

THE RETURN TO ISOLATIONISM IN US FOREIGN POLICY UNDER THE TRUMP  
ADMINISTRATION

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## Abstract

While the United States is inevitably involved in international affairs, president Donald Trump is committed to scaling back responsibilities and obligations abroad. This study aims to examine the actual decisions of Donald Trump in order to analyze and classify his views on global affairs. In addition, the initiation and development of the recent transition in foreign policy initiated by George W. Bush and Barack Obama are also examined to show continuities and discontinuities with the present administration. The decisions made by Bush and Obama led to Trump choosing the foreign policy strategy that is based on scaling back commitments around the world. This can be described as “neoisolationism.” This concept is related to classic isolationism, but differs from it because it embraces the recognition that the increasingly globalizing world does not make complete isolationism possible. Under a neoisolationist president, solving domestic affairs are the center focus of the administration. Therefore, the Trump administration decides what kinds of global engagements the U.S. should prioritize. President Trump chose to withdraw troops and resources from key areas of U.S. interest in Syria, Afghanistan, and the Korean Peninsula. He publicly denounced globalism and multilateralism and has been openly belligerent in relation to traditional American allies, especially those in the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. Trump insists on reducing overall immigration to the United States, by means of building walls, pressuring Mexico to solve their immigration problems, and requiring unique exams for those wishing to enter the U.S. The findings of this study suggest that the United States is decreasing its involvement with global affairs but not abandoning its claims to world leadership and predominance. Donald Trump’s foreign policy decisions, and even more so his constant messaging about his “America First” agenda reflect growing popular disapproval

of US intervention in global affairs. This widespread support makes neoisolationism a potentially more long-term change that can outlast this administration, at least until the harmful effects of these policies become widely recognized by the public.

The United States has taken many different approaches to foreign policy in its past. As many scholars have argued, such as Jason Edwards, foreign policy in America has been cyclical in nature, alternating between isolationism and internationalism (Edwards, 2018). The most recent segment is a transition to isolationism. The Trump administration understands that the U.S. cannot detach itself completely from the world, so it prefers to scale back commitments where it can. His approach represents “neoisolationism”. Neoisolationists understand that America is undoubtedly connected to global events. So most tend to favor a scaling back of overseas commitments rather than completely abandoning them. Christopher McNally argues that neoisolationists cannot reverse the effects of globalization, so they find blame in extensive immigration, free trade, and the unfair advantage that corporations gain over the rank and file workers (2016). Marek Jan Wasinski says that Trump’s statements during his campaign for presidency suggest that he was looking to reduce America’s role of maintaining peace around the world, and specifically its role in Europe (2016). Some scholars argue that neoisolationism is temporary in nature, because an internationalist foreign policy is already ingrained in the United States (Cha, 2016). This transition to neoisolationism was initiated by Bush, further enhanced by Obama, and made official by Trump during the early years of his presidency. His recent decisions, such as withdrawing troops and resources from abroad, rejecting globalism, and decreasing immigration suggest that America is moving towards a period of neoisolationism.

Isolationism and internationalism are two foreign policy approaches in the U.S. that offer opposite visions of international relations. Glenn P. Hastedt argues that isolationists believe that American national interests are best served by maintaining a healthy sense of detachment from the world (2017, 55). This idea was originally inspired by George Washington, who warned against permanent alliances with any foreign powers. Internationalists believe that America cannot escape the world. Things happening around the world significantly affect U.S. interests. They also hold that any approach that denies this is self-defeating. These two foreign policy orientations have been prevalent in the U.S. multiple times in its history. Change is frequent. Classical isolationism is based on the idea of staying out of foreign conflicts. However, the world is increasingly globalizing so international involvement has become a necessary fact of life in politics, economics, and culture. The Trump administration's neoisolationist strategy is to decrease U.S. presence abroad and limit involvement, mostly in response to political and electoral needs. The end goal for the administration is to reduce the level of support that the U.S. provides so that the organization or government being helped can later assume the burden that was previously held by the U.S.

Many scholars argue, however, that Trump is not an isolationist, at least not in a classical sense. Patrick Porter argues that "the United States remains committed to a grand strategy of "primacy" (Porter, 2018). It strives for military preponderance, dominance in key regions, the containment and reassurance of allies, nuclear counterproliferation, and the economic "Open Door" policy (Porter, 2018). However, still the Trump administration remains committed to reversing the current globalist approach that the United States is taking. It is evident in his actions regarding the withdrawal of troops in key areas of U.S. interest, like Afghanistan and

Syria. His administration was willing to lose out on military preponderance in the region because these conflicts are no longer seen as vital foreign policy priorities, even though the Middle East has been a critical area of U.S. interest since World War II. Dominance in specific, strategically vital regions is now less significant. Trump has not been committed to building stronger bonds with allies and partners. He has criticized them, claiming that this attitude will force tangible concessions that would benefit the US economically, and obviously also benefit Trump politically at home. The attacks and judgments even include Canada, as he called Prime Minister Trudeau “very dishonest and weak” (Young, 2017). Trump also criticized Mexico for their issues with drugs, crime, and massive flows of illegal immigration. Germany was not safe from his criticism and attacks either. During his United Nations General Assembly speech, Trump accused Germany of becoming totally dependent on Russian energy in the future if they maintain their current energy policy. As far as the economic “Open Door” policy goes, Trump has thrown out many trade deals that he believes prevent the United States from controlling their own destiny. He outright rejected agreements such as the Trans-Pacific Partnership and NAFTA, which he called “the single worst trade deal ever approved in this country” (Cha, 2016).

The post-World War II United States has always been entangled in numerous world affairs but certain periods witnessed lesser involvement. George W. Bush, a unilateral, interventionist president became deeply involved in world affairs, even though he faced strong opposition among the American public. Bush’s decisions during his time as president led to increasing opposition to American intervention in global conflicts. His decision to send troops to the Middle Eastern nations of Iraq and Afghanistan seemed as if they were the right policy

moves at the time. There was an alleged nuclear threat in Iraq, as well as considerable terrorist activity in Afghanistan. However, more than a decade later, public opinion polls reveal that even though the American public remains internationalist, it does not support the use of force as much and sees the Afghanistan and Iraq wars as mistakes.

Unilateralism was the highlight of the foreign policy of the George W. Bush administration. Crouch et al. (2017) argue that the nature of U.S. foreign policy continued to change throughout the presidencies of Bush, Obama, and Trump. George W. Bush greatly utilized his executive powers which led to a reaction in the Barack Obama era. Obama promised to limit the actions of the executive due to the negative effects of the Iraq and Afghanistan wars. The authors assert that President Trump has already committed to a unitary approach through the use of executive orders even when Congress does not fully support it. Nonetheless, the use of executive orders has not been the principal strategy of the Trump administration. He recognizes the established principle of involvement that the U.S. has maintained in its foreign policy, so he periodically and selectively scales back commitments. The decisions made by Bush and Obama have led to increased opposition to U.S. involvement in foreign affairs. Trump's neoisolationist strategy is a result of the decisions made by his predecessors which the public perceived as negative. Therefore, the current period of neoisolationism will last until public sentiment significantly changes again or a unilateral leader reverses the strategy.

Barack Obama further worsened the reputation of internationalism during his presidency. The Iraq and Afghanistan conflicts continued under his administration. He admitted that the Iraq conflict has negatively affected the United States, though it was not until 2011 when he withdrew from the Middle Eastern nation (Crouch et al., 2017). New wars were introduced following the

Arab Spring, a series of uprisings, anti-government protests, and armed insurgencies. Violence or considerable uprisings occurred in Libya, Egypt, Bahrain, Syria, and Yemen. The United States became involved in the Syrian and Libyan conflicts. This led to more erosion of internationalist sentiment, evident in public opinion polls. These polls implied that Obama's increase of military activity would lead to the election of an isolationist president. One poll conducted in 2016 showed that 57 percent of Americans prefer to let other nations deal with their own problems, and focus on domestic problems instead. This is a significant increase after only 46 percent held this view just six years before. In 2008, 60 percent of Americans believed that the following president should focus more on foreign policy, but in 2016, just 17 percent held this attitude (Hastedt, 2017, 105). Donald Trump recognized this increasing hostility towards international involvement, so he used neoisolationist slogans such as "America First" to win the election.

After winning the election, his actual decisions to put America first have led to the U.S. becoming increasingly neoisolationist. If public sentiment changes due to the negative effects of scaling back commitments, the next president may reverse the strategy of U.S. foreign policy by increasing U.S. involvement around the world. If public sentiment remains constant, then the current status of the U.S. neoisolationist attitude will remain in place. Until the effects of certain decisions have upset enough of the American public, the status quo will continue.

Following President Obama's total withdrawal of American troops from Iraq in 2011, a power vacuum left a breeding ground for the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS). This increased the erosion of internationalist sentiment. In a poll, 80 percent of Americans see Islamic extremist organizations in the Middle East as great threats to American security. 47 percent favor using force to defeat terrorism, but 47 percent feel that using too much force can result in more

terrorism. Much of the change in attitude is because of the decline of confidence in America's international involvement (Hastedt, 2017, 106). Many people feel that America is significantly less powerful than it was a decade ago. These polls however suggest that Americans are aware of the role the U.S. plays in the international system. The strategy of neoisolationism, or limiting America's involvement as much as possible within the current constraints of the global system, seems to be the most effective strategy for the current administration. The declining support for America's international involvement led eventually, in 2016, to the election of a leader who advocated neoisolationism.

Obama wanted to shift the attention of the United States to the Asia-Pacific region, which took away resources and commitment from the Middle East and European regions. In doing this, he shifted away from the high priority that the U.S. had placed on NATO since the Cold War began (Unger, 2016). This led to considerable tensions between the U.S. and fellow NATO members. Trump continued this shift away from protecting European countries. However, he has become more consistently neoisolationist because he wanted to divert U.S. attention away from many other regions during his presidency, not just Europe.

America First was declared Trump's foreign policy ideology from the start. He openly opposed globalism and multilateralism during his presidential campaign, including the longtime military alliance NATO. "It will be the major and overriding theme of my administration. My foreign policy will always put the interests of the American people and American security first" (Garcia, 2016). According to Britannica, The America First Committee was an influential American political pressure group that opposed aid to the Allies in the Second World War, worrying that it might directly involve the United States in the conflict (America First



Committee, 2019). It challenged Roosevelt's campaign for intervention and numbers exceeded 800,000, and advocated U.S. isolationism (America First Committee, 2019). By bringing back this phrase as the major election slogan, Trump indicated that he wished to return America back to its "rightful" past marked by isolationism. However, "America First" just means that Americans will be considered by Trump the top priority before any other national interest overseas. But at the same time he can be described as a neoisolationist because he does not wish to completely detach the U.S. from the world.

Favoring global interests, instead of American interests, is what Trump believes has led to turmoil for the United States. For example, Obama's foreign policy approach asked other nations, such as those in NATO, to pay their fair share in defense spending. NATO allies were not willing to increase their defense budgets, and the U.S. was negatively affected by their decisions. Trump believes that the U.S. cares too much for nations abroad, which ultimately led to the loss of the U.S. being able to control its future (Edwards, 2018, 182). He criticized the policies of his predecessors and made it known that he wished to bring the United States back in control of its own destiny by rethinking the scale of commitments to its allies and other states.

NATO and other European nations have lost confidence in the United States' cooperation with Trump as president, due to his callous remarks. After the February 2019 Munich Security Conference, a German senior official said, "no one any longer believes that Trump cares about the views or interests of the [European] allies" (Blackwill 2019, 28). Blackwill claims that during the Group of Seven (G7) meeting in June 2018, Trump complained about German trade methods. He then proceeded to throw pieces of candy at German Chancellor Angela Merkel and said "don't say I never give you anything" (Blackwill, 2019, 28). France was the next country to

experience Trump's harsh comments. French president Emmanuel Macron suggested that the European Union should construct an army and enhance its military effectiveness. Trump ridiculed his idea and added that France was "starting to learn German in Paris before the U.S. came along" (Blackwill, 2019, 28). The author goes on to say that Trump loathes almost all aspects of European countries' contributions to transatlantic relationships, including NATO, which is the most successful military alliance in history (Blackwill 2019, 28). It forestalls Russian aggression, and the imperative alliance ensures that no European conflicts which would involve the United States would happen. Thus, Trump may believe that NATO is not as important as it was and the domestic affairs have captured the full attention of his administration. He understands that his supporters would respond positively to his demand that NATO members to pay more and make the defense of Europe increasingly their problem, and not the United States'.

Trump did not stop attacking individuals in allied NATO states. For example, he said that Montenegro was "very aggressive" and if a conflict with Russia arose, it would initiate World War III (Blackwill 2019, 29). This is why Trump has discussed withdrawal from the Atlantic alliance he once called "obsolete" (Blackwill, 2019). He then proceeded to verbally attack Germany, claiming that it owes "vast sums of money to NATO & the United States must be paid more for the powerful, and very expensive, defense it provides to Germany". He also verbally attacked them for being a "captive of Russia" (Blackwill 2019, 29). However, NATO is an alliance of nations that cooperate to ensure defense in the North Atlantic. No NATO member owes money to the alliance, even if it is able to spend more on its defense. No previous American president arbitrarily attacked member nations of NATO and it is contradictory to the

US national interest to do so, unless in situations when they would be truly opposed to their participation in the multilateral organization. Nonetheless, Trump has not yet gone as far as to propose a full withdrawal from NATO. His administration understands the importance of the organization even though he believes America pays more for it than it should. His decision to remain a leader of NATO is partial evidence of Trump's new neoisolationist strategy of foreign policy that recognizes certain necessary elements of global involvement for reasons of national security.

Jason Edwards argues that promoting Americanism, not globalism has been Trump's approach since his campaign in 2016. When he examines and discusses foreign policy, he interprets it as in a state of chaos and disarray (Edwards, 2018, 181). From the beginning of his presidential campaign, he criticized the interventionist foreign policy of his predecessors as well as Hillary Clinton's. According to Jason Edwards, Trump said these policies were the main cause of poor trade deals, rampant illegal immigration, collapsing infrastructure, and nation-building which extended the United States military too much (Edwards 2018, 181). Trump claimed that globalism promoted by the Hillary Clinton campaign undermined U.S. sovereignty and degraded American exceptionalism. He pledged to stop the nation-building strategy and focus on establishing global stability. Then, he claimed the U.S. would do that by modernizing Western values and institutions, not by spreading universal values to a world full of different cultures (Edwards, 2018, 182). Trump asserts that the U.S. is in the weaker position today because of the departure of Americanism. He believes the actions of policy makers after the end of the Cold War created arrogance and foolishness, which must be changed. As a result, his decisions have returned the United States to a neoisolationist posture.

During a speech to the United Nations General Assembly, Trump made it clear that the United States was not interested in approaching the world with other nations. He says that America will “always choose independence and cooperation over global governance, control, and domination” (Remarks by President Trump 2018). It is evident that he wants to remain out of most conflicts if possible. Trump stresses sovereignty and the right of states to pursue their own ways. “The United States will not tell you how to live or work or worship” (Remarks by President Trump, 2018). His speech is full of remarks that let the world know that the United States is entering a period of neoisolationism. In the same speech, Trump persisted on the notion of sovereignty. He said that nations must defend against threats to their own sovereignty, from global governance, and from other “new forms of coercion and domination” (Remarks by President Trump, 2018). He also reintroduced a tradition established by the fifth U.S. president, James Monroe. The Monroe Doctrine of 1823 opposed European colonialism in the western hemisphere. The doctrine also states that the United States would not interfere with European colonies already established, nor will it be involved in the internal affairs of Europe.

Trump is also a supporter of the ideas of John Quincy Adams, the sixth U.S. president who advocated for isolationism. Adams was a primary author of the Monroe Doctrine. He described how the United States should interact with the world. Among the most notable lines is that the U.S. “not go abroad in search of monsters to destroy.” Later Trump said that the U.S. would not “go abroad in search of enemies” (Edwards 2018, 183). He believes America lost its way as soon as it detached from the judgment of Adams. Entanglements with allies is what many American presidents warned of, such as George Washington. Trump argues that he inherited entanglements from his predecessors, so he decided to alter the actions of the United States

abroad. However, neoisolationism advocates for only partial change because of the increasingly globalized international system that allows only limited room for isolationist policies to succeed.

It is not just foreign wars and conflicts that Trump is withdrawing from, but even many international trade agreements and economic deals are being canceled under his administration. The prevalent belief in the United States has been that products of globalism, such as the Trans-Pacific Partnership have caused a negative reaction among many Americans who now demand scaling back international economic commitments to refocus on domestic affairs. In January 2017, at the outset of his presidency, he withdrew from the Trans-Pacific Partnership. Trump referred to it as a “horrible deal” and blamed his predecessors for the weak position it put the United States in (Narine 2017, 2). He believes that it takes away American jobs and benefits large corporations, not the United States. Shaun Narine says that while the United States will continue its presence as a major economic player in the Pacific region, Trump’s withdrawal from the Trans-Pacific Partnership suggests the end of American global dominance. American economic problems have been developing since the end of the Cold War (Narine 2017, 2). This post-Cold War period that brought enhanced globalization has led to a wave of nationalism in the United States and around the world. Trump’s nationalism surge in the United States is built upon the idea that all nations are responsible for their own internal economic problems. Many scholars believe that the United States does not have the proper ideological and political resilience to reorganize its economic strategy as globalization continues. Because of this, American public opposition to multilateralism, especially to international trade agreements, will remain, and grow (Narine 2017, 2).

The opposition to economic globalization is shared by both the political left and the right, which reinforces this current transition of approach in U.S. foreign policy. Along with the Trans-Pacific Partnership, the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), China's acceptance into the World Trade Organization (WTO) also caused negative reactions among many Americans (Narine 2017, 3). Some American political leaders, such as Trump, have reinforced the belief that these multilateral deals have unfavorable effects on U.S. workers. This belief is not supported by significant proof or evidence. The neoisolationist leaders, including the president, are simply searching for someone or something to blame.

Donald Trump successfully ran on a platform of neoisolationism during the 2016 presidential election. His actual decisions to withdraw troops from abroad provide additional evidence that he is moving America towards a new era of scaled back involvement in foreign conflicts. For example, Trump announced in December 2018 that about half of the troops in Afghanistan would be leaving. One American official says withdrawing troops is an effort to make the Afghani military more reliant on their own and not on support from the U.S and other western countries (Gomes, 2018). Moreover, during a speech in Iraq, Trump said "the United States cannot continue to be the policeman of the world" (Gomes, 2018). It is evident that Trump's neoisolationist rhetoric means he is no longer willing to be attached to the world in a way that it has been since World War II while still trying to maintain U.S. primacy in global affairs. His unique decision led to the resignation of Defense Secretary James Mattis and Brett McGurk, an important State Department official who managed the fight against ISIS (Gomes,

2018). Trump's visit to Iraq and announcement of the troop withdrawal does not correspond with his frequently expressed desire to unilaterally project military power and U.S. dominance around the world.

Leaving Bush and Obama era conflicts is important to Trump, because they are also seen as mistakes by much of the American public. Trump's stated goal of withdrawing from the Bush and Obama conflicts in the Middle East suggests that he is serious about the neoisolationist strategy in foreign policy. In order to stay consistent with his supporters who have negative perceptions of the Afghanistan and Syrian conflicts, he must reduce U.S. presence there. However, as much as he believes that he can simply leave Afghanistan, he is tied down by this problem just like his predecessors were. Therefore, ending the Afghanistan war by means of withdrawal must be portrayed as a victory for America for Trump to succeed as a neoisolationist. He says that he "inherited a total mess in Afghanistan and Syria" (Gomes, 2018). These wars are not his to fight and he sees no reason to be involved.

Negotiating is another form of neoisolationism that Trump is embracing. Former U.S. ambassador to Afghanistan Ryan Crocker described negotiating as a "surrender" (Rubin, 2019). However, Trump believes that stopping a wasteful war would save money that could be used to improve America domestically. Barnett R. Rubin argues that it was Trump's intention to withdraw at the outset of his presidency. The unconditional withdrawal and cutoff of assistance to Afghanistan is his idea of victory. Rubin claims that negotiations provide the only path to stability after the withdrawal. The U.S. cannot wait for a "position of strength" to gain the upper hand in the talks (Rubin, 2019). According to Trump, Obama made a mistake by maintaining the

U.S. military in Afghanistan. To Make America Great Again, he believes that making individual, short-term deals rather than being directly involved long-term is the best solution to U.S. foreign policy challenges.

In 2018, Trump decided to withdraw some troops from Syria, which provides more evidence as to how he views the complicated Middle East wars. James Traub says his impression is that “the traditional American gap between an internationalist elite and an inward-looking electorate is growing” (Traub, 2019). Traub notes that as soon as Obama became president, the Republican party started to develop anti-activism foreign policy sentiment. The strong opposition to Obama by Republicans extended into Trump's presidency. As long as the threat to the United States is gone, his administration prefers not to waste resources on wars that do not directly threaten the United States. For example, Donald Trump believes that Obama created ISIS. Syria was inherited by Trump, and ISIS is the only threat in his eyes. The withdrawal of troops from Syria is due to the “defeat” of ISIS, meaning the defeat of the last caliphate. The “mess” of the Syrian civil war is not Trump's issue, but ISIS was, because it was a direct threat to the U.S. Now that it is gone, he sees no reason for continuous U.S. involvement in the Syrian conflict. Local forces should be able to handle the situation, while the U.S. mostly remains at home.

Nonetheless, Trump is not completely abandoning the Middle Eastern strategy that Obama used. The U.S. still “leads from behind.” There is substantial evidence that switching to a neoisolationist strategy of foreign policy was increasing before Trump took office. For example, just like Obama, Trump supports the method that involves supporting local forces, such as the Kurds. As much as he wants to shed the Obama legacy, he is tied down by it. Peter Dombrowski and Simon Reich claim that circumstances tend to limit the freedom of presidents in the



prosecution of military operations (Dombrowski and Reich, 2018). These authors agree with Linda Qiu of the New York Times when she says that Trump “mainly accelerated a battle plan developed by President Obama” which favored scaling back U.S. commitment (Dombrowski and Reich, 2018). Dombrowski and Reich claim that operations initiated by Obama have continued under Trump and have been successful in terms of combating terrorism (Dombrowski, Reich, 2018). For example, the troop withdrawal has damaged relations with Turkey, who is now forced to increase their intervention across the southern border. Turkey is a NATO ally and it is clear how Trump feels that restraint is the best strategy. Though bound to some of Obama’s decisions, he continues to move the United States in a different direction step by step.

The Korean peninsula represents another military commitment abroad that Trump does not intend to support. Indeed, he was skeptical of providing military support to allies in Asia long before he became president. On April 5th, 2013, in an interview with Fox News, Trump did not hold back on his view of nations that he believes are free-riding, such as South Korea. He said “The big culprits are other countries and what they are doing to us. You look as an example, South Korea. We are spending tremendous. We spend billions and billions of dollars to protect them from North Korea. They are not giving us anything” (Cha, Lim, 2019). In July 2018, Trump met with the North Korean dictator, Kim Jong Un. He decided to take matters into his own hands by encouraging and discussing peace in the peninsula. Peace in this region means that the United States will not have to devote as many resources to the region. This is due to the reduced burden the United States achieves from not having to protect South Korea as much. The neoisolationist policies of the Trump administration recognize the strategic importance of some

regions, but also acknowledges the tremendous effort it takes to maintain the status of the U.S. as a leader in those places.

Trump's unorthodox approach to directly meet the North Korean leader is something that his predecessors never attempted. Kim would never have proposed a summit with Trump if he had not escalated the situation with threats against North Korea. Trump "disrupted the unsatisfactory status quo" (Blackwill 2019, 24). The United States has a president that has a much different strategy than any of the past leaders. He is irritated with the South Korean comfort in accepting military assistance and providing little in exchange. So, he was looking to take matters into his own hands. During the actual summit between the leaders, Trump insisted that South Korea pay the United States for (or at least more) the troops it has stationed in South Korea. Trump was no longer content with simply calling out allies for their unwillingness to contribute. He now demands them to assume the burden that the U.S. has carried for many years (Blackwill 2019, 24). Though he is still committed to keeping troops in the Korean Peninsula because it is a key area of U.S. interest, he clearly wants to scale back the level of U.S. responsibility in the region.

Another area of concern regarding commitment to allies in Asia lies within the Association of South Eastern Asian Nations, or ASEAN. In November 2018, Trump skipped two major summits of this organization. Instead, Vice President Mike Pence attended. The U.S. is a counterweight to China in the Southeast Asia region, and this is concerning for regional allies (Gallu, 2018). They want the U.S. to repel China's growing military and economic power in the region. The Trans-Pacific Partnership withdrawal only raises even more concern. Oh Ei Sun, a senior advisor at the Asian Strategy and Leadership Institute says that "his absence would

doubtlessly solidify the impression that America has essentially abandoned its traditional presence in the Asia Pacific, not to mention the non-starter Indo-Pacific” (Gallu, 2018). Taking advantage of the absence of the U.S., China was able to further advocate their trade and development projects throughout the region.

Immigration was an issue discussed during Trump’s campaign, and he has continued his focus on it during his presidency. Taesuh Cha argues that “existing liberal internationalist grand strategy is likely to be revised and gestured toward “neoisolationism”. (Cha, 2016).” We are witnessing a historical watershed during which the direction of U.S. hegemony and the post-war liberal world order is beginning to change” (Cha, 2016). Then he claims that increased immigration, and weak measures to decrease illegal immigration during the Obama presidency has threatened white workers’ sense of economic security as well as their racial folk identity (Cha, 2016). To regain this sense of security and identity among Americans, Trump is willing to take an approach that his predecessors did not. For example, he wants to build a wall on the southern border of the United States. They share almost two thousand miles of land and in order to isolate the U.S. from Mexico. This means constructing a wall. He claims that increased migration poses a threat to national security. His predecessors wanted more border security, but Trump is taking the extra step. Taesuh Cha thinks Trump’s outlook is that “un-American aliens must be contained and excluded from the genuine American ethno-religious collective by the border wall, deportation, and similar initiatives” (Cha, 2016). It is a further rejection of globalism because he does not ban all migrants, allowing those that are highly skilled and ready to work to enter the U.S.

In the past, walls represented extreme isolationism. They include the Berlin Wall, the Great Wall of China, and the Walls of Constantinople. These were all constructed to keep out invaders and hostile groups. According to Trump's neoisolationist rhetoric, however, the modern invaders and groups are primarily coming across the southern border from Mexico and Central America. He claims that they are damaging the U.S. economy, bringing in drugs, and committing violent crimes. The wall is his way of getting Mexico to deal with their own problems so the U.S. does not have to be involved as much. Another reason that the wall is being erected is because the Trump administration wants to stop migrants who travel from South and Central America into Mexico from reaching the United States.

Mexico is the gateway to America for many other migrants who are not coming directly from that country. Trump has threatened to close the border with Mexico if they do not control their own illegal immigration problems. Migration also comes from Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador, and other Latin American nations. The U.S. has looked to Mexico to solve the problem of illegal immigration flowing from their country, but little has been achieved on their end.

Taesuh Cha says that within the United States, the sense of culture is being lost for many average people, especially the non-college educated white working class, who have been affected the most by globalization (Cha, 2016). This group is a large one in the United States and it opposes immigration. They rallied around Trump to reverse globalization and internationalism that was used by his predecessors. Now, he is increasing his restrictions on immigration to maintain support among this group.

Immigration from countries in the western hemisphere is not the only glaring issue highlighted by Trump. Muslims became victims of his neoisolationist rhetoric as well. He called

for “a total and complete shutdown of Muslims entering the United States until our country’s representatives can figure out what is going on” (Berenson, 2015). He then proposed an ideological purity exam, questioning immigrants and seeing if they “share our values and respect our people” (Cha, 2016). This is an international liberal norm that he shows hostility to. “We have a whole new world” he said when talking about Islamic terrorism (Cha, 2016). This suggests that he is willing to change the course of the United States to one that protects its own identity by adopting narrow-minded immigration policy. He believes that isolating the United States from risky immigrants who do not share the same ideas will bring more security to the country. Therefore, he does not want complete U.S. isolationism because he is still allowing some foreigners to emigrate to the U.S., according to more narrowly determined criteria that serve selected interests and needs of the economy.

Trump’s anti-immigration approach and rejection of globalism is comparable to the period of 1870-1940 in the United States. This is a period when the United States was believed to be more isolationist than ever in modern history (except the period of the Spanish-American War and the late stage of World War I). Trump is reviving this attitude in America and ensuring that the “true” American culture is preserved. During that period of isolationism, fears of immigrants were widely similar to the fears today. Julia Young compares the suspicions of immigration during the 1870’s to the 1940’s. “They were unable to assimilate to American culture, represented a threat to the native-born population, and feared that immigration would threaten American workers” (Young, 2017). These are all fears that Trump has reestablished as current issues that underlie his neoisolationist approach to foreign policy. These issues are connected to phenomena such as nationalism, patriotism and nativism. Julia Young (2017) says that the

current nationalists target different groups than they did during the 1870s to the 1940s. Now the terms are mainly directed at undocumented immigrants, the majority of whom are Mexican, Central American, and Muslim (Young 2017).

Foreign policy in the United States has always followed a cyclical pattern, between isolationism and internationalism. This time it is a shift from a globalist, multilateral approach to one that detaches the U.S. from international affairs. This is evident in the Trump administration's actual decisions, now framed as neoisolationism. During his campaign, Trump made it clear that he will put "America First" and promised to "Make American Great Again" which led to the construction of a border wall, increased deportations, and tougher restrictions on those who wish to emigrate to the United States. The withdrawal of troops from the Middle East showed that global U.S. military dominance is no longer the emphasis. The military is still active in many parts of the world, but its presence is limited. More soldiers are being sent home. Some are even being called up to defend America's border with Mexico. Will the American public continue to discourage intervening in global affairs? Is this new approach taken by the Trump administration going to be sustained by the next president? Will the next leader be more globally involved and repair relations with allies? Evidence suggests that public opposition to heavy involvement in global affairs began to develop throughout the sixteen years of George W. Bush and Barack Obama. Therefore, shifting to different strategies of foreign policy does not happen rapidly. We are seeing a gradual shift to neoisolationism, started under Obama in some form and accelerated by Trump. This foreign policy strategy will likely be prevalent until public sentiment changes and a leader carries out the wishes of the American people to become more involved. The Trump administration is carrying out the wishes of the growing numbers of American people that wanted to see the United States turn most of its attention to domestic issues.

Inevitably, when the negative effects of the decisions by a presidential administration begin to come to the light, public sentiment will begin to change. That is when a more globally involved United States might still return.

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