

PRESIDENT'S GAMBLE

Trump threatens everyone. But the US cannot take on the world.

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Aggressive towards rivals and threatening to neighbours and allies. Less than a month after taking office in the White House, Donald Trump seems to have achieved the feat of making the United States disagreeable to everyone, or almost everyone, in the world.

In practice, the much-touted Make America Great Again (MAGA) plan is in danger of turning into MAHA, an acronym for Make America Hated Again. Trump is threatening Europe with tariffs if it does not buy American arms and spend 5% of its GDP on defence, far more than the United States itself spends (3.3%). An insane figure, especially given the poor economic and energy situation of Europe, which, having paid the price of subservience to the Biden administration, is now being subjugated by the Trump administration.

Not content with this, The Donald bluntly claims, not excluding the use of force, control over Greenland, still a dependency with a large degree of autonomy from the Kingdom of Denmark, but "fundamental" to US national security. In an interview with Fox News, US Vice President J.D. Vance declared that Greenland was 'really important' to US 'national security'. Frankly, Denmark, which controls Greenland, is not doing its job and is not a good ally,' Vance said.

Does this mean that after giving up much of its ammunition and all of its artillery and F-16s to Ukraine, Denmark is suddenly not a good ally of the US because it is unwilling to give up Greenland? Not that Trump has treated his neighbours, Mexico and Canada, on whom he has imposed 25% tariffs, any better. In Trump's vision, Canada should also be annexed to the US as the 51st state, while he treats Mexico as a 'hostile country', not only deploying troops on the border to curb illegal immigration and drug trafficking, but also claiming territorial hegemony, as evidenced by his call to rename the Gulf of Mexico the 'Gulf of America'.

According to a keen US observer of international politics such as the conservative Daniel Pipes, 'Trump's broader threat to impose indiscriminate tariffs, including on Canada and Mexico, will have disastrous foreign policy consequences. The United States' closest allies will distance themselves and trading partners will flee to other markets.

The situation on the whole is no better for Latin America either. Having used economic threats (the usual tariffs) to persuade the Colombian government to accept the return of illegal immigrants deported by the US, and the threat of invasion to persuade the Panamanian government not to renew the contract with a Chinese

company to manage the port and canal linking the Atlantic and Pacific oceans, the US will certainly not be encouraging relaxed and good-neighbourly relations with Central and South America.

China has responded to Trump's tariffs by reducing exports of rare-earths to the US and has denied accusations of facilitating the fentanyl drug trade through Mexico, pointing out that Beijing, unlike the US, enforces strict laws against drug use. While seeking an agreement with Putin to end the conflict in Ukraine, the new US president has resisted the temptation to threaten Moscow with tariffs and further sanctions if no agreement is reached on the three-year war. Perhaps Trump has not noticed that ten years of sanctions have not bent the Russian economy.

In the Middle East, too, the American president quickly undermined the credit he had accumulated by forcing Israel to accept the hostage release and the Gaza disengagement agreement, and by proposing the deportation of Gaza's inhabitants to be placed under US control.

In a press conference with Benjamin Netanyahu, the president declared that 'the Palestinians must leave and go to other countries. The United States will take control of Gaza, a long-term control that will bring stability to the Middle East, Gaza will be the Riviera of the Middle East'. Trump reiterated that 'the United States will take control of Gaza and take care of ordnance removal and reconstruction'. A "long-term" control, by Washington over the Strip, which, according to the American president, "will bring stability to the Middle East". In Gaza, 'the people of the world will live, including the Palestinians. It will be the riviera of the Middle East'. It is unclear whether this plan includes the deployment of military troops on Palestinian territory. Trump did not rule it out, saying only that 'we will do what is necessary'.

By waiting for US Marines or contractors to wrest control of the ruins of Gaza from Hamas militiamen in order to turn it into a huge tourist resort with hotels and casinos to be incorporated into the US, Trump has incurred the wrath of the entire Middle East. Just to increase hostility to the US in the Middle East region, Trump offered Israel \$1 billion in new weapons and threatened Tehran with annihilation if the Iranians tried to kill him.

Overall, the foreign policy outlined by Trump is likely to irritate much of the world, both Washington's rivals and its friends and allies, favouring rapprochement with powers that appear less imperialistic and more open to dialogue, such as Russia and China. According to Pipes, 'it is one thing to threaten Colombia, the world's second-

largest exporter of flowers, with tariffs two weeks before Valentine's Day in order to persuade it to take in deported migrants. But getting Egypt or Jordan to accept the massive influx of Gazans is another matter'.

"If the need arose, Egypt and Jordan would replace US government funding with support from Saudi Arabia and the Gulf states. They would have almost unanimous diplomatic support. They would move away from the US and towards China".

Pipes spares no warning for the White House. "Woe betide a country whose leader pursues a casual foreign policy without careful consideration of the factors. Threatening everyone indiscriminately with economic damage will weaken America's standing in the world. Americans and their allies will lose a lot if Trump continues to threaten tariffs as a pillar of US foreign policy."