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## Trump's 'America First' Doctrine and the Waning of US Hegemony

[Wazeer Murtala Gatta](#) | 30 April 2018, 11:30am |

"[AMERICA FIRST](#)" as a colloquial is not a new rhetoric in the foreign policy vocabulary of the United States. The epithet became prominent during the months leading to the second World War as a nationalist pursuit that criticised the entry of the U.S. military into the war. Similarly, about 70 years later, [Donald Trump](#) rode on the back of these nationalist sentiments, among other factors, to emerge as the main figure in the race for the White House.

Conversely, unlike the isolationist policy promoted by the famous [America First Committee](#) in the 1940s, the "America First" rhetoric of the Trump presidential campaign and, indeed, his administration, is not isolationist. Trump's "America First" rightly aims to harness all the benefits that could be extracted wherever America is involved internationally and, as it seems, at all costs. While this is considered the realistic and unspoken desirable mainstay of the foreign policies of many countries, Trump's clear, staunch and stinger approach has taken it to higher levels, and the country is losing some of its hegemonic position in the world gradually.

USA remains the richest and, by far, the most militarily powerful country in the world, but the hegemonic position of the United States rests largely on a symbiotic relationship with other powers and allies in the international system. The U.S. is responsible for offering what is known as the public good for these countries, thereby maintaining its hegemonic position and the delicate alliance system as they work hand-in-glove to pursue their common objectives.

Largely, the United States of America, with its enormous economy and wherewithal, has been the largest contributor to international public goods as indicated by its financial contributions to the United Nations and several governmental international organizations, especially in the NATO alliance system. This explains why America leads and other countries in the alliance system follow, especially where their interests are well insured, either financially or through other transactions. Divergently, President Trump's rhetoric and attitude, such as his handling of the [refugee issue](#) with Australia and his [dysfunctional relationship](#) with Europe, among other missteps, stand to erode parts of the hegemonic position of the United States.

In his [remark](#) at the Article 5 and Berlin Wall Memorials, President Trump infamously said:

*"NATO members must finally contribute their fair share and meet their financial obligations, for 23 of the 28 member nations are still not paying what they should be paying and what they're supposed to be paying for their defence."*

While this can be seen against the backdrop of his campaign promises, it depicts his actual lack of understanding of how the United States, being the largest contributor to NATO for example, is also benefitting tremendously. Geo-strategically and militarily, the United States is the country that has dragged other NATO members to theatres of war in the Middle East, especially in the aftermath of 9/11, signalling the first time NATO assets were actively deployed outside the Euro-Atlantic area.

His failure to explicitly endorse [Article 5 of the NATO pact](#) during his trip to Europe remains a blunder, leading German chancellor [Angela Merkel](#) to [warn](#):

*"We Europeans must really take our destiny in our own hands."*

Trump's unilateral decision to [announce the recognition](#) of Jerusalem as the capital of Israel – a move that was practically rebuffed by the EU parliament, after the marathon shuttle diplomacy of [Benjamin Netanyahu](#) – is also symbolic of the fact that the United States of America needs to work in tandem with the other powers in the international system to preserve its hegemony. President Trump, after suffering a decisive defeat at the United Nations for his move on Jerusalem, vowed to punish all the countries that voted against the U.S.-Israeli side of the divide.

In what is archetypical of his approach to issues and his idea of putting America first, [he threatened](#):

*"We don't care. But this isn't like it used to be where they could vote against you and then you pay them hundreds of millions of dollars."*

What he practically intends to do regarding his threat is unclear given the fact that Egypt, one of the largest benefactors of US aid in the sub-region and a key player, was pivotal in drafting the resolution and the remaining 14 security council members [voted in favour](#).

Also, in response to Donald Trump's decision to cut aid to the occupied territories in Palestine, the EU pledged an additional 42.5 million euros as a substitute fund after President Trump decided to withhold 65 million of the US\$125 million package that goes to the U.N. aid agreement for Palestine. Trump's rationale for this action seems simple; the United States of America gets no respect for its financial help.

In another of his polemic moves, he slashed the budget allocation that could help the U.S. scientific community assess the impacts of climate change and promote climate change plans through diplomatic efforts. Additionally, on 1 June 2017, he pulled out of the Paris [climate change talks](#) that was agreed on in 2015 while, in a counter-balance move, French President [Emmanuel Macron](#) stepped up and vowed to replace every penny that was rescinded by Donald Trump.

In what seems to have been influenced by Benjamin Netanyahu, Trump's attempt to shred the current nuclear deal with Iran and the other great powers was also met with an unequivocal rejection. [Addressing this](#), EU's foreign policy chief, [Federica Mogherini](#), reminded Donald Trump that the Iran nuclear deal agreement is an international accord that is not a sole affair of the United States and "*...as Europeans, we will make sure the agreement stays.*"

Trump has also escalated a potential [trade war](#) with the European Union after his allegation that the bloc has been brutal and unfair to the United States in terms of trade. In response, the EU has promised to [respond proportionately](#) to the United States with an array of tariffs.

His [continuous tweets](#) of non-factual remarks, thoughtless retweets and audaciously despicable attitudes towards Muslims and immigrants have been met with frowns across the largely liberal world, with a [protest in London](#) a highlight of the resentment towards what he stands for. For example, his [retweet](#) of [Britain First's](#) right wing

divisive tweet led to an uproar against him [with a rebuff](#) from the Mayor of London, [Sadiq Khan](#).

[His remark](#) labelling African countries and Haiti as “*shitholes*” prompted leaders to [ask for an apology](#) from the United States in what is an unusual move with individuals from Africa positing that African countries should de-dollarise their foreign reserves in response to this — a move that is largely unlikely.

Not to mention the list of [potential scandals](#) levelled in opposition to him in his own country, the reactions against the Trump-America might seem negligible, but it is a clear indicator that the United States is losing some of its influence across the world under the administration of Donald Trump. It might be dismissed as trifling issues, but for those of us from outside the United States of America, the standard in the White House is abysmal and we can only hope that things don't get worse before his term ends at the Oval Office.

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