

US Foreign Policy at a Crossroads: Trump's 'Donroe' Doctrine

Written by Bruno S. Sergi and Mona Pearl

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BRUNO S. SERGI AND MONA PEARL, MAR 5 2025

U.S. foreign policy is at a crossroads as the world grapples with President Donald Trump's "Donroe Doctrine" – a reinterpretation of President James Monroe's 1823 Monroe Doctrine. This twist in U.S. foreign policy has significant implications for international relations, such as handling the Ukrainian crisis at the White House, which led to the support of the UK. The Trumpian version of this concept, which heralds the onset of the "American golden age" and prioritizes domestic interests over multilateral commitments, is poised to redefine how the U.S. interacts with its neighbors and beyond. Could this new doctrine merely reflect an era of heightened tensions, or is it a transformative moment for American diplomacy? The potential for reshaping international relations is a compelling aspect of Trump's foreign policy.

Trump's foreign policy demonstrates his assertive approach to international trade relations with his tariff policies, his stark criticism of NATO and global alliances, as evidenced by his stance on the Russia-Ukraine war, and his forceful stance toward China. He has consistently criticized international organizations, arguing that they undermine U.S. sovereignty and economic competitiveness. For instance, Trump has criticized NATO for bearing a disproportionate financial burden in defending Europe and has suggested withdrawing US support from NATO if allies fail to meet financial commitments. This policy has raised concerns among European leaders regarding the reliability of the U.S. as a security partner. Analysts argue that such policies could weaken NATO's deterrence capabilities, though Trump insists they would make the alliance more equitable.

Consequently, Trump avoids positioning the U.S. as the leader of a coalition in the Global North, indicating he is not interested in maintaining or strengthening traditional alliances. Instead, he emphasizes U.S. dominance on its own terms, focusing on its economic and geopolitical advantages. This may reflect an "America First" strategy that prioritizes national self-interest and suggests a move away from global leadership. Trump's doctrine could potentially reshape the relationship between the Global South and the Global North as they navigate their unique challenges and opportunities.

The terms Global South and Global North refer to socioeconomic and political divisions between countries, with the North representing wealthier, industrialized nations and the South consisting of poorer, less developed countries. These divisions arise from historical factors like colonialism and economic exploitation. While the Global North wields considerable power in international institutions, the Global South faces challenges such as poverty and political instability rooted in colonization. Understanding this divide and the global south's economic performance is crucial when evaluating recent shifts in U.S. foreign policy, particularly under Donald Trump's doctrine.

The Global North includes wealthy countries with significant political influence through institutions like the IMF and the UN. In contrast, the Global South encompasses regions that face substantial economic challenges. The Global South is expected to have a political and economic resurgence supported by a new leadership style to foster success. The disparity between the Global South and the Global North has been a focal point in a new approach that classifies countries based on economic, social, and governance characteristics rather than historical links. By viewing the Global South through these interconnected lenses, The Donroe Doctrine could pave the way for a global power distribution driven by emerging economies and the shifting responsibilities of developed economies. This

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potential for a significant global power shift is a topic that will surely captivate the minds of scholars and policymakers alike.

Donald Trump has suggested using military force to annex Greenland, the world's largest island, due to its strategic shipping routes and rich deposits of rare earth elements essential for defense and electronics. Acquiring Greenland could enhance U.S. economic competitiveness, especially amid rising Arctic competition from climate change and a need to reduce reliance on Chinese materials. However, extracting these resources would face significant technological challenges and high costs, likely rendering such efforts impractical. Trump's vision for the Western Hemisphere also includes expanding offshore drilling, changing the name of the Gulf of Mexico to the Gulf of America, and considering Canada to become the 51st state with hockey great Wayne Gretzky as Governor.

Understanding Latin America's largest and most significant country, Brazil, is a key example of how Trump's foreign policy approach interacts with Global South leadership. Under President Jair Bolsonaro, Brazil became a key friend of the Trump administration, notably in its efforts to challenge left-wing governments in the region. While reflecting the contradiction between the United States' emphasis on transactional diplomacy and the Global South's broader goals, this partnership also opens the potential for new dialogues in Latin America, offering a hopeful outlook for the future of U.S. foreign policy and the Global North-South dynamics.

Trump's doctrine, which promotes a more interventionist stance towards Latin America, found a willing partner in Bolsonaro, who shared Trump's skepticism of multilateralism. This partnership is built on shared conservative values. Trump's foreign policy often undermines the sovereignty of nations in the Global South, such as Venezuela, by supporting opposition groups and recognizing Juan Guaidó as interim president. This interventionist stance contradicted the US's prior non-intervention policy. Bolsonaro aligned Brazil's foreign policy with the US to weaken Maduro's government, reflecting the US's support for right-wing regimes in the Global South, which clashed with the aspirations of many regional countries.

Brazil's involvement with Trump's foreign policy approach also underscores the complex dynamics of the Global North and the South. While the U.S. and Brazil worked together to push back against leftist governments and maintain economic and political ties, the Global South's broader push for autonomy often collided with Trump's vision of a transactional, power-driven relationship. For example, Trump's support for Bolsonaro's environmental policies, heavily criticized for disregarding Indigenous rights and the Amazon rainforest, exposed the stark divide between the Global North's emphasis on economic growth and the South's need for environmental protection and sustainable development. This policy risked widening the divide between the U.S. and Global South countries advocating for sustainability and equity. However, it also inspires those championing these causes in global governance.

The long-term impact of Trump's foreign policy remains uncertain, underscoring the need for further analysis and understanding. Several key takeaways can be drawn, but the full implications of his actions are yet to be fully realized. Trump's policies may reshape political dynamics in Latin America despite initial resistance from left-wing governments. His support for right-wing leaders could encourage stronger governance, potentially leading to greater stability if managed well. Positive outcomes for the region are possible by promoting dialogue and mutual interests.

For the Global North, Trump's policies signify a shift toward nationalism and protectionism, challenging internationalism and multilateralism. This transition will continue to influence U.S. relations with allies and global governance. His approach to trade, immigration, and foreign intervention underscores the tension between domestic priorities and international relations, presenting challenges for the U.S. to balance national and global interests.

Trump's doctrine is a defining feature of his foreign policy approach. Trump's emphasis on nationalism, protectionism, and interventionism reinforces the divide between the Global North and South, often hindering cooperation. MAGA philosophies and the BRICS Plus prioritize sovereignty and economic independence within a multipolar world. Criticism of international financial institutions like the World Bank and IMF has grown, particularly regarding the dominance of the US dollar. The BRICS Bank, founded in 2014, aims to complement these institutions and supports members like India and South Africa in developing alternatives, while countries like Russia and Iran seek a separate financial system. With a capital of \$100 billion, the BRICS Bank has financed over 90 projects worth

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more than \$30 billion and operates on a "one member, one vote" principle without veto rights. MAGA focuses on economic self-reliance, aligning with BRICS Plus countries that aim to strengthen their economies and reduce dependence on Western financial systems. As a response, President Donald Trump has threatened to impose tariffs on the BRICS if they create a new currency or challenge the dollar's global role.

Trump's America First approach might lead to diplomatic isolation for the U.S. within the Global North. His decision to withdraw from international agreements such as the Paris Climate Agreement and the World Health Organization could further strain U.S. relations with global allies. In Latin America, his policies were seen as disruptive to regional cooperation, exacerbating tensions and undermining regional solidarity. The legacy of this doctrine will continue to be felt in future U.S. foreign policy, underscoring the importance of strategic planning. Balancing national interests and global diplomacy in an increasingly interconnected world will be a key challenge for U.S. leadership.

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Bruno S. Sergi, PhD, teaches and researches the economics of emerging markets. At Harvard, he is a Faculty Affiliate at the Harvard Center for International Development, an Associate at the Davis Center for Russian and Eurasian Studies, and an Associate at the Harvard University Asia Center.

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