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Global Power Dynamics: MAGA and the Reshaping of the International Political Order

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***Abstract*: This research paper examines the impact of the Trump's policies known as the MAGA on the liberal international political order (LIPO) which enjoyed hegemony since the Soviet disintegration in 1991. The LIPO had its moorings in firm faith in values of multilateral, human rights, democratic values, globalisation and national sovereignty. But the important point in its consolidation was the active leadership of the US who had unparalleled economic power, military capacity backed by the resolute will power of the US leadership particularly since the beginning of the 1990s. This LIPO has faced serious challenges by the US itself under the Trump's administration which has come up with the idea of make America great again slogan (MAGA). This study attempts to analyse how the policies and measures under the MAGA has affected the LIPO and what may be the order of the international order consequent upon it.**

***Keywords*: LIPO, MAGA, Multilateralism, Multipolarity, Globalism, USA.**

1. Introduction

The post 1945 international political order was primarily designed and anchored by United States leadership which functioned through a synergy of multilateral institutions, liberalized markets, and the normative promotion of democratic governance. As G. John Ikenberry (2011) posits, the distinguishing feature of this systemic arrangement was "consensual hegemony" organized around cooperative security and institutionalized solidarity as different from merely an exercise in raw power witnessed in the pre IInd world war period. The US extended her influence through frameworks such as the United Nations, NATO, and the Bretton Woods system and successfully legitimized its global primacy. The consequent shift in the international order was epoch making as it substituted the application of the brute force as an instrument of the traditional imperial coercion with a rule- based framework that incentivized international participation."

This long-standing consensus, however, has encountered a profound ideological disruption with the ascendancy of the "Make America Great Again" (MAGA) movement. This shift was perhaps most viscerally captured in Donald Trump's 2017 inaugural rejection of the "false song of globalism," a rhetorical pivot that signalled a systemic retreat from the multilateral commitments that once defined the American strategic core.

The consequences of this withdrawal extend beyond mere policy shifts, impacting the very "soft power" and institutional trust that, as Joseph S. Nye Jr. (2019) identifies, have been essential to America's enduring global influence. As the U.S. vacates its role as the primary guarantor of liberal norms, the global landscape is undergoing a structural fragmentation. Rather than a singular, unified framework, the contemporary era is increasingly defined by what Fareed Zakaria (2008) presciently termed a "world of competing orders". This study interrogates the extent to which the MAGA ethos has functioned as a catalyst for this transformation, examining the erosion of the liberal international order and the subsequent emergence of a more diffuse, multipolar global architecture.

A. Objectives

This paper examines how the "Make America Great Again" (MAGA) approach linked with Donald Trump has impacted the fundamentals of the liberal international political order (LIPO) which the US herself took the lead to build and consolidate. It assesses its impact on institutions, alliances, and power politics and explores as to what may be the likely scenario of the nature of the international political system as a consequence of the MAGA.

B. Literature Review

A number of scholars have addressed the various aspects of the Liberal international order and Trump's renunciation of the US' international obligations to accord exclusive priority to US national interests. Daniel Deudney and G. John Ikenberry (1999) introduced the concepts of "penetrated hegemony" and "co-binding" to explain why the Western liberal order is more stable and less oppressive than empires of the past. They argue that these two pillars create a "structural liberalism" that makes the order uniquely durable.

G. John Ikenberry (2011) has highlighted that the global order achieved longevity precisely because the United States in his role as the "Liberal Leviathan" voluntarily accepted institutional constraints to secure global legitimacy. She decided to follow the international rule like those of the UN or WTO) and this helped to ensure other countries' acceptance of the American leadership as legitimate and safe. In his alter analysis (2018, pp. 7-10), he argued that the liberal international order is under threat as, under the "America First" approach, the multilateral arrangements the us once voluntarily accepted to buttress, are increasingly viewed not as instruments of

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leadership, but as constraints that limit U.S. autonomy. Parmar (2025) argues that MAGA has grown in response to the realisation that US acceptance of the role as the guardian of democracy, multilateralism and free trade all over the world has only has weakened internally her borders, culture, and economy while strengthening other nations like China, Japan and Germany.

Stokes (2018) in his analysis has mentioned that as the champion of the LIPO, the US has enormously funded the liberal model to sustain only to see the other powers like Japan, Germany grow while internally, she has seen inequality and debt rising fast. This is the reason that the US has adopted the policy of reciprocal mercantilism under the slogan of Trump's MAGA.

Mahmud and Obaidullah have underlined, how Trump's retreat from multilateralism through withdrawals from agreements like the Paris Climate Agreement and the World Health Organization and economic nationalism manifest in high tariffs signal a departure from the US's traditional commitment to democratic alliances.

Acharya (2026) has come up with the idea of "Multiplex World" in the post US hegemon era where liberal international order would be replaced by a decentralized and pluralistic international order and multiple overlapping frameworks.

C. Research Questions

The research papers is driven by following questions:

First, what are the fundamental principles of the LIPO which are facing existential crisis particularly due to Trump's zeal for MAGA.

Second, how is the post IInd world order affected by the Trump's unbridled priority to national cause of the USA.

Third, in what might be the shape of the world order consequent upon the US strategic retreat.

D. Methodology

This research paper is based on discourse analysis of primary and secondary sources both. The study first conducts a thematic analysis of primary artifacts like Executive Orders, National Security Strategy reports, and Presidential rhetoric. This identifies the core tenets of the "America First" doctrine and its transactional approach to diplomacy.

Secondary sources comprise peer-reviewed journal articles, academic monographs and experts' commentaries from think tanks and comparative studies linking MAGA to global populism also fall into this category. These sources provide the necessary theoretical frameworks, such as realism and constructivism, to contextualize the movement's impact on 21st-century geopolitics.

2. Analytical Discussion

A. The Liberal International Political Order (LIPO)

The LIPO was conceived by the United States and its Western allies in the background of the unprecedented destruction caused by the World War II. The horrendous impact of the IInd World war was eh compelling factor to drive the leading powers in the Allied camp to devise a mechanism which could ensure a war free international world. Two worlds within 20 years in the first half of the 20the century strongly recommended a new international order which could replace the logic of the national interest self help, power and war embedded in the balance of power of the previous two centuries.

It was the obvious that the western world was now facing the contradictions of the realism anchored in the state power and national interest on the one hand and liberal values requiring democracy and human rights could no longer be accepted. This also meant that there was a dire need to apply liberal principles of democracy peace, cooperation, stability and prosperity in the international relations too which was not possible unless the actions and behaviour of the sovereign- states was put under some regulations and control, though it did not deny the authority of the nation state system. The increasing awareness of the human right and democratic values also meant that the questions of the human rights did not have only a binary proposition between man and state but must be seen in a trinary relationship comprising of man. State and international fraternity. Thus, international interference in case of the violation of the human rights was validated. (Deudney & Ikenberry, 1999, p. 191; Ikenberry, 2011, p. 65)

One of the most important components of the liberal international political order is multilateralism, which means that countries work together through international institutions rather than acting alone. A key example is the United Nations, which provides a platform for dialogue and conflict resolution among states. Alongside it, institutions like the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund were established to promote economic stability and development. Ikenberry (2001) has noted that the liberal order has an innate tendency to secure cooperation among member states as mutual interdependence has proved to be more beneficial than disruptions in trade and financial infrastructure caused by conflict and war.

Free trade is another vital component of the LIPO which ideally requires tariff and barrier free trade practices in the international world. The fundamental premise of this economic aspect of liberal value system is the belief that focussing on particular aspects of economic activity and a state of freedom of trade would be beneficial for all nations. Moreover, since such an ecology leads to mutual interdependence and cooperation among the trading nations, it facilitates the growth of democratic tools of negotiation, compromise and acceptance while significantly reducing chances of differences to exacerbate into unmanageable conflict and war situations. Institutions like WTO provide the basis for reduction of the irreconcilable clash of interests and facilitate cooperation by virtue of sharing economic interests. (Ikenberry, 2001; Rodrik, 2011).

The dominance of the LIPO heavily depended on the US leadership which was the only country with sufficient economic power, military capability and political will to protect and consolidate the LIPO particularly from the communist threat after the IInd World War. The US active involvement in the international affairs marked a reversal of her isolationist policies pursued largely over the past two centuries and

manifested in a number of areas. First, she took upon herself the responsibility to protect the "free people" of the western Europe from the expansionary Soviet communism in the immediate aftermath of the II World War. The Truman doctrine and the Marshall Plan were initiated and executed successfully by the US with this objective

In the economic field, she also took decisive steps to help create the World Bank and IMF so as to prepare the solid economic foundation of financial stability and economic development in the war- torn economies and the emergent third world. In the security domain too, the US led formation of a number of alliances like NATO, CENTO/SEATO, ANZUS on the principle of collective security. Gaddis (1982) has highlighted, how the US employed the politics of the alliances to protect the western institutions and values from the possible threat of expansion of Soviet communism. Thus, the US build up a complex and comprehensive network of shared values, economic interdependence and institutional structures to ensure a cooperative and stable world order.

While, it is obvious that the international scenario after the World War II could not have been as it was, had the US not taken lead to play an active role in the post 1945 world politics, what is most noteworthy is that she herself decided to "play by rules". This meant that though the US had no obvious compulsion by virtue of her vastly unparalleled economic and military might to honour the limits imposed by the institutional norms from an unadulterated pure realistic power politics approach, she willingly decided to act within the order it had helped establish. This act proved highly decisive in garnering legitimacy of the liberal institutions among the vast majority of nations. The lesson for the new nations apart from the other members was clear- there is no reason to cast doubt on structure and value framework of the liberal world order if the US with no obvious nationalist perspective of interests and compulsion was not only following but also committing huge resources at her disposal to sustain and strength.

1) Multipolar world

The "Make America Great Again" (MAGA) approach under Trump administration has acerated the shift from a U.S. led unipolar world toward a more multipolar international order. After the Cold War, the United States emerged as the central power shaping global institutions and norms though countries like Russia, China India etc. did pose challenge to the US' hegemony supporting a multipolar world order. MAGA policies further weakened leadership role of the US and created space for other powers to expand their influence.

U.S. retreat from multilateral leadership created vacuum leaving the void to be filled by other major powers. Taking into account this trend, Ikenberry (2018, pp. 7-23) argues, the liberal international order relies on sustained U.S. support, and its weakening contributes to a diffusion of global power. Economic nationalism under MAGA, particularly trade tensions with China, disrupted global economic interdependence by imposing tariffs on about $360 billion of Chinese imports. These actions weakened supply chains and undermined the rules-based global economic order, encouraging fragmentation and the emergence of alternative trade arrangements (Rodrik, 2011).

Under the MAGA approach, the United States moved away from its traditional role as a global security guarantor often described as the "international policeman" which involved maintaining stability and leading alliances such as NATO. By questioning alliance commitments and emphasizing burden-sharing, the U.S. signalled a reduced willingness to underwrite collective security. This created uncertainty among allies and encouraged them to pursue greater strategic autonomy, reducing dependence on U.S. protection.

At the same time, a decline in U.S. soft power limited its ability to shape global norms and influence partners through attraction rather than coercion (Nye, 2017, pp. 10.16). As Stephen M. Walt (2018, pp. 28-36) has noted, reduced U.S. leadership creates opportunities for rival powers to expand their influence. Consequently, the weakening of the U.S. security role contributed to a more fragmented and multipolar international order, rather than a stable U.S. led system.

2) Global Institutions

A central feature of the MAGA approach was the United States' withdrawal from key global commitments, treaties, and financial obligations, which had significant implications for the liberal international political order (LIPO). This policy of withdrawal can be seen in both the periods of the Trump's administration. During the first tenure of Trump as President (2017-2021), the US announced withdrawal many treaties like Paris Agreement on Climate Change, Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) (Iran Nuclear Deal), UN Human Rights Council (UNHRC), UNESCO, Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty, Open Skies Treaty, World Health Organization (WHO). During the IInd term of the Trump's rule, US withdrawal became more systematic and comprehensive. The missionary zeal of reached to new heights when in one stroke, Trump ended US connection with as many as 66 international organisations- 31 UN agencies and 35 other international organizations. The range of this mass withdrawal is very wide encompassing within its fold issues like democracy, climate change, terrorism, gender, trade, human rights. (White House, 2026). Such an unprecedented move by the US Administration has caused severe budget deficits for international entities ranging between 7% an 22%. (IDDRI, 2026). In particular, the US financial cut policy has posed a security crisis for the UN adversely affecting her peace keeping operations among others. (Pigou and Zyl, n.d.)

3) Multilateralism

A central feature of the MAGA approach was the United States' withdrawal from key global commitments, treaties, and financial obligations, which had significant implications for the liberal international political order (LIPO). The U.S. withdrew from major agreements such as the Paris Climate Agreement and the Trans Pacific Partnership (TPP), and exited institutions like UNESCO and the UN Human Rights Council, the World Health Organization (WHO). These actions reflected a broader shift toward unilateralism and scepticism of multilateral cooperation. Financial disengagement has further reinforced this trend, as the United States-traditionally the largest contributor to the UN system has reduced or withheld funding

to several agencies, affecting areas such as global health and development.

The impact of these withdrawals was both practical and symbolic. Practically, reduced funding constrained the functioning of international institutions and limited their capacity to respond to global challenges. Symbolically, U.S. disengagement weakened confidence in multilateralism and encouraged other states to question established norms and institutions. As Ikenberry (2018) argues, the liberal order depends heavily on sustained U.S. support for rules and institutions. Similarly, Nye (2017) notes that such withdrawal diminishes American "soft power," thereby reducing its ability to shape global norms and cooperation.

4) Transatlantic Unity

The "Make America Great Again" (MAGA) approach associated with Donald Trump created significant fissures in transatlantic unity between the United States and its European allies. Traditionally, this relationship was based on shared liberal values, mutual trust, and strong institutional cooperation. However, the emphasis on "America First" introduced tensions by prioritizing national interests over collective commitments.

A major point of strain emerged in relation to NATO. The Trump administration repeatedly criticized European allies for not meeting the 2% GDP defense spending guideline and at times questioned the value of the alliance itself. Although burden-sharing had long been debated, this confrontational approach created uncertainty about U.S. commitment to collective defense and weakened trust among allies (Nye, 2017).

Economic policies further deepened divisions. In 2018, the United States imposed tariffs on European steel and aluminium under national security provisions, prompting retaliatory measures from the European Union. This shift from cooperation to economic confrontation challenged the liberal norm of free trade that had historically underpinned transatlantic relations.

Policy divergence was also evident in key international agreements. The U.S. withdrawal from the Paris Climate Agreement and the Iran nuclear deal (JCPOA) contrasted with continued European support for these frameworks, highlighting growing strategic differences. As G. John Ikenberry (2018) argues, reduced U.S. commitment to multilateralism weakens alliances and undermines the stability of the liberal order. Overall, MAGA did not dismantle transatlantic unity, but it introduced distrust, policy divergence, and institutional strain, making the relationship more fragile and less predictable.

3. Conclusive Remarks

The "Make America Great Again" (MAGA) approach in the U.S. foreign policy has had far reaching implications for the future of the international political order. If MAGA-policies continue, the international system is likely to become more fragmented, competitive, and increasingly multipolar. One of the most visible impacts is the weakening of multilateral institutions. Reduced U.S. engagement with organizations such as the United Nations and withdrawal from global agreements signal declining commitment to collective governance. As G. John Ikenberry (2018) argues, the liberal order depends heavily on sustained U.S. support; when this support weakens, institutions become contested and less effective in managing global challenges.

Economic nationalism is another defining feature of MAGA that reshapes the global order. Trade tensions, particularly between the United States and China, along with the imposition of tariffs, have disrupted global economic interdependence. These actions challenge the rule based global trading system and encourage the formation of regional trade blocs and alternative economic networks. As Rodrik (2011, pp. 200–205) explains, such policies reflect domestic backlash against globalization and contribute to the fragmentation of the global economic order.

In the security domain, MAGA has strained long standing alliances, especially NATO. By emphasizing burden sharing and questioning alliance commitments, the United States has created uncertainty among its allies. This has encouraged countries, particularly in Europe, to pursue strategic autonomy, reducing reliance on U.S. security guarantees. As Stephen M. Walt (2018, pp. 30–32) notes, when the U.S. reduces its leadership role, it creates opportunities for other powers to expand their influence, thereby reinforcing the shift toward multipolarity.

Another important consequence of MAGA is the decline of U.S. soft power. Traditionally, the United States exercised influence not only through military and economic strength but also through its values, institutions, and global appeal. However, unilateral policies and reduced commitment to international norms have weakened this form of influence. As Joseph S. Nye (2017, pp. 10–11) emphasizes, soft power depends on credibility and attraction, both of which are undermined when a state appears disengaged or inconsistent.

This would provide a golden opportunity for major powers to extend and consolidate perception of their "spheres of influence" guided by their specific cultural and historical values, while rejecting Western defined "rules based" critiques as interference.

The US' abdication of her conventional linchpin role as the nucleus of the hitherto international political order has created power vacuum spurring other major international powers willing to reshape the world order. Thus, under the BRICS+ is accelerating "South-South" trade cooperation in order to bypass U.S. financial leverage (Sviridov, 2026; Vinjamuri, L. (2026, January 9).

Trump's criticism of the European nations in NATO and demand of the higher spending by the NATO members has broken the monolith structure of the most powerful collective security human history has ever witnessed and has force the European nations to enhance their spending on defence and devise alternative plans. Besides, US' new mantra has only given extra fillip to China which has been actively working for de-American international political order. She has taken several measures regarding trade, BRI etc.to replace US role with European countries and the Middle East and Africa. (The National. 2026).

It is obvious that the emerging new redistribution of power is moving towards a more decentralised and competitive global

order. Thers is also another possibility that the US reverses MAGA policy in the most likely scenario of post Trump leadership and attempts to restore her conventional role and the post IInd world order. Even if it happens, there is almost no possibility that a US and the liberal international political order would be restored as it worked earlier for the following reasons:

i. The structural changes in the global power structure caused by the US unilateralism have deep and long-lasting effects.
ii. The disbelief caused by Trump's brazen use of military power and chauvinistic nationalism and the ensuing insecurity among the international community is unlikely to erase prompting them to move for alternative frameworks.
iii. There is no possibility that increasing capacity of China, Russia, India etc. would wane facilitating their growth of parallel power centres and consequent multipolar world order.

Therefore, the future in international order is likely to be one of in which the liberal order would be working but power would me more widely distributed among several political entities giving more freedom of choice. Such a world may see simultaneous existence of cooperation and competition both. In sum, MAGA has catalysed the transformation of the international political order by a diminished US role, weakening multilateralism and driving multipolarity.

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