

Trump: *Imperium sine fine*

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With President Donald J. Trump's return to the Oval Office, international politics finds itself stirred by winds of change –winds that demand careful scrutiny to grasp their profound implications. The contours of his foreign projection, as articulated in his January 20, 2025, inaugural address and evidenced in his early weeks in office, invite close tracking of his statesmanship: a foreign policy oriented toward “national greatness” and a geopolitical vision asserting itself on the global chessboard. Amid a resurgence of imperial ambitions fostered by today's multipolar world order, a new era appears to be dawning –the era of the *Imperium sine fine*. On one hand, this represents a drive to reassert the United States' global role through a revival of conservative ideals; on the other, it entails the strategic management of a hemisphere housing politically contentious regimes such as Cuba, Nicaragua, and Venezuela. Relations with these actors shift fluidly among frameworks of state behavior –ally, enemy, partner, rival, or adversary– depending on the imperatives of the moment. These are the themes that unfold in the following pages.

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Introduction

Donald Trump returns to the White House after four years of personal and political difficulty —particularly, having been in opposition to the Democratic administration that denied him the opportunity to remain in power in 2021. Since then, not only has the United States of America undergone substantial changes, but the international system as a whole has also undergone significant transformations, reaffirming multipolarity as its structural configuration and perhaps the greatest challenge to a world long believed to be governed by rules.

To analyze Trump purely as an individual is both reductive and unproductive. While his personal attributes are relevant, the broader context in which he operates as a statesman imposes a dual imperative: to act in relation to both the state and the society he is part of. Frequently, the state's judgment exists beyond —and even above— him, guided by moral frameworks that may be morally opposed to those of individual actors.

This suggests that the challenge of governance now centers on a different mode of reasoning —one that departs from the norm-based world where “universal” rules once legitimized U.S. global leadership. The central debate today is not so much about authoritarianism versus democracy, but rather around great powers that understand their role in current affairs as that of empires.

The erosion of Western values, the decline of global preeminence, and the strategies employed by other empires —Russia and China— to penetrate Europe and Latin America by exploiting their structural weaknesses, form the foundation for undermining the pillars of the American empire, whose task

today is to formulate a new policy of expansion, coercion, control, and containment.

I. *Imperium Maius*: Trump as Statesman and Leader.

Donald Trump has returned, and with that, there is no shortage of considerations regarding this second term, as his task appears grounded in a struggle to uphold the long-standing belief that the United States is the heir to Rome —and, more than that, to ensure it does not fall. Even though the political moment from his departure in 2021 to his return was marked by a sense of exhaustion over the idea that it would not collapse, 2025 marks the beginning of a new opportunity to raise the stakes for an *Imperium sine fine*.

What has been said rests on the structural and paradigmatic changes that acknowledge the existence of a new international reality —one that is still difficult to fully accept— such as multipolarity, a condition of the international system's structure that breaks down the rules-based order, where the organizing variable —uncontested— was multilateralism.

Hence the blows dealt to the system, the unresolved black holes that emerged during the Biden administration, such as the conflicts between Russia and Ukraine, Israel-Hamas-Palestine, the exacerbation of the Woke agenda, the steady rise of actors like China and others on regional fronts, as well as the erosion of Western values that once supported U.S. global preeminence, all reveal —perhaps— the urgency faced by the statesman to prevent the fall of the empire and to craft a new policy of expansion, coercion, and geopolitical control.

An examination through the lens of political realism holds that the above was the schism where the balance of power—in terms of the status quo—of the Western powers sustaining the system collapsed, demonstrating how the likelihood of the use of force—nuclear force—is high, while cooperation—which was never an idyllic matter—finds some sense of possibility, but not of actualization.

In this situation, the maximization of security and power is exacerbated, which is characteristic of anarchy as a systemic condition, forcing—primarily the great powers—to make substantial changes in their preferences. In other words, short-term interests are shaped by security and military concerns amid profound uncertainty about global survival. This contrasts with long-term issues such as agreements, frameworks, and multilateral organizations, which are increasingly disregarded and discredited, thereby obstructing paths to understanding under conditions of international cooperation.

According to what has been said, the Biden administration paved the way for the most important challenges, causing both insiders and outsiders of the West to reaffirm that its foreign policy was flawed. Unintentionally, it created a negative gap compared to the previous administration, and in those cases where it hoped to gain supporters, it received the harshest criticisms from public opinion, which, in a full democracy—beyond just the vote—is cause to shake the foundations of a government.

Over the past four years, the opposition to Biden moved in two streams that Trump managed to capitalize on—namely,

internal and external discontent.¹ This time, there is a bit more appreciation for Trump's personality when it comes to decision-making, which had been heavily criticized during his first term. Still, critical voices continue to compare his rhetoric to that of Hitler, Stalin, or Mussolini, arguing that his narrative draws from the well of dehumanization.

At this point, the discussion more closely resembles a problem from the history of modern political thought —one that spans from the absolute imperative of morality, sometimes expressed through abstract but universally valid principles. It is a discussion that, acknowledging its imperfections, finds in human nature the answer, where interests and conflicts erode moral arguments that can never be fully realized.

From this perspective, Donald J. Trump comes to power shielded, yet also burdened with problems that demand leadership to drive change, envision the future, make a different reality possible, and prevent Rome from falling.

1 Henry Kissinger, near the end of his life, warned: "Any society, whatever its political system, is perpetually in transit between a past that forms its memory and a vision of the future that inspires its evolution. Along this route, leadership is indispensable: decisions must be made, trust earned, promises kept, a way forward proposed. (...) Without leadership, institutions drift, and nations court growing irrelevance and, ultimately, disaster." In this sense, Trump capitalized on leadership rooted in the internal and external discontent of the Biden era. Henry Kissinger. *Leadership: Six Studies on Global Strategy*. Editorial Debate, 2023.

II. Geopolitics and Foreign Policy: Trump's *Lebensraum*.

To navigate the waters of geopolitics and current U.S. foreign policy, certain structural and historical matters must be considered. The Founding Fathers, beyond drawing inspiration from ancient Rome —not only in its institutional design but also in its political system— also emulated its worldview, shaped by territorial scope. Specifically, they were grounded in the idea of their territorial weight on the global stage, to which they added the expansion of a great economic power.

The 2025–2029 administration projects itself, both internally and externally, based on three fundamentally significant elements. The first, on the domestic front, is characterized by a revival of the religious component —specifically, the (traditional) Protestant logic. The second is that its actions are inherently guided by the maxim of Manifest Destiny. And the third corresponds to the idea of Exceptionalism— a kind of virtue that implies economic, social, and political preeminence in the world..

However, Manifest Destiny is much broader, encompassing not only its thesis of development and the belief in the virtue of its institutions and citizens, but also the mission to extend those institutions in order to remake the world in the image of the United States —alongside the providential decision of God in entrusting the nation with the fulfillment of that mission.

During the 2017–2021 period, an approach to these pillars took place; however, the political conditions Trump was subjected to led American society to interpret this as a setback in the progressive advancement of social, political, and religious rights.

But this procedural revival of ideas embraces a historical legacy of the Republican Party —from Abraham Lincoln and Theodore Roosevelt to Ronald Reagan, the most contemporary of Trump’s predecessors. Hence, “Make America Great Again” or “America First” is not a personal delusion, but rather a revitalization of ideas that once shaped American identity.

At this point, several questions can be raised: Will this course continue? Will the ideas behind his slogan truly materialize? If his external projection leans toward isolationism, what decisive geopolitical role can he still play? And many more questions like these.

Although Atilio Borón² declared that the era of U.S. global hegemony had ended, the reality is that the Pax Americana persists, suggesting a state that still determines its position regarding domination, primacy, and hegemony —an inheritance held by the leading power of universal leadership, currently contested by Russia and China.³

This dispute keeps the legal-juridical order aside, favoring a more pragmatic approach, one that “is aware of the meaning

2 Atilio Borón, “Toward a Post-Hegemonic Era? The End of the Pax Americana.” *Compendio Diálogo y Seguridad*. Editorial Nueva Sociedad, 1995, Issue 2.

3 Joseph Nye, an American professor, former Assistant Secretary of Defense, and a staunch critic of President Trump, argues that the feeling of decline and the dispute over U.S. leadership has always existed in the American imagination. However, he states: “Sometimes, anxiety about decline leads to protectionist policies that do more harm than good. And sometimes, periods of hubris lead to overreaching policies such as the Iraq War. There is no virtue in either understatement or overstatement of American power.” See Joseph Nye, “American Greatness and Decline” *Project Syndicate*, February 2024, <https://www.project-syndicate.org/>

of political action. It is also conscious of the inevitable tension between the moral imperative and the demands of prudent political action,” as Morgenthau⁴ would assert, where the thesis of Manifest Destiny increasingly becomes an analogy for that Latin expression *Imperium sine fine*.

In this position, empires –or more precisely, imperialisms– acknowledge that there is no ideology but rather a sense of force and conquest that must guarantee their political, economic, military, historical, and geographical preeminence, occupying what for them must be the *Lebensraum* or “Living Space,” just as Karl Haushofer spoke of at the dawn of the Second World War.

Consequently, the issue of Greenland, the renaming of the Gulf of Mexico to the Gulf of America, Canada as a possible state of the union, the restitution of control over the Panama Canal, the impasse with Colombia regarding migrant deportations, and the meeting held in Caracas with Nicolás Maduro are all part of the Western power’s natural *Lebensraum*.

Other spaces will serve as meeting grounds for the great powers –Russia, the U.S., and China– to agree on new divisions of spheres of influence in terms of balance and harmony of interests, as in the case of peace in Ukraine. These actions are based on a rationale grounded in state logic, not individual actors, since morality in international politics is not only different, but is whatever states choose to make of it, lacking all sentiment or emotion proper to the human person.

commentary/with-trump-american-decline-becomes-self-fulfilling-prophecy-by-joseph-s-nye-2024-02/spanish

4 Hans Morgenthau in Stanley Hoffman, “Teorías Contemporáneas sobre RRIL.” Tecnos, Madrid, 1963, p. 91.

III. Latin America: Friends, Enemies, Partners, Rivals, and Adversaries.

Imagining Latin America's role in Trump's return is like trying to decipher a riddle wrapped in a mystery inside an enigma, as Churchill once described Russia's role in his time. Amid significant problems, not only regional but also stemming from the highly specific characteristics of each political unit, Latin America remains the most direct sphere of influence for the United States, though not necessarily its greatest challenge.

Generally swinging in a pendular motion between the Left and the Right, the region generates issues that the Trump administration must handle carefully, as Cuba, Nicaragua, and Venezuela are at the forefront of political unrest. However, the American statesman's pause in direct participation in foreign policy from 2021 to 2025 suggests that this should not be seen as a first-order priority. A definitive rupture occurred across the entire International System, and the new administration must focus its attention there.

Security, migration, and trade, countering China's influence, and maintaining a pragmatic approach are its guiding principles. In cases such as the Venezuelan opposition, this represents a challenge and/or conflict, as U.S. intervention in the political crisis will only occur insofar as its interests align, sending a clear message in the redesign of the opposition's strategy, which still places hope in such involvement.

The Trump administration is not defined by the personal opinions of government figures —like Marco Rubio. While such individuals may hold compelling views on the specific issues

facing different countries, what truly matters is the more complex reality of navigating as a nation among nations, and what the U.S. government must do in the name of national interest.⁵

The role of immigration is crucial. The internal demographic crisis implies a quasi-genetic mutation for the United States, while excessive migration speaks volumes —no one leaves their homeland because everything is fine. However, this is not a problem that falls solely on President Trump.

It is worth noting that even during his first administration, Trump did not surpass the record set by Barack Obama over his two terms in terms of deportations. Moreover, when factoring in two additional measures —“border returns” and “Title 42 repatriations”— Joe Biden stands as the president who has expelled the most people from the country, with a record of 4.6 million.

However, thinking about Latin America revolves around the lens of confronting the political left, and in some cases, the statesman will apply the “madman theory,” exacerbating situations in exchange for political transactions; in others, he will use “tit for tat” or equivalent retaliation. And when least expected, he will achieve “bandwagoning” —the support of his detractors—

5 Juan Gabriel Tokatlían recently stated in an interview with the BBC that Trump still has Mexico very much in mind in relation to the fight against drug trafficking, and Venezuela, for having failed to remove those in power. Hence: “He returns frustrated with Latin America for what he didn’t achieve in his first term (...) That mix of disinterest and fury toward Latin America, I believe, will be reflected in his initial actions.” See Ayelén Oliva, “Para Trump, América Latina es la imagen del dependiente. Y encima de todo la infantiliza”, BBC, 2025. <https://www.bbc.com/mundo/articles/c4g32g001n8o>

more out of fear than sympathy, leading some to become his partners, friends, rivals, adversaries, or enemies.

Conclusions

Trump perfectly understands —paradoxical as it may seem— that the multipolar world is essentially the worst scenario for the power that considers itself the ruling force of the International System, but he is also aware that it is the best for medium and small actors. The great powers continue to question the legitimacy of borders, and issues such as the loss of democracy in the periphery are relegated to secondary matters. It must be emphasized that this is not a product of the statesman's imagination, but of the reality he faces.

According to these considerations, there is no doubt that the period 2025–2029 will present countless situations whose positive or negative consequences can be assessed in the next presidential elections, because having won the 2024 contest not only in the number of voters but also in the electoral colleges, the connection with society and its problems is what elevates emperors or destroys them.

The Trump era has an expiration date, but the empire must remain standing, neither a day more nor a day less. Eventually, another emperor will lead the republic that, for Trump, remains an *Imperium sine fine*, boundless in its pursuit of greatness.