Zsolt Csutak

A COMPARATIVE OUTLINE OF THE FOREIGN AND SECURITY POLICY PRIORITIES OF THE TWO TRUMP ADMINISTRATIONS

DOI: 10.35926/HDR.2026.1.7

ABSTRACT: *This paper examines the palpable changes and assumed paradigm shifts between the foreign and security policies of the first and second Trump administrations, with special focus on the global transformations and new challenges that have occurred and interfered with the concerning policy priorities over the last decade in the realm of international affairs. As the plethora of new executive orders and policy directives has demonstrated, the "America First" and the "Make America Great Again" phrases have proved to be much more than just political campaign slogans both for President Trump and for the key members of his administration. In the study, the key strategic guidelines and priorities of the first term of Trump's presidency are highlighted. Furthermore, a comparative scrutiny of the policy cornerstones is provided with special correlations between the events, decisions taken, and possible changes in priorities and methods implemented in the first year of the second term of Donald Trump's presidency. The study implements content analytical methodology, with special focus cast on conclusions to be drawn concerning the political, intellectual, and European geopolitical aspects of the American policies.*

KEYWORDS: *foreign and security policy, Trump presidencies, challenges, tariffs, peace deals*

ABOUT THE AUTHOR:
Zsolt Csutak, PhD, is an external, affiliated researcher at the Ludovika University of Public Service, Budapest, Hungary. This study was completed with the support of a short-term research grant provided by the John Lukacs Research Center of Ludovika University. (ORCID: 0000-0002-6389-9530)

INTRODUCTION

The foreign policy strategies of the second Trump administration, so far, have been marked by a continuation of many of the key approaches that defined his first term in the White House, including an emphasis on protectionist patriotism, populism, and economic protectionism. However, the second term of his presidency also saw the Trump administration adjust to shifting geopolitical circumstances, including the aftermath of the pandemic, rising tensions with the upcoming rival Asian great power, China, a recurring Middle Eastern conflict hotspot, as well as the increasingly fragmented pseudo-chaotic nature of international relations and global institutions. All these factors combined have resulted in a sensible decline in order, predictability, and coherence in the dimensions of global affairs, security, and volatile international relations. Donald Trump, as a political pioneer and

'black swan'[1] ever since his striking appearance in the White House in 2016, has drastically shaken and altered the ways and methods we used to regard, comprehend, and analyze American policies and executives. Trump's eccentric, social media-based, outspoken, and direct communication manner has also transformed public diplomacy and domestic and foreign policymaking in a rather unique though controversial way, heralding the dawn of a new, postmodern, antagonistic digital age. His "America First" agenda, which prioritized political sovereignty, placed American hegemonic primacy and economic interests before liberal institutionalism and multilateral cooperation urged by previous Democratic Party administrations. President Trump also continued to influence foreign policy decisions significantly throughout the first year of his second term, even taking the lead in key bilateral diplomatic negotiations and process developments.

The study explores the key strategic approaches adopted by the second administration of President Trump, focusing on four central areas primarily related to the foreign and security policy domains, such as the controversial relations with China, the Middle East, NATO, and Europe, as well as global trade policy. Through these case studies, the essay also analyzes the lasting impact of Trump's approach to global power structures and US foreign relations.

Both inaugural addresses of President Trump highlighted the direction and status of his administration concerning the great power position, duties, and shared responsibilities of the United States.[2] Contrary to the rather ideology-driven American administrations heralded by President Obama and Biden and the progressive liberal wing of the Democratic Party, the new administration led by the 45th and 47th American president, namely Donald J. Trump, with the majority of Republican voters behind him, demonstrated a different, old-new political paradigm shift concerning policy guidelines and decision-making priorities.

In the volatile presidential election campaigns of both 2016 and 2024, Trump pushed his rather populist, anti-progressive-elitist messages, such as "get back to 'normality' and 'drain the swamp' of the Washington establishment".[3] Furthermore, he also expressed his admiration for the established realist paleo-conservatism of his great predecessor statesmen, whom he admired and respected, such as Presidents McKinley, Theodore Roosevelt, and Ronald Reagan.[4] The so-called classic American values emphasizing patriotism, democracy, and freedom of religion and speech, with the primacy of protestant Christianity, also tend to align with the idea of American exceptionalism, pragmatism, and foreign political realism shared by Donald Trump and the key prominent figures of his White House staff.

The new members of the second Trump administration also seem to be expressing absolutely no interest or willingness to undertake any remnants of neoliberal, progressive postmodern ideas pursued by their rival Democratic Party policymakers, and spin doctors within the dimension of the overwhelmingly polarized American political spectrum. This anti-progressive purge of the White House was spectacularly manifested in the campaign against the so-called costly state-funded liberal propaganda organs, such

[1] This term was coined and introduced by American Lebanese sociologist, philosopher Nassim Nicholas Taleb in his bestselling book The Black Swan, and has been adopted by many authors and analysts ever since, e.g., POLITICO Magazine 2016.

[2] See The White House 2025.

[3] Tuzara 2024.

[4] Khalid 2025.

as the news outlets of the American Global Media Radio Free Europe, Voice of America, as well as the controversial shutdown of the US Agency for International Development (USAID).[5] The rather eccentric diplomatic actions of former US ambassador to Hungary David Pressman, commissioned between 2022 and 2025, strikingly demonstrated the ideology-driven and politically biased American diplomacy, as well as the deliberately unfriendly attitude of the Biden administration[6] towards the so-called illiberal political regime of Hungary under the leadership of Prime Minister Orbán.

Without fast forwarding to the conclusion of this paper, it can already be affirmed that in both terms of President Trump, the White House proved to be keen on establishing and maintaining a rather pragmatic, transactional, and much less ideological attitude and relationship with both its numerous allies and its more volatile partners from around the world, including the European Union, Israel, and the Islamic Republic of Iran. Trump has seemingly demonstrated a pragmatic political attitude similar to that of renowned Cardinal Richelieu and Bishop Charles Maurice de Talleyrand-Périgord from France of the bellicose 17th and 18th centuries, by claiming willingness to align even with the devil for the benefit and advantages of his country, the United States, let alone renegotiate trade tariff quotas or allied partnerships.

It is also noteworthy that Donald Trump, after the failed assassination attempt against him at the campaign event of July 2024 in Butler, Pennsylvania, claimed many times, including in his presidential inaugural address,[7] that every day after that dramatic moment is a gift for him from the Almighty. This is similar to the revelation of President Reagan, also after a failed assassination attempt in Washington, D.C. in 1981, as a sort of touch of providence or divine reassurance of his mission to save, serve, and fight for his country, the United States.[8] Nowadays, unlike for Reagan during the second peak of the Cold War in the 1980s, for President Trump, there is no real "satanic empire" on the horizon, as the Soviet Union was supposed to be, to fight against as far as ideology is concerned. However, there is the evidently rising geopolitical great power of China, which should be contained by the US within its own front yard in Southeast Asia. Nevertheless, the closest traditional ally of America, the rich but militarily rather impotent European Union,[9] proves to be a pain in the neck for Washington for various reasons. All the same, Europeans prove to be a definitely much less tiresome and volatile power structure than the old-new nuclear challenger powers, such as Russia, China, and potentially the rather hostile Iran and North Korea, which altogether tend to destabilize the US or the West-led world order and threaten the primacy of America in many respects.

These issues and dimensions tend to be the most important key international structures, policy status report details, and challenges for the White House that the president and his staff must face, address, and resolve for the benefit of their citizens as well as for their allies around the world, from Taiwan to Hungary.

5 Durkee 2025.
6 Magyar Nemzet 2023.
7 See The White House 2025.
8 See Rothman 2015.
9 Trump labelled Germany and the EU in 2018, as "frenemies, rich and weak" countries, almost as dishonest as China, but much smaller. See Winter 2018.

THE KEY STRATEGIC DIRECTIONS OF THE FIRST TERM OF PRESIDENT TRUMP

The first administration of Donald Trump articulated a distinct "America First" grand strategy that emphasized national sovereignty, competitive economic statecraft, and military strength, while exhibiting skepticism towards multilateral institutions and long-standing alliance commitments.

One of the most important key documents of the Trump administration, the National Security Strategy (NSS)[10] was launched in mid-December 2017, and had been elaborated and coordinated by a top military scholar, former Iraq War veteran Lt. Gen. H. R. McMaster from the White House staff. The NSS outlined four strategic pillars to be accomplished by the administration: to protect the homeland by all means, to promote American prosperity, to leverage strength to preserve peace, and to advance American influence in the world.

Furthermore, it also framed Great Power competition (especially with the rising Asian power, China, and the former superpower, the Russian Federation) as the central strategic challenge faced by the country. The strategy of the US prioritized military modernization, fierce deterrence, trade leverage (tariffs and renegotiated trade deals), and, evidently, as a landmark of Trump's policymaking, a more transactional approach to alliances involving the idea of expecting US allies to bear much greater defense burdens than before.

In practice, this foreign and security policy vision produced a mix of continuity and rupture. Continuity included sustained emphasis on counterterrorism, force posture in East Asia, and NATO's conventional deterrence, as well as the use of sanctions against hostile nations, e.g., Iran, Cuba, and North Korea. Ruptures involved withdrawal or American disengagement from multilateral agreements (e.g., the Trans-Pacific Partnership, the Paris Climate Accord, and the Iran nuclear deal), public questioning of alliance obligations, and frequent use of unilateral economic coercion (foreshadowing the tariff war approach on China and even on US allies, like Canada, Japan, or the European Union). These actions signaled a preference for selective engagement over the post-war US-dominated liberal world order's more institutionalized burden-sharing scheme, resulting in the new military expenditure thresholds enforced by Washington, targeting 2% and then 5% GDP-related defense budget contribution by all NATO members.[11]

American political theorist Hal Brands asks whether the Trump administration had a coherent grand strategy at all or just an ad hoc transactional mix of policies.[12] Other analysts claimed that Trump's rhetoric, along with selective military and economic initiatives, constituted a distinct "America First" strategy focused on privileging near-term material interests and imposing costs on perceived free-riders among the allies, such as prosperous but militarily lame European nations from Spain to Germany.[13] From this perspective, the first Trump administration seemed to be lacking coherent long-term strategic planning despite the various strategic documents it managed to elaborate and launch. Policy oscillations between confrontation and accommodation (notably with North Korea and Russia) and organizational turbulence undercut the systematic execution of directives outlined in the strategies.

[10] See The White House 2017.
[11] See Stokes 2018.
[12] See Brands 2017.
[13] Bacevich 2017.

Operationally, the Trump administration shifted resources and rhetorical emphasis towards Great Power competition with China – combining military deterrence (Indo-Pacific presence and renewed pseudo-alliance with Taiwan and the Philippines, aiming to contain the explicit maritime expansionist attempts of China), economic competition (trade war and export controls), and technological security measures – while reducing US engagement in some Middle East contingencies and arguing for European and regional burden-sharing in terms of collective defense expenses. However, many policy experts, including even Russian scholars, argue that despite the affirmative Trump diplomacy and foreign political efforts, there is a significant decline in American assertive and hegemonic power presence in Southeast Asia, which had started well before Trump's presidency during the Obama administration, facing Chinese expansion.[14]

The defense strategy of President Trump involved the reform and upgrade of American military technology, which included an ambitious development project starting in 2019, something similar to a renewed Manhattan Project, supported by the US Congress.[15] The military technology megaproject, not so much publicized, has been allocated a special budget of more than a hundred billion dollars to be spent on American nuclear technology upgrade, such as the construction of 12 new ballistic missile nuclear submarines, super carriers, new generation Sentinel ICBMs, and even new thermonuclear warheads, also called pots.[16]

Moreover, the establishment of the sixth American military branch, the US Space Force, by President Trump in December 2018,[17] along with the strengthening of the 10-year-old Cyber Command (USCYBERCOM),[18] aligns with the military technology development ambitions of the Trump administration. These new military branches and command centers with global outreach, equipped with 21st-century special military technological know-how, aim to develop new defensive and offensive operational skills, competences, and potentials with the direct strategic goal to face and deter all potential new challenges from state- or non-state-level actors that may loom over America from space (China, Russia), as well as from the new warfare domain posed by cyberspace.

Of President Trump's appearance and communication style, his administration also favored personalizing the so-called summit diplomacy (with influential Asian leaders, most noteworthy being his two meetings with North Korean dictator Kim Jong Un) and public transactional bargaining as instruments of statecraft and US power amplification.

Foreign policy analysts conclude that the period accelerated debates about the liberal international order's resilience and the balance between American primacy, restraint, and transnationalism. Trump's foreign and trade policy could as well be depicted as win or win, or even as a sort of redefined Cold War tactic of "zero-sum game",[19] where the US counterpart evidently must be on the bright and winner's side in any negotiation.[20]

[14] Stepanov 2022.
[15] Smith 2020.
[16] Kristensen et al. 2025.
[17] See the US Space Force website on their mission: https://www.spaceforce.com/about.
[18] See U.S. Cyber Command [no year].
[19] Term and strategy co-elaborated by renowned Hungarian American mathematician and nuclear scientist John von Neumann, who played a key role in the American Manhattan Project as well as in the foundation of RAND Corporation in 1949. See Bhattacharya 2021, 129–135.
[20] McMaster – Cohn 2017.

Political science professor Brands also emphasized that institutional constraints (bureaucratic continuities, military missions, and alliance structures) moderated some campaign-level promises of Trump, producing a hybrid outcome for the Trump presidency until the outbreak of the pandemic in 2020.[21] Sadly enough for the world and for the Americans, towards the tormented final years of his presidency, Trump's controversial but mostly efficient economic and foreign political measures had been dramatically overshadowed by the socio-economic disruptions of the COVID-19 pandemic, which also resulted in more than one million fatalities and drastic *vis major* policy measures in the US. The coronavirus pandemic and its devastating socio-political consequences (e.g., partly arbitrarily imposed lockdown) definitely contributed to the further polarization of the tormented American political fabric and the ensuing political regime change in Washington from a Republican to a Democratic Party-led administration, with the shocking scenes of the siege of the Capitol on January 6, as well as the demise of the first term of Donald Trump's presidency.[22]

NEW GOALS AND NEW DIRECTIONS FOR THE SECOND TRUMP PRESIDENCY

"We know only too well that war comes not
when the forces of freedom are strong,
but when they are weak.
It is then that tyrants are tempted."
President Reagan

The main headlines of the foreign and security policy strategies of the second term of the Trump administration also reflected the continuation and intensification of his "America First" and "Make America Great Again" (or "MAGA") approach, which emphasized patriotism, protectionism, and the prioritization of American interests over multilateralism or international cooperation, partly featured by liberal institutionalism of the previous Obama and Biden administrations. Although Trump's first term was marked by significant volatility, preliminary trade wars, and an unprecedented approach to personal diplomacy and peacemaking efforts, the second term had to grapple with the increasingly complex international environment of the post-pandemic world, as well as with increasingly violent military conflicts in Ukraine and the Middle East.[23]

While certain aspects of US foreign policy were consolidated, Donald Trump's second term revealed deeper divisions in the global political landscape, pushing the administration to adapt its strategies in response to China's rising influence in the world, the Middle East's ongoing instability with Iran and Israel in its epicenter, the European security challenges, and the multilateral trade order, which has also been thoroughly reshaped by the American trade tariffs.

[21] Cf. Brands 2017, 23.
[22] The American Presidency Project 2020.
[23] See Friedman 2022.

In the first year of his second term, President Trump manifested an increased American foreign political assertion in terms of new bilateral trade tariff schemes renegotiated and redefined with more than 90 different countries from around the world. This new assertive attitude manifested in foreign trade policy reflects the economic hard-soft power stance of the White House, which is meant to be part of the new power toolkit of President Trump, next to the deliberate deterrent military might of the US. This foreign political attitude and volatile economic assertion of President Trump displays a remarkable alteration and sharp distinction from the liberal, trade and rule-based world order which had been established by the US after World War II and seemed to be prevailing until the advent of Donald Trump and the rise of the semi-anarchic transactionist pragmatism as a new guiding principle and framework narrative in international relations and trade.[24]

The federal budgetary constraints of the United States, crippled by skyrocketing sovereign debt of 30 trillion dollars, have affirmed the necessity of new revenue resources for the US Treasury in an estimated amount of up to 5 trillion dollars in the forthcoming years from the new tariffs. The intellectual masterminds behind the controversial and much-debated foreign trade deal policy of Donald Trump include Peter Navarro, presidential advisor on financial issues and former Harvard professor of economics, Stephen Miran,[25] head of the Council of Economic Advisors of the President, and Kevin Hassett, president of the National Economic Council.[26]

Concerning Trump's sympathy and admiration towards the assertive trade-based American foreign policy, as well as his controversial idea of a potential territorial expansion of the US (from the strategically important Panama Canal to the Arctic region of Greenland), the name and example of former President McKinley must be noted. President McKinley is among the presidents with notorious protectionist trade policies from the late 19th century, with an average 60% of trade tariff leveraged on goods imported into the United States in the 1890s.[27] President McKinley was also considered a victorious republican commander-in-chief, who waged a comprehensive and quite devastating war on the Kingdom of Spain, extending from the Caribbean to the Pacific theatre of war, resulting in the annexation of numerous strategically important islands to the US, such as Puerto Rico, the Philippines, or Guam.[28]

Trump, as well as his influential aides and speechwriter consultants, like Ross Worthington,[29] have seemingly found a special source of political and intellectual inspiration in 19th-century political ideas. These influential legitimizing political and cultural concepts were also shared by the above-mentioned President McKinley and heralded the intellectual heritage of the idea of manifest destiny, or the Westward, and consequently global, even space-oriented, expansion of the US frontier and sphere of interest in the world.[30] Interestingly enough, not only President Trump, but previously, presidents Theodore Roosevelt, John F. Kennedy, and even Ronald Reagan had also expressed their admiration and respect towards these ideas on American exceptionalism and mission, or "manifest destiny" about

[24] Cf. Ikenberry 2011.
[25] Das 2025.
[26] Mueller et al. 2025.
[27] See Vock 2025.
[28] See Khalid 2025.
[29] Cai – Burns 2025.
[30] See The Manifest Destiny Doctrine and James K. Polk's Presidential Actions Explained 2025.

a nation guided by divine providence. President Trump even directly referred to these new guiding principles at the start of his presidency in his second inaugural speech on January 25, 2025.[31]

From this vantage point, we could assume that the expansionist ideas of President Trump expressed to Panama, Venezuela, or even the largest island in the world, Greenland, may as well be justified by and legitimized based on the political philosophy of the Manifest Destiny or by the well-known American Monroe Doctrine, so often cited since 1823. These special ideas and political strategic approaches altogether share the idea of American supremacy and exclusivity, particularly concerning the pivotal and exclusive right of the United States to be the regional, continental hegemon in North and Central America, against any rival, hostile foreign power that may intrude into the hemisphere. Notably, in the 19th century, such a foreign hostile power proved to be the British Empire and later Spain, while during the Cold War, it was the Soviet Union, and more recently, its successor great powers: Russia and China, both pursuing superpower ambitions on their own will.[32]

The fear of covert Chinese economic and political expansion in the Americas is not without basis, considering the amount of evidence of the growing presence and influence of China in fragile states like Panama, Nicaragua, Venezuela, or even on the Danish autonomous island of Greenland, which may justify the security concerns of Washington in this matter.[33] China, as the major global great power challenger, as well as economic and military adversary in the Pacific region, has been neglected in many ways by previous administrations before President Trump. The grandiose Chinese navy development program of the last two decades could as well be labelled as the most ambitious and vast military shipbuilding project in history, which has made the navy branch of the People's Liberation Army of China the largest maritime force by the number of military vessels afloat (355 altogether) in the Indo-Pacific region.[34] The Trump administration reacted to the new security challenge posed by China (and its infamous ally, North Korea) in the Pacific megaregion by ordering the launch of a comprehensive, new-generation military vessel construction project as of 2025, aiming to obtain and operate at least 381 navy ships by 2050.[35]

Moreover, in terms of foreign and security policies, based on the above-mentioned political intellectual fundamentals and attitudes, the second Trump administration seems to be pursuing the strategic guidelines elaborated during its first term in 2018–2019, heralded by the National Security Strategy, the National Defense Strategy (NDS),[36] and the National Military Strategy (NMS).[37] In the latter two key American documents, it has been stated that the new threats and challenges in the rapidly changing and evolving international environment demand an urgent upgrade and development plan primarily for the American nuclear triad capabilities,[38] including the development of new generation warheads for the deterrent weapons of mass destruction (WMDs).

---

31 See The White House 2025.
32 Tokatlian 2024.
33 Curley 2025.
34 Bassoli 2025.
35 Cichon 2025.
36 2018 National Defense Strategy of the United States of America 2018.
37 The Joint Staff 2018.
38 Such as intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs), ballistic missile nuclear submarines, and strategic bombers (B-1, B-2, B-52s).

What is even more important, the development of a comprehensive missile defense capability or missile shield, covering potentially the entire North American continent under the supervision of the Colorado-based North American Aerospace Defense Command (NORAD), has also been reinitiated and forwarded to the US Congress for approval and budgetary support. The so-called "Golden Dome for America" layered missile defense plan[39] is intended to be a continental version of the famous Israeli "Iron Dome" and "Arrow 1 and 2" missile defense shield systems. Nonetheless, in the American context, it would be the revisited and upgraded 21st-century version of the "Star Wars" megaproject, initiated by the Reagan administration in 1982, with the famous Hungarian American nuclear physicist Edward Teller as the most influential mastermind behind the costly project during the last decade of the Cold War.[40] In the rather intense period of the Cold War era, the preliminary American missile defense system aimed to intercept and destroy any ICBM coming from the Soviet Union across the Arctic region towards the mainland United States. However, nowadays, new missile threats may come towards America from North Korea or China, from the eastern or the north-eastern directions. The rather ambitious project involving cutting-edge military technologies will be funded from an extra budget ranging from USD 120 to 350 billion[41] from the estimated 1 trillion-dollar mega-budget for the financial year of 2026 of the Department of Defense.[42] The military items proposed by the defense project will be developed by outstanding American military contractors, such as Lockheed Martin,[43] Northrop Grumman,[44] Boeing, and Raytheon. It is noteworthy that in October 2025, President Trump also signed an executive order aiming to rename and rebrand the Pentagon, or officially the US Department of Defense, to the US Department of War,[45] as it used to be called until the end of the Second World War. The presidential order symbolically features the firm and resilient response of the United States to the rather volatile, hostile international environment that the country may have to face in the 21st century.

As far as the strategically important transatlantic security policies are concerned, it is noteworthy that President Trump has a rather sceptic and ambivalent attitude towards his European NATO allies, most of whom previously, during his first term in office, he considered as mere rich free-riders, delinquent beneficiaries of the American security umbrella, who are unwilling to share the burdens and pay for their own military defense and security.[46] According to John Bolton, Trump's former national security adviser and a neoconservative hawkish strategist, Trump was outraged by the rather impotent attitude of his European allies, even considering for a moment withdrawing the United States from NATO before the notorious transatlantic NATO security summit held in Brussels in July 2018.[47]

---

39 Baldwin et al. 2025.

40 See Broad 1992.

41 This skyrocketing amount would account for about 30% of the annual budget of the Pentagon from 2026, or for China's annual defense budget, and it is also a larger amount than the entire defense expenditure of the European NATO member states. See World Population Review 2025.

42 Office of the Under Secretary of Defense 2025.

43 Lockheed Martin 2025.

44 Kumar 2025.

45 Toropin – Megerian 2025.

46 Diamond 2018.

47 Cf. Bolton 2020, 118–126.

Trump's outraged attitude has been appeased and softened towards Europe, though his overall skepticism and disfavor towards those allies who are unable and unwilling to spend on their own defense and security have not changed significantly in his second term of presidency.[48] This aggressive and rather assertive American attitude has also been reflected in the shocking initiative of President Trump and US Secretary of War Pete Hegseth at the 2025 NATO summit in The Hague to raise the minimal defense requirement from 2% to 5% of the members states' GDP by 2035, which would pose considerably high extra financial burden on most of the NATO member states, including the US.[49]

Nevertheless, the soaring defense expenditures in Europe and North America, facing the war in Ukraine and the subtle expansionist hybrid threats from Russia, would evidently benefit the vast American military industrial complex, too. According to a recent NATO directive, 3.5% of the member states' defense budgets should account directly for the development of military infrastructure and lethal capabilities of the various military branches, while 1.5% of the planned budget should be spent on critical infrastructure protection and other military and civilian defense projects, personal development training, *inter alia*.[50]

President Trump's famed transactionalism was also reflected in his security policy, a harsh commitment to reliable self-defense, as well as in his determination for common burden-sharing within the transatlantic defense alliance, which has remarkably been met and manifested through the significant changes in the defense budget figures of all NATO states. While in 2018, only 8 NATO member states fulfilled their 2% defense budget commitments, by 2024, this number reached 18, and it culminated in 2025, with 31 out of the 32 NATO member states in total.[51] Belgium, Slovenia, and Denmark prove to be the only member states at, or slightly below, the budgetary threshold, and tend to be lagging behind their commitments, as they seem to be unwilling to comply with Trump's harsh defense policy directives.

Besides and seemingly contrary to Trump's firm militarist attitude and determination to the maintenance of collective self-defense capabilities, mostly based on the revisited Reaganite 'peace through strength' strategy expressed in the motto above,[52] it is also remarkable that in the first year of Trump's second term in the White House, his foreign policy activism and diplomatic offensive for peace in various conflicts has proved to be quite striking, efficient, and spectacular, even extraordinary. Taking Trump's own words and estimates for granted, he brokered seven peace deals from Pakistan to Armenia, and particularly in the Gaza war with Israel, only in 2025. However, not surprisingly, there are many controversial arguments against this rather superfluous presidential claim.[53]

Concerning the foreign and security policy strategies of President Trump's second term in the White House, they can be presumed to continue the implementation of his primary political ideas, focusing on the well-known "MAGA" dimension and set of objectives behind this concept. It may as well involve soft or even hard power interventions to reach and achieve these goals, with the allies of the US (for instance, the EU) or more emphatically

48 See Dombrowski – Reich 2017.
49 NATO 2025a.
50 NATO 2025a.
51 NATO 2025b.
52 As expressed by President Reagan in July 1980 at the Republican National Convention, cited in the chapter's motto. Reagan 1980.
53 Taheri 2025.

among hostile entities and 'rogue states', let it be China, Russia, North Korea, Venezuela, or even the Islamic state of Iran. All these states seem to be challenging the American hegemony and threatening the economic and world-political interests and primacy of the US, which has to be tackled with appropriate American countermeasures.[54]

All the same, the respective core principles, strategic guidelines, and set of goals for the Trump administration are planned to be framed and published for the public by the end of 2025 in the forthcoming key documents, namely the National Security Strategy and the National Defense Strategy of the United States,[55] elaborated by the National Security Council of the White House as well as the Pentagon under the supervision of Secretary of State Marco Rubio and Secretary of War Pete Hegseth.[56]

CONCLUSIONS

While the first term of Trump's presidency aimed to establish a more pragmatic, utilitarian, and pseudo-conservative political agenda, not breaking with the neoliberal economic and trade policies, the second Trump administration's foreign policy approach proves to be more realistic and idea-centric (though not ideologized) at the same time, based on 19th-century political ideas on American exceptionalism, manifest destiny, protectionism, and much disputed territorial expansions proclaimed on the basis of a revisited Monroe Doctrine. This revisited old-new foreign political paradigm seems to be implemented through the foreign and security directives of President Trump's second term administration, particularly concerning controversial issues and hegemony concerns in the Caribbean region (Venezuela, Panama Canal), as well as in the Arctic, considering the highly disputed American annexation plan of Greenland against the objection of a long-time US ally, the Kingdom of Denmark.

Trump's foreign policy strategies have ultimately been shaped by a combination of anti-liberal conservative commitments, personal diplomacy, and a pragmatic response to shifting global dynamics, mostly neglecting the institutionalized global diplomacy of the United Nations. While the Trump administration's populist messages and protectionist trade policies attracted significant domestic support in the first months of his second term, they also reshaped diplomatic terms and strained relations with traditional, predominantly European allies (with few exceptions, like Hungary and Türkiye), and challenged global trade norms previously established and maintained by the United States itself.

President Trump's focus on unilateral actions, relying on his bulwark political slogans "America First" and "MAGA", his economic nationalism, and military disengagement marked a clear departure from mainstream liberal institutionalist American foreign policy approaches. Whether these strategies ultimately served American interests or isolated the US on the world stage remains a subject of ongoing debate among analysts, since the second term of his presidency has not even reached its halfway point.

[54] Cf. with the findings of Csizmazia et al. 2025.

[55] U.S. Department of War 2025.

[56] The manuscript of this paper had been closed by the end of November 2025, only a few weeks before the two above-mentioned important strategic documents were to be published in the US. However, the length of this study does not allow a detailed presentation and analysis of the aforementioned strategic documents.

Across both of Trump's administrations, US policy towards Ukraine and Russia has been marked by a tension between classical support for sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine – in the form of sanctions and aid – and a president predisposed towards diplomatic pragmatism, often at the expense of long-term strategic clarity and predictability with the aim of appeasing , containing, and neutralizing an expansionist Russia in Eastern Europe. All the same, the primary strategic hegemony-challenger rival of the United States remains China, whose ambitious maritime development projects in the Pacific region must also be counterbalanced and contained by the United States and its allies in the region, most notably by Japan, Australia, and South Korea. Presumably, a potential and predictable superpower clash between the US and China might occur in that strategic region in the 21st century.

During the first term of Trump's presidency, the balance leaned towards support for Ukraine, albeit shattered by internal contradictions and controversial presidential rhetoric. In his second term, the balance appears to be shifting again: to a much more striking and harsher economic line against the Russian Federation, but with also a growing willingness to diplomatic solutions that may compromise Ukraine's position and legitimize the shaky *status quo* along the frontlines.

This oscillation and *ad hoc* diplomacy prove to be a negotiating tool for the White House, although it is also a risky factor of uncertainty, which may undermine the coherence and reliability of US foreign policy. Provided it is pursued without clear guarantees, it risks weakening both Ukraine's statehood and national security, as well as long-term US influence in Eastern Europe and the strategic dilemma of NATO's Eastern flank facing a growing risk of escalation into a full-blown war and transcontinental security threat from the part of the Russian Federation in the forthcoming years.

The Trump administration's approach to European affairs tends to reflect partly great power arrogance or *hubris,*[57] and partly negligence, dismay, and a distorted sense of resentment of being personally offended, a feeling that has been expressed by both key parties involved: President Trump and the liberal leaders of the European Union. This sort of allied dissent and soft political hostility between Washington and Brussels certainly does not contribute to a successful, orchestrated transatlantic effort to achieve a lasting peace in Eastern Europe with or against an increasingly more assertive Russia.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- *2018 National Defense Strategy of the United States of America*. Washington, D.C., 2018. https://www.dau.edu/sites/default/files/Migrated/CopDocuments/2018%20National%20Defense%20Strategy%20Summary.pdf (Downloaded: 12/10/2025)
- Bacevich, Andrew: *The "Global Order" Myth*. The American Conservative, 2017.
- Baldwin, Sarah L. et al.: *What is the "Golden Dome for America"? Here's what to know about Trump's missile defense plans*. CBS News, 2025. https://www.cbsnews.com/news/golden-dome-for-america-trump-missile-defense-plan/ (Downloaded: 17/11/2025)

[57] Also *hybris,* is a Greek word, meaning 'pompous pride', applied to great power arrogance, an attitude that has prevailed for centuries among great powers, such as Russia or the US. See the comprehensive analysis of the US Congressional Research Service 2024, 22–30.

- Bassoli, Anna Matilde: *Bigger and Better: How China's Fleet is Getting More Dangerous*. The Diplomat, 2025. https://thediplomat.com/2025/11/bigger-and-better-how-chinas-fleet-is-getting-more-dangerous/ (Downloaded: 30/11/2025)
- Bhattacharya, Ananyo: *The Man from the Future – The visionary Life of John von Neumann*. Penguin, New York, 2021.
- Brands, Hal: *The Unexceptional Superpower: American Grand Strategy in the Age of Trump*. Survival, Global Politics and Strategy, Vol. 59, No. 6 (2017), 7–40.
- Bolton, John R.: *The Room Where It Happened*. Simon & Schuster, New York, 2020.
- Broad, J. William: *Teller's War. The Top-Secret Story Behind the Star Wars Deception*. Simon & Schuster, New York, 1992.
- Cai, Sophia – Burns, Dasha: *Trump hires policy-focused head speechwriter*. POLITICO Magazine, 2025. https://www.politico.com/live-updates/2025/01/14/congress/trump-worthington-00198301 (Downloaded: 22/09/2025)
- Cichon, Frederick: *The Next Great Era in U.S. Shipbuilding*. U.S. Naval Institute, 2025. https://www.usni.org/magazines/proceedings/2025/february/next-great-era-us-shipbuilding (Downloaded: 19/07/2025)
- Csizmazia, Gábor – Eszterhai, Viktor – Tárnok, Balázs: *The Impact of Trump 2.0 on Europe's Position in the Transforming World Order*. John Lukacs Analyses on Global Affairs, Ludovika University of Public Service, No. 1 (2025).
- Curley, Gregg: *The US is right to be concerned about China's influence over the Panama Canal*. New Atlanticist, January 9, 2025.
- Das, Supratik: *Meet Stephen Miran: Brain Behind Donald Trump's Bold Tariff Blitz Shaking Up Global Trade*. The Daily Jagran, 2025.
- Diamond, Jeremy: *Trump opens NATO summit with blistering criticism of Germany, labels allies 'delinquent'*. CNN, 2018. https://edition.cnn.com/2018/07/10/politics/donald-trump-nato-summit-2018/ (Downloaded: 22/10/2025)
- Dombrowski, Peter – Reich, Simon: *Does Trump have a grand strategy?* International Affairs, Vol. 93, No. 5 (2017), 1013–1037.
- Durkee, Alison: *Why is Elon Musk Attacking USAID? How Partisan Politics Made Foreign Aid Agency Suddenly So Controversial.* Forbes, 2025. https://www.forbes.com/sites/alisondurkee/2025/02/03/why-is-elon-musk-attacking-usaid-how-partisan-politics-made-foreign-aid-agency-suddenly-so-controversial/ (Downloaded: 19/11/2025)
- Friedman, George: *Trump: The Global Challenges*. GF Geopolitical Trends Analyses, 2022.
- Ikenberry, G. John: *Liberal Leviathan: The Origins, Crisis and Transformation of the American World Order*. Princeton University Press, 2011.
- Khalid, Asma: *Why Trump loves former President McKinley so much*. NPR, February 3, 2025. https://www.npr.org/2025/02/03/nx-s1-5272753/why-trump-loves-former-president-mckinley-so-much (Downloaded: 09/10/2025)
- Kristensen, Hans M. – Korda, Matt – Johns, Eliana – Knight-Boyle, Mackenzie: *United States nuclear weapons, 2025*. Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists, 2025. https://thebulletin.org/premium/2025-01/united-states-nuclear-weapons-2025/ (Downloaded: 19/11/2025)
- Kumar, Aditya: *Northrop Grumman Targets Key Role in America Golden Dome Missile Defense Program*. Defense News, July 29, 2025. https://www.thedefensenews.com/news-details/Northrop-Grumman-Targets-Key-Role-in-America-Golden-Dome-Missile-Defense-Program/ (Downloaded: 20/08/2025)
- Lockheed Martin: *Golden Dome for America*. August 2025. https://www.lockheedmartin.com/en-us/capabilities/missile-defense/golden-dome-missile-defense.html (Downloaded: 21/10/2025)

- Magyar Nemzet: *Pressman, a patron of the LGBTQ Community*. 2023. https://magyarnemzet.hu/english/2023/06/pressman-patron-of-lgbtq-community-video (Downloaded: 18/10/2025)
- McMaster, H. R. – Cohn, Gary D.: *America First Doesn't Mean America Alone*. Wall Street Journal, May 30, 2017.
- Mueller, Eleanor – Chalfant, Morgan – Talcott, Shelby: '*Team tariff' vs 'team econ': Trump's top advisers at odds as markets shake*. Semafor, April 8, 2025.
- NATO: *Defence expenditures and NATO's 5% commitment*. The Hague, 2025a. https://www.nato.int/en/what-we-do/introduction-to-nato/defence-expenditures-and-natos-5-commitment (Downloaded: 10/08/2025)
- NATO: *Defence Expenditure of NATO Countries (2014-2025)*. NATO Press Office, 2025b. https://www.nato.int/content/dam/nato/webready/documents/finance/def-exp-2025-en.pdf (Downloaded: 18/09/2025)
- Office of the Under Secretary of Defense. Comptroller/Chief Financial Officer: *United States Department of Defense Fiscal Year 2026 Budget Request*. Defense Budget Overview, 2025. https://comptroller.war.gov/Portals/45/Documents/defbudget/FY2026/FY2026_Budget_Request.pdf (Downloaded: 18/08/2025)
- POLITICO Magazine: *The Black Swan President*. November 12, 2016. https://www.politico.com/magazine/story/2016/11/donald-trump-president-white-house-policy-black-swan-214450/ (Downloaded: 12/01/2025)
- Reagan, Ronald: *Peace Through Strength*. Republic National Convention, 1980. Ronald Reagan Presidential Library. https://www.reaganlibrary.gov/permanent-exhibits/peace-through-strength (Downloaded: 21/09/2024)
- Rothman, Lily: *Read President Reagan's best jokes about being shot*. Time Magazine, 2015. https://time.com/3752477/reagan-assassination-reaction/ (Downloaded: 19/08/2025)
- Smith, Jeffrey R.: *Under Trump, the nuclear weapons industry has boomed*. The Center for Public Integrity, December 23, 2020. https://publicintegrity.org/national-security/future-of-warfare/under-trump-the-nuclear-weapons-industry-has-boomed/ (Downloaded: 22/12/2024)
- Stepanov, A. S.: *US Policy towards Southeast Asia: from Barack Obama to Joe Biden*. Herald of the Russian Academy of Sciences, Vol. 92, Suppl. 15 (2022), 1473–1478.
- Stokes, Doug: *Trump, American hegemony and the future of the liberal international order.* International Affairs, Vol. 94, No. 1 (2018), 133–150.
- Taheri, Mandy: *Map shows where Donald Trump has helped broker peace deals since election*. Newsweek, August 8, 2025. https://www.newsweek.com/map-shows-where-donald-trump-has-helped-broker-peace-deals-since-election-2110970 (Downloaded: 29/09/2025)
- The American Presidency Project: *Fact Sheet – President Trump's Historic Coronavirus Response*. August 10, 2020. https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/fact-sheet-president-trumps-historic-coronavirus-response (Downloaded: 19/10/2025)
- The Joint Staff: *Description of the National Military Strategy 2018*. Washington, D.C., 2018. https://history.defense.gov/Portals/70/Documents/nms/NMS2018%20Overview.pdf?ver=oERVYfgg1p-jtlK_kYsZHQ%3d%3d (Downloaded: 12/01/2025)
- *The Manifest Destiny Doctrine and James K. Polk's Presidential Actions Explained*. USA History Timeline.com, 2025. https://www.usahistorytimeline.com/pages/the-manifest-destiny-doctrine-and-james-k-polk-s-presidential-actions-explained-a2e9f90e.php (Downloaded: 21/09/2025)
- The White House: *National Security Strategy of the United States of America*. Washington, D.C., 2017. https://stratml.us/pdfs/NSS2018.pdf (Downloaded:10/11/2025)

- The White House: *The Inaugural Addresses of President Trump, 2017 and 2025*. The White House, 2025. https://www.whitehouse.gov/remarks/2025/01/the-inaugural-address/ (Downloaded: 22/09/2025)
- Tokatlian, J. G.: *Donald Trump and the Return of the Monroe Doctrine*. Americas Quarterly, September 4, 2024. https://www.americasquarterly.org/article/donald-trump-and-the-return-of-the-monroe-doctrine/ (Downloaded: 19/09/2024)
- Toropin, Konstantin – Megerian, Chris: *White House says Trump will seek 'Department of War' rebrand for Pentagon*. PBS News, 2025. https://www.pbs.org/newshour/politics/white-house-says-trump-will-seek-department-of-war-rebrand-for-pentagon (Downloaded: 21/10/2025)
- Tuzara, Joe: *President Trump outlines NINE STEPS he plans to take to "drain the swamp"*. Tuzarapost, 2024. https://tuzarapost.substack.com/p/president-trump-outlines-nine-steps (Downloaded: 10/11/2025)
- U.S. Congressional Research Service: *Great Power Competition: Implications for Defense – Issues for Congress*. February 28, 2024. https://www.congress.gov/crs_external_products/R/PDF/R43838/R43838.101.pdf (Downloaded: 22/11/2025)
- U.S. Cyber Command: *Our History*. [no year] https://www.cybercom.mil/About/History/ (Downloaded: 22/12/2024)
- U.S. Department of War: *Statement on the Development of the 2025 National Defense Strategy*. Washington D.C., May 2, 2025. https://www.war.gov/News/Releases/Release/Article/4172735/statement-on-the-development-of-the-2025-national-defense-strategy/ (Downloaded: 20/07/2025)
- US Space Force. https://www.spaceforce.com/about (Downloaded: 21/01/2024)
- Vock, Ido: *Why Trump wants Greenland…?* BBC, March 24, 2025.
- Winter, Chase*: Donald Trump slams EU trade relationship*. Deutsche Welle, 2018. https://www.dw.com/en/donald-trump-nobody-treats-us-much-worse-than-the-eu/a-45888402 (Downloaded: 25/09/2025)
- World Population Review: *NATO Spending by Country*. 2025. https://worldpopulationreview.com/country-rankings/nato-spending-by-country (Downloaded: 22/09/2025)