

# Middle East or China: Which is more important for US?

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The Middle East is losing its exclusive position in the energy sector that it held during the 1970s and 1980s.... However, Trump's efforts to portray himself as a problem-solver and resolver of all global crises have led to renewed attention from the US president to the region and its key issues.



US President Donald Trump (R) attends a bilateral meeting with China's President Xi Jinping during the G20 leaders summit in Osaka, Japan, on 29 June, 2019.  
● REUTERS

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## ANALYSIS

The Middle East has always been one of the most critical regions on the United States' strategic map, with American officials, regardless of party affiliation, maintaining a special focus on the area. However, since the Obama administration, Washington's primary foreign policy priority has been defined as strategic competition with Beijing. Now, nearly three months into Donald Trump's second presidential term, the operational priorities of his administration are gradually coming into focus, shedding light on the likely trajectory of his foreign policy over the next four years. A closer examination of these initial three months reveals that a central theme of Trump's policymaking remains his nationalist — or more precisely, exceptionalist — view of the United States. This aligns with the historical American concept of "American exceptionalism." During this period, Trump has showcased an even more intense and overtly nationalist approach compared to his first

term. While his initial presidency pursued a domestic-focused "America First" agenda — withdrawing from international agreements, periodically threatening global rivals, and engaging in tariff wars with adversaries like China — his second term has seen him unsheathing the sword of trade confrontation against a broader array of nations, both allies and foes alike. In early April 2025, Trump hosted a ceremony in the White House Rose Garden, attended by his cabinet members, several senators, and senior US political figures, to announce new tariffs on goods imported into the United States. Dubbed the "Day of Freedom" by Trump, the event had been promised weeks in advance. At the ceremony, Trump revealed a 25% tariff on all foreign-manufactured vehicles imported into the US, stating that tariffs would apply to "nearly every import pathway." He's not entirely wrong. Among the destinations subject to tariffs, in addition to the European Union and allied European countries, even the name of the Zionist regime is visible, which is unprec-

edented and historic. It seems Trump is determined this time and is not joking with any of his allies. Israeli officials were very surprised to be on this list. The Finance Minister of the Zionist regime has stated that the tariff will severely damage Israeli industry. The US also announced that since Israel imposes a 33% tariff on goods imported from the US, this tariff is in response to Israel's action.

Despite a 90-day suspension of these tariffs (excluding China, which faces a 125% tariff), the new trade policies are poised to redefine the US' relations with other nations, particularly major economic partners and rivals. This appears to mark the acceleration of a strategy inherited from previous US administrations: countering and constraining China's global influence.

The "pivot to Asia" policy, which began during the presidency of Barack Obama, was one of the first serious steps taken by US governments to address China's growing influence on the global stage. However, the continuous advancement of China was so significant that it gradually captured the full attention of US officials, leading the United States to shift its focus from international issues and challenges in regions like the Middle East to China. In fact, it can be said that China's increasing advancements in economic, diplomatic, and other areas, along with the serious threat of its surpassing and replacing the United States in the international system, have made the policy of containing Beijing the central focus of US foreign policy, manifesting in various strategies such as the Indo-Pacific policy.

From this perspective, recent events, including the imposition of steep tariffs on China, become clearer. During his "Day of Freedom" speech, Trump remarked, "I have great respect for President Xi [Jinping] of China, great respect for China, but they were taking tremendous advantage of us." he said, "If you look at that... China, first row, 67%. That's tariffs charged to the USA, including

currency manipulation and trade barriers." The US president also boasted, "I stood up to China like no administration has ever done before. Bringing in hundreds and hundreds of billions of dollars pouring into our Treasury from China when no other president had gotten even 10 cents. Not one president got — and I literally mean — not 10 cents. We got hundreds of billions of dollars." Predictably, China retaliated within a day, imposing a 34% tariff on all American goods. It seems the tariff wars of Trump's first term are reigniting, but on a far grander scale. All this background is provided so that when we consider why Trump is giving special attention to the Middle East at the beginning of his second term in the White House, we do not overlook the state of global equations and avoid making analytical errors.

The reality is that the Middle East has always been one of the most important regions in American analytical frameworks, and US officials, regardless of political trends and party affiliations, have given it special attention. The reasons for this are evident, chief among them being the Middle East's geostrategic significance, its unparalleled role in global energy supply, and the existence of the Zionist regime. During his brief second term, Trump has sought to prioritize and resolve lingering Middle Eastern issues. Yet the question remains: Why such heightened attention? Is it solely the region's inherent importance driving Trump's focus, or has the Middle East itself risen in priority within the US strategic calculus?

The answer, it seems, is both yes and no. A closer look at global trends shows that the United States' desire to maintain a presence in the region has been declining year by year, and this is due to global changes. First, the importance of the Middle East has been diminishing as new energy sources are discovered in other parts of the world and as the world gradu-

