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**Diminishing Global Power, Downgrading Human Rights:  
Making Sense of American Foreign Policy under Donald Trump**

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**Abstract:** Scholars have remained puzzled about the direction that President Donald Trump might take the U.S. at the global level. Throughout his campaign, Trump often articulated contradictory ideas concerning his foreign policy approach. Trump evidenced warmth towards authoritarian leaders in Eastern Europe, but condemned them in Latin America. The purpose of this paper is to make sense of Trump's foreign policy approach, and its novelties and continuities, by putting his administration into comparative-historical focus alongside Bush II and Obama. I analyze their foreign policy approach by using Michael Mann's IEMP model of power to draw out their distinctive qualities. Similar to Mann's own analysis of Bush II, I show that Trump has prioritized the expansion of military power. Obama also utilized military force, but he sought to regain global support lost under Bush II by speaking the language of multilateralism, and opening up relations with former foes, particularly Cuba and Iran. Unlike Bush II and Obama, Trump has pursued some entirely divergent global policies, particularly involving his global trade war and bellicose rhetoric. Yet, similar to Bush, Trump has exacerbated the retreat from multilateral institutions by working to institutionalize them. Finally, I point out that the global ramifications of U.S. anti-globalism at this historical juncture differ from when Bush II occupied the White House. With the U.S. moving towards more isolationist policies, we can expect both China and Russia to accumulate global power relative to the U.S. and displace the U.S. as a hegemonic power in some areas of the world.

## Introduction

Next to no one expected the presidential victory of Donald Trump, allegedly not even Trump himself. In November 2016, however, Trump defied predictions and defeated Hillary Clinton. During the campaign, Trump's promises were often vague, grandiose in scale, and terrifying to many minority groups: a huge wall along the U.S.-Mexico border; a ban on Syrian and other refugees; and a repeal of ObamaCare. Since coming to power, Trump has tried to initiate many of these policies, but with little success. His initial travel ban was largely struck down, there is no wall, and alternatives to ObamaCare have floundered in the Senate. And, with the Democrats recently winning back the House of Representatives, these initiatives now appear far less likely than ever before.

Trump has also continued to sow confusion throughout the world. During the campaign, much of his foreign policy rhetoric contradicted itself. Trump criticized the U.S. for acting like "a bully" on the global stage and attempting to police the world, such as by invading Iraq. Yet, he claimed he was going to create the biggest, most financed military the world has ever seen. Trump criticized the Castro government in Cuba and lambasted the Maduro government in Venezuela for promoting socialist economic policies and allegedly maintaining a dictatorship. Yet, he praised a bevy of human rights violators, including Russian President Vladimir Putin, among other authoritarian leaders located in places such as Hungary and the Philippines.

Now with Trump fully at the helm, there is much concern surrounding the direction of U.S. foreign policy and how we might understand the foreign policy approach taken by his administration. In this article, I make sense of American foreign policy under Trump by placing his general approach into comparative-historical focus alongside the George W. Bush (Bush II) and Obama administrations. I use Michael Mann's (1986, 2005, 2012) IEMP model of power – which centralizes ideological, economic, military, and political power – to examine both the current administration's foreign policy approach and the ramifications this approach might have on the future of U.S. hegemony, that is, its capacity for global leadership.

Under the Bush II administration, Mann (2005) himself observed that the U.S. was turning towards a new type of imperialism primarily based upon military power. He asserted that the U.S. would continue to maintain significant economic power, but it would seek to exert global domination primarily through military incursions. Despite U.S. military preponderance, though, Mann (2005) argued that U.S. hegemony could not solely rest on military power, particularly given that U.S. military forces were not omnipotent and had much difficulty achieving, for example, basic military objectives in Afghanistan and Iraq. Overall, Mann foresaw ideological and political power diminishing under Bush II, especially as it pursued unilateral military policies in the Middle East and North Africa. What is more, Mann (2005) deemed the U.S. "an incoherent empire" that ultimately generated global chaos.

Indeed, as a result of the Global War on Terror that Bush II initiated, the U.S. incurred much global disdain and generated rifts between the Americans and some traditional allies, particularly France. Bush II's contempt for multilateral institutions and treaties also irritated many in the global community. And the fact that Bush II faced much difficulty in rallying the international community, to begin with, illustrates some of the existing limits of U.S. hegemony. Former President Obama worked to reverse the ideological and political damage the U.S. suffered under Bush II. Obama sought to re-engage traditional allies and multilateral groups, diminish the scope of the Global War on Terror in some important respects, and even reach out to U.S. foes, including Cuba and Iran. Still, Obama escalated the use of drones to assassinate foreign and even domestic citizens, and engaged in warfare in Libya, without consulting

Congress or the United Nations. Despite this, global favorability ratings increased under his tenure, and the U.S. repaired many of its damaged relationships, particularly throughout Europe.

Under the new administration, the U.S. has returned to a path more in line with Bush II. Trump has condemned multilateral institutions, loudly sought to bolster the U.S. military, and has maintained a fairly bellicose demeanor towards U.S. challengers, including some who in no way seem to represent an imminent threat, such as Venezuela. Yet, while some continuities persist, Trump represents a significant break with Bush II and Obama. Trump not only promotes unilateralism, but he has also elevated the ideas of anti-globalism and national sovereignty to the fore. In doing so, he has begun to formally detach the U.S. from multilateral institutions, such as the UN; he has reduced the role played by global aid and diplomacy; sparked a global trade war; and jubilantly embraced a wide range of human rights violators and undemocratic regimes like those that exist in Russia and Hungary. In the end, these changes bode ill for the future of U.S. hegemony particularly at this historical juncture. China and Russia are actively seeking to achieve their own influence throughout the world, both politically and economically, and, given the Americans' isolationist position, they will seemingly displace the U.S. in at least some corners of the world as dominant actors. U.S. military preponderance will continue, but this alone cannot assure the U.S. a hegemonic position across the world.

### **U.S. Global Power**

The U.S. achieved its status as a global superpower following the decimation wrought across Western Europe during World War II. Although the U.S. certainly made some forays into other countries before this period and periodically expanded the boundaries of the new nation, it was not until this point that the U.S. truly became a global superpower (Go 2011; Mann 2012). As former European powers had now become ill equipped to produce enough goods to satiate global demands, the U.S. became a global leader in manufacturing and production. Indeed, following WWII, the U.S. generated around 35 percent of global GDP. In addition, the U.S. established and controlled the Bretton Woods financial system, which ultimately ensured the dominance of the U.S. dollar and American-led capitalism. Through the Marshall Plan, the U.S. assisted Western Europe in its reconstruction efforts and provided the country with enough credit and liquid capital to purchase U.S. products. And in order to control the threat of communism, the U.S., particularly through the Central Intelligence Agency, worked with Western European state security services to neutralize leftist parties, beginning with electoral intervention in Greece and Italy shortly after WWII. Elsewhere, such as in Latin America and the Caribbean, the U.S. directly or indirectly supported the forceful dislocation of leftist governments and the arrival of right-wing, authoritarian regimes, such as the government of General Augusto Pinochet in Chile (Go 2011; Robinson 1996).

These aforementioned dynamics characterize the post-World War II, mid-20<sup>th</sup> century world, wherein the U.S. maintained an unequivocal, hegemonic position. At the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, though, much has changed. The Cold War has ended, countries throughout Europe have since re-industrialized, and new global actors have powerfully emerged alongside the U.S., namely China and Russia, who are each vying for global influence particularly within their geographic regions of the world. This has led some authors to argue that U.S. global power is, in the least, in relative decline, and perhaps soon facing total displacement (Boswell 2004; Friedberg 2011; Go 2011; Hopewell 2016; Nye 2015; Wallerstein 2003).

Yet, there are next to no scholars that contend the U.S. is currently in a subservient global position writ large. As a result of European reconstruction efforts, for example, the U.S. level of

global GDP has indeed diminished, but, in recent years, it has hovered around 24 percent – still the world’s largest proportion (World Bank 2018). The U.S. dollar still effectively serves as the world’s reserve currency, and the U.S. also continues to possess military bases stationed all throughout the world, including 800 by one recent estimate (Mann 2012; Nye 2015; Vine 2015). In addition, the U.S. maintains the world’s largest military budget – nearly \$700 billion; and it maintains disproportionate influence within international financial institutions, such as the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, and the World Trade Organization (Babb 2009). The country also wields much influence within domestic electoral contests throughout the world by providing technical and financial assistance to like-minded political parties so that they might outcompete competitors in electoral contests (Burron 2013; Gill 2018; Robinson 1996).

Despite all of these dynamics, though, the persistence of U.S. hegemony is no foregone conclusion. Instead, U.S. state leaders must forge a careful global path that allows them to maintain U.S. leadership capabilities. The U.S. must articulate ideas that resonate with populations all throughout the world, facilitate the success of its economy and the corporations headquartered therein, maintain working relations with other powerful global actors, and eliminate or deter any serious military threats. This is difficult balance, and one that has been mastered more successfully by some U.S. presidents than others. So where does Trump line up?

### **Assessing U.S. Global Power**

Assessing U.S. global power involves an analysis of several dimensions – not just, for example, military power. Michael Mann (1986, 2005, 2012) has utilized, what he has termed, an IEMP conceptual framework to examine the multiple bases of power, as he understands them, and to make sense of the relations between these bases of power. In this framework, IEMP refers to ideology, economics, the military, and politics, and Mann argues that individuals aim to exert influence through the command of at least one of these four bases. In his four volume-set titled *The Sources of Social Power*, Mann begins in Mesopotamia and concludes in 2011, assessing various crystallizations of power throughout time and place. Through this framework, Mann has examined a dizzying array of historical events, including the rise and fall of the Soviet Union, the civil rights movements in the U.S., and the Great Recession of 2008 and its global consequences. What does Mann precisely mean, though, by each of the IEMP sources of social power?

First, Mann (2012:1) asserts that ideological power “derives from the human need to find ultimate meaning in life, to share norms and values, and to participate in aesthetic and ritual practices with others ... [Ideologies] embody our hopes and fears.” We can apprehend the ideological power of U.S. administrations by identifying those “norms and values” they promote and how they seemingly resonate with the global community. Second, economic power involves command over systems of production, exchange, and distribution of resources. We can extend our understanding into the global world, and consider what countries, and the citizens and corporations headquartered therein, dominate over systems global production, exchange, and distribution. Some important indicators include global GDP, global currency reserves, and leverage within international financial institutions. Third, military power involves command over as the capacity for state-orchestrated violence, and, at the global level, we can look at sea, land, and air capabilities, as well as budget allocations to get a sense of a country’s military might. Finally, Mann (2012) understands political power as the authority that states and their leaders wield over bounded territories. However, at the global level, we can understand political power as the authority that states wield throughout the global system, and we can examine this by

looking at the leadership positions states wield in intergovernmental and multilateral bodies, the allegiances that states possess, and their capacity to ensure that other states bend to their will.

With the IEMP model, Mann (1986, 2012) has deliberately aimed to prioritize no one particular dimension of power as necessarily determinative of any other dimension. As a result, Mann is most closely, theoretically aligned with Max Weber. In his work, Weber primarily sought to respond to the alleged economic determinism of Marxist theory and illustrate how other dynamics shape social behavior and social outcomes, other than the economic motives of the bourgeoisie and proletariat, and the conflict between them. In perhaps Weber's (1905) most famous work, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, Weber sought to show, for example, how religiously-based ideas shaped the origins of capitalism in Western Europe. What is more, Weber drew systematic attention to the existence of multiple bases of authority, including rational-legal authority, traditional authority, and charismatic authority. All taken together, Weber sought to demonstrate how societal power and authority did not solely arise "at the point of production." Likewise, Mann too understands social power as rooted in an array of sources – indeed the economy, but also having root in ideological, military, and political sources.

In order to make sense of the state of U.S. hegemony under the Trump administration, this paper also utilizes the IEMP framework. In the end, I argue that while Trump is posed to enhance U.S. military power and use this power on a more extensive global basis, he is generating significant global declines with reference to ideological power, economic power, and political power. While some of his policies extend the policies of other, recent presidential administrations, particularly Bush II, but also Obama, his full-fledged emphasis on anti-globalism and national sovereignty, however, run contrary to them. Bush II seriously damaged U.S. global influence, and Obama sought to repair this damage. The Trump administration, however, has arisen at vastly different historical juncture, that is, one in which other global actors are posed to capitalize on the global missteps of the U.S., namely China and Russia. The Trump administration, therefore, poses a more immediate threat to the future of U.S. hegemony, and one that will become much more difficult to recover from under future administrations.

### **U.S. Global Power under Bush II and Obama**

At the end of the Cold War, it appeared that the U.S. had finally conquered all formidable challengers. In the immediate post-Cold War context, conflicts still ensued, such as in Bosnia and Kosovo, but the U.S. largely seemed to dictate the direction of global affairs, often referred to as the liberal international order (LIO). Some commentators even proclaimed the end of history, and a new era for peace and democracy ushered under the auspices of U.S. global hegemony. This celebratory atmosphere, however, changed with the terrorist attacks on the U.S. on September 11, 2001. Less than a year into the presidency of Bush II, America appeared more vulnerable than previously imagined. Much of the global community indeed sympathized with the U.S., but Bush II's handling of the aftermath, however, quickly spawned widespread disdain for American foreign policy and its claims to global leadership.

How can we briefly understand the four bases of global power that underpinned the Bush administration and its foreign policy pursuits? Although some members of the international community supported the invasion of Afghanistan, Bush II's unilateral military policies and neoconservative political philosophy, which championed, among other measures, preemptive military activity, drone warfare, and enhanced interrogation techniques (EITs), irritated many more members. Bush II's unilateral policy was entirely not out of ideological lockstep with previous administrations, but his championing of preemptive military strikes, whereby the U.S.

might attack countries and groups before they actually perpetrated attacks against the country appeared as a terrifying justification for nearly any sort of global military foray. And despite widespread global criticism, Bush II appeared uninterested in global public opinion. For his administration, the U.S. would not hesitate to transgress international law and global consensus concerning how conflicts should be addressed, even if this included declaring an indefinite, global war involving little oversight.

These dynamics undoubtedly damaged U.S. ideological and political power. Bush II experienced dismal global confidence ratings with the advance of his term in office. For instance, Pew reported the following ratings for Bush by 2008: 16% in the UK, 14% in Germany, and 13% in France. In 2001, though, Bush had possessed considerably higher ratings – 30% in the UK, 51% in Germany, and 20% in France (Wike et al 2017). What is more, Bush II was openly rebuked by many historical U.S. allies, including government leaders in Canada, France, and Germany, who refused to participate in the invasion of Iraq and denounced these U.S. efforts. And so, amid much global sympathy for the U.S. and an opportunity to curry global support for a U.S. response, Bush II turned much of the world against him and his policies.

Yet, while Bush II damaged the ideological and political standing of the U.S. by championing ideas and pursuing policies out of touch with the rest of the world, U.S. military preponderance and economic dominance persisted. The U.S. continued to maintain the largest military budget, and no other country maintained anything close to the amount of overseas military bases (Vine 2015). The U.S. portion of global GDP dwarfed all closest competitors, and, by any other estimation, U.S. economic dominance continued apace: the highest amount of foreign direct investment, housing a disproportionate amount of the most financially successful corporations, and retaining the highest level of purchasing power parity, one indicator that would diminish in later years.

After coming to power, Obama sought to reverse some of the ideological and political pursuits of Bush II. Obama, for example, reined in on the use of EITs and paid no lip service to the idea of preemptive military strikes, but his administration indeed conducted more drone strikes than the previous, and he still prioritized unilateral military measures, as embodied by his administration's decision to unseat Libyan autocrat Muammar Gaddafi without consulting the UN or Congress. Yet, Obama often spoke the language of multilateralism; sought to open some relations up with former foes, namely Cuba and Iran; and pursued global economic integration, as typified by the Trans-Pacific Partnership. He also presented himself as someone willing to listen to allies and to engage with audiences around the world, rather than acting based on his own intuition.

Seemingly as a result of his more intensive engagement with the broader world, Obama received very high favorability ratings throughout the world, especially in comparison with Bush II. The Pew Research Center has reported that throughout the world Obama maintained a 64% confidence rating by the end of his presidency (Wike et al 2017). And in many countries, this rating was much higher: 79% in the UK, 84% in France, 86% in Germany, and 93% in Sweden. In addition, as with Bush II, U.S. economic and military preponderance generally continued, with one caveat. Under Obama, both China and Russia began to actively pursue a more significant role in the world. China initiated its One Belt, One Road policy in order to economically link up with countries all throughout the world and finance development projects, and Russia began, once again, to become a primary supplier of military weapons to countries throughout the world. Both countries moved into their current roles, too, as global aid providers to countries both within and beyond their traditional spheres of influence to include countries in,



for example, Africa and Latin America. Nonetheless, the U.S. remained the world's largest aid provider and many countries' primary trading partner.

So, what has changed, if anything, under Trump in regards to the projection of U.S. global power, and is there anything distinctive about his presidency in comparison with Bush II and Obama?

## **Analyzing Global Power under the Trump Administration**

### *Ideological Power under the Trump Administration*

Above any other idea or value, President Trump has championed "America First." Trump has promised to protect the country from terrorists and undocumented immigrants by securing the borders and placing strict limitations on immigration policy. At the global level though, what does Trump presumably mean when he embraces "America First"? Trump's "America First" policy involves an embrace of national sovereignty. For instance, during his UN General Assembly Speech in September 2017, Trump mentioned the words "sovereign" or "sovereignty" 21 times, and, in 2018, he mentioned these words 12 times. Indeed, towards the beginning of his 2017 speech, Trump clearly articulated his vision of American foreign policy, stating

"In foreign affairs, we are renewing this founding principle of sovereignty. Our government's first duty is to its people, to our citizens -- to serve their needs, to ensure their safety, to preserve their rights, and to defend their values. As President of the United States, I will always put America first, just like you, as the leaders of your countries will always, and should always, put your countries first."

In this statement, Trump clearly asserts the primacy of U.S. citizens, and that, even in foreign affairs, Trump will remain concerned with the "needs, safety, rights, and values" of the U.S. This disposition coheres quite consistently with his domestic nationalist policies that have prioritized ethnic chauvinism.

Under Trump's sovereignty doctrine, he seemingly welcomes foreign governments as they exist. And, in doing so, Trump suggests that he will not condemn foreign governments' human rights violations, but will work with an array of state leaders, regardless of their styles of domestic governance. Since coming to power, Trump has, in fact, praised several authoritarian leaders widely recognized for their human rights violations, including, for instance, Vladimir Putin in Russia, Rodrigo Duterte in the Phillipines, and Victor Orbán in Hungary. He has even gone so far as to cast doubt on CIA findings regarding Russian intervention into the 2016 election, and the Saudi-government linked murder of journalist Jamal Khashoggi.

On the other hand, though, Trump has loudly criticized several leftist, authoritarian leaders, including Raul Castro in Cuba and Nicolás Maduro in Venezuela, evidencing an obvious double standard, which, of course, predates Trump, but was most intense during the height of the Cold War. What is more, Trump has sought to roll-back the advances Obama made involving U.S.-Cuba relations, and he has repeatedly called democratically-elected Venezuelan President Maduro "a dictator," stating that a U.S. "military option" exists to violently remove him from power. All of this is to say that while Trump rhetorically embraces sovereignty, he appears to respect the national sovereignty of some countries, but not others, and, in doing so, remains entirely willing to embrace human rights violators and undemocratic regimes. Indeed, these dynamics predate the Trump administration, but no other recent president has explicitly embraced authoritarian, undemocratic rulers with such exhilaration as Trump.

While Trump vocally embraces these ideas, though, they resonate very little throughout the world, ultimately illustrating what amounts to a serious decline in U.S. ideological power. The Pew Research Center, for instance, has reported that since Trump took office global confidence in the U.S. president diminished from 64% to 22% (Pew Research Center 2017). Most countries Pew surveyed evidenced double digit declines. Sweden, for instance, evidenced a reduction of 83 percentage points from 93% to 10% confidence in the U.S. president, and both the Netherlands and Germany exhibited a reduction of 75 percentage points. Only two countries have witnessed an increase in confidence in the U.S. president: Israel (from 49% to 56%) and Russia (from 11% to 53%). Throughout 37 countries surveyed, Pew found that citizens across the world have more confidence in Angela Merkel (42%), Xi Jinping (28%), and Vladimir Putin (27%) than they do in Trump (22%).

Perhaps even more startling is how many countries now consider U.S. power and influence *a threat* to their country. Since Trump took office, a majority of the population in countries all throughout the world now find the U.S. *a threat*, including Chile (57%), Japan (62%), Lebanon (50%), Mexico (61%), Spain (59%), and Turkey (72%), among several others (Pew Research Center 2017). In addition, Pew research has shown that global favorability ratings of the U.S., generally speaking, have diminished from 64% to 49%, as many citizens around the world continue to somewhat separate countries from their leaders. Nonetheless, Pew's findings paint a very bleak picture for the prospects of U.S. ideological power under Trump.

Beyond the expression of values, Trump has cut funding for many institutions that contribute to what Joseph Nye (2004) has termed U.S. soft power – or a state's ability to persuade other states to follow its leadership without using force. This ability derives from cultural allure, and the norms and values societies allegedly champion. Much U.S. soft power emanates from the provision of global aid, as well as from global attraction to U.S. institutions, such as American universities and research development centers. Yet, Trump has sought to intentionally curb the allure of the U.S. so much so that U.S. universities are, for a second year in a row, witnessing declines in international enrollment. What is more, Trump has continually called for reductions in spending on the diplomatic services of the State Department and on U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) programs. As a result, many State Department positions that were filled under Obama continue to remain empty, including the Under Secretary for Civilian Security, Democracy, and Human Rights.

These reductions limit the influence that the U.S. might wield abroad. USAID programs, for instance, historically have supported non-governmental organizations (NGOs), human rights groups, English language programs, and cultural exchanges, in addition to economic development programs. These programs are not without criticism, especially concerning the political-economic disposition of the groups that often receive funding (Burron 2013; Robinson 1996). Nonetheless, though, Trump's actions will undeniably reduce U.S. influence abroad. Indeed, in those countries that receive higher amounts of U.S. aid, the U.S. also witnesses far higher favorability ratings. And, more importantly, in those countries that possess higher favorability towards the U.S., we see, for example, an increased probability of voting alignment within the UN, as well foreign troop commitments to U.S.-led military pursuits (Datta 2009; Goldsmith and Horiuchi 2012). In other words, we find higher levels of leadership capabilities.

As the U.S. plans to cut back its support for international aid programs, both China and Russia have increasingly come to play a more prominent, international role in the provision of global aid, particularly in Africa and Latin America. Both countries, for instance, have economically assisted the Venezuelan government since former President Hugo Chávez came to

power, a fervent critic of U.S. foreign policy. Since 2005, the Chinese government has provided Venezuela with over \$60 billion in loans (Smilde and Gill 2013). And, amid its gripping economic crisis, the Chinese and Russian governments have renegotiated existing loans with current Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro and continued to provide additional capital so that Venezuela might pay international bondholders, lest they claim Venezuelan foreign assets. The Venezuelan government has even pledged its U.S.-based subsidiary Citgo to Russia as collateral, should it fail to make future payments. The two countries have continued to conduct military exercises together, and Russia has continued to supply the Venezuelan government with an array of military weapons, including tanks and Sukhoi fighter jets (Smilde and Gill 2013).

In both Africa and Latin America, China has increasingly sunk billions of dollars' worth of funding into raw materials alongside the construction of development projects: dams, roads, bridges, housing. Chinese state companies have invested in mines in DR Congo and Guinea, as well as oil and gas in Angola and Guinea (Chen, Dollar, and Tang 2015). In addition, the Chinese government has financed the construction of dams in several African countries, including DR Congo, Ethiopia, Ghana, and Sudan. As a result of Chinese economic efforts in Africa and elsewhere over the past decade, it is little surprise that the Pew Research Center (2017) has found that out of 37 countries surveyed, a majority in only four countries view Chinese power and influence as a threat: Japan, South Korea, Spain, and Vietnam. This is, once again, in comparison with nine countries that now view the U.S. as a threat.

Given the lack of confidence in Trump and his "America First" policy and given his deliberate attempts to undermine U.S. soft power, U.S. ideological power bodes to clearly suffer under his rule. And although Russia appears as one location where citizens have applauded his rise to power, both China and Russia remain more than willing to cultivate support in locations throughout the world where the U.S. has long considered itself *the* hegemonic power. In Latin America, for instance, Chinese and, to a lesser extent, Russian trade and investment is beginning to equal and, in some instances, outpace U.S. efforts. China, for instance, has now become Brazil's largest trading partner. In addition, both China and Russia continue to work closely with governments that retain anti-American sentiments, particularly Cuba and Venezuela, but also Bolivia and Nicaragua. More than a few Latin American governments remain undeniably closer with the Chinese and Russian governments than ever before, and they now appear more concerned with how these two powers view their policies and governance than they do the U.S.

### *Economic Power under the Trump Administration*

There is no doubt that the U.S. continues to wield an inordinate amount of economic power and influence at the global level. The U.S. dollar, for instance, continues to comprise a clear majority (64%) of all allocated foreign exchange reserves throughout the world (IMF 2017). The dollar also remains the most traded currency and even operates as the *de facto* currency in nations beyond its borders, including Ecuador and Zimbabwe. U.S. government bonds remain the world's most sought after, and the U.S. stock market remains the largest in the world. The U.S. also continues to wield considerable influence within international financial institutions, like the IMF, and, despite some earlier concerns, Trump plans to continue to heavily fund these organizations (Babb 2009). Perhaps most importantly, though, the U.S. continues to generate the world's largest amount of global GDP: \$18 trillion. And yet, despite all of these features, serious questions regarding the future of U.S. economic power under Trump persist, namely as it involves his orchestration of a global trade war with China.

Interdependence largely typifies relations between the U.S. and Chinese economies. U.S. consumers and U.S.-headquartered corporations rely upon Chinese manufacturing and labor for cheap products, and Chinese manufacturers and workers rely upon the U.S. market to sell those products. Scholars continue to debate, though, if/when China will overtake the U.S. along a range of economic indicators. China has, in fact, already surpassed the U.S. in one measure: purchasing power parity (ppp)-adjusted GDP. In 2014, while the U.S. possessed 16.28% of the world's ppp-adjusted GDP, China reported 16.48%— and, since this time, this ranking has persisted with Chinese ppp-adjusted GDP sitting at over 19% in 2019 compared with the U.S. at 15% (*Business Insider* 10/08/2014; IMF 2019). What this indicates is that while U.S. citizens might make more money than the average Chinese citizen, the average Chinese citizen is able to purchase more goods with the same amount of currency. In terms of the production of actual global GDP – perhaps the most important economic indicator of all, China still continues to lag fairly far behind the U.S. with \$11.2 trillion, compared with the U.S.'s \$18 trillion. In addition, the Chinese renminbi comprises only 10% of foreign reserves held throughout the world – behind also the Australian and Canadian dollars, as well as the Euro, Japanese yen, and British pound (IMF 2017).

One area in which the U.S. is posed to lose economic power, however, derives from the manner in which Trump has attacked free trade. One of Trump's first acts after coming to power included his decision to withdraw from the TPP agreement, which included eleven other countries. Aside from closer economic integration, the agreement was expected to diminish Chinese economic power throughout Asia, particularly in Vietnam. With the U.S. withdrawal, however, this has allowed China to intensify its One Belt, One Road Initiative, which has involved closer economic integration with countries all throughout the world. In the section above, we see just how intensively China is attempting to make inroads into places like Africa and Latin America, by sponsoring development projects alongside its acquisition of natural resources. In doing so, many individuals fear that without the moderating influence of an actor like the U.S., many foreign governments will increasingly rely upon the Chinese government for aid and development projects, which are devoid of the political strings that U.S. aid often involves, such as greater demands for democracy (Naím 2009; Risse and Babayan 2015). As a result, some have labeled China's approach as involving autocracy, rather than democracy, promotion, and they fear that any political-economic vacuum, such as the folding of the TPP, will be filled by China.

For his part, Trump initially backed away from irritating China. Throughout his campaign, Trump recurrently talked tough on China. However, after coming to power, Trump reneged on his campaign promise to label China a currency manipulator, failed to even lightly criticize Chinese human rights violations on his visit to the country, and ousted Steve Bannon, his administration's loudest critic of China. Trump not only reverse course once though, but twice. While it initially appeared he was cozying up to China, he has recently begun to wage a trade war against the country, from which the Chinese do not appear willing to back down. Throughout 2018, Trump levied \$250 billion in tariffs against Chinese imports, and, in response, China has set tariffs on \$110 billion worth of U.S. imports. Trump has even promised to impose tariffs on all remaining amount of Chinese tariffs if China does not comply with Trump administration demands, which include an end to alleged intellectual property theft.

Although the U.S. economy continues to experience growth, a trend that has continued since the aftermath of the Great Recession of 2008, there are signs that the U.S. economy will face serious problems in the near future, not least of which due to Trump's trade war with China.

U.S. consumers remain heavily reliant upon Chinese imports, and U.S. tariffs only bode to raise the cost of consumer products in stores throughout the country, such as Walmart and Target. Indeed, we are already beginning to witness signs of reduced consumer confidence throughout the country and diminishing retail stocks. Should these efforts result in less consumption, U.S. jobs will also suffer. What is more, China is already beginning to diversify its supply chains by, for example, cutting its supply of soybeans from the U.S. and initiating record-breaking trade with Brazil. And for their part, U.S. farmers are now relying upon billions of dollars' worth of U.S. subsidies, that is, as their crops rot in storage.

It is rather difficult to understand who Trump is precisely aiming to help with his trade war. His protectionist policies are out of lockstep with the needs of both U.S. consumers and the world. He has claimed that he would like to bring manufacturing jobs back to the U.S., but there is no indication that this is a serious possibility. In fact, some producers like Harley-Davidson have even made plans to relocate production elsewhere in order to service overseas consumers, given that Trump tariffs have also hit steel and aluminum imports from the rest of the world, with very few exceptions (Meyersohn 2018). In the end, then, economic policies under Trump resemble nothing like the approach taken by the Bush II and Obama administrations, which both aggressively pursued trade initiatives within and beyond the hemisphere. Bush II indeed imposed short-term steel tariffs, but a widespread trade war with China and other countries never came upon the agenda. If Trump policies return more well-paying jobs to the country than not, he will be surely praised, but this possibility seemingly has no serious support beyond the administration itself, and its implementation is puzzling.

#### *Military Power under the Trump Administration*

Under Trump, there is no doubt that the U.S. will continue to maintain military dominance throughout the world. Trump, for example, has increased the Defense budget to nearly \$700 billion, as he intends to update machinery and employ more military members to defend the country. And, unlike any other former superpower, the U.S. commands preponderant military forces on air, land, and water. In addition, the U.S. maintains around 800 military bases (Nye 2015; Vine 2015). Yet, despite the continuation of a clear preponderance of military force, some caveats are in order concerning U.S. military power under the Trump administration.

Although Trump ultimately backtracked on his criticisms of NATO, it is important to note that he initially doubted the relevance of this organization. According to Trump, NATO involved a largely obsolete, unnecessary, and needlessly cost-inefficient arrangement. Many individuals on the both right and left agree with scrapping NATO. Given increased Russian aggression in Eastern Europe, particularly Ukraine, other scholars, however, have pointed out that scrapping NATO in the contemporary period would be a mistake. More than any other organization, the Russian government loathes the presence of NATO and its ability to combat its militaristic efforts in the region. In the end, Trump has apparently come to terms with the existence and importance of the international organization, albeit he has couched its relevance in terms of containing undocumented immigrants and refugees throughout Europe.

Although on the campaign trail Trump often criticized the U.S. as “a bully,” lamented U.S. involvement in the War in Iraq, and seemed to suggest that he would scale back U.S. foreign policy efforts, Trump has acted in a highly aggressive manner since coming to office. Trump has intensified efforts in Afghanistan – including an increase in both the use of troops and the use of bombs. In fact, in September 2017 alone, the U.S. dropped over 700 bombs throughout Afghanistan – the largest amount in seven years. Trump also shot Tomahawk missiles at Syrian

government sites in a show of force towards the Assad regime. And, perhaps most shockingly, Trump has threatened to “totally destroy” North Korea, a country that possesses nuclear weapons, and he has threatened the Maduro government in Venezuela with “a military option” if it does not acquiesce to his demands. Trump has thus clearly gone back on his earlier vision of reigning in U.S. foreign aggression.

Trump does not appear all that different than any other GOP politician on many military issues. We could have surely expected another Republican president to have ramped up military spending, and aggressively combated Syria. We could have also expected some tough talking on North Korea and Venezuela. However, openly considering military intervention, particularly into a country that possesses nuclear capabilities, is beyond what any other serious American politician would articulate. Obama, for his part, reined in on enhanced interrogation techniques, but he still deployed U.S. military force, particularly in the form of drone warfare, and most notably against Libya. Where Trump diverges from other recent presidents is in his intensified rhetoric. However, he does not diverge very much from the national executive line of strengthening and relying upon U.S. military force to pursue some semblance of global order.

### *Political Power under the Trump Administration*

Similar to ideological power, U.S. political power also bodes to suffer major setbacks under the Trump administration, particularly as a result of its rejection of human rights norms, its bellicose posturing, and its cheerful embrace of authoritarian leaders. Trump and his aggressive verbiage have sparked diplomatic rows with a number of countries, and his militaristic disposition towards a number of countries throughout the world has already threatened to derail multilateral efforts to achieve peace in a number of locations, namely North Korea, Iran, and Venezuela. Trump himself has evidenced antipathy towards a number of multilateral institutions and multilateral initiatives, including the UN, the Organization of American States (OAS), and the Paris Agreement. As a result, many world leaders are coming to disdain Trump’s behavior and, unsurprisingly, have sought to further distance themselves from him. Perhaps unsurprisingly, then, most of the world leaders that have actually shown some warmth towards President Trump include only those leaders that rule in a generally authoritarian and human rights-violating manner: the Saudis, Russian President Putin, Filipino President Duterte, Hungarian Prime Minister Orbán. In turn, Trump has demonstrated warmth for them, illustrating what little regard the administration has for promoting democracy and human rights abroad.

As several countries have promoted dialogue and negotiation concerning crises in a multiplicity of locations, Trump has been more apt to engage in chest-beating much to the dismay of world leaders that have consistently worked towards peace. This is evident in a variety of places, including North Korea, Iran, and Venezuela. On several occasions, Trump has alluded to potentially using force against the North Korean government. He has suggested that North Korean leadership will only listen to force and, during his UN speech, Trump asserted that the U.S. will “totally destroy” North Korea if necessary. These threats have deeply concerned nearby countries, including China, Japan, and South Korea, who have worked towards diplomatic solutions to crises involving North Korea. There is no doubt that grave human rights abuses persist in North Korea; however, surrounding countries recognize that the government possesses nuclear power capabilities, and they are loathe to bait North Korean leadership into potentially utilizing them.

In Latin America, as well, several countries have been working diligently to bring the Venezuelan opposition and the Venezuelan government to the negotiating table to extract

concessions particularly from the government. In the last several years, Venezuela has experienced a deep economic crisis, and the Maduro government has increasingly engaged in authoritarian behavior by sidelining its national legislature and, in some instances, arbitrarily arresting members of the opposition. Amid the crisis, Maduro has failed to accept global aid, much to the detriment of the Venezuelan population, many of whom cannot find regular access to food and medicine. What is more, Trump announced that “a military option” existed to take out Maduro and has pushed for all-out regime change by supporting opposition leader Juan Guaidó as the country’s interim president. Much to the dismay of regional governments, this has fueled intensified nationalistic fervor within Venezuela, leading Maduro to claim that an imperial effort exists to undermine his government. In the end, dialogue between the government and opposition has generally broken down, and the government has remained recalcitrant, leading to a current standoff, wherein working-class Venezuelans are most posed to suffer.

At the global level, Trump has shown antipathy for international institutions that receive support from most countries throughout the world, many of which champion human rights norms. During the campaign, Trump recurrently criticized the UN and promoted a pro-national sovereignty, anti-multilateral position, and he threatened to de-fund the organization. In addition, Trump has sought to undermine the UN’s most prominent, recent accomplishment: the Paris Agreement. Under this agreement, countries around the world have agreed to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and take additional measures to combat global warming. In June 2017, though, Trump announced that the U.S. would begin the four-year process of withdrawal from the agreement, which would complete in 2020. Foremost among his reasons, Trump asserted that trillions of dollars and millions of jobs would be lost as a result of adherence to the agreement (*BBC* 2017). Trump additionally stated that the U.S. would also withdraw from UNESCO which promotes international integration and commemorates world heritage sites. Trump has claimed that the group displays an anti-Israel bias, due to its recognition of Palestine, and, given existing \$550 million of existing arrears, Trump chose to withdraw from the body (Harris and Erlanger 2017).

In addition to the UN, Trump has shown contempt for the OAS, the Western Hemisphere’s most prominent multilateral group, and its associated entities, particularly the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR). During March 2017, the Trump administration failed to appear before the IACHR for hearings related to Trump’s proposed immigration policies (Wroughton 2017). This act further illustrated Trump’s commitment to national sovereignty over and above the promotion of global human rights norms. Indeed, the only two other countries that regularly make a habit of denouncing the OAS include Cuba and Venezuela, two countries the Trump Administration currently remains at odds with.

While Trump has criticized Cuban and Venezuelan leadership, however, for democratic and human rights shortcomings, Trump has lavished praise upon right-wing, authoritarian leaders elsewhere. He has invited Hungarian Prime Minister Orbán to the White House for a future visit, despite the aggression that Orbán has directed towards NGOs, human rights groups, and Central European University. What is more, Trump welcomed Thailand’s military junta leader, Prime Minister Prayuth Chan-ocha, to the White House, in addition to members from the authoritarian Turkish government. The Thai leader initially came to power through a military coup and has subsequently ruled the country in a repressive manner. And, finally, Trump has continually displayed warmth towards Russian President Putin – referring to him as a strong leader, suggesting that the U.S. and Russia develop closer relations, and downplaying Putin’s murderous regime. In an interview with a newscaster over the 2017 Super Bowl Weekend, for

instance, Trump told the newscaster that he respected Putin and, when the newscaster stated that Putin was a killer, Trump minimized these accusations and responded by saying “We’ve got a lot of killers. What, do you think our country’s so innocent?” (Pengelly 2017).

Finally, while Trump has reached out to authoritarian leaders and denigrated multilateral institutions, Trump has hindered the work of his own state apparatus. Until the present, the Department of State, that is, the U.S. state agency charged with carrying out the day-to-day work of U.S. foreign policy, remains grossly understaffed, including vacant ambassadorships. Perhaps most startling of all, Trump actually praised Putin for ordering 755 U.S. foreign service officers out of Russia, saying that he wanted “to thank him because we’re trying to cut down on payroll, and as far as I’m concerned, I’m very thankful that he let go of a large number of people, because now we have a smaller payroll” (*New York Times* 08/10/2017). Indeed, Trump seems vastly unconcerned with the lack of U.S. personnel stationed throughout the world, and this lack of concern, perhaps more than anything else, illustrates how intensively Trump wishes to scale back diplomatic efforts. Without these members of the foreign service stationed abroad, it is quite difficult to even begin to consider any sort of effective U.S. diplomacy.

## Conclusion

Perhaps more than any other dimension of U.S. power, ideological power promises to diminish as Trump’s “America First” policy has little to offer the world. Indeed, many countries rely upon U.S. foreign aid for a large portion of their GDP, and many citizens around the world are eager for more U.S. cultural exchange. Trump, however, has enthusiastically championed national sovereignty over and above the promotion of global human rights. While he has selectively criticized left-wing authoritarian leaders, such as in Venezuela, he has lavished right-wing authoritarian leaders with praise. In addition, Trump has generally shunned multilateral institutions that much of the world has come to embrace, including the UN and the OAS, as well as those U.S. institutions that allow the U.S. to exercise much of its soft power, including foreign aid programs, such as those operated by USAID.

Nowhere is the global repudiation of the Trump Administration and its policies more evident than in global public polling that illustrates the startlingly low levels of confidence that global citizens have in Trump. The election of Trump has puzzled many around the world, and his actions have continued to do so. Trump has implicitly, if not explicitly, catered to the interests of white supremacists, and he has even been quite slow to castigate his neo-Nazi and Klan supporters. Only two countries have seemingly welcomed the election of Trump: Russia and Israel. Elsewhere, the world has continued to cringe at the president’s antics.

The ideological vacuum that the U.S. portends to leave open as a result of Trump’s policies might very well become filled by China. In the last several years, China has begun to provide a number of loans to countries all throughout the Global South, and it has embarked upon a number of development projects, particularly in Africa and Latin America. To a lesser extent, Russia has made inroads throughout Latin America and appears quite willing to curry favor throughout the Western Hemisphere. On the economic front, too, the Chinese government seems all the more interested in furthering its One Belt, One Road economic policies, and pouring funds into Africa and Latin America, among other locations. The U.S. dollar will surely continue to reign supreme, and U.S. stocks and bonds will continue to trade at feverish rates. Through its development policies though, the Chinese government, however, will continue to provide an alternative to U.S. foreign aid, and, in doing so, the Chinese will harden the anti-American positions that many governments have taken over the last several decades.



At the level of global politics, Trump has irritated many leaders, from neighbors in Mexico and Canada, to those in Australia and Germany. Much to the detriment of many in the global community, Trump has exacerbated tensions between the U.S. and North Korea, as well as between the U.S. and Venezuela. Trump's actions threaten to derail efforts towards diplomacy and peace that many world leaders have worked towards for several months, if not years, in their respective regions of the world. More than anything, then, the Trump Administration has already proved a bane to global peace efforts. This is no more evident than in the bellicose posturing that Trump himself has engaged in. He has, at times, overtly threatened both the North Korean and Venezuelan governments with military action, leading to alarm in both countries.

There is no doubt that U.S. military preponderance will continue, as Trump has solidified a nearly \$700 billion Defense budget. The U.S. will continue to command preponderance on land, sea, and air, and this will, of course, limit the actions of many countries throughout the world. Nonetheless, many leaders recognize that despite U.S. preponderance, the U.S. does not remain invincible. Communism, of course in name, still persists in China, Cuba, Laos, North Korea, and Vietnam, and challenging governments continue to maintain power in place such as Belarus, Nicaragua, Russia, and Venezuela. U.S. military power thus cannot contain all challengers, and the U.S. will need to rely upon political and diplomatic strategies if it wishes to cultivate a more cooperative global environment. What is more, Trump has threatened peace efforts throughout the world and even exacerbated existing tensions, such as in North Korea, Iran, and Venezuela. If anything, these escalations threaten both global and national citizens, and, given North Korean nuclear capabilities, even risk total annihilation.

Whether Trump lasts a full eight years in the presidency or undergoes successful impeachment proceedings, ramifications will persist for years to come. Following Bush II, Obama made systematic efforts to restore confidence in the U.S. by traveling extensively across the globe. During the 2008 election, Senator John McCain lambasted Obama for these efforts. In the end though, they worked, as the U.S. regained much of its clout. Of course, not all world leaders and global citizens were taken with Obama, but his appeal was much more wide-ranging than both Bush II and Donald Trump. This appeal is not without benefits. Obama negotiated with Iran, initiated diplomatic relations with Cuba, and sought to economically integrate several countries through the TPP agreements. Indeed, all together, such developments contribute to a much more integrated and cooperative world-system that benefits U.S. administrations. Like Obama, Trump's behavior will also surely have ramifications. Primarily, this will involve the gulf created by the U.S. amid its retreat from multilateralism and the global community. Bush II also retreated in part from the global community; however, no other country had the abilities to displace U.S. leadership. In contrast, at the current historical juncture, we see China and, to a lesser extent, Russia actively pursuing the cultivation of global influence. Obama had the opportunity to bolster U.S. hegemony; Trump, however, is taking the opportunity to dismantle it and, with the rise of other countries, much more intensively than Bush II.

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