



Trump 2.0, Personality and Power: Assessing Trump's Foreign Policy in a Multipolar World Order

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ABSTRACT

The evolving role of the United States on the international stage during the second presidency of Donald Trump, coupled with the trend towards a multipolar global system, necessitates a thorough reassessment of the foundational elements of U.S. foreign policy-making. Traditionally, analyses of U.S. foreign policy have been anchored in the rational actor model, which emphasises rational calculations. However, there is a noticeable gap in scholarship that incorporates the personal traits, character, belief systems, and experiences of individual U.S. leaders into this analysis. The election of Donald Trump as the 47th President of the United States in 2024 presents a significant opportunity to revisit U.S. foreign policy through a more idiosyncratic lens, particularly in light of the declining influence of the U.S. within the international system. This study employed a qualitative research approach, utilising a desk review as the primary source of secondary data, and applies thematic and content analysis as the principal methods for data analysis. The findings assert that Trump's inward-looking policies expressed in the "Make America Great Again" (MAGA) slogan, ambitious nationalist and expansionist agenda such as the acquisition of Greenland, Canada, Panama Canal and renaming of Mexico, abrupt withdrawal from multilateral institutions, erratic trade wars among others are adversely affecting U.S. global leadership position. These actions are creating space for revisionist states such as Russia, China and BRICS bloc to occupy in the absence or relative decline of the U.S. thereby making the multipolar world imminent. This research

serves as a valuable resource for academics, scholars, and policymakers, encouraging an expansion and diversification of interpretations and analyses of U.S. foreign policy, particularly as the country navigates its position as a leading power in an ever-changing international landscape.

Key terms: Foreign policy, international system, personality traits, multipolarity, new world order

INTRODUCTION

The international system is in flux. The United States is fast receding from its global leadership position and international engagements, populism in on the rise, multilateralism and the liberal international order are under strain. The second administration of Donald Trump hereto known as Trump 2.0 is unprecedented as it happened in a tumultuous international climate, characterised by the intensification of great power rivalries, competition and shifting power tendencies. The post- Cold War order established and dominated by the U.S. is considered to be at risk (Mazarr, 2016). The post-Cold War order was one which has been described as a “unipolar moment” whereby U.S. dominance and primacy was the defining feature of the international system (Brands, 2016). Under this order, the U.S. faced no near-term rivals for global influence and power as democracy and free markets spread like never before (Ibid). But in the contemporary international system, rivals are rising with Russia and China was the principal rivals. Emerging powers from the “developing world” such as China, India and Brazil are increasingly challenging the U.S.-led international order (Vezirgiannidou, 2013). The United States is declining as the leader of the post-cold war era (Momoh & Jacob, 2023). The current structure of the international system is undergoing revision from unipolarity to multipolarity (Muzaffar et al, 2017). This multipolar tendency puts U.S. foreign policy under strain as its struggles to maintain its primacy under the leadership of Donald Trump.

The personalities of U.S. Presidents and foreign policy decision-making have gained some scholarly attention over time. Gallagher and Allen (2014) use the big five measures of U.S. President's personality traits to establish a causal link between the inherent traits of U.S. leaders and their foreign policy decision-making. The study reveals that leaders who have high tendency towards Excitement Seeking are more likely to use force in executing their foreign policy objectives while those who are more Open to Action exhibit

a greater variance around their foreign policy decision-making. Etheredge (2014) used two hypotheses from the interpersonal generalisation theory to posit that personality characteristics have probably been crucial in a number of cases in American foreign policy between 1898 and 1968. In another study, the personalities of U.S. leaders and foreign policy is approached along party lines- Republicans and Democrats wherein it is argued that Republicans tend to use hard power in the pursuit of their foreign policies while Democrats use soft power (Nicmiye, 2022). Despite this scholarship shown that personality traits matter in foreign policy decision-making of U.S. Presidents, such efforts have not be made to carve out the context of the operating international system in the analysis of this interplay. This paper therefore fills that contextual gap by examining the personal idiosyncrasies of Trump and its impact on U.S. foreign policy in a multipolar world order.

The main objective of this paper is to assess the complex interplay between President Trump's personality traits and its impact on U.S. foreign policy in a changing geopolitical context- multipolar tendency. The paper is structured into the following: a general introduction, a methodological delineation, conceptual clarification, a review of personality traits in understanding foreign policy decision-making, a discussion of U.S. foreign policy objectives, an analysis of the contemporary international system and finally how Trump's personality is impacting U.S. foreign policy in the contemporary international system.

METHODOLOGY

This paper is grounded in the qualitative research approach. It employed a desk review as a means of collecting secondary data. The purpose was to gain from the rich tapestry of insights and scholarship on the decisive role of leadership personality on foreign policy decision-making under the second Trump administration. It did so by critically reviewing literature on theories of leaders' personal traits in foreign policy-making in international politics in general before narrowing it down to

the United States under the second presidency of Donald Trump. Data on Trump's personality traits and his foreign policy approach were gathered from policy documents, news reports, institutional reports, speeches and government statements between 2017 and 2025. Themes consistent across data sources were sorted and classified. Thematic and content analysis was the analytical framework employed in the study. This methodology enabled a structured understanding of U.S. foreign policy under Trump 2.0 and its impact on the contemporary international system.

Conceptual Clarification

Trump 2.0

Generally, Donald Trump won elections to become the 45th President of the United States of America under the Republican Party in 2016 for the 2017-2021 term of office. He lost to Joe Biden in 2021. It is argued that his first presidency impacted America's domestic policies and global relations as it was ultra-nationalistic as depicted in his "America First" policy (Saliya, 2025). In fact, his first term have been described as both destructive and chaotic (Klingebiel and Baumann, 2024). In this paper, Trump 2.0 is used to refer to the second presidency of Donald Trump. Donald Trump won the 2024 U.S. presidential elections to become the 47th President of the United States of America still under the Republican banner. This second win was unprecedented especially given the circumstances which surrounded him at the end of his first tenure marked by scandals and legal prosecutions. It is posited that Trump 2.0 will be a continuity of his first presidency (Groitl, 2025). His adherence to the "Make America Great Again" (MAGA) slogan and its attendant policies which characterised his first presidency continues to guide his second presidency in a more crystallised form.

New World Order

The meaning of the term new world order is not fixed. Its meaning has evolved over time to suit different contexts. In international politics, the term is often used to connote transformation in the international political and security environment (Thirlwell, 2005). The scholar argues that the term was first used around the international policy circle by Woodrow Wilson following the creation of the League of Nations and the creation of the

international regime of collective security. After that time, it has been used in several other instances such as after the creation of the Bretton Woods institution: IMF, World Bank, General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT, later replaced by the World Trade Organisation, WTO). It was also used by George WH Bush following Saddam Hussein's invasion of Kuwait in the 1990s, the collapse of the Soviet Union etc. These events consequently structure and define the international system. The international system has oscillated between unipolarity, bipolarity and multipolarity cyclically. In the former, one state reigns preponderantly on the international system, in the bipolar order, two powers command hegemony such as U.S. and former Soviet Union before during the Cold War period. Meanwhile multipolarity reflects the existence of multiple centres of political power on the international arena.

Literature Review on Personality Traits in Foreign Policy Analysis

This section presents a critical and systematic review of the start of the art, that is to say the decisive role of leaders' personality traits in foreign policy analysis and decision-making.

In a study grounded in Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic philosophy, Jooji (2022) advanced the thesis that decision makers' personalities are consequential in assessing the path of a country's foreign policy. In a Freudian framework, psychoanalytic thinkers stress various elements of personality such as genetics, sensation, perception, motivation, emotion, learning and memory. In this study, the Jooji (2022) established that extreme crisis determines leaders' foreign decision-making. During such moments of urgency, normal decision-making procedures and protocols are suspended while immediate actions are taken to arrest the emergency as decision-makers have extreme time restrictions (Ibid, p.7446). This entails that the leader becomes pragmatic and considers only what works to solve the pressing issue(s). That is why communication becomes shorter and stereotypical and material that does not meet the expectations of the leader is simply ignored because there is no time to analyse the information (Ibid).

In another study, Thiers and Wehner (2025) posit that the personality profiles of populist leaders have a strong bearing on the foreign policy behaviour of

the states. these scholars used the case studies of former U.S. President, Donald Trump (2017-2021) and former Venezuelan President, Hugo Chavez (1993-2013) to underline that their personality traits explains their non-cooperative, conflict-driven and hostile behavioural patterns on the international system during the periods under consideration. They describe the attitudes and behaviour of these leaders as erratic and unpredictable (Ibid, p.2). This personal disposition, they explain amplifies the difficulties of other states to establish stable patterns of cooperation with these leaders (Ibid). they concluded that the tendency of Donald Trump and Hugo Chavez to react in hostile ways to regional and international peers and institutions stems from the psychological characteristics of the leaders and not from the type of ideology driving the populist governments around the notion of people versus elite and the general will (Ibid).

With regards to personal traits which influence foreign policy decision-making, Hermann (1980) identified four broad characteristics: belief, motive, decision style and interpersonal style. These four character traits, Hermann notes affect both the style and content of foreign policy. Belief which refers to the leader's fundamental assumption about the world considers whether events are predictable, whether conflicts basic to human interaction, whether one can have some control over events and whether the maintenance of national sovereignty and superiority is the most important objective of a nation (Ibid, p.9). Motive looks at why a political leader is doing what he or she is doing and Hermann considers the need for power to be the most discussed motive of political leaders (Ibid). Decision-making style which is the preferred method of making decisions by the leader interrogates how the political leader goes about making decisions and questions if there are certain ways of approaching a policy-making task which characterise the leader (Ibid). Finally, interpersonal style deals with the characteristic ways in which a policymaker deals with other policymakers. Two interpersonal characteristic styles identified by Hermann are paranoia (excessive suspiciousness) and Machiavellianism (unscrupulous, manipulative behaviours) (Ibid, p.10).

Zhang (2014) underlines the pivotal role leaders' personality plays in foreign policy orientation of States using the Chinese example under Mao

Zedong (1949-1978) and Deng Xiaoping (after 1978). The scholar posits that the personal traits of the above leaders played a crucial role in the disjuncture of Chinese foreign policy (Idem, p.904). Zhang identified three personality traits which impact foreign policies of states which include: degree of dominance of the leader, leader's belief systems and leader's degree of interest in foreign affairs. Drawing from Hermann (1980), Zhang (2014) argued that predominant leaders have the ability to stifle all opposition and dissent as well as the power to make a decision alone if necessary (Zhang, 2014:908). On belief system, leaders who possess strong conviction about what is true to them influence their foreign policy orientation just like Mao and Deng who believed strongly in communism as better alternative to capitalism which subsequently led to the replacement of capitalism in the People's Republic of China (Idem). And finally, a leader's interest in foreign affairs is reflected in his or foreign policy decision-making. In Zhang (2014), Chinese foreign policy was influential under Mao and Deng because of their strong interest in international affairs (p. 909).

Empirical gap in existing literature

Despite the rich literature available on the impact of leaders' personal traits on foreign policy orientation of States in general and U.S. foreign policy in particular, similar studies have not been conducted on the impact of such personal idiosyncrasies on foreign policy orientation in a changing geopolitical context and structure of the international system. More specifically, little or no such studies exist on the second administration of Donald Trump despite the impact his unprecedented return to the White House and Oval office is already having on the international system and the international world order. This paper argues that it is important to put a critical spotlight on the personality traits of Donald Trump against the backdrop of the basic guiding principle of U.S foreign policy orientation to be able to have an appraisal of the contemporary international system which is shifting towards multipolarity. The stakes of the changing international system seem to be high for the U.S as the leader of the rules-based international order.

The Personality Traits of Donald Trump

A seminal work that details the personal traits of Donald Trump is that of Immelman and Griebie

(2020). Grounded in psychology, these scholars relied on psychodiagnostics relevant data collected from biographical and media reports of Trump's post-inaugural political behaviour from January 20, 2017 until July 2020 (Ibid, 2020). This was synthesised into a personality profile using the Milton's Inventory of Diagnostic Criteria (MIDC). Based on the MIDC and Milton Index of Personality Styles manuals and employing the interpretive guidelines, Trump's primary personality patterns were found to be: ambitious or self-serving (bordering on exploitative), dominant or controlling (bordering on aggressive) and outgoing or gregarious (bordering on impulsive) (Immelman and Griebie, 2020). Secondary patterns were also identified to include dauntless or dissenting. In sum, the scholars posit that these personality traits were suggestive of the suspicious, distrusting, erratic and unstable tendencies emerging during Trump's tenure in office (Ibid).

Immelman and Griebie (2020) provide some conceptual clarifications to the above personality traits. First, they explain that ambitious individuals are bold, competitive and self-assured. They easily assume leadership roles, expect others to recognise their special qualities and often act though entitled. Second, dominant individuals on their part enjoy the powers to direct others and to evoke obedience and respect; they are tough and unsentimental and often make effective leaders. Third, outgoing individuals are dramatic attention-getters who thrive on being the centre of social events, go out of their way to be popular with others, have confidence in their social abilities, tend to be impulsive and undisciplined and become easily bored especially when faced with repetitive or mundane tasks. And, dauntless individuals tend to flout tradition, dislike following routine, sometimes act impulsively and irresponsibly and are inclined to elaborate on or shade the truth and skirt the law (Ibid). These personal traits, together with those provided by Hermann (1980) will be analysed subsequently considering Trump 2.0. To proceed, it is imperative to examine the U.S. foreign policy-making process.

U.S. Foreign Policy Orientation.

U.S. foreign policy is not static but has evolved over time and in strategic contexts. The U.S. has historically relied on geopolitical isolation and

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neutrality as its foreign policy orientation until the outbreak of the Second World War (Paterson, 2018). In this orientation, the U.S. under different administrations sought to protect and defend U.S. interests by not intervening in issues outside the U.S. This is often characterised by U.S. disengagement and retrenchment from international politics. However, this orientation shifted after the Cold War which saw U.S. foreign policy dabble between engagement and retrenchment (Ibid:45). The latter has continued to serve as a core strategic consideration for U.S. foreign policy. Studies have shown that irrespective of the political party from which the President emanates, whether Republican or Democrats, geopolitical realities greatly influences U.S. foreign policy options.

The foreign policy goals and objectives of the U.S. have been influenced over time by four core philosophical schools of thought. These schools of thought include: Jeffersonism, Hamiltonism, Jacksonism and Wilsonism (Paterson, 2018:10). All except Alexander Hamilton being former U.S. Presidents, Jeffersonism, named after Thomas Jefferson (1801-1809) the core foreign policy objectives included advocacy for the preservation of democracy, warned against the cost of maintaining a large and expensive standing military and avoided wars especially with war-prone Europe during that

era (Ibid). Hamilton's foreign policy ideas were based on extensive overseas trade and non-intervention in overseas political adventures (Ibid, p.11). Andrew Jackson President (1829-1837) anchored his foreign policy objectives on maintaining a strong army to defend U.S national interest, non-intervention in international wars perceived as unwinnable, unnecessary and not vital to American interest (Ibid). Finally, Woodrow Wilson, President of the U.S. from 1913 to 1921 emphasised that U.S foreign policy should be focused on the promotion of democracy and human rights. According to him, democracies advance U.S interest as it makes more partners than tyrannies. Thus he argued for global governance based on law and morality, which led to the formation of international organisations such as the defunct League of Nations (Ibid,p.12). The above literature portrays that the U.S. foreign policy orientation of the U.S. oscillates between isolationism or neutrality and engagement depending on the administration in place. By inference, U.S. foreign policy is principally guided by national interest and rational calculations. According to the U.S. Department of State, U.S. foreign policy is guided by seven national interests which are: national security, economic prosperity, American citizens and border security, law enforcement, democracy, humanitarian response and global issues which are interrelated and mutually reinforcing (U.S. Department of State).

The post-Cold War order, which is the liberal and rules-based international order is U.S.-led and is marked by the military, economic and technological preeminence of the United States. This period is generally referred to as the unipolar world order. Under U.S. preponderance, major powers such as China and Russia acquiesced to the U.S.-led international order by not attempting to balance power against the U.S partly because the U.S. was too far ahead in terms of raw power and perhaps because they were not yet dissatisfied with the status quo (Blackwill & Wright, 2020). But in the contemporary international order, the international system is witnessing a major shift characterised by Great Power Competition (GPC). The strategic competition from China and Russia is projected to greatly orient U.S. national security strategy (Mazarr, 2022). This revisionist tendency is having an eroding impact on U.S. leadership role in the international system. This is further

compounded by the retrenchment of the U.S. from international engagements under the Trump administration.

How Trump's Personality Traits are Impacting U.S. Foreign Policy in a Changing World Order-Multipolarity

This section builds on the personal characteristic traits already identified and emerging ones in order to analyse the extent to which Trump's personal traits are impacting U.S. foreign in a context marked by Great Power Competition (GPC). The point of departure is that from historical antecedents, U.S. foreign policy is assumed to be based on rational calculation wherein national interest takes precedence.

To begin, Trump's ambitious nationalist agenda has damaging effects on the image of the United States as the leader of the liberal international order which the U.S. has led for decades. Trump's nationalist policies project an inward-looking United States, unconcerned with issues in the international system. In the first 100 days of Trump's second administration, a raft of Executive Orders (EO) have been signed underlining the ambitious nationalist path Donald Trump is orienting U.S. foreign policy. The U.S. under Trump 2.0 has withdrawn from a number of international commitments and engagements. On January 20, 2025, Trump signed an Executive Order indicating the withdrawal of the U.S. from the World Trade Organisation significantly reducing funding to the UN agency (Yamey and Titanji ,2025). The "Make America Great Again" slogan was instrumental in Trump's first presidential run in 2016. This slogan, it is argued emphasises defence of U.S. national interest and security in the first place, economic protectionism, enhancement of traditional American values and reduction of irregular immigration (Ochao De Olza, 2025).

In addition, Trump's personal ambitions is orienting U.S. foreign policy towards expansionism and imperialism. Trump's public statements indicate his desire to have control or influence over certain areas which according to him would be strategic to the United States (Ibid, p. 7). Trump 2.0 has made references to this tendency in relation to Canada, Greenland and Panama Canal and the renaming of Mexico. In Canada, Trump has proposed the buying

of Canada and making it the 51st State of the U.S. He also expressed desire to buy Greenland from Denmark, aligning it with her national security priority and strategic interest of the U.S. (Ibid). This is not new because Trump had echoed these ambitions during his first tenure. Thus, it is just a reiteration under Trump's second administration.

Furthermore, President Trump's contradictory personal traits also translate to the contradictory content of his foreign policy. This is reflected in his desire to achieve peace in the war between Ukraine and Russia and Israel and Palestine and his simultaneous use of rhetoric which instead increases international tension. It is posited that one of the most characteristic features of President Trump is his permanent contradiction between goals and means in that he seeks peace but his rhetoric creates confusion along the way, between his words and deeds (Ochoa De Olza, 2025:11). This scholar adds that the change in his rhetorical style stands out as he is much more combative and is willing to play with the fantasy of others in his own words (Ibid). Media reports have presented Trump as an ally of Vladimir Putin than Vlodimir Zelenski. However Trump's recent pressure on Putin to sign a peace deal proves the contrary. This strategy appears to weaken V. Zelenski by pressurising Ukraine to sign a peace deal thereby gaining Russia to its side (U.S.) and separating it from China. By doing so, the U.S. would be employing the same imperialist strategy as Russia and China its great counterparts. Thus, it appears rhetoric undergirds Trump 2.0 foreign policy decision-making.

It can be added that Trump's belligerent and confrontational personal style influences his foreign policy objectives. Donald Trump's second administration escalated trade wars with major trading partners. On 16 April 2025, U.S.-China trade relations escalated. Trump imposed a 34% reciprocal tariff on Chinese imports, sparking a trade war between the two countries. On April 10, 2025, tariffs on Chinese goods were raised to a minimum of 145%, marking the highest rate in modern U.S. trade policy (Stober, 2025). China retaliated by equally imposing 34% tariff on all U.S. goods starting 10 April 2025 and suspended negotiations regarding the sale of Tiktok. China also introduced export control on minerals critical to defence and technology and equally escalated customs checks on U.S. agricultural imports (Ibid).

This has had reverberating repercussions on the global economy. This has made U.S foreign policy objective which promotes economic liberalism to take a protectionist and confrontational turn.

Implications of Trump 2.0 on the World Order

U.S. foreign policy under Trump 2.0 is adversely affecting the world order established after the Cold War, the liberal international order championed by U.S. preeminence in the international system. By adopting an inward-looking foreign policy path, Donald is escalating the rapid decline of the U.S as the leader of the liberal international order. Major Powers like China and Russia are rising with revisionist tendencies. International relations pundits and analysts have started pondering the new centre(s) of power in international system. Could it be the East? Could it be Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA)? These among other questions, preoccupy international relations enthusiasts as Trump 2.0 is yet to even complete just one year in his return to the White House and Oval office. The world order is fast shifting from unipolarity to multipolarity as the U.S is rescinding from its decades-old position as the hegemon of the post-Cold War era.

Signals of the shifting international order include: the rise of Russia and China, Brazil, India and South Africa (BRICS) bloc among others. These states and blocs are rising to challenge the status quo dominated by the western alliance. The renowned IR scholar, John J Mearsheimer had argued in 2019 that the liberal international order was bound to fail. He posited that this doom was evident since 2019 due to the shifting tectonic plates and internal contradictions within the system itself. To him, this failure is irreparable and cannot be rescued (Mearsheimer, 2019:7). On 17 June, 2025, China announced a zero-tariff access to all 53 African countries with which it maintains diplomatic relations (AGOInfo, 2025). This move is projected to boost export opportunities across the continent by positioning Africa to better compete in the world's second largest economy (Ibid). It goes without saying that as the U.S. increasing looks inward via trade protectionism, Africa would pivot Eastward, thereby exacerbating the decline of U.S hegemony in the liberal international order and hastening the eventuality of the multipolar world order.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

This paper sought to analyse the unprecedented return of Donald Trump to the White House and Oval Office and the complex interplay between his personal leadership style and U.S. foreign policy in a context marked by a shifting international system towards multipolarity. Studies in IR and Foreign Policy Analysis (FPA) to be specific, have established the intricate dynamic of idiosyncratic traits of leaders on the foreign policy orientation of states. In these studies, it is revealed that the foreign policy path adopted by some Presidents like Donald Trump is positively linked to some extent to their personal style and idiosyncratic traits. Under Trump 2.0, his nationalist ambitions like the MAGA slogan are tilting U.S. foreign policy towards expansionism, imperialism and protectionism. His contradictory rhetoric simultaneously contradicts U.S. peace diplomacy in the Russia-Ukraine war and the Middle East conflicts by instead increasing tensions. These traits and policies are quickly eroding U.S. stature and status as the leader of the post-Cold War liberal international order. Another repercussion is the emergence of strategic competitors such as China, Russia, the BRICS bloc among others. The ultimate assessment is that the multipolar world order is a reality and Trump 2.0 may hasten it. The next four years of Trump's presidency will determine and pattern and pace of this reality.

However, this study does not claim to absolutely capture the entire personality traits of Donald Trump but rather attempts an analysis of the most obvious and trendy. This entails that further

research is indispensable to unpack the personal idiosyncrasies of Donald Trump and its bearing on U.S. foreign policy in a drifting geopolitical context. This makes the study relevant for future research to enrich the literature. Moreover, behaviour is not static but evolves over time and context. By implication, the findings of this study are only plausible. In the entire matrix, U.S. state interest is central in the study of Trump's personality trait and foreign policy orientation. Since realism is a core theory in understanding state behaviour on the international system, this paper induces expanding the realist trend to focus on the personality of state leaders like the U.S. president, a superpower in appreciating their foreign policy orientation in a multipolar world order.

As a recommendation, policy makers should factor the critical role of leaders' personality traits in their consideration for policymaking, analysis and implementation, especially foreign policy. The rational calculation model which has been primary in foreign policy calculations despite its strengths increasingly needs to be complemented by other approaches such as the personal idiosyncrasies of foreign policy leaders. The approaches should be used in congruence and not in isolation so as to permit a nuanced and multifaceted understanding of the dynamics in foreign policy directions in shifting geopolitical contexts like the contemporary international environment marked by great power competition and revisionism. In this case, actors in the international system especially States must pay a rapt attention to the personal traits of the U.S. President, Donald Trump in order to be adaptable and pragmatic in their foreign relations.

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