

## The Arrival of Trump 2.0 and the Era of Global Turmoil

The arrival of the second administration of President Donald Trump – hereafter, Trump 2.0 – has been a whirlwind. In just over a hundred days, his administration has drastically downsized the civil service, signalled a swift withdrawal from Ukraine, launched an aggressive new tariff war, and betrayed traditional allies in Europe. Trump's new policies have thrown the United States and the world into chaos.

How should we understand the governing patterns of the Trump 2.0 era? What underlying factors are at play behind his seemingly arbitrary behaviour? What impact will the Trump 2.0 era have on China and the world? How will the world change as a result? These questions are urgent and pressing for people around the world who are filled with anxiety.

The period from Trump's first term in office in 2016 to the dawn of the Trump 2.0 era in 2024 has made it clear that his political base consists of the vast disenfranchised segments of US society and the new right-wing conservative social movements driven by these disenfranchised groups. Trump did not emerge out of nowhere, nor does he act on a whim; he is a product of this powerful ideological movement rather than its cause. To understand the underlying logic behind Trump's action, one must begin with his social base and ideological movement.

This new wave of right-wing conservatism, which has spread widely in Western societies, differs from traditional US neoconservatism. It is characterised by a clear anti-liberal stance, with outward manifestations such as opposition to immigration, gender relativism, and free trade. Its underlying traits, however, reflect anti-globalisation, anti-democracy, and anti-establishment sentiments. It no longer seeks the universality of Western liberal values or believes in the promises of a liberal utopia, instead retreating to the US and prioritising 'America First'. Additionally, its behavioural values have generally returned to Christian traditions, particularly the fundamentalist traditions of white Christianity.

The sweeping rise of the new right-wing conservative movement stems from the rampant spread of free-market capitalism. Over the past thirty years since the end of the Cold War, there has been an unstoppable global expansion of capital and individualistic values under the banner of liberalism. The greed of the US bourgeoisie has reached unprecedented levels, which has led to exacerbating income inequality, eroding social morality, and the dismantling of the fabric of communities. In this context, society urgently needed a movement of social protection to counter market forces. The new right-wing conservatism is a symptom of this need for social protection.

From the perspective of Marxist political economy, capitalism is characterised by cyclical patterns of expansion and contraction. Excessive accumulation becomes widespread due to overproduction, leading to a decline in the average rate of profit and the disruption of capitalism's internal equilibrium. In the era of globalisation, where national borders are constantly broken down, this cyclical movement manifests itself as

unbalanced rapid expansion across all corners of the world, thereby driving the rise of emerging powers and the decline of traditional powers. The new right-wing conservative ideology is a feature of the decline of traditional capitalist powers.

New right-wing conservatism is a social ideology that emerges during the decline of liberal capitalism. Its emergence and development follow certain patterns. First, its emergence is on a world scale – it is a product of the global expansion of the capitalist mode of production. Secondly, it is long-lasting – as long as the wealth gap and the disintegration of communities caused by liberal capitalism remain unresolved, the ideology of new right-wing conservatism will persist. The scale and influence of this ideology are inversely proportional to the governance flaws of liberal capitalism. Thirdly, it has local characteristics – new right-wing conservatism will combine with the history and national conditions of different countries, resulting in ideologies with distinct features. Fourthly, it has the characteristics of its times – for instance, the new right-wing in Europe today cannot openly oppose the democratic system because Western-style democracy has become politically correct and denying it would come at a significant cost.

Given the long-term nature of the new right-wing conservative ideology, the Trump era is merely its beginning. Therefore, it is extremely urgent and necessary to analyse its relationship with the world and China.

The world order will undergo a drastic reorganisation, and chaos will become the norm in the face of the new right-wing conservative ideology. Because the values of the new right-wing conservatism are anti-liberal, US-led alliances based on Western liberal values will split, and friend-enemy relations in the Western world will change. The traditional allies of the US will seek strategic autonomy and break away from dependence. Some medium-sized powers in the West will form new alliances. At the same time, the new right-wing conservatism emerging worldwide will seek to establish a coalition of right-wing values – particularly between the new right-wing movements in the US and Europe – which will rapidly forge deep spiritual and material connections. In this context, Global South countries will find themselves marginalised by the new right-wing US because their development and security concerns will not be prioritised. This harsh reality will force some Global South countries that once followed the Global North to seek new avenues. More importantly, as the new right-wing conservative ideology sweeps the globe, the rules and norms that have governed the world since the end of the Cold War will be shattered (or even completely destroyed). As the world faces the narrow nationalism of ‘America First’, existing global rules will largely cease to function, and a new international system will be difficult to establish. The effectiveness of international organisations such as the World Trade Organisation and the World Health Organisation will significantly decline.

Under the influence of neo-conservative right-wing ideology, Western countries are dominated by nationalism and populism, making conflicts between nations and ethnic groups highly likely. In such an international environment, it is not difficult to imagine that contradictions and conflicts will lead to war. For China, the rise of the new right-wing conservatism will also present significant challenges while also offering numerous new opportunities.

First, under the influence of the new right-wing conservative ideology, China’s external relations will undergo profound adjustments. If the Trump administration continues to view China as its primary strategic competitor, then the EU – which previously prioritised values as its first principle in diplomacy – will distance itself from the US and readjust its relations with China for its own self-interest. Similarly, Asian allies of the US, such as Japan and South Korea, will also adjust their relations with China in response to the US narrowly

pursuing its own national interests.

Second, the nature of the struggle between China and the US-led Global North will change significantly. The focus will shift from the ideological struggle, centred on Western concepts of ‘democracy, freedom, and human rights’, to a struggle over national interests characterised by the ‘America First’ policy. Because the new right-wing conservatism is anti-liberal and xenophobic, it no longer possesses a claim to universality and therefore significantly loses its appeal to human society. As a result, the primary contradiction of China’s ideological struggle in international politics will shift from one of values to one centred on national interests.

Third, China’s advocacy for a ‘community of shared future for humanity’ is a profound response to human society’s growing desire for new universal values in times of great turmoil.<sup>1</sup> With the launch of the ‘Global Development Initiative’, ‘Global Security Initiative’, and ‘Global Civilisation Initiative’, China has proposed a set of values capable of replacing the decaying Western liberal order and charting a new direction for human society.<sup>2</sup> At a time when new right-wing conservatism is widespread in the US, China should further advocate the concept of the ‘community of shared future for humanity’ and provide political-economic and philosophical interpretations of its profound theoretical connotations. The concept should be theorised and systematised to rally the people’s hearts and minds in this era of turmoil.

Finally, at a time when relations among friends and enemies are undergoing drastic changes, China should adhere to the Global South as its main strategic direction, unite the majority of the Global South countries, and form a united front in the new era. The reasoning behind this is not complicated. The US will not give up its strategic intention to contain China, and the EU will waver due to its liberal values. Only the Global South, especially those countries that seek to break away from the unipolar world dominated by the US, could be China’s friends in building a new multipolar international system. The difference between this and Mao Zedong’s ‘Three Worlds’ strategy lies in the fact that China’s current strategy is not merely about carving out a vast intermediate zone amid US-Soviet rivalry but about leading Global South nations in striving to create an equal and orderly multipolar world.

The arrival of the Trump 2.0 era marks the onset of a great era of chaos, with future turmoil only intensifying and constantly surpassing our expectations. Therefore, we must be prepared.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> This concept was first proposed by President Xi Jinping at the Moscow State Institute of International Relations on 23 March 2013.

<sup>2</sup> The three Global Initiatives were proposed between 2021 and 2023. They serve as strategic directions for the goal of building ‘a community with a shared future for humanity’. The initiatives focus on the main contradictions in today’s world, such as development, security, and civilisation. They aim to provide action plans for the reform and development of global governance.



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