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The Impact of Realism on U.S. Foreign Policy during the Trump Presidency

Adam Taim



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Abstract

Purpose: This article explored the impact of realism on American foreign policy during the Trump administration, striving to answer whether Trump adopted a realist stance or employed a unique blend of realism to enhance American interests on the global stage.

Methodology: Centering on theoretical analysis and historical context, this study investigated the alignment of Trump's controversial personality and his "America First" slogan with the quest for national interests and power dynamics. This paper spotlighted Trump's unorthodox implementation of realism by exploring specific global issues, such as security strategies, trade policies, and diplomatic methods.

Findings: This paper underscored Trump's deviation from traditional realism and adopting an unconventional realist approach. Particular emphasis was placed on this approach's implications for global power dynamics and the ethical dimensions of U.S. foreign policy. This study pinpointed noteworthy results from Trump's unique fusion of realism, providing insights into its effects on international relations.

Unique Contribution to Theory, Practice and Policy: This research contributed to theoretical comprehension and practical implications for future American foreign policy. It illuminated the Trump administration's unorthodox implementation of realism and its ramifications for international cooperation. Moreover, this paper advocated for a balanced approach incorporating strategic pragmatism with ethical leadership to efficiently tackle intricate global challenges and uphold the United States' role in the international arena.

Keywords: *Realpolitik, Trumpian Unique Realism, Multilateral Institutions, Unilateralism, Transactionalism*

JEL Codes: *F51, D74, F53, F51, F50*

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INTRODUCTION

The world is a dangerous place. We're going to have to be very strong and we're going to have to be very vigilant.

Donald Trump, 2016

Donald Trump's provocative rhetoric characterizes an era marked by political upheavals and debates on American foreign policy. Throughout his presidential tenure, Trump's political behavior has sparked different discourses, raising questions about the nature of his approach to foreign policy. Did Trump adopt a realist stance, or did he employ a unique blend of realism to enhance American interests on the international stage?

In international relations, realism arises as a prominent theoretical framework, stressing the primacy of national interests by significantly focusing on the role of power and the pursuit of national security in forming the dynamics of the international system. In his book "Politics Among Nations," Hans Morgenthau points out that states are driven by self-interest and the quest for power (Morgenthau, 1948, p. 78). Additionally, Kenneth N. Waltz further developed realism in his work "Theory of International Politics," stating that power distribution among states is a crucial factor influencing their behavior in the international environment (Waltz, 1979, p. 72).

This article dissects the dynamics of realism and its presence in U.S. foreign policies, focusing on the Trump era. Additionally, it explicitly explores Trump's behavior in critical geopolitical contexts, such as his approach to NATO allies, dealings with Russia and China, and interactions with global institutions. For example, Trump's doubt about long-standing partnerships and emphasis on bilateral relations may resonate with Morgenthau's emphasis on state sovereignty and the quest for national interests. In contrast, Trump's transactional approach to diplomacy and concentration on "America First" may also challenge Waltz's structural realist perspectives on power distribution.

Problem Statement

The Trump administration's foreign policy has sparked questions about its alignment with traditional realism doctrine in international relations. While realism emphasizes the quest for national interests and power dynamics, the Trump administration's political thought, actions, and rhetoric deviate slightly from conventional realpolitik. Additionally, Trump pursues a distinctive approach, a variant of realism I termed "Trumpian unique realism." This research explores the impact of realism and Trumpian unique realism on American Foreign policy during Trump's presidency. By scrutinizing the theoretical principles of realism and the policies and behaviors of the Trump administration, this study aims to provide insights into the nuances of American diplomatic strategies during this pivotal period. Moreover, the paper seeks to delineate the features of Trumpian unique realism and assess its ramifications for the United States' engagement with the international community. Through meticulous examination of primary and secondary sources and diplomatic rhetoric, this article endeavors to contribute an understanding of the intricacies inherent in employing realist principles within contemporary U.S. foreign relations.

Theoretical Framework: Realism Theory and American Administrations

Like other nations, the United States has consistently pursued its interests throughout its historical journey, particularly regarding the organization of its foreign policies. These policies were not devoid of realism, serving as a guiding force in shaping the foreign policies of various

American administrations. Realism became more apparent in U.S. foreign policy after World War II, but its roots can be traced to earlier times. As a structured theory within the international relations realm, it originates in the writings of thinkers such as Machiavelli, Hobbes, and Thucydides. Such scholars laid the foundation for comprehending through the perspective of power dynamics and national interest. However, realism strongly emerged in the United States in the early 20th century under the leadership of President Harry S. Truman, who addressed Congress in 1947, calling for financial assistance to Greece and Turkey to prevent the spread of communism (Truman 1947, 118-121). Undoubtedly, this speech served as a significant turning point for the United States, viewing global issues through the lens of power dynamics and asserting American presence in international affairs. Moreover, the United States embraced a realist approach more deeply during the Cold War through the policy of Containment, developed by diplomacy George F. Kennan (Kennan 1947, 566-582).

The realist approach in the United States' foreign policy persisted through subsequent administrations, particularly during the Cold War, characterized by geopolitical competition between the United States and the Soviet Union. The American policy of containment, a fundamental aspect of realist thinking, significantly influenced political decisions at that time (Morgenthau 1948, 217). A striking example is the Cuban Missile Crisis during Presidency John F. Kennedy's term in October 1962. Such a global event was pivotal because it aimed to prevent the Soviet Union from deploying nuclear missiles in Cuba, which was perceived as a direct threat. Such a global event was a pivotal event aiming to prevent the Soviet Union from deploying nuclear missiles in Cuba, which was perceived as a direct threat. In dealing with this significant matter, America employed a blend of diplomatic and military preparedness to prevent the crisis from escalating and uphold its strength in the global balance of power. Through blockade and intense diplomatic endeavors, the U.S. forced the Soviet Union to disassemble its missile bases in Cuba, avoiding a confrontation and maintaining its strategic advantage. The handling of this crisis reflected realist considerations of power dynamics and the necessity to prevent a strategic advantage for the Soviets (Mearsheimer, (Mearsheimer 2001, 110).

Additionally, the détente policies followed by President Richard Nixon marked a substantial change in U.S. policy, opting for diplomatic means rather than direct conflict with the Soviet Union. This explored the areas of cooperation between the two powers and their weaknesses, reflecting a realist understanding of the complexities in the relations of great powers and exploring differences in various political, economic, and security domains during the Cold War.

Investigation Realism in the Trump Presidency

America's First Slogan

Trump's inaugural speech in 2017 was a turning point in the traditional discourse of American foreign policy. Thus, Trump stressed a vision of prioritizing American Interests, echoing realism in all its nuances. His declaration, "From this moment on, it is going to be America First," emphasizes his administration's overall approach, emphasizing the primacy of national interest in international relations (Trump 2017). Additionally, the Trump slogan marked a signal of departure from multilateralism and returned to a leading and singular leadership position in dealing with external affairs.

Trump's discourse in 2017 markedly reflects realist sentiments regarding political presence in all its facets, explicitly concerning power dynamics and engagement with the external world. Realists claim that nations are primary players on global stages, and the pursuit of security and power mainly drives their deeds (Waltz 1979, 75). In this sense, one could argue that Trump's

approach aligns with this view, as it is a spotlight on the competitive landscape of global politics and the need for nations to assert their influence to secure their interest. Nonetheless, it is imperative to recognize that the realism approach is not a homogenous theory and can be interpreted and applied in numerous ways.

Whereas the "America First" approach shares likenesses with realist principles, it also diverges from particular facets of traditional *realpolitik*. Detractors argue that Trump's unilateralist inclinations and transactional approach damaged long-term strategic interest and undoubtedly eroded American relationships, conceivably weakening America's position in the international arena (Slaughter 2017). A prime illustration is Trump's decision to withdraw from international accords such as the Paris Climate Accord and the Iran nuclear deal. The withdrawal from such agreements has considerably strained relations with crucial allies and weakened America's credibility as a trustworthy ally in multilateral diplomacy (Haass 2017, 125-150). This type of political thought undoubtedly undermines America's capability to address international challenges. Additionally, it weakens the alliances and partnerships crucial to maintaining U.S. influence and leadership on the global stage.

Trump's Unique Realist Trade Policies and American Economic Interests

Trump's trade policies were symbolic of his unique realist approach, which concentrated considerably on maximizing American economic interests and power dynamics on the global stage. In addition, Trump pursued favorable trade terms with countries such as China, which was regarded as engaging in unfair commercial practices (Ross, 2018, pp. 22-27). A striking example is tariffs, specifically those imposed on steel and aluminum imports in China. The goals of imposing tariffs on steel and aluminum were to enhance domestic manufacturing and protect U.S. jobs in these industries. According to the U.S. Department of Commerce data, the Trump policy tariff significantly increased domestic steel and aluminum production, with numerous steel plants reopening and expanding their operations (U.S. Department of Commerce, 2019). Nevertheless, such tariff policy also elicited retaliatory measures from China, which imposed tariffs on American exports, including automobiles and agricultural products. The trade tensions between the two nations contributed to uncertainty in global markets and disrupted supply chains for numerous industries (Bown & Kolb, 2019). These political behaviors are historically rooted in the realist notion of power politics, where states strive to strengthen their relative power and economic benefit in the global system. Such policies aimed to rectify perceived trade imbalances and bolster America's position in the global economic arena, aligning with Trump's "America First" doctrine. While Trump's approach policies are grounded in realist principles, they also display aspects that overlap with other international relations theories. For instance, Trump's emphasis on protectionism and prioritization of national interests aligns with a realist viewpoint on power dynamics. Nonetheless, his refusal to engage in multilateral agreements and preference for bilateral negotiations embody a departure from liberal internationalist norms, prioritizing cooperation and institutionalism.

Moreover, Trump's administration's prioritization of renegotiating trade deals, exemplified by agreements like the United States-Mexico-Canada, also reflects an emphasis on advancing national interests, reminiscent of realist notions of power and favored self-interest over multilateral cooperation (Smith 2019). Thus, Trump endeavored to assert U.S. dominance in the international economic order by renegotiating trade deals to benefit American workers and industries. This strategy resonates with historical precedents, such as protectionist policies of the interwar era, where states emphasized national economic interests Amid international

economic turmoil (Frieden 2015, 92). Despite short-term advantages in specific sectors, Trump's trade policies have encountered criticism for their long-term economic implications. For example, a study conducted by Blanchard et al. (2018) implies that while tariffs may safeguard domestic industries in the short run, they frequently increase consumer costs and disruptions within the framework of global supply chains, ultimately undermining economic growth. Furthermore, analyses by global institutions such as the International Monetary Fund have forewarned that trade disputes from Trump's foreign policies might weaken global economic prospects and contribute to a slowdown in international trade.

However, it is imperative to recognize the limitations of Trump's realist approach to trade policies. While his administration sought assertive measures to protect U.S. industries, such as enforcing tariffs, these actions also led to retaliatory measures from trading partners, resulting in significant trade disputes and disruptions in global supply chains (Frieden 2015, 92). Whilst Trump's foreign policies demonstrate elements of realism, a precise understanding requires a critical assessment and consideration of both continuities and deviations from past practices. Furthermore, the efficacy of Trump's trade policies in attaining long-term economic gains remains controversial among economists and policymakers.

American National Security and the "Maximum Pressure" Campaign

In the realm of American national security, Trump did not stray far from his unique realist tendencies, which were particularly apparent in the "maximum pressure" campaign against adversaries such as North Korea and Iran. Using coercive measures, including military posturing and heavy economic sanctions, Trump aimed to force these states to alter their political behavior in alignment with American interests (Cohen, 2018, pp. 63-84). Such an approach reflects a realist belief in the significance of power and compulsion in shaping international outcomes. In addition, it reveals a comparison with previous administrations through strategic continuities and contrasts. For instance, the solo exit from the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) and the restoration of sanctions on Iran mark a deviation from the multilateral engagement preferred by prior administrations. Previous white house administrations, such as Obama's, highlighted a teamwork-focused strategy for tackling Iran's nuclear ambitions (Johnson & Williams, 2014). Such agreements were broadly seen as landmark diplomatic achievements, expressing a multilateral effort to restrain Iran's nuclear program via sanctions relief and rigorous inspections. Unlike that, Trump wielded the threat of military force and imposed economic pressures to weaken the Iranian regime and compel concessions on numerous issues, most notably nuclear proliferation and regional influence (Sanger & Wong, 2020).

Generally, Trump's maximum-pressure campaign has been significantly subject to criticism. One prominent critique pertains to its failure to attain intended results, particularly regarding the Iran nuclear program. Despite the severe sanctions, The Irani regime not only continued its nuclear program but also succeeded in escalating the tensions in the region, leading to heightened instability, specifically in the Middle East (Erlanger and Sanger 2021). In addition, the maximum-pressure campaign resulted in adverse effects on civilians, particularly concerning access to essential goods and healthcare, raising ethical concerns. Detractors argue that such actions inappropriately harm vulnerable populations without achieving strategic expectations. As such, Trump's unilateral approach to the campaign tensed relationships with crucial partners, undermining collective endeavors toward diplomatic solutions Johnson 2019, 189-210). As demonstrated by his trade policies and national security strategies, Trump's foreign policy took a unique, realistic approach. By focusing on power dynamics and

prioritizing national interests, Trump sought to assert American dominance in the international order. On the other hand, past administrations frequently combined coercive tactics with diplomatic engagement, utilizing alliances to achieve strategic objectives.

Trump's Unorthodox Implementation of Realism

Although Trump's foreign policy content considerably resembled conventional realist principles, it also diverged from traditional realism interpretations, reflecting his unique approach to international relations. As mentioned earlier, his administration's unilateralist tendencies and transactional approach represent departures from traditional realism while still grounded in the quest for national interests and power dynamics (Walt 2017).

One noteworthy deviation from Trumpian realist strategies was his inclination toward unilateralism, which often shunned long-standing alliances and multilateral cooperation. In contrast to prior administrations, which valued diplomacy and collective security through institutions like NATO and the United Nations, Trump openly doubted the usefulness of such alliances and favored unilateral engagements (Sokolsky and Adams 2019, 7-24). This was apparent in his decision to withdraw from the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty (INF-Treaty) with Russia, accusing it of violating its terms. Arguably, while such action undoubtedly was driven by a desire to advance American interests, it disregarded the concerns of NATO allies and elicited concerns regarding escalating arms races deteriorating security dynamics with Russia.

Moreover, Trump's transactional method of foreign policy, marked by his willingness to use economic leverage and threats of military force to advance American objectives, also departs from conventional realpolitik. Instead of sticking to long-term strategic goals, Trump frequently chased short-term gains and pursued to extract compromises from other states through coercive action (Bender 2020). For instance, his imposition of tariffs on automobiles and automobile parts mainly targeted products from South Korea, Japan, and the European Union (Swanson and Tankersley 2019). While such an approach reflected a realist understanding of power dynamics in international relations, it diverged from conventional strategies that accentuated stability and predictability in state behavior.

Hence, Trump's transactionalism and political approach created distrust among key partners and allies (Brooks 2020). By employing intimidation tactics and capricious policy shifts, such as recurring threats to withdraw from international pacts, Trump undermined the credibility of American commitments and raised skepticism of the United States as a unique strategic partner (Jordans 2019). This erosion of trust weakened established partners and offered rival powers chances to capitalize on divisions and advance their interests, which thwarted endeavors to sustain stability and security in the international system. The breakdown of trust undeniably deepened global unease, making it progressively difficult for diplomatic endeavors to reach common ground on critical issues, thus hampering the effectiveness of global institutions and cooperative frameworks.

Trump's Personal Manner and Unconventional Methods on Foreign Policy

The era of Trump as President of the United States from 2017 to 2021 shows a significant departure from conventional diplomatic norms and practices, especially in foreign policy matters. His employ of social media, such as Facebook and Twitter, to convey messages to world leaders and bypass traditional diplomatic channels was unprecedented in modern diplomacy (Wike, Fetterolf, and Mordecai 2020). Arguably, relating on such media allowed former President Trump to swift and unrestricted communications, empowering him to

establish his dominance and advance his administration's agenda promptly. Such informal interactions embodied realist inclinations because Trump, without a doubt, prioritized American interests over adherence to diplomatic measures and norms (Baum 2017). By prioritizing direct communications and transactions based on interactions, former President Trump displayed a pragmatic inclination to secure positive results for the United States (Renshon 2020, 3-28). Nevertheless, the unbridled nature of Trump's Twitter and Facebook diplomacy repeatedly brought about impromptu statements that lacked the thoughtful, diplomatic deliberations typically associated with official channels. Additionally, it caused diplomatic gaffes and tense relations with longstanding partners. The most obvious example is public altercations with figures such as Angela Merkel, the former chancellor of Germany, and North Korean president Kim Jong-un, which accentuated the potential pitfalls of Trump's unconventional communication style, led to diplomatic strains, and undermined broader strategic imperatives (Wong and Sanger 2018).

Moreover, Trump's era was characterized by a significant deviation from the established norms and global institutions that underpin the liberal international order. Trump's continued critiques of multilateral frameworks, exemplified by his belittlement of essential entities such as the United States and his skepticism toward free trade agreements, represented a divergence from the bipartisan consensus that had hitherto defined American foreign policy. Unlike his predecessors, who had commonly endeavored to strengthen and uphold these organizational frameworks, Trump's skepticism reflected a prioritization of bilateralism and a focus on national sovereignty (Beauchamp 2018). Therefore, Trump's political behavior departed from conventional wisdom. This divergence from political convention undeniably alluded to a redirection of US foreign policy with a revitalized emphasis on unilateral assertiveness and a diminished commitment to multilateral cooperation (Johnson 2018, 45-62).

Trump's style and unorthodox approach were profoundly distinguished by the implementation of realism within his international relations platform. Although his skillful use of social media channels facilitated direct communication and projected a facade of strength, it simultaneously led to diplomatic strains and hindered the achievement of strategic goals. A comprehensive examination of these facets of Trump's foreign policy approach highlights the complex interactions between individuals' leadership styles, diplomatic methodologies, and the quest for national interests within global affairs. Thus, while projecting political power, Trump unintentionally planted uncertainty and instability in global political arenas (Johnson 2020, 45-62).

The supporters of the realist paradigm Trumpian Foreign Policy

With numerous and various perspectives regarding Trump's foreign policy approach, it's essential to analyze both its strengths and limitations, specifically from a realist standpoint. While some scholars commend Trump's adherence to realist principles as a sensible response to global challenges, others voice reservations about its efficacy and implications. Proponents contend that politicians should prioritize the national interests in international relations. For instance, realist scholars such as Stephen Walt and John Mearsheimer defend President Trump's foreign policy decisions, especially his skepticism towards multilateral institutions and emphasis on power dynamics (Walt and Mearsheimer 2016, 135-152). They argue that Trump's interactive approach symbolizes a sober understanding of international relations in a world where states vie for dominance and power (Walt 2018). In their defense of Trump's foreign policy approach, Mearsheimer and Walt assert the significance of maintaining a clear-

eyed focus on US national interests instead of being bogged down by idealistic notions of global cooperation and harmony.

Furthermore, other scholars indicate that Trump's emphasis on sovereignty and national security is one of the essential aspects of a realist foreign policy. Hence, by prioritizing America's interests above all, Trump sought to ensure the country's survival and prosperity in a competitive international context (Jervis 2020). Realpolitik proponents also praised Trump's willingness to challenge traditional wisdom and departure from diplomatic norms, observing such behavior as necessary for affirming American dominance (Schweller 2019, 64-100). Trump's unorthodox approach to diplomacy, sparked by direct and confrontational rhetoric, is observed as a tactical move to assert American interests and project power on the global stage (Schweller 2019, 64-100). Additionally, proponents of Trump's unique realist approach, such as John J. Mearsheimer and Stephen M. Walt, argue that Trump's emphasis on power dynamics is an essential corrective to what they view as the naivety of previous administrations' foreign policies (Walt and Mearsheimer 2016, 135-152). Trump's daring approach to diplomacy undeniably may have been unsettling to some states. However, it conveyed the message of grit and determination in a pragmatic and uniquely innovative political style. In addition, Trump's behavior has advanced America's negotiating position and leverage in international affair (Lee-Makiyama 2019). Therefore, such political tactics are often more effective in attaining numerous and concrete gains for the US (Schweller 2019, 284-312).

However, it is critical to investigate the criticisms and limitations of Trump's realist approach. For instance, some academics contend that Trump's prioritization of national interests can undercut long-term alliances and cooperative endeavors, potentially isolating America diplomatically. Critics also raise questions about the efficacy of his confrontational rhetoric and unorthodox diplomatic style in attaining strategic goals, suggesting that they may exacerbate tensions and impede diplomatic progress (Smith, 2020, pp. 87-105). An excellent example of that is Trump's diplomatic engagement with North Korea, especially regarding its nuclear program. Trump chased an extraordinarily personalized and unconventional approach, directly negotiating with North Korean leader Kim Jong-un. Undeniably, Trump's desire to interact with North Korea initially to achieve progress toward denuclearization and achieve peace on the Korean Peninsula. However, his approach lacked a cohesive strategy and undoubtedly risked legitimizing the North Korean regime without achieving concrete concessions (Lee, 2023).

As such, whether it is a bold assertion of US power or a reckless gamble with international stability, Trump's unique realist approach to foreign policy has triggered intense debate and reflection on America's role in an increasingly interconnected world. This political thought drives the reassessment of conventional diplomatic strategies and opens avenues for exploring novel approaches to global engagement. In retrospect, whether observed as a deviation from norms or a necessary recalibration, Trump's era underscores the complexity of navigating contemporary international relations.

The Ethical Dimensions and Trump's Unique Realist Policies

Trump's unique realist foreign policies have ignited intense debates within the international community, pushing policymakers and scholars to scrutinize the ethical implications of his actions on the world stage. As a theoretical framework in international relations, realism asserts that states primarily advance their national interests in an anarchic world order where power dynamics shape interactions among actors (Gvosdev 2018, 378-394). As such, Trump's unique approach reflects a commitment to this realism worldview, asserting the protection and

prioritization of US interests above all else. One significant ethical dimension of Trump's realism is prioritizing national interests over common global challenges. Realists contend states have ethical obligations to ensure their citizens' well-being and security. However, detractors assert that Trump's unilateralist tendencies and transactional actions have eroded efforts to address pressing and significant issues such as nuclear proliferation and climate change. Trump's foreign policy approach has also damaged international cooperation by prioritizing short-term gains and narrowly defining national interests, hampering progress on critical global issues (Johnston 2019, 101-114).

Trump's departure from global norms and treaties has elicited concerns regarding the erosion of the rule of law and the sanctity of agreements. For example, Trump's administration's policy separating migrant families at the America -Mexico border promoted significant ethical dilemmas and drew condemnation from numerous domestic and global communities (Jordan and Dickerson 2018). Under this policy, myriads of children were unfairly separated from their parents or guardians upon crossing the border to deter illegal migrates. Such approaches violated global human rights norms, including the principle of family unity and the child's rights, as specified in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (United Nations Human Rights Council 1989), and ignored the United States' obligations under international refugee law.

Another epitome of Trump's realism, Trump's unique approach to violating the international community norms, is cutting funding to international organizations and withdrawing support from global health initiatives, such as the World Health Organization (WHO). While Trump's policy has sparked criticism for its effect on international health equity, some academics justified his political approaches due to concerns about mismanagement within these institutions (Smithson, 2020, pp. 410-425). They contend that withholding from withholding financial support from international aid efforts might induce reforms within these organizations and ensure more efficient utilization of resources to address global health challenges. Nonetheless, notwithstanding these arguments, it is essential to acknowledge the potential ramifications of such measures. As such, withdrawing support from global health initiatives may undermine endeavors to tackle international health challenges, such as pandemics, and perpetuate global inequalities in access to healthcare. Despite these concerns, Trump repeatedly dismissed international concerns and forged ahead with his unilateral actions that undoubtedly affected the position of the United States as a superpower country.

In general, Trump's realist foreign policies display numerous ethical challenges and violations of international law and humanitarian standards that transcend conventional notions of national interest. The examples mentioned assert the complexities inherent in balancing strategic objectives with ethical considerations, highlighting the importance of critical reflection and debate in shaping responsible foreign policy decisions. As the global community grapples with these numerous issues, it becomes clear that the quest for national interests must consider the common international interests, shared values, and principles that underpin a just and equitable international order.

Global Responses to Trump's Realistic Unique Approach and Its Consequences

Undoubtedly, states' foreign policies are not executed in a vacuum but rather profoundly intertwined with the responses of allies and partners. During the four years of Donald Trump's presidency, his unique realist approach to foreign policy was a landmark and brought varied reactions worldwide. The salient feature of Trump's foreign policy was his inclination to challenge and reformulate longstanding alliances, raising concerns among traditional American

allies. An example is his critique of NATO's financial contributions, which strained relations with European partners, who perceived their commitment to collective defense was being undermined (Erlanger 2017). Additionally, Trump's transactional approach to diplomacy frequently put allies and partners in tricky positions, as he demanded concessions in exchange for security guarantees. This can be evident by Trump's insistence on South Korea paying more for American military equipment on its soil (Choe 2019). Such a political approach created significant strains and raised skepticism about the U.S.'s willingness to uphold its obligations.

Undeniably, Trump's unique realist foreign policies also had positive implications for U.S. adversaries, particularly in how they evaluate U.S. power, intentions, and aims. While some adversaries may have perceived Trump's unpredictability as a source of leverage, others saw opportunities to capitalize on divisions within the international community. The simplest example of that is Russia. Although it faced sanctions and diplomatic pressure from the President Trump administration, it found a means to leverage the U.S.'s strained relations with its traditional allies (MacFarquhar and Higgins 2021). The Kremlin capitalized on its influence in regions such as Eastern Europe and the Middle East, pursuing to fill the void left by a retreating U.S. presence (MacFarquhar 2019). Analogously, China adopted a strategic approach to broaden its influence in Asia and beyond, while America was preoccupied with internal divisions and trade conflicts (Wong and Swanson 2019). On the other hand, although repeatedly facing threats of military action against it from President Trump, North Korea strategically engaged in diplomatic initiatives, most notably the historic summit between Kim Jong-un and Trump, to ease sanctions and gain international recognition (Etel Solingen 2019, 543-547). Venezuela, as such, also considerably capitalized on divisions within the global community. Under the leadership of Nicolás Maduro, Venezuela successfully rallied domestic and foreign support and garnered sympathy from other anti-American regimes, such as Cuba and Russia. (Nicholas Casey and Ana Vanessa Herrero 2020). Such global responses undoubtedly highlighted the adaptability of America's adversaries in navigating a shifting geopolitical landscape and taking advantage of apparent vulnerabilities in U.S. foreign policy

Generally, Trump's realist, unique foreign policy approach raised mixed responses from allies and adversaries alike. Some allies found a common platform, while others questioned the reliability of U.S. global commitment. Similarly, adversaries sought to exploit the divisions of the global community to maximize benefits for their states. Despite skepticism and tensions, Trump's foreign policy approach undoubtedly spurred a reassessment of diplomatic norms and strategic realignments as countries pursued to navigate the evolving international stage, resulting in a reevaluation of conventional alliances and the emergence of new geopolitical dynamics.

Implication for Global Power Balance and Dynamics Shift during Trump Tenure

Examining Trump's realist approach to foreign policy reveals that his era had far-reaching implications for the international power balance, not to mention the dynamic changes and altering conventional alliances among states (Ikenberry 2015, 56-68). One of the most significant implications of Trump's unique realist foreign policy was the erosion of multilateralism and the decline of international bodies (Wike et al. 2020). This shift was evident in his administration's withdrawal from major and significant multilateral agreements and institutions. An illustrative example is his withdrawal from significant agreements such as the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), the Paris Climate, and the Universal Postal Union (Landler and Lipton 2018). Such withdrawals undermined decades of efforts to enhance global cooperation and consensus on critical issues. In addition, this transactional approach negatively

affected global governance and the international community in general. Therefore, some states refrained from responding to such significant global issues. As a result, global efforts to tackle these challenges faltered, creating a more fragmented and uncertain world order (Stiglitz 2017, 54-59).

On the other hand, Trump's unique realist foreign policy also contributed to the emergence of regional powers pursuing to assert their presence and influence in the international arena (Hudson and Jaffe 2018). With Washington's influence declining as a global leader, states such as Russia, China, and Iran saw opportunities to extend their influence and challenge the existing international order. Moscow exploited the weakness of U.S. engagement and successfully extended its presence in Crimea and the Middle East (Sakwa 2015, 122). As such, Iran seized the opportunity presented by the shifting dynamics in the Middle East through regional alliances and, of course, by proxy conflicts. Iranian regime furiously backed up militia groups and intervention in numerous conflicts in Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, and Yemen (Hubbard and Kirkpatrick 2019). As a particular case, China considerably leveraged Trump's realist inclinations to enhance its economic and diplomatic ties with countries in Asia, Latin America, and Africa, paving the way for a fresh era of Chinese dominance. In addition, Trump's foreign policy behavior caused other global protagonists to seek their agendas, disregarding American intervention or opposition (Kirkpatrick and Schmitt 2020). This is exemplified by Turkey's military incursions into Libya and Syria, where Erdogan and his administration sought to assert itself as a regional intermediary, often at undoubtedly odds with U.S. interests.

Furthermore, Trump's realist political approach also resulted in fragmented international traditional alliances, as some states sought to hedge their bets and pursue independent foreign policies. With America adopting a more transactional approach towards global issues, partners and close allies became incrementally wary of relying on U.S. security guarantees and began exploring alternative partnerships. A prominent example of this is European states' shifting foreign policy towards other regional powers such as Russia and China. EU enhanced their diplomatic ties with Mosco and Beijing to reduce reliance on the U.S. (Erlanger 2021). As such, states in the Middle East and Asia sought to enhance relations with Russia and China and observed them as potential counterweights to U.S. influence. Turkey reflects this by shifting foreign policies with Russia and, of course, through Pakistan and its economic and strategic relations with China under Trump's tenure (Erlanger 2021). Such foreign policy shifting of both states reveals a desire to diversify strategic partnerships and reduce reliance on traditional alliances with the United States.

Overall, Trump's realist foreign policy undoubtedly had a profound negative impact on the international balance of powers, forming alliances and empowering the emergence of other regional powers as strong players on the global stage. By eroding international cooperation and undermining traditional alliances, Trump's behavior and approach established a more fragmented and uncertain world order, where all conventional norms and significant global institutions were challenged. In addition, Trump's political mindset created a vacuum in global governance and significantly exacerbated challenges and security threats.

Lessons for Future American Foreign Policy Learned from Trumpian Realism

Throughout the Trump administration's tenure, the application of Trumpian realism in American foreign policy yielded various outcomes and implications. While advocates canted that realism offered a framework for prioritizing the nation's interests, pundits refer to instances where the quest for such interests considerably clashed with broader strategic objectives (Irwin 2018). One of the main lessons extracted from Trumpian realism is the necessity to balance

power dynamics with diplomatic acumen. Realism, emphasizing power and self-interests, directed Trump towards a more transactional approach to international relations (John J. Mearsheimer 2020, 22-34). Hence, pursuing a nuanced approach to diplomacy is significant to achieving comprehensive foreign policy objectives. For instance, negotiations with North Korea highlighted the challenges of depending solely on power dynamics without considering diplomatic intricacies. Moving forward, future U.S. foreign policy should prioritize strategic engagement that integrates both power projection and diplomatic finesse to navigate intricate international relations while effectively maintaining global stability. The second significant lesson from Trump's approach is that pivoting away from bilateral security, economic, and strategic agreements in favor of unilateral agreements is no doubt detrimental to the interests of the nations and led to complete estrangement from the global community. In addition, pursuing such an approach undermined the U.S.'s status as a global superpower (Garcia 2019, 72). An excellent example is the withdrawal from the Iran nuclear deal. Such decisions strained relationships with crucial allies and hindered efforts to tackle regional security concerns.

Thirdly, Trump's realist approach varied and imposed realist policies depending on the geopolitical context. This also serves as a significant lesson that cannot be overlooked, particularly in light of the principle of future engagements with regional power states. In engaging with rival states such as Russia and China, Trump sought a competitive stance grounded in realpolitik principles. For instance, the Trump administration-imposed measures such as increasing military presence in Eastern Europe to counter Russian aggression and imposing actions on Chinese imports (Cohen 2017, 151-164). Such actions are undeniably intended to protect American interests and naturally maintain a balance of power; however, they also risk escalating tensions and undermining diplomatic efforts for cooperation. Fourthly, Trump's unique realist approach has presented numerous challenges to the United States as a global leader. Although withdrawn from significant agreements such as climate change and global health crises, the Trumpian approach failed to address such complex transnational issues. Therefore, Trump's unilateral actions, including withdrawal from agreements, use of power, and threats, are rarely conducive to national interests. Fifthly, Trump disregarded the fundamental character and principles of the nation's foreign policy, emphasizing solely the potential gains from the international arena rather than global cooperation. Sixthly, Trumpian realist policies have heightened scrutiny on the moral dimensions of American foreign policy, specifically in relation to human rights and democratic values (Johnson 2019, 345-367).

Lastly, despite the myriad consequences of foreign policies implemented during the Trump administration, it is essential to acknowledge that Trump's emphasis on favoring national interests has resonated with specific segments of the American population. Furthermore, his administration's efforts to reassess and renegotiate certain international agreements have raised essential conversations about the efficacy and fairness of existing frameworks. Additionally, the focus on transactional diplomacy has undeniably, in some cases, resulted in concrete gains for American interests despite considerable controversy.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This article has explored the intricate dynamics of Trump's controversial personality and the realism he employed to shape his foreign policies. President Trump utilized a unique realism formulated through his policies and decisions that often closely resembled the principles espoused by realist theory. His realpolitik was undoubtedly peculiar and unparalleled but also very realistic. Trump's unique interpretation of realism, which I have termed Trumpian unique realism, is framed conventionally in his style and thinking, leading to significant divergence

from conventional foreign policy strategies. The Donald Trump administration's foreign policies also deviated from conventional diplomatic norms. President Trump sought a realist approach characterized by unilateralism, transactionalism, and prioritization of U.S. interests.

Throughout his era, Trump emphasized power dynamics in international relations and reflected a realist approach by prioritizing U.S. interests above all else, skepticism towards multilateral institutions, and willingness to challenge diplomatic norms. Nonetheless, Trump's approach also deviated from traditional realpolitik in particular ways, specifically in his unilateralist tendencies and transactional styles. Arguably, these departures from conventional realist doctrine highlight the idiosyncratic nature of Trump's foreign policy and the lasting impact of his presidency on the practice of American diplomacy and its approach toward alliances and, obviously, adversaries. Trump's unique, realistic foreign policy had undeniably significant implications for the global balance of power. His confrontational approach to global issues contributed to a more fragmented and uncertain international world order. As a result, regional powers such as China and Russia managed to fill the vacuum left by the United States.

In brief, Trump's political thought brought numerous challenges to the United States, which should be taken as important lessons for future policymakers, particularly regarding the formation of foreign policies and engaging with global powers. Furthermore, policymakers desperately need a balanced approach integrating strategic pragmatism with ethical leadership in navigating complex international challenges. By looking further ahead, decision-makers should work diligently to reestablish trust and credibility in the world by reasserting the United States's commitment to global cooperation and upholding its treaty obligations. This entails reconnecting with multilateral organizations like the United Nations and adhering to alliances through diplomatic dialogue and mutual respect. Additionally, investing in strategic foresight and long-term planning is significant in preparing for and effectively responding to emerging geopolitical dynamics and international challenges.

Lastly, through a rigorous examination of Trump's foreign policies, utilizing theoretical and historical analyses, and employing numerous data sources, additional investigation is needed to comprehensively grasp the implications of Trump's realist approach to international relations. Subsequent studies could further explore the long-term effects of Trumpian realism policies on international power dynamics and the ethical dimensions of foreign policies. By employing such research methods, scholars can contribute to a deeper understanding of the U.S.'s role in the world and the future of international relations, particularly in light of the global developments witnessed.

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