporter la moindre preuve, cet activisme guerrier suscite une inquiétude grandissante au Congrès, y compris certains élus républicains.

Il fait peu de doute que l'objectif de Donald Trump est bien celui d'un changement de régime à Caracas. Certes, le président Nicolas Maduro, qui a plongé son pays dans la misère, s'accroche au pouvoir après avoir manifestement perdu l'élection présidentielle de 2024. Mais l'aventurisme de l'administration américaine, quand bien même elle parviendrait à obtenir son départ, pourrait plonger ce pays failli dans une crise encore plus grande.

Donald Trump ne duplique pas seulement en Amérique latine la virulence et les menaces dont il use à profusion à l'intérieur des frontières américaines envers ses adversaires politiques. Il y multiplie également les incohérences, qui rendent difficilement lisibles ses orientations politiques, d'autant que la vision stratégique de son administration n'a toujours pas été présentée publiquement, contrairement à l'usage.

Comment concilier en effet l'engagement de lutter par tous les moyens contre le narcotrafic, érigé au rang de menace principale, et la décision d'accorder une grâce « *totale et absolue* » à l'ancien président de droite du Honduras Juan Orlando Hernandez, [condamné, en 2024, à quarante-cinq ans de prison aux Etats-Unis pour trafic de drogue](#) ? C'est cette même contradiction qui fait de Donald Trump un défenseur acharné des cryptomonnaies, au bénéfice de sa propre famille, alors que celles-ci constituent un véhicule financier essentiel pour le crime organisé.



Text 7 - Trump and the end of American soft power

Joseph Nye coined the term for the influence countries exert through attraction. Here he sets out why exclusive nationalism is likely to prove a losing strategy

Joseph Nye, *The Financial Times*, MAR 8 2025

International relations is power politics. As Thucydides wrote more than two millennia ago, the strong do as they will and the weak suffer what they must. Power, however, rests on more than bombs, bullets and economic coercion. Power is the ability to affect others to get the outcomes one wants, and that can be done through attraction as well as through force and payment.

Because this attraction — soft power — is rarely sufficient by itself, leaders can find hard power more tempting. But in the longer term, soft power often prevails. The Roman empire rested not only on its legions, but also on the attraction of Roman culture. The Berlin Wall came down not under an artillery barrage, but from hammers and bulldozers wielded by people who had lost faith in communism and were drawn to the values of the west.

A nation's soft power rests upon its culture, its values and its policies when they are seen as legitimate by others. That legitimacy is affected by whether a nation's actions are perceived as congruent with or contradicting widely held values. In other words, attention to values enhances a nation's soft power. A smart realist provides room for including some widely shared values in the definition of the national interest. There is an important difference between inclusive and exclusive nationalism. "America First" is a great slogan for American elections, but it attracts few votes overseas.



A protest in Washington in February against plans to shut down USAID © Getty Images

President Donald Trump does not understand soft power. His background in New York real estate gave him a truncated view of power limited to coercion and transactions. How else can one explain his bullying of Denmark over Greenland, his threats to Panama, which outrage Latin America, or his siding with Vladimir Putin over Ukraine, which weakens seven decades of the Nato alliance — not to mention his dismantlement of the US Agency for International Development (USAID) that John F Kennedy created? All undercut American soft power.

Writing after the English civil war in the mid-17th century, Thomas Hobbes imagined a state of nature without government as a war of all against all, where life was "nasty, brutish and short". In contrast, writing in a somewhat more peaceful period a few decades later, John Locke imagined a state of nature as involving social contracts that permitted the successful pursuit of life, liberty and property. Locke's ideas became enshrined in American political culture.

“Trump is so obsessed with the problem of free riders that he forgets that it has been in America’s interest to drive the bus

victory in the second world war, the US was by far the most powerful nation, and it attempted to enshrine these values in what became known as “the liberal international order” upheld by the UN, the Bretton Woods economic institutions and others. The US did not always live up to its liberal values, but the postwar order would have looked very different if the Axis powers had won.

These institutions served the US national interest. But liberal values and institutions mean little to Trump, and he has weakened or withdrawn from several. One of the most important norms of the UN system is that states are not supposed to take their neighbours’ territory by force. It is a norm that Russia blatantly violated with its full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. Yet on the third anniversary of the war, Trump refused to condemn Russia’s violation and the US instead voted with Russia in the UN.

The rise of human rights law after the second world war, including the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights, was a reaction to the horror of genocide. While many nations have signed up to these conventions, they often fail to adhere to them, or they interpret them in different ways. The world is far from a consensus on liberal values — and even within democracies, the rise of populist nationalism shows deep differences. Nonetheless, universal values affect politics and power. Trump’s myopic transactionalism misses this “truth social”.

Values affect a nation’s attractiveness or soft power, and surveys show that the most admired countries have tended to be liberal democracies. The US has generally ranked near the top. Autocracies such as Russia or China tend to rank lower. On the other hand, attractiveness depends on the perceptions of the beholder and can vary from country to country and group to group within countries. Autocracies sometimes find other autocracies attractive. It is interesting that in the great power competition between the US and China, recent Pew polls find China lagging behind the US on most continents, but the two countries are roughly tied in Africa.

The case of China is particularly interesting regarding soft power and universal values. As China dramatically developed its hard power resources, leaders realised that it would be more acceptable if it were accompanied by soft power. This is a smart power strategy because as China’s hard military and economic power grew, that could

Liberals in the Lockean tradition argue that although there is no world government, there are many social contracts that provide a degree

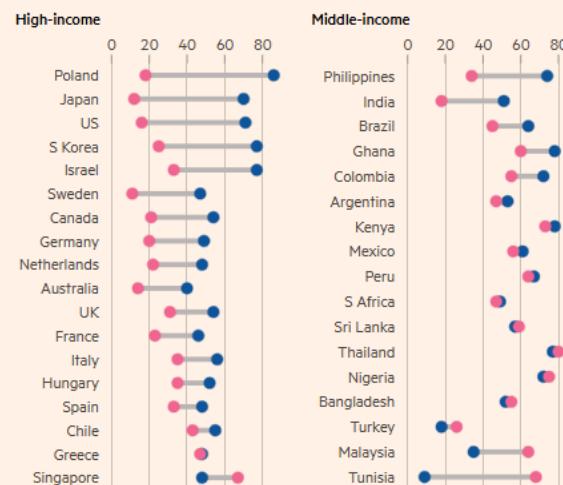
of world order. After

frighten its neighbours into balancing coalitions. If it could accompany its rise with an increase in its soft power, China could weaken the incentives for these coalitions. In 2007, then Chinese President Hu Jintao told the 17th Congress of the Chinese Communist party that they needed to invest more in soft power, and this continued under President Xi Jinping.

Billions of dollars were invested in Confucius Institutes and foreign aid programmes — but China has had mixed success with its soft-power strategy. Its impressive record of economic growth, which has lifted hundreds of millions of people out of poverty, and its traditional culture have been important sources of attraction, but polls show it lags behind the US, including in Asia. These numbers may change as China steps into the gap that Trump is creating.

The US is more highly regarded than China in most high-income countries, but views are much more balanced in middle-income nations

% who have a favourable opinion of the US or China



Source: Spring 2024 Global Attitudes Survey, Pew Research Center

FINANCIAL TIMES

Much of a country’s soft power, however, comes from its civil society rather than from its government. Government propaganda is usually not credible and often does not attract and thus does not produce soft power. China needs to give more leeway to the talents of its civil society, but this is difficult to reconcile with tight party control.

“ US soft power has always relied heavily on values related to democracy and liberal views of human rights

Chinese soft power is also held back by its territorial disputes with its neighbours.

Creating a Confucius Institute

to teach Chinese culture will not generate positive attraction if Chinese naval vessels are chasing fishing boats out of disputed waters in the South China Sea. And assertive “wolf warrior diplomacy” responds to popular

nationalism at home, but is counter-productive abroad. It can undercut the soft power benefits from infrastructure spending in China's Belt and Road Initiative. It is interesting that unlike during the cold war days of Mao Zedong, China's soft power strategy has rested less on ideological proselytising of universal communist values and more heavily on transactional relationships.

In contrast, though American soft power also rests in part on transactions, it has relied heavily on values related to democracy and liberal views of human rights. Some Europeans described cold war Europe as divided into two empires — but the US presence in western Europe during the cold war was an “empire by invitation” in contrast to the Soviet empire in eastern Europe. However, with Trump's recent bullying of Volodymyr Zelenskyy and his false statements about Ukraine — combined with the critical speech given by vice-president JD Vance at last month's Munich Security Conference — Europeans and others have cause to worry about the US commitment to Nato as an alliance of democracies.

In Trump's view, the post-1945 world order of rules, institutions and alliances has suckered the US into accepting unfair trade practices and paying for foreign defence. He describes himself as a dealmaker (“My whole life is deals”) and sees the US-led world order as a bad deal. But he is so obsessed with the problem of free riders that he forgets that it has been in America's interest to drive the bus.

The years of Trump's first term were not kind to US soft power. This was partly a reaction to his narrowly nativist foreign policies of turning away from allies and multilateral institutions, summarised in his slogan “America First”. Friends became even more concerned when Trump undercut universal values of democracy by trying to disrupt the orderly transition of political power after he lost the 2020 election. January 6 2021 witnessed the shock of a mob invading the Capitol building in Washington. Recommended Chinese economy Martin Wolf talks to Keyu Jin: Has China's economy run out of gas?

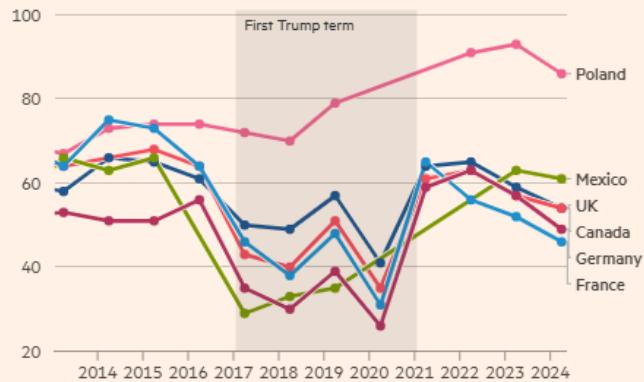
Polls show that American attractiveness diminished during Trump's first term. It recovered somewhat under the presidency of Joe Biden, with his rhetoric about democracy, and revival of support for multilateral institutions and alliances. But the history of Trump's first term leads one to expect a decline in his second.

In a longer historical perspective, American soft power has suffered decline before, particularly after the wars in Vietnam and Iraq. However, the US has demonstrated a capacity for resilience and reform. In the 1960s, cities were burning over racial protests and the streets filled with anti-war protesters. Bombs exploded in universities and government buildings. Martin Luther King and two

Kennedys were assassinated. Yet within a decade, a series of reforms passed Congress, and the honesty of Gerald Ford, the human rights policies of Jimmy Carter and the optimism of Ronald Reagan helped restore American soft power.

Opinion of the US slumped in many countries during Trump's first term, including **Canada, Mexico, France, Germany** and the **UK**

% who have a favourable view of the US



Source: Spring 2024 Global Attitudes Survey, Pew Research Center

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Moreover, even when crowds marched through the world's streets protesting against US policies in Vietnam, the protesters sang Martin Luther King's “We Shall Overcome” more than the Communist Internationale. An

anthem from the American civil rights protest movement based on universal values illustrated that America's power to attract rested not on government policy but in large part on civil society and a capacity to be self-critical and reform.

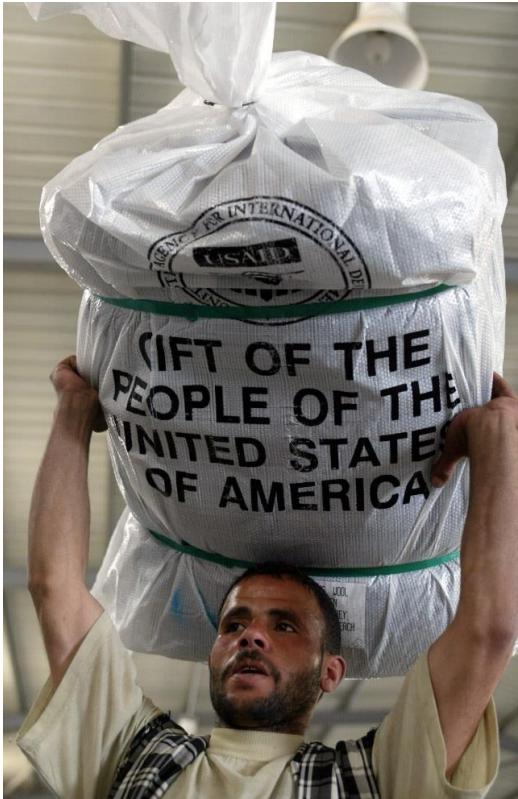
“ Many soft-power resources are separate from government — such as Hollywood movies, a diverse, free press and freedom of inquiry at universities

Unlike hard-power assets (such as a nation's armed forces), many soft-power resources are separate from the government and attract others despite politics. Hollywood movies that showcase independent women or protesting minorities can attract others. So too does a diverse and free press, as well as the charitable work of US foundations and the freedom of inquiry at American universities. Companies, universities, foundations, churches and protest movements develop soft power of their own, which may reinforce others' views of the country. Peaceful protests can actually generate soft power.

By contrast, the Trump-inspired mob in the Capitol in January 2021 was far from peaceful. It also provided a disturbing illustration of the way Trump exacerbated

political polarisation by making his myth of a stolen election a litmus test in the Republican party. The US has become increasingly polarised during the past two decades, a shift that was under way well before the 2016 election. Many senators and Congress members were cowed by threats of a primary challenge by members of Trump's base.

As Trump, with the help of billionaire Elon Musk, weakens democratic norms, destroys institutions and asserts the power of what his supporters call the "unitary executive" presidency, some critics fear that January 2021 was a harbinger of democratic decline. Trump's blanket pardon of violent protesters has reinforced these fears. If these trends continue, they will weaken American soft power.



Joseph Nye is former dean of the Kennedy School at Harvard University and author of the recent memoir 'A Life in the American Century'

Two views on bringing USAID to an end

Text 8 - American soft power doesn't need reform — it needs a complete redesign

The Hill, by Mark Green, opinion contributor - 08/26/25

The abrupt dismantling of U.S. Agency for International Development has created many uncertainties in how the U.S. carries out international assistance and humanitarian relief. But it also offers a once-in-a-generation opportunity to set a new course with fresh ideas and new approaches.

The good news is that a number of efforts are already underway to "reform foreign assistance," but it is essential

A man in Jordan carries a package from USAID in 2003 © Reuters

Fortunately, there are reasons not to write off American democracy just yet. Courts work slowly, but they still work. If Trump's economic policies lead to inflation or painful reductions in social programmes, he will probably lose the House of Representatives in 2026, which would restore some checks and balances. Markets can also produce constraints. And in a federal system, there are multiple centres of power. In 2020's election a democratic political culture produced many local heroes, such as secretaries and state legislators who stood up to Trump's efforts to intimidate them into "finding" votes. And that election result was upheld in more than 60 court cases overseen by an independent judiciary.

This does not mean that all is well with American democracy. The first Trump presidency eroded a number of democratic norms, and the pace has increased since his second inauguration. Social media models, some controlled by Trump and Musk, are based on algorithms that profit from polarising extremism, and artificial intelligence makes all social media subject to manipulation by conspiracy theorists. The problem of polarisation is far from solved, and there is much to worry about in democratic terms.

Soft power is only part of a country's power. It must be combined with hard power in ways that are mutually reinforcing rather than contradictory. And democratic values are not the only source of soft power. A reputation for being benevolent and competent also generates attraction. But legitimacy matters, and for much of the world where democracy and rights are important, a country's alignment with those values is a vital source of soft power. True realism does not neglect liberal values or soft power. But extreme narcissists such as Trump are not true realists, and American soft power will have a hard time during the next four years.

to realize what's called for is something more sweeping than we've produced in past reform efforts.

"Reform" implies a one-off project with a beginning and an end, when we need an entirely new framework that changes and evolves as the world does. "Assistance" presupposes America only offers funding when, in fact, we have so much more to share. American ingenuity is second to none, and we must capitalize on the flow of ideas

and information and the best ways to break down barriers to private enterprise and investment.

Let's not get caught up in acronyms and org charts — the "hardware" of foreign policy — when it's a focus on the software that's needed. Previous "reform" efforts wasted time with disputes over where offices and titles will fit into the schematics of bureaucracy, when we need a strategic approach with a clear vision statement on how and why we engage with the world and build from there.

In the first Trump administration, we proclaimed the very purpose of all foreign assistance should be ending its need to exist. When we encountered leaders and countries willing to take on policy reforms, we would walk with them on their "journey to self-reliance." Our vision was for countries to go from being aid recipients to trade partners to fellow donors and contributors. Every leader I met during my travels was eager to embrace that vision as well.

To go along with that vision, we should build our new approach around the principle that private enterprise remains the greatest force on earth for lifting lives and building communities. That doesn't mean merely turning to business to carry out government-designed orders — that's contracting. We've been doing that for years.

What we really need is collaboration, where officials set forth broad goals and concepts, but then turn to entrepreneurs for their ideas on the best ways to get there. It means understanding business supply chains, distribution networks, and market strategies, and then looking for areas where strategic and economic interests align to incentivize effectiveness and innovation in ways that make resources go further.

Second, we must remember the importance of our presence overseas. During the first Trump administration, I often gave my USAID colleagues a reality check by saying, "Just so we're clear, we don't actually do development here in the Reagan Building. And we don't do development anywhere in Washington, D.C.

Development takes place out there, overseas, in countless communities large and small."

Having a strong presence overseas advances American business opportunities around the world — a principle China has already learned. Beijing now has more diplomatic posts in the world than we do, and in particular, a larger diplomatic footprint in Africa. Every person they place with those posts is a Chinese voice in the field and a new channel for China to spot economic opportunities, press its interests and shape strategic relationships.

Finally, a new approach to wielding American soft power recognizes we are entering what the IMF's Kristalina Georgieva has described as "an increasingly shock-prone world." That's not only true in terms of macroeconomics, but it applies with respect to development challenges as well. When we provide our humanitarian assistance, we should include elements that help those receiving relief become stronger and more resilient against future shocks and disasters, both man-made and natural.

American leadership has long made this world a better place. To be sure, not everything has gone right in our foreign assistance programs, and not every dollar has produced the hoped-for results, but the difference that initiatives like PEPFAR, Feed the Future and President Trump's own Prosper Africa have made is nothing short of extraordinary. Thirty seven million lives saved since 2003 and closing 1,100 trade and investment deals in four years is not just impressive, but a strategically smart investment.

Programs like the Millennium Challenge Corporation and PEPFAR changed the way the world approaches key development and humanitarian challenges, and this moment calls for a whole new approach that's at least as bold, accelerates progress, and serves all of America's interests: humanitarian, strategic and economic.

Ambassador Mark Green was President Trump's first term USAID administrator and President George W. Bush's Ambassador to Tanzania. He was also a four-term congressman representing Wisconsin's 8th District.

Test 9 - We may all regret dismantling USAID

By Ryan Crow - *The Los Angeles Times*, Feb. 22, 2025

American foreign assistance is experiencing an existential moment. The foreign assistance budget appears to be on the chopping block, and the primary agency responsible for delivering foreign assistance, the U.S. Agency for International Development, is undergoing rapid, unplanned disassembly. Some are saying it's time to give up on foreign assistance altogether, but is it?

As someone who worked on USAID-funded projects around the world for nearly 15 years, I can say that

USAID deserves much of the criticism it receives — critiques such as poor performance, misplaced focus and insubordination. Many of its projects run far behind schedule or fail to achieve their intended results. Others appear to be poorly aligned with U.S. foreign policy objectives or simply disconnected from them. Even the more successful programs cost substantially more than one might expect. And U.S.-based contractors and nongovernmental organizations take home a large portion of the assistance, all while working on contracts

and grants that minimize their risk and guarantee a profit (where permitted).

But our strategic interests, including energy, critical minerals and counterterrorism, among others, span the globe. A few billion dollars wielded effectively in countries around the world can do far more for American interests than some want to believe, especially in the long run. Dismantling the agency may be something we come to regret.

Foreign assistance fills the liminal space between harder and softer forms of power, reducing friction in the sometimes fraught but often low-stakes interactions that comprise the bulk of international political engagement. For example, military power is of little use in convincing a small, cash-strapped ally or friend to devote more energy to disease surveillance. Similarly, sometimes pure persuasion won't cut it. Only aid, in the form of security assistance, development projects or both, will change minds. And sometimes the stakes are high — such as convincing a would-be adversary to allow U.S. forces to hunt terrorists on its territory, when doing so is likely to generate domestic opposition.

Effectively shuttering USAID will also take important power projection capabilities off the table. As many have already noted, containing disease outbreaks, reducing migration and bolstering political stability are all more difficult without the unique set of skills and expertise built up (often painfully) over decades at USAID. The value of these activities can be difficult to recognize in the short term because they often work far upstream and geographically far away from the consequence they are intended to avert, such as strengthening the justice system in Honduras to reduce migrant flows. But they do have demonstrable value. A safer, healthier, less violent and more prosperous world is in the United States' interests as much as anyone's, and foreign aid can help achieve these goals where military force, private interests or markets cannot alone.

After all, America's international interests will not safeguard themselves.

Indeed, Russia, China, Iran and others are continually seeking to promote their own interests in these same places, and at our expense. Even where competition is not particularly acute, in the absence of U.S. leadership the "jungle grows back," often in the form of security challenges, disease outbreaks or humanitarian crises that would've been much more easily and cheaply dealt with when they were small.

Despite some occasionally well-founded grumbling about ineffective or poorly designed projects, Congress has generally understood these fundamentals well.

That's why the foreign assistance budget and USAID have survived previous rounds of cost-cutting, even when the Trump administration itself has initially attempted to reduce or even zero out large portions of the foreign assistance budget. Now, however, U.S. foreign assistance is truly in danger of being eliminated or dramatically reshaped.

As satisfying as it may be to some to imagine USAID being fed to the woodchipper, the right move is to fix foreign assistance. This may not feel as decisive or effective, but doing so could reduce costs while also making U.S. foreign assistance more targeted and focused on American interests. There is already a strong if scattered playbook available to lawmakers.

First, Congress needs to reassert its budgetary authority. Congress is the appropriate venue for deliberating and determining the tradeoffs associated within the foreign assistance budget and across the government as a whole. If the American people, in whose name foreign assistance is literally delivered, are unhappy with where their tax money is going, then their elected representatives can and should reshape their appropriations to bring spending back into line. (Foreign aid generally represents about 1% of federal spending.) When coupled with rigorous oversight, more competitive processes for distributing assistance dollars and more innovative approaches to partnership and financing, the potential to decrease costs and increase effectiveness is enormous.

Second, policymakers should remember that foreign assistance is not charity. Assistance has long been a crucial component of American foreign policy, and tied to specific national objectives. The fact that foreign assistance efforts, if effective, will produce positive outcomes for the country in question should not obscure the fact that assistance is ultimately intended to make life safer, healthier and more prosperous for Americans. Even if "America first" is the objective, achieving it doesn't mean "America only" is a viable strategic choice.

Policymakers should assign values to specific foreign assistance efforts and make strategic tradeoffs to further the interests of the United States. Programs that are ineffective or that are not reflective of American values should be cut. In light of looming fiscal challenges, that may well mean a smaller foreign assistance budget, but it should also mean a more nimble, focused and self-consciously American one as well.

Ryan Crow is the director of program design, impact and implementation at the R Street Institute, a think tank in Washington

