

Analysis of Trump's Foreign Policies

Cihan Zhang

*School of International and Public Affairs
Jilin University*

**Corresponding author. Email: Zhangch9918@jlu.edu.cn*

ABSTRACT

Since Trump took office in 2016, U.S. foreign policy has undergone a series of drastic adjustments, causing shocks in U.S. relations with the world. During his four-year term, Trump launched a global trade war, "exited" from various multilateral cooperation mechanisms, built a border wall, reshaped the US alliance system, and intensified strategic competition with China. This series of diplomatic actions not only reflects the strong personal style of President Trump, but also reflects the transformation of the US diplomatic strategy. The core concept of Trump's foreign policies is "America First", and Trump has transferred the "jungle state" of business and the law of negotiation to the field of international relations, boosting the trend of geopolitics, and regards the game of great powers as American diplomacy and security. The primary challenge of his diplomatic strategies is to maximize the relative benefits of the United States through reciprocal transactions, extreme pressure and other strategies. Through analysis, the author finds that Trump's foreign policy is still subordinate to the hegemonic category of "destined leadership", but the domestic economic and social structure of the United States has undergone dramatic changes, and the world has gradually moved from a world dominated or led by the United States to a world of "multiple power centers".

Keywords: *America First, Principled Realism, American Diplomacy, Small Group Thinking, Trump Administration*

1. INTRODUCTION

The election of Trump as US president in 2016 and "Brexit" represented the beginning of a new cycle in international history. The first two stages of international history were the period of rapid economic growth from 1945 to 1975 and the period of international financial growth from the early 1980s to 2008. In other words, Trump's inauguration is a turning point in the relationship between the United States and the world. The way President Trump has behaved is very different from previous presidents. He is a "political amateur", behaves erratically, and has published a series of fragmented and emotional views through Twitter and other social media. At the same time, relying on social media such as Twitter, Trump won the 2016 election. After entering the White House, instead of closing his Twitter account, he relied on Twitter to govern the country. It can be said that he is the first "Twitter President" in American history.

Starting from the pedigree of American foreign policies, this paper will summarize many diplomatic issues during his tenure from the perspectives of Trump's strong personal style, small group thinking and decision-

making mode, and Trump's "securitization" and "de-securitization", and try to answer the characteristics and the root cause of US foreign policy during the Trump era. In order to coordinate the relationship between China and the Trump administration, it is essential to grasp Trump's foreign policies and take appropriate measures. This study of his foreign policies will be conducive to the proper handling of Sino-US relations and of the most important practical significance for China's development.

2. TRUMP ADMINISTRATION'S FOREIGN POLICIES

Trump redefines the main threats facing the United States, changes the order of threats, and conducts continuous securitization mobilization, thus forming a new national security strategic goal. The foundation of Trump's foreign policy is the formation of a new security discourse. Security is a way to transcend all political rules and structures, a special politics above all politics. In the discourse of security, an issue is presented as having the highest priority, so that by putting It puts the security label on it, and an actor can claim a right to respond to a threat through extraordinary measures. U.S. foreign

policy depends on the balance between a series of distinct and competing voices and values, and it is a symphony, or trying to be a symphony, not a solo. Trump shock eventually formed Trump Universalism, or the new U.S. grand strategy, "provides a 'big picture' of national interests by linking the concept of national identity, foreign policy, and the conduct of national security."

2.1. America First

"America First" is at the heart of Trump's foreign policy, redefining the United States' borders and role as a sovereign state. Trump was invited to give a foreign policy speech at the Center of the National Interest on April 26, 2016 [2]. Trump introduced the concept of "America First" in this speech, stating that his foreign policy will always prioritize the American people and their security. Trump's foreign policy is centered on "America First," in order to fulfill Trump's campaign slogan of "Make America Great Again." "Greatness" is a two-way relationship between the United States and the rest of the world, whereas "America First" emphasizes withdrawal, and the United States should not take on too many international responsibilities.

Trump's "America First" campaign is a contraction and challenge to the concept of "cost awareness." Since World War II, the United States has been the builder and maintainer of the global order, and "America First" is a withdrawal from the "liberal internationalism" order. Trump believes that the nation-state is still the bedrock of happiness and harmony. During World War II, anti-war and isolationist groups founded "America First." The "America First Committee" at Yale University was opposed to the United States' involvement in World War II. Even if the United Kingdom was on the verge of annihilation, it should not take part in the war. The main threat to the United States comes from within, specifically the Jewish community. In foreign policy, "America First" was anti-Semitic and pro-Hitler [3]. Some historians have questioned Trump's choice of such an infamous one. The well-known slogan serves as the foundation of its policy philosophy.

"America First" is a rebellion against the liberal internationalist order, claiming that US foreign policy has failed to effectively respond to the challenges and threats that the country faces. The income and expenditure structure of American-style globalization, according to Trump, is unbalanced and needs to be adjusted to focus on and expand the benefits of the United States. "Unfortunately, one of the biggest obstacles to the long-term prosperity of the United States is other countries' adherence to mercantilist and trade protectionism," says Navarro, Director of the White House National Trade Council [4]. "America First" means that US foreign policy must prioritize national and local interests. In terms of its allies, the United States has allowed itself to become overextended. Second, the United States should approach

trade from the standpoint of what is best for the United States, rather than what is best for the global economic system. Once again, rigid multilateralism is a Cold War legacy. Rather than clinging to an outdated structure in an era of American hegemony, the United States should collaborate with anyone with whom it shares interests. Following Trump's election, several speeches at the United Nations General Assembly emphasized "sovereign countries," demonstrating not only the will of "America First," but also attacking multilateralism [5].

"America first" is the priority of sovereign states, returning to the fundamental starting point of realism, that is, "self-help" by the country, thereby redefining the United States' national interests and adjusting foreign policy based on the new structure of national interests. In his inaugural address, Trump stated, "Today we are not simply transferring power from one administration to another, or from one party to another - but we are transferring power from Washington, D.C. and giving it back to you, the people." This populist discourse is not only Trump's "canvassing" move, but it also indicates that the majority of "America First" supporters. Trump expanded on "America First" by saying, "Buy American, Hire American" [6]. Furthermore, according to Trump, it is all the result of the incompetence of America's elite leadership. Trump has created a new adversary structure. The main threats and enemies that the United States faces are the establishment in Washington and liberal internationalist measures. The establishment elites are the main threats to the American people, whereas Hillary and Obama are not only Trump's opponent, but also the American people's enemy. 2.2 "principled realism"

"principled realism" is a refinement of the concept of "America First", which contains a Trumpist "map" of diplomatic operations, restrains the US's impulse to intervene in the outside world, and reduces the US's overseas obligations and commitments. Trump proposed "principled realism" during his first visit to Saudi Arabia after taking office. Some scholars believe that behind "principled realism" is the doctrine of populist sovereignty, which is a distinctive feature of Trump's foreign policy thinking. Political actions and policy priorities, in harmony with Trump's political instincts, are also deeply embedded in American political culture. Trump believes that the nation state remains the foundation of happiness and harmony. To achieve this, it is necessary to withdraw from the endless war. Today, when the relative strength of the United States is declining, political polarization is becoming more serious, and the two-party confrontation is becoming more and more serious, it is more important to be more clear about the focus and core of the grand strategic layout than to be the world's policeman [7].

2.2. Principled Realism

"Principled Realism" is a refinement of the "America First" concept, which includes a "map" of Trump's diplomatic operations, restrains the US's desire to intervene in the outside world, and reduces the US's overseas obligations and commitments. The fact that the United States is not the world's policeman does not imply that the United States withdraws from the world and returns to the old path of isolationism, but rather that the focus of American national security is redefined and the so-called "restraint" strategy is implemented [8]. The grand strategy of restraint assumes that the United States is a very safe country, and that only a few things can jeopardize that security. The geographic location of the United States and its vast nuclear arsenal make it a naturally safe country, and the only homeland security threat the United States may face, aside from terrorism, is the Southwest border. The blurring of the United States' Southwest border has become a geographical fact that no amount of security can change. As legal or illegal immigrant groups in Latin America become the majority of cities along the US-Mexico border, Samuel Huntington's "Who are we?" anxieties have become more visible. After taking office, Trump tightened immigration policies and insisted on constructing a high wall along the US-Mexico border. He claimed that the wall was built to keep Mexican immigrants and drugs out of the country, but it also marked the end of the American frontier and its degradation. Since the end of the Cold War, the United States has intervened in Eurasian disputes while ignoring border security. Trump's "wall construction" demonstrates that the US has elevated the US-Mexico border to the highest level of national security.

2.3. Securitization and Desecuritization

The Trump administration has mobilized to securitize and de-securitize many U.S. diplomatic issues, changing the focus and structure of the U.S. national security strategy. Less than a year after Trump took office, he issued the National Security Strategy of the United States of America, which reordered the threats facing the United States. Great-power politics was re-securitized and became the top challenge and threat facing the United States. National Security Adviser McMaster is believed to be the chief architect of the report, whose core goal is to turn the United States from a nearly two-decade war on terror to confronting so-called "revisionist powers." McMaster, who left the White House shortly after completing the document, and in his book "Battlefield," expands on the ideas in the National Security Strategy Report, and he doesn't think Trump accepted his own concept because Trump had not read the document [9]. Whether or not Trump has read the National Security Strategy Report and listened to the briefings carefully, he has achieved an adjustment of the US national strategic focus during his tenure. Both the National Defense

Strategy Report and the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2019 put "great power politics" at the center of U.S. strategy.

Trump continues to "exit" from the quagmire of the war on terror in the Middle East. In fact, the Trump administration continues the Obama administration's idea of ending the war in the Middle East. First, the U.S. military withdrew from Syria and signed a peace agreement with the Taliban. During the election, Trump promised to end the war in Afghanistan within this year. What has attracted much attention is that Trump withdrew from the Iran nuclear deal and reinstated and tightened sanctions on Iran. In early 2020, the US killed Qassem Soleimani, the commander of Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps' Quds Force, in Iraq, triggering the US-Iraq war crisis, but the Trump administration has maintained "restraint" on the issue of war against Iran. Second, the U.S.-Israel relationship has never been stronger. The Trump administration has not only recognized Jerusalem as the capital of Israel and moved the embassy in Israel to Jerusalem, but also promoted the United Arab Emirates and other countries to sign peace agreements with Israel and establish diplomatic relations. The United States' anti-terrorism war in the Middle East has entered its twentieth year. It is costly and mired in the quagmire. It is imperative to revise strategic goals and conduct "de-security" mobilization. Former U.S. Secretary of Defense Robert Gates believes that the U.S. goal in Afghanistan is "to have a local government and military strong enough to prevent the return of the Taliban to power and prevent al Qaeda from reusing the country as a breeding ground for its terrorism" [10]. The Trump administration has also made major adjustments, signing a deal with the Taliban to get out of Afghanistan.

The Trump administration's foreign policy adjustment is most concerned about Sino-US relations, especially during the 2020 election, when Sino-US relations fell to the lowest point in the four decades since the establishment of diplomatic relations. The main feature of the U.S. policy toward China is the securitization of economic issues. After the COVID-19 pandemic, the U.S. policy toward China has shown a trend of binding multiple issues. The discussion on Sino-US relations has changed from "Thucydides Trap" to "decoupling theory" and "new cold war". Sino-US relations are facing the most severe challenge since the establishment of diplomatic relations. Behind the trade war with China is Trumpism to securitize trade, withdraw from the global multilateral trading system, and use "national security" as an excuse to contain and suppress trade, investment, technology, etc. Putting "maximum pressure" on China will lower the bottom line of Sino-US relations. On July 23, 2020, US Secretary of State Pompeo declared in his speech that the US policy of "engagement" with China over the past four decades has failed [11].

3. REASONS FOR THE FORMULATION OF THE TRUMP ADMINISTRATION'S FOREIGN POLICIES

The Trump administration's foreign policy has drawn attention and questioned because of Trump's strong personal style, but the socio-political foundation of Trumpism has long been established. Before Trump's unexpected victory, the social and psychological foundation of Trump was already in place, or the pyre was already set up, and it was only a matter of a demagogue like Trump igniting it. Trump's paranoid style has accelerated the adjustment of the relationship between the United States and the world.

3.1. The Personal Style and Businessman's Worldview

Trump's personal style and his businessman worldview are the "appearance" of Trumpism. Since the end of World War II, the president's power in foreign and security affairs has continued to expand, and American foreign policy has been marked with a strong presidential personal style. Trump is a "political amateur", but he has experienced ups and downs in the business world, and he has also experienced business failures. Survival is the law of the business. Trump believes that "doing business is knowing the world." His mantra is "no one knows better than me" [12]. Trump has a strong desire to perform and the ability to manipulate audience emotions, and the rise of social media represented by Twitter has provided him with a cheap and direct political mobilization tool. We-media has changed the logic of media, and the world has entered a "post-truth politics" [13]. Although the American media has continuously disclosed Trump's "lies" one after another, the credibility of the so-called mainstream media has also been questioned. Trump has hundreds of millions of fans on various social media, thus forming a special circle. Trump's intuition, opinions, and emotions are transmitted through social media, forming emotional resonance with "fans". Trump has become a veritable "Twitter President", [14] relying on Twitter to win elections and govern the United States. Twitter provides a destructured, de-hierarchical model of governance, and forms a flat and dense network centered on Trump, who has gained a medium to bypass the mainstream media and directly interact with the American public thus his emotions and "lies" can spread like a virus.

3.2. The polarization of political parties the "minority rule"

Foreign policy is an extension of domestic affairs. After the 2008 economic crisis, the white class in the United States has increasingly become the "forgotten majority". As a populist president, Trump is very concerned about the movements of this class. In addition,

compared to other presidents, Trump has carried out his campaign promises better. The polarization of political parties in the United States and the "minority rule" caused by the electoral system are the inherent logic of power in Trumpism. The political system and constitution of the United States provide the possibility for political amateurs like Trump to become president. Trump gets his chance when the Republican Party is at a disadvantage in the general election. Combined with Trump's strong small group thinking, this has resulted in an unprecedented increase in the power of the US president, which is reflected in the nomination and selection of officials, also brought the strong populist ideas for officials in all kinds of institution. Trump came to power with an anti-establishment stance, and by the time of the 2018 midterm elections, Trump had won the Republican majority and became a veritable Republican president. Over the past few decades, the Republican has turned to the right, the Democratic has turned left, and the Republican has turned to the right faster, resulting in an "asymmetric polarization" of bipartisan politics. The fragmented constituency system and electoral system allow Republican presidential candidates to win even if they do not win a majority of votes. The electoral system tends to be in rural areas, and the Republican has benefited a lot from it. From a political standpoint, the Republican Party has already Being the third largest party, the electoral system allows the Republican to maintain elite rule.

Some scholars in the United States believe that behind Trump's rise is the United States' turn to chaebol populism, combining the two forces of chaebol rule and populism. Except for the distrust of democracy and investment in the Republican, the two have basically no similarities. The neoliberal discourse formed since the Reagan administration has become a kind of "hegemony", propaganda through think tanks, media, the interests of the rich have become the interests of the whole society, and the middle and lower classes have also fallen into this kind of In the discourse system, consciously and unconsciously safeguard the interests of the rich. The elected representatives are firmly controlled by the huge wealth; the once moderate political party began to take the most anti-democratic part of the wealth rule gradually emerging in the United States as its core program; several Not only are tens of millions of low-income Americans voting for a party that pursues economic policies that are bad for ordinary people, but allegiance to that party is becoming increasingly tribal.

3.3. Domestic politics-Grabbing the forgotten majority

After 2008, the financial crisis swept the world, several major U.S. banks collapsed and the auto industry nearly collapsed, which was a major test for nearly 30 million Americans who live in suburbs or small towns. A

large number of ordinary Americans lost their jobs, among who are mainly the "silent majority" consisting of white working class people. Social antagonism arose along the cracks of the great economic crisis. The white middle class, originally the most hardworking, simple, with the purest ethical constraints, willing to let their children be educated, is now displaced, and through electoral politics, small-town residents are given the opportunity to express themselves. Trump captured the psyche of this white working class segment, stirring up emotions that were not obvious and accelerating populism, which became an important basis for his election. Trump has always been a president who does what he says he will do, and he made several policies of "withdrawal", "building a wall" and "trade war" to protect the working class's interest. Although they are too absurd in the eyes of foreigners and elites, these policies have allowed him to have a firm grip on these "hardcore fans". Because it allows the "forgotten majority, the working class, to find work and give them hope to return to life, and this has also become one of the important basis for Trump's foreign policy.

4. CONCLUSION

Trump's foreign policy is still subordinate to the hegemonic category of "destined leadership", but the domestic economic and social structure of the United States has undergone dramatic changes, and the world has gradually moved from a world dominated or led by the United States to a world of "multiple power centers". The "New York Times" commented that the United States has no reason to maintain such a dominant position, and there is no need to pursue global dominance [15]. Trump's foreign policy is guided by America First, to achieve the goal of making America great again. Trump's withdrawal from the multilateral network is not the exit of American hegemony, but a clearer strategic focus and goal. This paper does not discuss too much about the resilience of democratic institutions and the tame effect, but only expounds Trump's foreign policy from a general perspective. In the future, we will continue to pay attention to whether there will be a legacy of Trump's foreign policy in the foreign policy of the Biden administration, and the influence of domestic politics in the United States on foreign policy making.

REFERENCES

- [1] Walter Russell Mead, Special Providence: American Foreign Policy and How It Changed the World, *Journal of American History*, Vol. 89(3), 2002, p. 58.
- [2] Online: <https://time.com/4309786/read-donald-trumps-america-first-foreign-policy-speech/>
- [3] Encyclopedia Britannica, America First Committee, 2019. Online:

<https://www.britannica.com/topic/America-First-Committee>.

- [4] Peter Navarro and Greg Autry, *Death By China: Confronting The Dragon—A Global Call to Action*, Pearson FT Press, 2011, p.49.
- [5] Friedman, George, and Jacob L. Shapiro, The Limits of the Trump Doctrine, *Horizons: Journal of International Relations and Sustainable Development*, (9), 2017, pp. 12–21.
- [6] U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, Online: <https://www.uscis.gov/archive/buy-american-and-hire-american-putting-american-workers-first>
- [7] AronEttinger, "Principled Realism and Populist Sovereignty in Turmp's Foreign Policy". *Cambridge Review of International Affairs*, Vol. 33(3), 2019, pp. 410-431.
- [8] Barry Posen, *The Rise of Illiberal Hegemony*, *Foreign Affairs*, 2018, p.26
- [9] Online: <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/10/22/books/revie-w/battlegrounds-the-fight-to-defend-the-free-world-hr-mcmaster.html>
- [10] Robert Gates: *Responsibility*, translated by Chen Yuqian et al., Guangdong People's Publishing House, 2016, p. 555
- [11] Online: https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/at-nixon-library-pompeo-declares-china-engagement-a-failure/2020/07/23/c4b073f2-cd29-11ea-99b0-8426e26d203b_story.html
- [12] Donald J. Trump, Meredith McIver: *Never Give Up*, Wiley & Sons, Incorporated, John, 2008, p. 77.
- [13] Hector MacDonald, *TRUTH: How the Many Sides to Every Story Shape Our Reality*, Little, Brown Spark, 2018.
- [14] Jacob Burckhardt, Paul Pierson, *Let them Eat Tweets: How the Right Rules in an Age of Extreme Inequality*, Contemporary World Press, 2020, p. 13.
- [15] Online: <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/10/15/opinion/america-global-power.html>