

## Preserving Democracy in U.S. Foreign Policy

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*We shall listen, not lecture; learn, not threaten. We will enhance our safety by earning the respect of others and showing respect for them. In short, our foreign policy will rest on the traditional American values of restraint and empathy, not on military might.* Theodore C. Sorensen

*Here is my first principle of foreign policy: good government at home.* William E. Gladstone

### What Makes a Good Foreign Policy

A good foreign policy effectively advances a nation's core interests—security, prosperity, and values—through a strategic and effective combination of diplomacy, economic tools, and military strength. Key elements include responsible engagement, building strong, stable alliances, maintaining transparency, and making evidence-based decisions that produce sustainable, long-term outcomes. Using this yardstick, the Trump foreign policy has been a dismal failure. Alliances are shattered, irresponsible statements and actions abound, motives are either hidden or display petulance, arrogance and/or greed and long terms outcomes promise only danger and chaos.

### Core Principles of an Effective Foreign Policy strategy and action:

- **Strategic Goal Alignment:** A good policy aligns actions with national interests, such as protecting citizens and fostering economic growth. Trump's foreign policy advances *his* psychopathic psychological goals for fame as well as the president's greed. Economic aggrandizement dominates American foreign policy. Juvenile concerns with status and privilege dominate American foreign policy.
- **Proactive Diplomacy and Negotiation:** Prioritizing negotiation, building strong relationships with other nations, and utilizing international cooperation over confrontation ensures long-term stability. Trump has fractured NATO, attacked our allies and cozied up to dictators like Putin. He espouses the dangerous old doctrine that might makes right.
- **Evidence-Based Decision Making:** Policy should be based on data, historical analysis, and objective evidence rather than ideology, allowing for adjustments based on outcomes. Narcissism, greed and power are the basis of decision making in the Trump administration. The ideological fanaticism displayed in Project 2025, which playbook Trump follows, trumps any empirical facts in Trump's lurid fantasy world.
- **Balancing Means and Ends:** Effective policies carefully consider the resources used (military, economic, or diplomatic) versus the desired outcome, ensuring the cost does

not outweigh the benefit. Trump relies exclusively on force, threats and intimidation which have accomplished little that is salutary.

- **Accountability and Transparency:** Clear, public-facing, and transparent processes build trust both domestically and internationally. Foreign nations no longer trust in the United States.
- **Values and Security Balance:** A strong policy balances protecting national security with advancing ethical values, such as supporting human rights and democracy. Any semblance of ethical values is missing in Trump's approach to foreign policy. Concern for human rights has vanished from our foreign policy.

### **The Characteristics of a Democratic Foreign Policy**

A democratic foreign policy generally emphasizes multilateralism, diplomacy, and the promotion of human rights, prioritizing international coalitions over unilateral action. It typically seeks to strengthen alliances, combat climate change, support global health initiatives, and use economic tools or sanctions to defend democracy against authoritarianism. Trump has abandoned each and every one of these.

Key features of a Democratic foreign policy include:

- **Multilateral Engagement:** A strong preference for working through international institutions and building alliances to address global challenges.
- **Diplomacy First:** An emphasis on diplomatic solutions over military action, often aiming to strengthen the "3Ds" of U.S. national security: Diplomacy, Development, and Defense.
- **Values-Based Approach:** A focus on promoting human rights, democracy, labor standards, and combating authoritarianism, particularly from countries like Russia and China. Trump, of course, praises Russian and Chinese autocracy.
- **Global Priorities:** Addressing transnational threats, including pandemics, climate change, and economic instability.
- **Use of Targeted Tools:** Utilizing, for instance, targeted sanctions, export controls, and support for democratic reformers to influence foreign behavior.
- **Strategic Restraint:** A potential, though not universal, inclination toward greater restraint in foreign intervention, focusing on domestic strength and international cooperation.

While the approach often emphasizes collaboration, it can also include strong, targeted interventions when liberal values or vital interests are deemed under threat. Each one of these

is noticeably absent from Trump's approach to foreign policy. Regrettably, he often does the exact opposite.

### **Democratic Foreign Policy is Good Foreign Policy**

A democratic foreign policy, characterized by **multilateral engagement, diplomacy, and the promotion of human rights**, is a "good" foreign policy for several reasons: it enhances national security, fosters global prosperity, and aligns with core national values.

Key arguments for a democratic foreign policy include:

#### **Enhanced National Security and Stability**

- **The Democratic Peace Theory:** In the past, stable democracies virtually never have gone to war with one another. Spreading democracy enhances a nation's security by reducing the number of potential military threats and increasing the pool of reliable allies. Trump unfortunately has shown a penchant for attacking our democratic allies while praising oppressive dictatorships such as those in Russia and Saudi Arabia.
- **Deterring Aggression:** Democratically governed nations are more likely to secure peace and deter aggression through collective security and international cooperation.
- **Reduced Support for Terrorism:** Authoritarian regimes are often the principal sponsors of international terrorism. The spread of democracy helps combat international terrorism by removing state support for such acts.
- **Fewer Humanitarian Crises and Refugee Flows:** Democracies are less likely to engage in mass murder of their own citizens or experience significant civil unrest, which in turn reduces the number of refugees fleeing to other countries.

#### **Economic Benefits**

- **Long-Term Prosperity:** While autocratic countries might experience short-term economic booms, democracies tend to perform better economically over the long run. Democracies are more likely to have market economies, respect private property rights, enforce contracts, and attract long-term investments, which creates a stable foundation for sustained growth.
- **Better Economic Partners:** Stable democracies make better long-term partners for trade and investment, as their political systems and legal frameworks offer greater predictability and stability.
- **Open Markets:** Democratic foreign policy often involves expanding open markets and promoting economic development, which benefits all participating nations.

#### **Upholding Core Values and Global Cooperation**

- **Promoting Human Rights:** A core component of a democratic foreign policy is the promotion of individual liberty, human rights, and the rule of law abroad. This approach aligns with fundamental American values and serves as a moral anchor for international engagement.
- **Diplomatic Engagement:** Democratic foreign policy typically favors diplomatic solutions and international engagement, often working through international institutions like the United Nations and NATO to build consensus and solve global problems.
- **Increased Alliances:** Historically, most of the United States' allies have been democracies. Spreading democracy is likely to create more like-minded alliance partners, amplifying a nation's influence and helping secure its interests.
- **Accountability:** Democratic systems hold leaders accountable to the people and allow opposition to be expressed openly, which reduces internal violence and allows for the peaceful transfer of power.

In essence, a democratic foreign policy is a strategic investment that fosters a more secure, stable, and prosperous global arena by promoting fundamental rights and cooperative international relations. Because Trump has abandoned these hallmarks of democratic foreign policy, it is no wonder that his foreign policy has not only failed but returned us to a chilling period in foreign affairs—imperialism.

### **Authoritarian Foreign Policy is Bad Foreign Policy**

An authoritarian foreign policy is bad foreign policy for several reasons related to its inherent characteristics of centralized power, lack of feedback mechanisms, and disregard for international norms. Trump's approach to foreign policy, as is the case with his domestic policy, has all the earmarks of an authoritarian foreign policy.

Key reasons why authoritarian foreign policy is detrimental include:

- **Poor Decision-Making:** Authoritarian regimes often lack the necessary "feedback mechanisms" of democracies, meaning leaders are surrounded by like-minded individuals and rarely receive dissenting views or constructive criticism. This absence of varied perspectives and the inability to "course correct" or reassess decisions often lead to rigid, brittle structures and flawed, uninformed policy choices.
- **Instability and Conflict:** The transactional and self-serving nature of authoritarian foreign policy can create global instability, as competition for resources and spheres of influence often replaces cooperation on global problems. The historical pattern of such politics demonstrates that they often lead to conflict rather than a stable world order.

- **Human Rights Abuses:** Authoritarian foreign policy involves the support of repressive regimes or the use of political repression to maintain the status quo, leading to human rights violations and a disregard for civil liberties and the rule of law. This leads to significant human suffering, such as the use of state media for propaganda and the silencing of free speech.
- **Undermining International Law and Cooperation:** Authoritarian leaders ignore or selectively enforce international laws and norms, making it difficult to forge alliances, build partnerships, and exert positive influence in international affairs. The rejection of multilateral institutions weakens the international system's ability to address global challenges that require collective engagement such as climate change.
- **Loss of Credibility and Trust:** Engaging in failed foreign policies or supporting despots for short-term gain can tarnish a nation's reputation and credibility on the global stage. This loss of trust makes it difficult to promote national interests or values effectively in the long run.
- **Domestic Consequences:** The pursuit of an authoritarian foreign policy can have negative domestic repercussions, including economic decline, social unrest, and the erosion of public trust in government institutions. It can also foster an environment of fear and a lack of innovation by discouraging independent thinking both at home and abroad.

### How Democratic is U.S. Foreign Policy?

So, how democratic is U.S. Foreign Policy?

U.S. foreign policy used to formally prioritize promoting democracy, human rights, and international law as core objectives, acting as a global counterweight to authoritarianism. However, although these noble sentiments are still “official” goals of our foreign policy listed on the State Department’s website, in reality our foreign policy has become one of cultural, political and economic imperialism and bullying. Trump dominates foreign policy in a way that ignores the Congress and the Courts, allies, the public and international law.

Key aspects of the democratic nature of U.S. foreign policy in the past included:

- **Policy Objectives:** The U.S. framed its foreign policy as a tool for promoting democracy and human rights worldwide. Trump has abandoned these noble pursuits in the favor of greed and power for power’s sake.
- **Congressional Role:** Congress has acted as a pressure point for making human rights a more central, consistent component of foreign policy. This is no longer the case as

Congress has shamefully abandoned its Constitutional role in the making and executing of U.S. foreign policy.

- **Transparency and Influence:** Under Trump our foreign policy is often seen as a tool for protecting specific elite, interests. Those who flatter Trump get influence no matter what they want from the U.S.

The degree to which American foreign policy acts "democratically" on the global stage has declined markedly under the Trump administration. Our emphasis on power and might and strength above all else makes our foreign policy today more authoritarian than democratic.

### **Constitutional Constraints on Executive Power in Foreign Policy**

The Constitution did not envision nor does it sanction the executive's role as that of a king.

The U.S. Constitution mandates a democratic foreign policy through a system of **separation of powers and checks and balances**, which divides foreign affairs authority between the executive and legislative branches of government.

#### **Constitutional Arrangements**

The Constitution deliberately parcels out foreign policy powers to ensure shared responsibility and prevent any single branch from having unfettered authority. While the president is commander in chief, our chief diplomat and voice of our nation internationally, the president does not have unlimited powers in foreign affairs.

- **Congressional Powers (Legislative Branch):** Congress provides essential checks on presidential power and plays a crucial role in shaping foreign policy.
  - **"Power of the Purse":** Congress must authorize and appropriate all federal funding, including the budget for the military, State Department, and foreign aid, allowing it to influence or limit executive actions.
  - **Declaration of War:** Only Congress has the power to formally declare war, which is a major check on the President's role as Commander-in-Chief.
  - **Advice and Consent (Senate):** The Senate must approve treaties negotiated by the President with a two-thirds majority vote and confirm ambassadorial and cabinet-level nominations by a simple majority.
  - **Regulation of Commerce:** Congress has the power to regulate foreign commerce, impose tariffs, and enact economic sanctions.

- **Oversight and Investigation:** Congressional committees conduct oversight of executive branch activities and agencies (e.g., the State Department, Department of Defense, CIA) through hearings and investigations.
- **Judicial Role (Judicial Branch):** The courts, while less involved than the political branches, interpret laws and can rule on the constitutionality of foreign policy actions and international agreements if a proper case is brought before them. However, they often exercise judicial restraint, deeming some disputes "political questions" best left to the other branches.

### **Institutional Arrangements**

Beyond the explicit constitutional grants, several institutional practices and laws ensure democratic input and accountability:

- **Elections:** The fundamental democratic mechanism is that both the President (indirectly) and members of Congress (directly) are elected by the people and are accountable to the electorate for their foreign policy decisions.
- **Congressional-Executive Agreements:** Many international agreements are entered into through a process involving both Congress and the President, often requiring approval by a simple majority in both the House and Senate, rather than the two-thirds Senate majority required for a formal treaty.
- **War Powers Resolution of 1973:** This law requires the President to notify Congress within 48 hours of deploying armed forces into hostilities and to withdraw forces within 60 days unless Congress authorizes the action or declares war.
- **Intelligence Oversight:** Specialized congressional committees, such as the House and Senate Intelligence Committees, provide close oversight of the U.S. intelligence community to ensure adherence to law and democratic principles.
- **Public Opinion and Media:** Public scrutiny and media attention play a crucial role in shaping foreign policy debates, as elected officials are responsive to public sentiment.

This dynamic interplay between the branches, though sometimes leading to conflict or "an invitation to struggle" over policy direction, was designed to ensure that a broad range of democratic voices and interests are represented in U.S. foreign policy.

Unfortunately neither Congress nor the Supreme Court have effectively performed their Constitutionally mandated function to be check on and a balance to the executive. These institutional checks only work if they are implemented. They have been ignored with the complicity of both Congress and the Court.

## **How Foreign and Domestic Policy Interact**

Concern over the nature of American foreign policy is not some abstract, esoteric effort. Our domestic policy and our foreign policy are intrinsically intertwined and one affects the other. Americans must realize that domestic and foreign policy are intrinsically intertwined. Concern for domestic policy means interest in foreign policy. Just as we have an obligation as citizens to have our voices heard, we must be involved in holding the

Foreign and domestic policies are deeply intertwined: international events, like wars or trade shifts and tariffs, directly impact domestic issues such as the economy, security, and public health, while domestic factors, like a nation's political stability, economic strength, or public opinion, shape its ability to act abroad, creating a constant feedback loop where one's actions significantly affect the other.

### **How foreign policy affects domestic policy**

- **Economic Stability:** Trade agreements, tariffs, or global recessions (like those caused by the Russian-Ukrainian War) affect jobs, prices, and inflation at home.
- **National Security:** Foreign threats can lead to increased military spending, changes in surveillance laws, or shifts in privacy rights (e.g., post-9/11 policies).
- **Public Health:** Pandemics (like COVID-19) require international cooperation and affect border policies, travel, and resource allocation domestically.
- **Social Issues:** Foreign interventions or human rights crises abroad can influence domestic debates on immigration, refugees, and national values.

### **How domestic policy affects foreign policy**

- **Economic Strength:** A strong domestic economy provides resources and leverage for foreign policy initiatives; a weak one limits options.
- **Political Will & Stability:** A divided government or public opposition can hinder a president's foreign policy agenda, while national unity strengthens it.
- **National Identity:** Domestic cultural values, historical experiences, and social issues (like democratic struggles) influence how a nation presents itself and acts internationally.
- **Resource Allocation:** Budgetary decisions to fund domestic programs (education, infrastructure) versus defense/foreign aid directly impact foreign policy capability.

### **Examples of interplay**

- **Trade Wars:** A foreign policy decision to impose tariffs (e.g., on China) creates domestic economic impacts (job losses in some sectors, price hikes for consumers). Trump has gone from one trade war to another with no benefit to U.S. interests.
- **Military Spending:** Foreign policy debates over defense budgets influence domestic funding for other services like the EPA or education.
- **Climate Change:** Domestic political stances on environmental regulations affect a nation's ability to participate in international climate agreements.

In essence, what happens inside a country (domestic) dictates its power and priorities abroad, while global events (foreign) inevitably shape life within its borders, making them inseparable parts of national governance.

More specifically, foreign policy deeply impacts domestic policy by creating economic shifts (trade, energy prices), influencing national security and civil liberties (counter-terrorism), shaping social values (human rights, immigration), and driving resource allocation (defense spending vs. social programs). Events abroad, like conflicts or pandemics, directly affect home, while domestic issues, such as political polarization, can weaken a nation's international standing, showing the two are interconnected.

### **Economic Impacts**

- **Trade & Tariffs:** Foreign trade agreements (free trade) lower costs, while tariffs raise prices on imported goods, affecting consumers and businesses.
- **Energy & Resources:** Geopolitical instability abroad, like the war in Ukraine, can cause domestic gas price spikes, prompting actions like releasing strategic oil reserves.
- **Job Markets:** Foreign investment policies and global supply chains directly influence domestic employment and industry.

### **Security & Rights Impacts**

- **War on Terror:** Foreign conflicts can lead to increased domestic surveillance and restrictions on civil liberties. The Trump administration is consumed by concern over domestic terrorists linked to foreign governments and has dispatched the quasi-SS ICE to suppress legitimate dissent in the name of national security.
- **National Security:** Threats like cyberattacks from foreign entities or global health crises (pandemics) require domestic policy responses in defense, intelligence, and public health.

### Social & Cultural Impacts

- **Immigration:** Foreign policy decisions on refugee crises or trade affect immigration flows, fueling domestic debates over cultural identity and economic impact.
- **Values & Identity:** Promoting human rights or democracy abroad shapes a nation's self-image, influencing attitudes towards diversity and inclusion at home.

### Governance & Resource Allocation

- **Budget Priorities:** Foreign aid, defense spending, and international commitments compete with domestic needs, affecting funding for education, infrastructure, and healthcare.
- **Domestic Politics:** International crises often become major voting issues, forcing politicians to address global events as domestic concerns to win elections.

In essence, what happens internationally has ripple effects at home, and a nation's internal strengths and weaknesses (e.g., democratic stability) affect its ability to act effectively abroad, creating a constant feedback loop. Trump's recklessness in foreign policy affects what happens here. No one should say that they are not concerned about foreign policy.

### Challenges to Democratic Practice

- **Elite Influence:** Policy is shaped by foreign policy establishments, think tanks, and powerful interests, sometimes described as the "Blob".
- **Partisan Polarization:** Major divisions exist, especially on issues like climate, immigration, and aid to Ukraine/Israel, affecting consensus.
- **Public vs. Policy Gap:** While many Americans want less intervention, political dynamics often push for an active, interventionist role.
- **Inconsistency:** Actions (like supporting autocrats for strategic reasons) sometimes contradict stated democratic ideals.

### Public Opinion Trends

- **Partisan Splits:** Democrats often favor more aid and internationalism; Republicans are more divided, with a segment leaning toward isolationism.
- **International View:** Global views on American democracy and foreign policy are mixed, with some countries viewing U.S. democratic ideals critically.

In essence, while democracy is a stated pillar, the *process* involves power struggles, partisan influence, and elite consensus, leading to outcomes that sometimes diverge from pure democratic ideals, creating tension between stated values and realpolitik.

### **Why Americans Should be Concerned about Foreign Policy**

Americans should be concerned about foreign policy issues because these decisions directly affect **national security**, **economic prosperity**, and the overall **well-being** of communities within the U.S. The line between domestic and foreign policy has become increasingly blurred, with global events having direct local consequences.

Key reasons for American concern include:

- **National Security:** Foreign policy is crucial for protecting the U.S. homeland and its citizens. Key concerns for Americans include preventing terrorist attacks, stopping the spread of nuclear weapons, and maintaining a military advantage. Addressing crises abroad through diplomacy or engagement can prevent power vacuums and larger conflicts from emerging that would eventually require a much stronger response and could destabilize entire regions.
- **Economic Prosperity:** Foreign policy significantly impacts the U.S. economy.
  - **Trade and Tariffs:** Decisions about international trade agreements and tariffs affect the prices Americans pay for goods and services, as well as job security.
  - **Resource Access:** Assuring continued access to international resources, such as energy supplies, is a key U.S. foreign policy goal that directly impacts domestic life.
  - **Supply Chains:** Global events, such as the Russian invasion of Ukraine, can disrupt international supply chains, causing price increases for everyday items like food.
- **Transnational Challenges:** Issues that cross national boundaries cannot be contained by single countries and require international cooperation. These include:
  - **Climate Change:** Foreign policy commitments to addressing climate change can generate jobs in the green economy and affect global environmental standards. If we do not deal with climate change, climate change will deal with us.
  - **Pandemics and Health:** International cooperation on disease monitoring is vital for early detection and containment of potential pandemics, which can save

American lives. Given our retreat on public health, the next pandemic is just around the corner.

- **Illegal Drugs and Crime:** Diplomatic and law enforcement efforts are needed to disrupt the global supply chains of synthetic opioids and combat international crime that affect U.S. communities.
- **Domestic Investment vs. Global Engagement Tradeoff:** The federal budget is finite. Prioritizing investments in war and foreign military interventions over domestic needs can impact funding for U.S. housing, education, transportation, and other critical infrastructure. Americans are often concerned with striking the right balance between addressing global challenges and focusing on problems at home. "Every gun that is made, every warship launched, every rocket fired signifies, in the final sense, a theft from those who hunger and are not fed, those who are cold and are not clothed."  
— Dwight D. Eisenhower
- **Global Influence and Alliances:** U.S. foreign policy shapes its relationships with allies and adversaries. Maintaining strong alliances through cooperation with multinational organizations like NATO helps protect the collective security of the U.S. and its partners, making the U.S. safer and potentially reducing the cost of acting alone.

Ultimately, foreign policy decisions have a direct, tangible impact on the daily lives, safety, and financial well-being of every American citizen.

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