

# Trump Reinvents Limited Sovereignty

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Since the end of the Cold War, the United States has never been a fervent supporter of multilateralism. But Donald Trump is taking this tendency to a new level. Many among the American elites have believed, or still believe, in the existence of a unipolar world.

It is a combination of the United States' exceptional power, their faith in their historic destiny as a nation and the widely shared feeling that they hold a mission of spreading values that they believe to be superior which are contributing to this view. Of course, within this broad sentiment shared by many, a wide range of nuances and differences exist. Bill Clinton and Barack Obama have been quite multilateralist presidents, especially when compared to others such as George W. Bush. Yet, it was Bill Clinton, considered a president who was open towards multilateralism, who nevertheless claimed that the United States remained "the one indispensable nation". American unilateralism wasn't born on 9/11, and neither on the day D.J. Trump was elected. Unilateralism is one of the tenets of US foreign policy. It is encoded in its DNA, in the conception of a perfectly exceptional nation. B. Obama had reduced this tendency towards unilateralism, but even he did so only partially.

But Donald Trump brings this tendency to fever pitch. His slogan "America First" hardly hides his deeper goal of "America only". The problem is not that the current US president disagrees with other nations or that he prefers unilateral political action over cooperation. The core problem is that Trump's foreign policy is based on using threats and punishment as a means to control those who disagree with him. According to him, it should be exclusively the United States who determines international rules in terms of economy or security. Other countries would be wrong to disagree and thus run the risk of being punished. This is what happened with the Iranian nuclear agreement, signed in July 2015 in Vienna, which had patiently been negotiated over more than twelve years between the permanent members of the United Nations Security Council and Germany and was approved by the UN assembly's vast majority, only to be one-sidedly broken by the United States. What's more, the current US administration considers it to be legitimate to punish those parties who want to continue adhering to the jointly built agreement by upholding trade with Iran. They also arrogate themselves the right to back out of the Paris agreement on global warming, signed in December 2015, denying the near universal consensus among political leaders and scientists who have identified global warming as the greatest challenge for humanity.

Finally, the United States treats its NATO allies as subordinates. Every head of state and government supports its country when bidding for the organization of sportive competition, such as the Olympics or the Soccer World Cup. As for Donald Trump, the US application for the organization of the 2026 World cup was accompanied with the threat of sanctions for countries unwilling to support the US application. This is a first in the history of great sporting events

attribution. The United States makes requests and decides unilaterally, and all other countries must follow obediently. Donald Trump's national security advisor, John Bolton, made a speech that can be considered as a declaration of war to the International Criminal Court (ICC) and by extension to international law as a whole: "If the court comes after us, Israel or other US allies, we will not sit quietly. [...] We will ban its judges and prosecutors from entering the United States. We will sanction their funds in the US financial system, and we will prosecute them in the US criminal system. We will do the same for any company or state that assists an ICC investigation of Americans. We will take note if any countries cooperate with ICC investigations of the United States and its allies." This statement clearly illustrated the United States' current belief of holding all rights and privileges while all other countries don't hold any, resembling a cowboy in a Native American reservation. The US, according to this narrative, is not subjected to any superior law and no other nation or body has the right or ability to judge it. By what right?

There is a deep contradiction between the European vision, shared by many other countries worldwide, and the position of the United States on the other hand that places Washington outside of international rules and reciprocal accountability. As a result, the question emerges: Can this country still pretend to speak out in the name of western values? What would have we said if Russian or Chinese leaders had made a statement similar to Bolton's?

In 1968, when the Warsaw Pact troops entered in Czechoslovakia, Leonid Brejnev invented the concept of "limited sovereignty", an oxymoron which aimed to conceal the underlying reality: At the time, no country of the Warsaw Pact could exercise its sovereign rights because they were contrary to the soviet policy. Today, Donald Trump is reinventing this concept with an especially resounding impact for the western world.

For sure, we could presume that Trump's era is just a rough period and that we merely have to wait until it ends. But that would be an error. No one can predict when Trump will end his term. He may well win the 2020 elections. We must be prepared to be confronted with a Trump presidency until 2024. But even if another candidate enters the White House, sooner or later, there are few chances that he or she will be a strong tenant of multilateralism. As Stephen Walt accurately described in his latest book, *The Hell of Good Intentions*, the consensus on the hegemony of American liberalism unifies liberals and neocons in the Washington Belt.

Trump is simply blunter and more brutal than his predecessors.

But, at the same time, he is also a challenger and an opportunity for Europeans. He pushes us to be more organized and more coherent as our security is at stake. We need to move towards a European Strategic Autonomy for real.

The concept of European Strategic Autonomy is not directed against the US. It is directed against dependency. By becoming autonomous, European countries could enhance, not weaken, their links to Washington, based on the foundation of a more balanced alliance. We do have a lot of common interests with the US, but sometimes, interests and goals may differ. In this case, it is paramount for Europeans to be able to have the choice between following the American route or not – instead of being obliged to do so in the absence of any true alternative.