

## DRIFTING HEGEMONY: TOWARD A NEW U.S. FOREIGN POLICY

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### ABSTRACT

The United States has entered a phase of drifting hegemony. Under the second Trump administration, the vision of “Make America Great Again” (MAGA) and “America First” is a poor fit with the emerging bipolar global system. U.S. foreign policy today is characterized by inconsistent isolationist and interventionist tactics, alongside a divided political culture. Allies begin to doubt U.S. credibility in the era of tariff threats and situational military interventions. There is insufficient attention to the impacts for the post-neoliberal world and U.S. interests in it. U.S. public opinion is fascinated by billionaires, despite a continued and deepening income and wealth gap. The mindset of Trump and most U.S. billionaires instrumentalizes public opinion and action to extend the interests of the wealthy. U.S. soft power is declining relative to other nations. Sustained efforts by the political opposition and the U.S. public should be made to reinvigorate elements of a more responsible U.S. foreign policy.

**Keywords:** American foreign policy, Trump, plutocracy, MAGA, soft power

### 1.0 INTRODUCTION

Most Americans have not fully acknowledged the decline in U.S. global preeminence. Despite clear warning signs in key areas related to its new foreign policy under Donald Trump’s second term, the United States continues to lull itself into complacency. The Trump administration, led by a group of billionaires, pursues a foreign policy based on the principles of "America First" (White House, 2025a) and “Make America Great Again (ECFR, 2025).” Some refer to this set of ideas and policies as “The Trump Doctrine” when discussing foreign policy priorities (NYCFPA, 2024).

The U.S. soft power index is declining relative to its global competitors, especially China. This decline is a significant concern, though supporters of military strength often overlook it. It results from growing divisions within the U.S. public along party lines and the cyclical questioning and easing of U.S. influence to support or expand the neoliberal global order. The decline is also linked to Americans' ongoing fascination with wealth and the wealthy as symbols of effective leadership, which has only worsened income and wealth inequality.

The analysis will be structured into several sections. First, it will outline the context of U.S. global leadership as a developing bipolarity, with China seen as the opposition to the current order, highlighting key issues that should remain central to U.S. foreign policy. Second, it will examine the Trump administration's foreign policy as an inconsistent and unpredictable mix of interventionism and isolationism. Overall, U.S. foreign policy is marked by disengagement

from global affairs. This will lead to a discussion of the influence of billionaires and the underlying mindset driving current U.S. foreign policy, as well as the growing role of wealthy individuals and public opinion in shaping government decisions. Third, the effects of U.S. leadership and disengagement are reflected in the decline of U.S. soft power compared to China and other major nations. It concludes by summarizing its main points and suggesting several strategies to restore U.S. leadership and prevent drift and stagnation.

## 2.0 THE CONTEXT

The United States took on a global responsibility in the last century. Promoting democratic government under the rule of law lies at the heart of U.S. foreign policy. Since the Great Wars, the United States has sought to establish a global order founded on political liberalism, free trade, and a dollar-based economy. The end of the Soviet Union ushered in a period of relative stability, with post-Gorbachev Russia emerging as a potential candidate for NATO membership.

This course of U.S. foreign policy now faces pressure from multiple directions (Mearsheimer, 2019). In less than 25 years, a new Axis of Autocracy has emerged. Countries from China to North Korea and Russia to Iran have traded or forsaken freedom under the rule of law for their versions of national security and economic growth. China's ascent has significantly altered the global order. Russia no longer appears headed to join NATO, having engaged in a reactionary war against Ukraine. Russia, China, and several other major powers openly oppose allegiance to a neoliberal world order pushed by the West. The nuclear club has grown to nine members, and military capabilities are on the rise, including those of the United States (Associated Press, 2025).

Second, China is not only a global power but also a superpower, whose military strength is growing in tandem with its economic development (Cordesman, 2023). Together with Russia, India, and other BRICS partners, China now seeks to challenge the international order by creating an alternative framework to the current system (Polychroniou, 2024). Its efforts will take decades, but they are gaining momentum (Jones and Yeo, 2022). The rise of China and the expansion of partnerships are challenging the existing global order, signaling the emergence of a new bipolarity. These developments should prompt systematic engagement by the United States; however, as we will see, the Trump Doctrine practices selective or intermittent engagement, followed by overall disengagement — a drift (Lee and Sims, 2025).

Third, global hotspots demonstrate the fracturing of stability in the current order (International Crisis Group, 2025). Russia is pursuing a new Vietnam in Ukraine, with support from China, Iran, and North Korea. Israel is engaging in a regional conflict against Iran and Hamas. North Korea continues to enhance its nuclear weapons and conventional military strength (Choe, 2024). Iran's nuclear program has been slowed but not "obliterated" (White House, 2025c). Hamas and Hezbollah have been weakened, but there is no reconciliation among the major powers. Netanyahu's conflict will neither strengthen his position nor prevent a resurgence of Israel's enemies (Hecht, 2025). Other countries, such as Saudi Arabia and the European Union, which have significant capabilities and ambitions, should also be considered.

These three developments establish a new framework and logic of global power. They suggest that the 21st century is beginning to develop a system of bipolarity, if it has not already done so. The United States remains a status quo superpower, while China emerges as a rising superpower within this order, positioning itself as an anti-status quo superpower.

Some prefer to describe this emerging bipolarity as “the New Cold War” (Brands, 2025). Its new frontiers include space, satellites, digital technology, and computer chip materials (Xuetong, 2023). Various other major powers compete for regional influence, allies, or perceived allies of the two superpowers. Some nations, notably India, a rising power itself, play both sides as a form of “strategic autonomy” (O’Connor, 2023). We should expect such behaviors only to increase.

However, the bipolarity is not fully established. As I argue in this paper, U.S. power is currently in a state of drift, either to a secondary position relative to China or, in the post-Trump era, toward a new period of alliance and allied power-building. The United States cannot sustain its hegemony without regaining the lost authority and power it has accumulated over the last two centuries, especially during the previous two Republican administrations. At best, U.S. global standing is a form of drifting hegemony.

### **3.0 THE NEW U.S. FOREIGN POLICY: TRUMP, MAGA, AND AMERICA FIRST**

It certainly makes sense that a president like Donald Trump would emerge. Americans today are polarized, and the most evident division is not one of race or political party, although those divisions exist; rather, it is class. The “haves” are defined as the top one, five, or ten percent of Americans who earn more income and possess more wealth than the rest of the country. The trends in income and wealth have remained fairly stable or increased only slightly for over 50 years (Kuhn and Rios-Rull, 2025).

Economic outcome gaps exist alongside high expectations and resentment among different parts of the electorate. Many white, male wage earners and their families are the core supporters of Donald Trump and MAGA. Likewise, many income earners and families who benefited from the 2017 tax cuts (Srikant, 2024), which Trump plans to renew, support an administration aiming to preserve and extend those tax cuts. These supporters also tend to favor reducing the size of the federal government, a concern that has persisted since the era of New Federalism and Ronald Reagan (James, 2025).

At the same time, a second area of division involves “liberal culture,” which includes support for the arts but centers on the LGBTQ+ movement, race, and ethnicity. Trump’s MAGA doctrine calls for the end of affirmative action, diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) policies, and emphasizes cracking down on illegal and undocumented immigrants. More broadly, it is a reaction to the ideologies of the Democratic Party, which has promoted a competing version of progressive culture, implemented related policies, and provided funding. MAGA supporters see themselves as overturning several decades of liberal internationalist and “woke” blindness (Bessner, 2025).

What sets Trump apart from most recent U.S. presidents is that he intensifies partisan divisions rooted in class and cultural differences rather than working to bridge them or promote bipartisanship for the public good (Iyengin, 2025). Trump’s policies do little to address white

resentment or MAGA concerns about U.S. culture. Instead, Trump leverages these issues to galvanize public support for his initiatives (Sue, 2023; OBI, 2016).

The Trump economic policies are likely to keep lower-income Americans in poverty. Their financial outlooks have continued to worsen under both of Trump's administrations (Zamarippa and Hanlon, 2023; Duke and Agilore, 2025). The reality of these policies, which is ongoing hardship and decline in workers' financial prospects, often goes unnoticed. Media images influence Americans across the political spectrum, captivating or horrifying them with Trump's policies. This replaces reporting on actual results.

MAGA, as Trump's vision, appeals to and further divides the United States. Policies to cut federal research grants focused on DEI at Harvard and other universities, end birthright citizenship — a constitutional right — and restrict abortion rights to state laws are examples of anti-liberal policies that deepen the fault lines within U.S. society.

Among the most divisive policies on foreign relations is Trump's tariff strategy. Despite widespread agreement among experts that tariffs will only worsen U.S. economic struggles (Sarkar, 2025), Trump continues with his approach. He seems unaware or dismissive of the fact that many U.S. workers (57 percent) are just one paycheck away from poverty (Haverstic, 2025). He threatens to impose tariffs on nearly every country in the world. Recently, he has implemented or threatened tariffs, including a warning to tax key allies South Korea and Japan (Boak, 2025), as well as tariffs on Mexico and the European Union (Durkee, 2025). Trump has maintained tariffs on many other nations, claiming that bilateral "deals" are essential.

His credibility in making the tariff gambit work is declining (Hyatt, 2025), as he has already postponed several rounds of tariff impositions. His goal of achieving "deals" that benefit Americans has produced relatively few results (agreements with the United Kingdom, the Philippines, Indonesia, Vietnam, the EU, and Japan), despite the publicity and instability of his statements and threats (Cameron, 2025; Kurtenbach, 2025).

Nevertheless, tariff threats appeal to Trump's resentful and distressed political base in the short term, even if they do not address the underlying problems and are likely to exacerbate them. Despite some mild market turmoil, with no significant price increases so far, the policy seems to be a complete success for MAGA supporters. Experts know that if general tariffs are imposed, this will no longer be the case (Clausing and Loving, 2024).

"America First" is another, complementary version of values for Trump's administration. As the world's most powerful nation, it commits to testing whether a given foreign policy benefits the United States first (Sankey, 2024). If existing alliances or agreements do not do so, they should face reevaluation and potentially end, removing the agreement or coalition participation. The benefits may be upheld if foreign allies contribute more or if tariffs are used to correct unfair trade advantages.

America First also emphasizes distancing and insulating the United States from others' conflicts rather than interventionism, but it does not entirely reject activism. The stance includes border control and the removal of immigrants, currently numbering 200,000, both illegal and legal, if they do not show lawfulness or if they act against the administration's view of U.S. interests (Irwin, 2025). It also involves policy reversals and intervention when

necessary to defend U.S. interests and promote peace, as seen in Trump's recent pledge to supply arms to Ukraine with Europe paying (Stokols and McLeary, 2025).

Third, when U.S. core interests or commitments are threatened, the policy involves applying "overwhelming strength and devastating force" to eliminate threats (Choi, 2025). Of course, it is also true that America First prioritizes U.S. domestic policy needs over those of foreign commitments or intervention in the global system.

The Trump administration's Fiscal Year 2026 budget reflects many of these priorities. It includes cuts to Medicaid and food stamp programs (social safety nets for the poor and disabled), increased spending on border security, cuts to environmental initiatives, and the elimination of DEI programs, among other measures. It extends the non-progressive 2017 tax cuts and raises the deduction for state and local tax (SALT) deductions. These proposals are presented under the banner of "securing the border" and combating Marxist "wokism" (White House, 2025b).

Trump's domestic policies have significant, even crucial, foreign policy effects. He began his administration by threatening tariffs on Mexico and Canada, effectively asserting U.S. dominance over these countries. He hinted at a desire to take control of Greenland, sending Vice President Vance on a diplomatic mission to the region. He has attempted to negotiate peace and initiate peace talks with Putin and Zelensky, but those efforts have been unsuccessful. Similarly, he has tried to mediate between Iran and Israel, and Israel and Hamas. The Trump administration transferred the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) funding back to the Department of State. Trump has also, as in his previous term, pressured U.S. allies to increase their defense spending. With the U.K. tariff deal and NATO members' willingness to increase their spending, he has achieved some "wins" in that area (Kirby, 2025).

The Trump administration has either withdrawn from or indicated its intention to cancel U.S. participation in global climate agreements, including the Paris Accords, as well as its commitments to the World Health Organization and the 1951 Refugee Convention (Hashemi, 2025). He has promised a skeptical review of all international organizations to which the United States belongs (Patrick, 2025). His proposed FY26 budget includes cuts to current and previous funding for foreign aid (Zengerle, 2025). Foreign aid is part of soft power, which will be discussed in more detail below.

To supporters of Trump, MAGA, and America First, criticizing U.S. allies' shortcomings as partners fits with the idea of sending immigrants back to their countries, neglecting the need for responsible immigration policies, and pulling the United States out of efforts for peace in Ukraine and the Middle East. Trump may genuinely want to end conflicts, but his impatience in taking the necessary steps suggests that his concern is less sincere. Nothing in the Russo-Ukrainian or the Israeli-Iranian conflicts indicates that peace is near. Warm words, weapons, and bombings do not equal a strategy, much less peace.

Furthermore, some experts see the Trump Doctrine as a form of isolationism that begins by accepting the differences of other nations. The importance of this idea changes depending on the situation. Agreeing that countries like Russia and China have differences means pulling

back from issues like human rights and supporting institutions that uphold the global free trade and commerce order (Amnesty International, 2025). If the Doctrine involves “America First,” it also seems to reflect a fortress mentality that guards against the world and its threats.

If this seems confusing, it probably is. In some ways, Trump’s core doctrines can be seen as a quiet acknowledgment of declining U.S. influence compared to other nations. They also allow Trump to shift between different positions or hold no clear stance at all. With so many global hotspots, the once-dominant United States cannot lead in every area and succeed. Picking and choosing would involve strengthening alliances, which Trump supports but only on U.S. terms. Therefore, cherry-picking “deals” and downplaying the value of partnerships, or increasing “burden sharing” by allies, all enable Trump to appeal to his domestic base and misuse corporate-style negotiating tactics in international relations. The new U.S. foreign policy also sends a message to allies, neutrals, and rivals that U.S. power is more limited and may not be used to serve their interests, unlike in the past. This reduces soft power, primarily by eroding trust in the U.S., as allies and other nations face increased uncertainty. Ultimately, it causes nations and people to focus more on Trump—what he wants to do—rather than on clear policies that are communicated and implemented, which generally bring certainty and credibility to promises and threats.

#### 4.0 FOREIGN POLICY AND PLUTOCRACY

Although less frequently discussed, recent studies indicate that a rise in the number of billionaires marks the second decade of the 21st century in the United States. More Americans are becoming billionaires (900 and counting), or more precisely, part of the one percent—those with incomes and wealth in the top one percent of U.S. households (Martinez and Manuel, 2025). There are 23.8 million or more millionaires, which accounts for over 18 percent of all U.S. households (Merrenor, 2025). Does wealth grant someone a leadership title? Do the wealthy make better leaders? These are ongoing questions. However, the U.S. belief is that no amount of wealth—or lack thereof—entitles anyone to leadership.

In the Republic, Plato’s Socrates discusses justice and the tendencies of the state. A genealogy of states, souls, and entropy forms the core of Books Eight and Nine. Each type of state or government aligns with a dominant type of soul characteristic of that state. The entropy of human effort, if unchecked, progresses from kingship down to mob rule. The virtuous regime of aristocracy declines when it turns into a regime of “rule by the wealthy” or oligarchy.

Trump believes he is restoring U.S. democracy to its former greatness and that he and his colleagues embody a kind of virtue in pushing back against the ills of liberal democratic rule (Noah, 2025). He thinks that men, more than women, should lead the way back to greatness (Jones, 2025). This reaction to the past 50 years of liberalism on both the right and left in the United States is a common form of reactionary thinking. It also marks a significant moment in U.S. history, as about half the electorate supports it in various forms.

However, this reactionary moment is also open to Plato's critique, as a form of plutocracy or oligarchy disguised as an aristocracy (Mahbubani, 2020). Trump’s new aristocracy relies on the entry of billionaires into government, which Alex Morris names “techno feudalism” (Morris, 2025). At least 14 billionaires serve in the Trump administration. Biden had no

billionaires; Obama had one. These billionaires are undeniably talented, often building fortunes that most people will never dream of, and some inherit wealth, seeking to turn their economic success into power over others.

This is a plutocratic era, where billionaires seek to move from financial success to political power. Morris characterizes billionaires as having less generosity, less compassion, more narcissism, social avoidance of those outside their class, less empathy, and an exaggerated sense of self-worth (Morris, 2025). Many favor a form of Social Darwinism that views liberalism as weak and for the lower classes. This also fits with the idea that the Washington government is a “swamp” to be drained of liberal influences, especially from a Republican perspective, which has historically aimed to limit government.

Indeed, as this paper has argued, Trump is working to divide Americans along racial and ethnic lines. His policies also aim to divide those who support feminist and women-centered positions. The same applies to issues of sexuality and policies toward the LGBTQ+ community. All these divisions make it easier to control a population, most of whom face dimmer economic prospects.

Edelson would organize these ideas into what various researchers call “a dark triad” of narcissism, psychopathy, and Machiavellianism (Eidelson, 2019). The top one percent of Americans is more likely to exhibit traits like emotional coldness, self-promotion, a willingness to lie, and aggressiveness. In Trump, these Americans have found a hero fighting against the liberal machine and, it seems, winning. An article by JC Pass describes Trump’s style as that of a “populist strongman,” showing “strong signs of narcissistic leadership, authoritarian tendencies, and transactional logic” (Pass, 2025). Trump claims to represent “ordinary Americans” and to oppose the elites (a term that can shift from economic to cultural power), but his policies primarily serve a plutocratic United States, and those elites increasingly shape them. For students of political psychology and leadership, this should come as no surprise, since Trump’s mentor and enabler was Roy Cohn (Corn, 2024). His sister has stated that Trump’s mindset was also influenced by his grandfather and father, who admired plutocracy (Subramian, et.al., 2020).

But what distinguishes this era is that billionaires tend to align closely. Aside from outliers like George Soros, Warren Buffett, and the Pritzkers, most wealthy families tend to give significant contributions to the campaigns and causes of Trump and the Republicans (Conley, 2024). In the 2022 elections, estimates suggest that most of the \$881 million spent was directed toward supporting Trump and Republican candidates (Conley, 2024). In 2024, that number increased to over \$2 billion, with 72 percent of the funds going to Trump and the Republicans. All of this has occurred under the permissive regime established by *Citizens United v. Federal Election Commission* (2010). This law allows unlimited donations to Super PACs and is widening the gap in campaign inequality, reflecting the interests of plutocracy (Campaign Legal Center, 2025). Increasingly, the coalition of the dispossessed—white working-class men—is willing to vote and align with billionaires they will never know and who do not want to know them. The policies they promote are said to benefit the working American, but so far, there is little evidence of rising fortunes, as opposed to inflation and stagnant employment (McNicholas, 2025).

Those Americans enthralled with Trump who attend his rallies and cheer for his policies seem unaware that his policies have widened the divide between the rich and the poor. The founding of the United States included the idea of a “yeoman culture” that everyone could aspire to and possibly surpass (Hofstadter, 1956). This idea persists—that all Americans deserve a basic set of opportunities and can achieve life-affirming and sufficient outcomes as a measure of progress and self-reliance.

However, what MAGA and America First promote is the increasing divide between the one percent (including parts of the upper decile) and the rest of Americans, aided and abetted by many of the “ninety percenters” themselves. Stoking hatred of liberalism only creates negative feedback for the needs of working people and their families.

What Plato observed in ancient societies and considered fundamental to human nature is, in other words, a requirement that those interested in rational and reasonable policy anticipate and, if possible, address the consequences of imbalance in the proper ordering of a soul, state, citizens, and government. The growing gap in incomes, wealth, and prospects for Americans is beginning to be reflected in how government leaders are chosen, as well as in their thinking. Isolationism, aggression, and breaking from alliances all align with the mindset outlined by an elite interested in governing for the sake of wealth. This is an un-American and dangerous path, perhaps mostly styled as “Project 2025 on steroids” (Durkee, 2025).

## 5.0 DIMINISHING SOFT POWER

Power has many definitions, but the core idea is that it combines the ability relevant to a situation for action with the credibility of the decision-maker or person to use that ability. Power can also include military power, economic power, and various forms of capability or measures. As a student, I remember hearing that one way to define a nation’s power potential is as population times the gross domestic product (Beckley, 2018).

Power also encompasses both hard power aspects, such as military strength, and soft power aspects. Soft power is defined as the ability to influence an actor to take a desired action (or prevent an undesired one) without using force. It involves factors such as the types of organizations a nation is part of, the number of agreements, communication and propaganda efforts, and methods for spreading a nation’s priorities (Pass, 2024). It also includes the influence of culture, foreign aid, diplomacy, international exchanges, and educational opportunities for foreign nationals (GovFacts, 2025). The soft tools of policy include information, foreign aid, and diplomatic initiatives.

The Trump administration has seen a decline in U.S. power, including soft power, compared to China and other countries. Although the United States once had perhaps the world’s largest stockpile of power, that situation is changing—and not gradually. Many experts focus on military or economic strength, but it's also important to recognize shifts in both relative and absolute soft power. U.S. soft power is waning compared to that of China and other major powers. While in absolute terms, U.S. soft power still ranks number one, its advantage is shrinking. When considering U.S. key allies, it becomes clear: today, and increasingly in the future, maintaining U.S. hegemony and global stability depends on soft power—specifically, functional, strong, stable alliances.

Various indices of soft power now rank the United States behind EU nations or highlight rising challenges to U.S. hegemony among anti-status quo countries. The British Institute for Government ranked France and the UK above the United States in 2010, with China, South Africa, Brazil, and India's soft power ranks trailing behind (McCloy, 2010). By 2019, Monocle had ranked many U.S. allies higher in soft power, with the United States still ranking above China (Monocle, 2018). By 2021, one index ranked China above the United States (Cevik and Padilha, 2024). As of 2025, Brand Finance ranks China in second place behind the United States (Brand Finance, 2025).

The Trump administration has abolished the Voice of America and ended the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). These actions are highly significant from the perspective of soft power. Relying on the Chinese, who are actively involved in international development, amid the growing influence and presence of BRICS, is unwise. Adding to the problem, threat-based tariffs and delays create distrust, resentment, and additional costs for allies, neutral nations, U.S. competitors, and enemies alike.

Power relies on predictability and reliability in use if the goal is to prevent unnecessary conflict caused by misperceptions of power and its exercise. Trump's leadership style, which depends on unpredictability and asserting power, does not constitute a rational foreign policy. Allies and enemies do not respond well to bullying and threats. Soft power diminishes when promises are broken, and each concession or claimed victory is met with another perceived threat. This behavior is too typical in the Trump administration. Media leaks once used trial balloons to gauge public reaction to a potential opponent or course of action. Making tariff policy by seeing what sticks is not a practical approach.

## 6.0 CONCLUSION: Where Do We Go from Here?

U.S. foreign policy enters the second quarter of the century as a declining or drifting hegemon. Many believe the era of U.S. dominance is over. The Trump era can be seen as a transitional phase. Overall, it appears as a period of drift caused by domestic division and the erosion of international influence. There is no doubt that China, and soon India, will not adhere to the old or current order. Global conflicts persist, and hotspots like Ukraine, Israel, and others demand coordinated efforts to defend democracy and the free flow of commerce.

At the same time, as U.S. opponents and competitors strengthen their global power bases, the United States appears to be too slow in responding. For any U.S. administration, building stronger ties and trade with allies and forming new alliances seems obvious. Not participating in this effort leaves much of the world vulnerable to being overtaken by U.S. rivals.

The Democratic Party continues to wait for the U.S. fantasy about Donald Trump to end, but it has not, and it may persist even after his time in office. There is an urgent need for new leadership within the Democratic Party. It should be leadership that can connect with Trump's supporters while promoting a more responsible and rational approach to policy, including U.S. foreign policy (Gamboa, 2025).

- Respect for international agreements and accords (Piccone, 2017);
- Negotiation and Senate ratification of trade agreements (Griswold and Packer, 2024);

- A responsible national immigration policy (Tanden and Gandhi, 2025)
- End the fight against birthright citizenship (Fwd.us, 2025);
- Support for Ukraine and European security, consistent support, in tandem with NATO (McCusker and Kagan, 2025);
- Opposition to nations whose visions of culture and society do not uphold individual rights and property rights (U.S. Mission Geneva, 2024);
- Attention to the growing disparities of wealth and income that drive isolationist and reactionary policy stances, domestic and foreign (Adler-Bell, 2017);
- A responsible strategy for building support for the (post-) neoliberal world order through alliances and regional coordination of security interests (Schelz-Forberg, 2024).

The current U.S. brand images of the Trump administration and Republican Congress accompany a U.S. system increasingly fixated on executive power (Savage, 2025), and an enabling and activist Supreme Court (Orts, 2024). In turn, they situate the further emasculation of representative and legislative power, as well as a less predictable U.S. president at the helm of military, economic, and political initiatives. Trump's actions have diminished U.S. power among allies, competitors, and adversaries, but he and his audience see it as the opposite. MAGA America is divided, and America Firsters wear blinders. Trump's fixations only reinforce his ex-ante presuppositions about the concept of power and its use, but not without incurring terrible harms to the U.S. security interests, credibility, soft power, and global position, not to mention the impacts on the neoliberal world order the United States has worked to create.

President Trump hails the present as a time when the United States is the "hottest country in the world" (White House, 2025d). The reality, however, is one of hegemonic drift, with inflated rhetoric of power and achievement that conceals disengagement from allies, collective agreements, and the foundations of U.S. power itself. The current era's retreat from investing in the global order that the United States helped create—an effort for which it bears much responsibility—may signal the end of U.S. dominance altogether, whether it likes it or not. The plutocracy that promotes autocratic domestic and anti-immigrant policies, with only sporadic and inconsistent leadership, contributes to the decline of the liberal international order. U.S. foreign policy today is driven by self-interest, but its actions hide a truth of global disengagement that threatens its vital interests and those of the free world.

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