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## Trump Erodes U.S. Tradition of Global Leadership



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When President Trump heads to Poland and the G-20 summit in Germany this week, he will be going in a different capacity than any president in our lifetimes.

During the first half of the 20th century, the U.S. became the leader of the Western, democratic world. In the second half of that century, there was no real rival as leader of the free world. With global leadership came prestige and clout, but also responsibilities and burdens. With little complaint, generations of Americans shouldered those responsibilities, some in uniform (though at a cost of both lives and treasure, taxpayer funds that surely could have been spent at home).

In less than a year, that tradition of global leadership has virtually evaporated.

Covering a speech by German Chancellor Angela Merkel shortly after a NATO summit in Brussels and a G-7 meeting in Italy, the headline in the May 29 New York Times was “Wary of Trump, Merkel Doubts U.S. Is Solid Ally.” Merkel said, “The times in which we could rely fully on others—they are somewhat over,” adding that European countries should “really take our fate into our own hands.”

Soon after, Canadian Foreign Affairs Minister Chrystia Freeland told the Canadian Parliament that she “has come to question the very worth of its mantle of global leadership,” Canada, like other countries, must “set our own clear and sovereign course.” Freeland is a former U.S. editor of the Financial Times. Paul Heinbecker, former Canadian ambassador to the United Nations and advisor to a number of Canadian governments, commented, “I saw it as being based on the recognition that Washington can’t or won’t lead.”

As Richard Haass, president of the Council on Foreign Relations, wrote last month, “It is increasingly clear that U.S. President Donald Trump represents a departure when it comes to America’s global outlook and behavior. As a result, the United States will no longer play the leading international role that has defined its foreign policy for three-quarters of a century, under Democratic and Republican presidents alike.”

Haass, author of the new book, *A World in Disarray: American Foreign Policy and the Crisis of the Old World*, added that “a shift away from a U.S.-dominated world of structured relationships and standing institutions and toward something else is under way. What this alternative will be, however, remains largely unknowable. What we do know is that there is no alternative great power willing and able to step in and assume what had been the U.S. role.”

However, “the absence of a single successor to the U.S. does not mean that what awaits is chaos. At least in prin

principle, the world's most powerful countries could come together to fill America's shoes. In practice, though, this will not happen, as these countries lack the capabilities, experience, and, above all, a consensus on what needs doing and who needs to do it."

It isn't just world leaders and foreign policy elites who see this change; a recent Pew Research Center survey of citizens in 37 countries around the world with at least 800 interviews in each found that in "the closing years of the Obama presidency, a median of 64 percent had a positive view of the U.S. Today, just 49 percent are favorably inclined toward America," noting that "some of the steepest declines in U.S. image are found among long-standing allies." The study found that "the drop in favorability ratings for the United States is widespread. The share of the public with a positive view of the U.S. has plummeted in a diverse set of countries from Latin America, North America, Europe, Asia, and Africa. Favorability ratings have only increased in Russia and Vietnam."

The poll found that "a median of just 22 percent has confidence in Trump to do the right thing when it comes to international affairs. This stands in contrast to the final years of Barack Obama's presidency, when a median of 64 percent expressed confidence in Trump's predecessor to direct America's role in the world." The Pew study showed that the "sharp decline in how much global publics trust the U.S. president on the world stage is especially pronounced among some of America's closest allies in Europe and Asia, as well as neighboring Mexico and Canada. Across the 37 nations polled, Trump gets higher marks than Obama in only two countries: Russia and Israel." In a May study conducted for the Asian Research Network, a consortium of public-policy institutes in Australia, China, Indonesia, India, Korea, and Japan, and supervised by professors Simon Jackman of the United States Study Centre at the University of Sydney and Gordon Flake of the Perth USAsia Center at the University of Western Australia, showed that "assessments of American influence and value in the region have diminished—particularly in Australia, Japan, and Korea, but not in China." The survey, which interviewed at least 750 citizens in each of those six Pacific Rim countries, found that in Australia, for example, "respondents increasingly see China as having the most influence in the Indo-Pacific region (72 percent)." Only 11 percent chose the United States. Additionally, "more than half of Australians (62 percent) perceive American influence in the next five years as negative under U.S. President Donald Trump." There is no doubt that elections have consequences. Last November, Americans voted for Trump and his slogan, "Make America Great Again." But what exactly were the voters saying? It is clear that many Americans felt ignored or disrespected, that the elites on the East and West Coasts, in government, the media, and in both corporate America and in organized labor, had ignored their interests and watched idly while their real incomes waned as others flourished. The rich and powerful were doing well, but these voters felt that they were working harder and harder and making little, if any, progress. There was also a sense that some were cutting or getting promoted to the front of the line, along with resentment about minorities and immigrants that had been building for some time. While certainly many of these Trump voters want us to focus more on problems at home, did they consciously choose for the United States to abdicate its position as global leader, as the Leader of the Free World? Did they intend a fundamental change in the direction of U.S. leadership? For a lot of foreign policy pros, if you asked them who is the most respected leader of all democratic countries, they would more likely say Angela Merkel than Donald Trump.