

penalties on them. Whether Trump will have the power to do any of this is uncertain: the court system was one of the most resilient barriers to his excesses during his first term. But the Republicans have been working steadily to insert sympathetic justices into the system, such as Judge Aileen Cannon in Florida, who threw out the strong classified documents case against him. Some of the most important changes will come in foreign policy and in the nature of the international order. Ukraine is by far the biggest loser; its military struggle against Russia was flagging even before the election, and Trump can force it to settle on Russia's terms by withhold-

ing weapons, as the Republican House did for six months last winter. Trump has privately threatened to pull out of Nato, but even if he doesn't, he can gravely weaken the alliance by failing to follow through on its Article 5 mutual defence guarantee. There are no European champions that can take the place of America as the alliance's leader, so its future ability to stand up to Russia and China is in grave doubt. On the contrary, Trump's victory will inspire other European populists such as the Alternative for Germany and the National Rally in France. East Asian allies and friends of the US are in no better position. While Trump has talked tough on China,

he also greatly admires Xi Jinping for the latter's strongman characteristics, and might be willing to make a deal with him over Taiwan. Trump seems congenitally averse to the use of military power and is easily manipulated, but one exception may be the Middle East, where he is likely to be wholeheartedly supportive of Benjamin Netanyahu's wars against Hamas, Hezbollah, and Iran. There are strong reasons for thinking that Trump will be much more effective in accomplishing this agenda than he was during his first term. He and the Republicans have recognised that policy implementation is all about personnel. When he was first elected in 2016, he did not

come into office surrounded by a coterie of policy aides; rather, he had to rely on establishment Republicans. In many cases, they blocked, deflected, or slow-walked his orders. At the end of his term, he issued an executive order creating a new "Schedule F" that would strip all federal workers of their job protections and allow him to fire any bureaucrat he wanted. A revival of Schedule F is at the core of the plans for a second Trump term, and conservatives have been busy compiling lists of potential officials whose main qualification is personal loyalty to Trump. This is why he is more likely to carry out his plans this time around. Prior to the election, critics in-

cluding Kamala Harris accused Trump of being a fascist. This was misguided insofar as he was not about to implement a totalitarian regime in the US. Rather, there would be a gradual decay of liberal institutions, such as occurred in Hungary after Viktor Orbán's return to power in 2010. This decay has already started, and Trump has done substantial damage. He has deepened an already substantial polarisation within society, and turned the US from a high-trust to a low-trust society; he has demonised the government and weakened belief that it represents the collective interests of Americans; he has coarsened political rhetoric and given permission for overt

expressions of bigotry and misogyny; and he has convinced a majority of Republicans that his predecessor was an illegitimate president who stole the 2020 election. The breadth of the Republican victory, extending from the presidency to Congress as well, will be interpreted as a strong political mandate confirming these ideas and allowing Trump to act as he pleases. We can only hope that some of the remaining institutional guardrails will remain in place as he takes office. But it may be that things will have to get a lot worse before they get better.

The article first appeared on The Financial Times.

Trump 2.0 will not be like anything we have seen before



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OPINION

The horrible truth is, Donald J Trump is back. He has made one of the most stunning political comebacks in American history. All this means is that the world will not only witness a repeat of his first term in power. There is also every reason to believe, once back in office, he will build an administration much more oppressive, racist, and consequential than the one he led in 2017–2021. Trump's second inauguration on January 20 will unleash a far-right, semi-autocratic regime, and an assault on what remains of representative democracy in the US on a federal level.

Trump's plan for the US centres around old-style laissez-faire economics, isolationism, and white male supremacy — a real attempt at bringing the US back to the 1890s.

On the foreign policy front, Trump 2.0 will see an exacerbation of existing policies that already proved destructive and costly.

The first presidential term of Trump, and that of Joe Biden after him, were marked by an insistent refusal by Washington to engage in any effort to uphold international law and defend the rules-based order the US helped build after World War II. Under Trump 2.0, this purposeful disengagement, which had horrific consequences across the world, will intensify into a new era of American isolationism and likely pave the way for new conflicts and power struggles.

Trump has hinted that, as president, he would not support Ukraine in its ongoing war effort against Vladimir Putin's Russia. "That doesn't mean I don't want to help him because I feel very badly for those people. But he should never have let that war start. The war's a loser," Trump recently said in reference to Volodymyr Zelenskyy, Ukraine's war-time president. There are widespread fears that Trump's reluctance to back Ukraine in this war could lead to losses on the battlefield and on the diplomatic front that could prove devastating not only for Ukraine but the security and stability of all its European neighbours.

And when it comes to Palestine, Trump appears in favour of giving Israel even more freedom to continue with its genocide than Biden, who did next to nothing to try and stop the carnage. "I'm glad that Bibi decided to do what he had to do" despite Biden's attempts to restrain him, Trump said last month in reference to Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu slaughtering tens of thousands of Palestinian civilians, supposedly to defeat Hamas in Gaza.

This non-interventionist approach will likely embolden rogue regimes across the world to end any pretence of adherence to international law and the liberal order. Trump 2.0 will



US President-elect Donald Trump takes the stage to address supporters at his rally after winning the election, at the Palm Beach County Convention Center in West Palm Beach, Florida, on November 6, 2024.
● BRIAN SNYDER/REUTERS

usher in a new era of renewed devastation to nations and communities already suffering from conflict and overall geopolitical instability.

On the economic front, Trump says he will introduce higher tariffs on goods from China and other nations, all in an effort, supposedly, to help the US economy. Except in this era of globalisation, such tariffs will likely have a chilling effect on US finances. At least one study on Trump's tariffs plan suggests that, if the policy is implemented, the median income of Americans would drop between two and four percent and unemployment will rise, particularly in the manufacturing sector. There would also likely be a global economic ripple effect, causing higher inflation rates, stock market volatility, and trade wars. Domestically, he will eagerly implement the Heritage Foundation's much-feared Project 2025 and use it as a blueprint to ensure that the US remains a safe haven for unbridled, corrupt capitalism and the rich white men and megacorporations who benefit from such corruption. Meanwhile, the marginalised groups Trump identified during his campaign as America's enemies — undocumented immigrants, Arab and Muslim Amer-

icans, among others — will face increased oppression and discrimination. Once again, white male supremacy will openly become the law of the land.

"We will get them out of our country. I will ban refugee resettlement from terror-infested areas like the Gaza Strip and we will seal our border and bring back the travel ban," Trump said at an event marking the first anniversary of Hamas's October 7 attack on Israel, referring to his

infamous "Muslim ban". In 2017, Trump directed his threats of deportation and entry bans specifically at people from Muslim-majority countries who he called "jihadists". But throughout his 2024 campaign, he made it clear, over and over again, that his ambition is to deport and ban all undocumented migrants, and any other brown and Black migrant and refugee he can, whether they are from Central and South America, the Caribbean,



Protesters at LA airport show their opposition to then-president Donald Trump's 2017 travel ban on people from several Muslim-majority countries.
● REUTERS



Africa, or the Middle East. The entire structure of the federal civil service will also face significant threats. Under Project 2025, Trump and Congress would eliminate the US Department of Education (DOE) and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA). They would privatise the Transportation Security Administration (TSA), the National Flood Insurance Program run by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), the federal housing loan giants Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac, and all federally subsidised student loans. Trump himself has said that he would go after leading government officials personally after he takes the oath of office on January 20. "Oh, it's so easy. It's so easy. I would fire him within two seconds," Trump said last month about special counsel Jack Smith.

Smith has been prosecuting the now president-elect for the January 6 insurrection and the mishandling of classified documents since 2023. Smith is not the only official in Trump's crosshairs. According to NPR, Trump has issued more than 100 threats to his opponents, including Vice President Kamala Harris and former US representative Liz Cheney.

Trump will now be able to get away from his conviction in New York, his various trials and lawsuits across the US, and his debts in the US and abroad, possibly even through pardoning himself for all his actions since 2016.

Make no mistake. Trump's upcoming second term in office will see efforts at all levels to remake the US into a conservative, evangelical, capitalist theocracy. The coming four years will be marked by persecution, oppression, retribution, and needless death from forced pregnancies, mass deportations, nonsensical public health decisions, and preventable wars. America is going back to Trump. The US and the world should be prepared for the second coming of Trump and the new global order he will try to create. The world should prepare and resist.

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