

# Opinion If Trump wins, he will destroy the American-led world order

[Max Boot](#)



Russian President Vladimir Putin and President Donald Trump at a Group of 20 summit in Hamburg in 2017.

(Evan Vucci/AP)

Pdf by:  
<https://www.pro-memoria.info>

It has become a cliché to say that every election is the most important of our lifetimes, but the looming contest between [President Biden](#) and former president [Donald Trump](#) really is. This will be a referendum not only on the future of American democracy but also on the future of America's role in the world.

Ever since World War II, the United States has played a vital, indeed indispensable, leadership role in the world. It continues to play that role today. You can see it in the U.S. military action, in cooperation with allies,

in Yemen to safeguard shipping through the Bab al-Mandab Strait — a maritime chokepoint that handles [a third of the world's container ship traffic](#) — from Houthi missiles and drones. Other U.S. troops stand guard from Poland to South Korea to protect allies against aggressors. In all, there are some [171,000 U.S. military personnel](#) deployed across 750 bases in at least 80 countries. Notwithstanding the tragic loss of [three service members](#) in a drone attack on a U.S. base in Jordan on Sunday, most of these deployments keep the peace without incurring any casualties.

Along with being the world's policeman, the United States is also the world's chief diplomat, spearheading efforts to address vital concerns such as public health, climate change and human rights.

Every president but one since Franklin D. Roosevelt has believed that the United States should exercise preeminent international influence for its own good and that of the world. Trump is the lone exception. He is committed to an "America First" agenda — the same label embraced by the Nazi sympathizers and isolationists of the pre-Pearl Harbor period. He has nothing but scorn for the twin pillars of postwar U.S. foreign policy: free-trade pacts and security alliances.

In Trump's first term, he did not manage to overturn more than 70 years of American global leadership, but he certainly undermined it. He pulled out of the Paris Climate Accords, the Trans-Pacific Partnership and the Iran nuclear accord. He tried to pull all U.S. forces [out of Syria](#) and about a third of them [out of Germany](#). He [temporarily blocked arms deliveries](#) to Ukraine to coerce President Volodymyr Zelensky into helping him politically. He launched a pointless trade war with China that inflicted [considerable costs](#) on the U.S. economy.

Trump's foreign policy record had a few isolated successes — e.g., the [Abraham Accords](#) in the Middle East — but, on the whole, he veered from one blunder to another. In dealing with North Korea, he went from "[fire](#)

[and fury](#)" warmongering to exchanging "[love letters](#)" with Kim Jong Un. Trump undoubtedly would have been more destructive still if he hadn't been held back by the "adults in the room" such as Defense Secretaries Jim Mattis and Mark T. Esper and national security advisers H.R. McMaster and John Bolton.

But it's a safe bet Trump will not be appointing any moderates next time. He has vowed [to purge](#) apolitical civil servants — a.k.a. "[Communists, Marxists, Racists, and Radical Left Thugs](#)." The Heritage Foundation is compiling long lists of [MAGA loyalists](#) to staff a Trump administration.

Thus, there would be little — aside from [his own mental fog](#) — to stop Trump from carrying out his isolationist agenda. According to Thierry Breton, a senior European Union official, Trump in 2020 [told E.U. leaders](#) "that if Europe is under attack we will never come to help you and to support you" and "NATO is dead, and we will leave, we will quit NATO." Congress recently passed legislation to prevent a president from exiting NATO [without congressional approval](#), but Trump could still make the alliance a dead letter by refusing to honor the Article 5 obligation to defend members under attack.

Trump would almost certainly cut off U.S. aid to Ukraine — as his followers in Congress are already attempting to do, [at his behest](#). He says he would end the Ukraine war "[in one day](#)" by telling Zelensky that Ukraine would have "to make a deal." Such a deal would presumably turn over at least 20 percent of Ukraine's territory to Russian occupation while dictator Vladimir Putin readied his forces to take the rest. Zelensky called Trump's talk "[very dangerous](#)," but Trump is far more interested in courting Putin than Zelensky. ("[I was the apple of his eye](#)," Trump recently boasted about his Kremlin pal.)

You might expect that, while caving to Russia, Trump would take a tougher line against China. And it's true that he [promises to revoke](#) China's most-favored-nation trade status and impose tariffs of up to 60 percent on

Chinese goods — actions that could lead to a breakdown of the global trade system. But he also says he might not come to Taiwan's defense because it "[took all of our chip business](#)." So, bizarrely, he seems more exercised about China trading with other nations than invading them.

The leaders of some countries — e.g., Russia, North Korea, Hungary, Saudi Arabia — might be enthused about Trump returning to power, but it's a safe bet that Mexico, America's [top trade partner](#), won't be one of them. [Trump has vowed](#) to "carry out the largest domestic deportation operation in American history," with most of those migrants presumably being sent south of the border over the opposition of the Mexican government. Trump, who talked in office about firing missiles at drug labs in Mexico, is also [developing plans](#) to unilaterally use military force against Mexican drug cartels — a move that no sovereign nation could tolerate.

Of course, it's entirely possible that a lot of what Trump says is mere bluster and that he would do something entirely different in office. As [John Bolton wrote last August](#) in the Hill, "Trump's approach to decisionmaking verges on incoherence": He "disdains knowledge," listens "to the last person in the door" and sees all U.S. relationships "as matters of personality" — so he is favorably inclined toward foreign leaders who flatter him. Perhaps democratic leaders can get on Trump's good side by letting him [win at golf](#) — or [staying at his hotels](#).

But I don't think Bolton is quite right that Trump "has neither philosophy nor policies." For decades, Trump has espoused consistently protectionist, isolationist views. He didn't have as much success as he hoped in implementing his philosophy the first time around. The danger is that he would be more effective in his second term. (His campaign is [already better run](#) than it was in 2016 or 2020.) The result could be the end of the Pax Americana. We would then enter a chaotic post-American world where rogue states committed aggression with impunity, democracies cowered and trade ties frayed. Sea lanes turning into

shooting galleries would become the norm, not the exception, with the U.S. economy paying the price.

The conventional wisdom is that foreign policy doesn't decide U.S. elections, but the choice has seldom been this scary or stark. The November election will decide whether America continues its post-1945 internationalist foreign policy — or risks a return to the pre-Pearl Harbor policy of isolationism. How did that work out?

Pdf by:  
<https://www.pro-memoria.info>