

# Can Donald Trump Unite the World (Against Himself)?

The Rise of an Anti-Trump Movement Globally - and on His Home Turf

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*One thing already seems clear in the Trump era: the world will not turn out to be the American president's playground. His ultra-unilateralist, rejectionist policies on trade, the Iran denuclearization agreement, the costs of defense, and climate change are already creating an incipient anti-Trump movement globally (and in the United States as well). To a remarkable degree, the countries he has targeted are banding together to oppose him and his policies. That still inchoate but gathering opposition assures that, whatever Donald Trump's view of America may be, it is no longer — in the phrase [coined](#) 20 years ago by Secretary of State Madeleine Albright — the “indispensable nation.” Abroad or even at home, with the president facing increasingly strong headwinds on climate change at the state and local level, we're entering a new world order on the heels of the collapsed American domination of the past three-quarters of a century.*

Let's consider the opposition Trump has generated on an issue-by-issue basis.

## Cross-Border Trade

In January 2017, on his first day in office, President Trump promptly withdrew the United States from the long-negotiated 12-nation Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) pact, deeply disappointing among others a close ally, Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe. He had assiduously curried favor with Trump as soon as he was elected, on and off the golf course.

A day earlier in January, Abe had even succeeded in getting his own parliament to approve the agreement.

But in an act by Washington's allies unprecedented in the last seven decades, Abe, along with the leaders of the 10 other countries in that pact — Australia, Brunei, Canada, Chile, Malaysia, Mexico, New Zealand, Peru, Singapore, and Vietnam — [refused](#) to take Trump's executive order as TPP's death sentence. Instead, in a groundbreaking step into a new world, they resumed negotiations on the pact in the Chilean city of Viña del Mar.



This March, after months of deliberation, they [signed](#) the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership in Chile's capital city, Santiago. For the signatories, it reduces tariffs drastically, while introducing sweeping new trade rules in markets covering half a billion people on either side of the Pacific Ocean.

This was a landmark event, inaugurating an era in which countries long accustomed to following cues from Washington forged ahead without its participation. In doing so, they rejected Trump's view of trade as a zero-sum game, consisting of winners and losers. Reflecting the common perception of the signatories, Chilean President Michelle Bachelet [said](#),

"We need to stay on the course of globalization, yet learning from our past mistakes."

Bachelet's view was shared by Abe, who leads the country with the [third largest economy](#) in the world. Japan is a key player in global trade. So, too, is the 28-member [European Union](#) (EU) whose aggregate gross domestic product (\$17.278 trillion) far exceeds Japan's (\$4.872 trillion).

Soon after recovering from Trump's TPP exit, Abe decided to [revive](#) his country's stalled free-trade talks with the EU. Their shared disapproval of the American president's trade policy led the two sides to rapidly overcome their differences. In July 2017, Abe formally agreed to an outline of a free-trade deal with European Council President Donald Tusk and European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker. By so doing, the EU and Japan, highly developed democracies, made clear their commitment to the liberal, free-trading, rules-based international order, which runs counter to Trump's worldview.

In July 2018 in Brussels, the European Union and Japan [inked](#) the globe's largest free-trade deal, the Economic Partnership Agreement. Remarkably, it covers almost a third of the globe's gross domestic product and 600 million people. Toshimitsu Motegi, Japan's minister for economic revitalization, [summed](#) up the situation in this way:

"The signing of the Japan-EU deal today will show the world once again our unwavering political will to promote free trade."

Juncker was even more upbeat.

"[The] impact of today's agreement goes far beyond our shores," he said. "We are showing that we are stronger and better off when we work together. And we are leading by example, showing that trade is about more than tariffs and barriers. It is about values, principles, and finding win-win solutions for all those concerned."

For the first time since the end of World War II, Washington's allies in the West as well as the East thumbed their noses at an American president. That made it a truly historic event.

## The EU Goes Head to Head With Trump

In May, when Donald Trump exited the multilateral Iran denuclearization deal endorsed by the United Nations Security Council, Juncker was equally strident in his criticism of him. The Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), which had been signed in July 2015 by six world powers (America, Britain, China, France, Germany, and Russia) and the EU, was being implemented as specified in the document. Yet Trump announced the reimposition of the American sanctions that had been in place before the JCPOA. These covered Iran's energy,

banking, and other sectors, and included a provision penalizing foreign businesses worldwide that continued trading with or investing in Iran.

The American president's 11-minute TV address explaining his decision ignored the 10 quarterly reports by inspectors from the International Atomic Energy Agency confirming that Iran was in compliance with the pact. Altogether his address contained [10](#) false or misleading statements, including the howler that Iran was on the "cusp of acquiring the world's most dangerous weapons."

Before launching economic warfare against Tehran, Trump had alienated the EU by [refusing to grant](#) it an exemption from steel and aluminum tariffs he started imposing on China and other countries in March. An American president is authorized to take such action only to protect "national security." EU officials argued, to no avail, that their bloc was an ally of the United States and so, by definition, not a national security threat.

"We are witnessing today a new phenomenon: the capricious assertiveness of the American administration," Tusk [said](#), on the eve of an EU summit in Sofia, Bulgaria, in mid-May. "Looking at the latest decisions of President Trump, some could even think, 'With friends like that, who needs enemies?'"

At that meeting, EU members agreed unanimously to stick to the JCPOA as long as Iran agreed to do the same.

On August 7th, U.S. sanctions went into effect on any financial transactions involving American dollars relating to Iran's automotive sector, purchases of commercial planes, and metals, including gold. The European Commission, the executive arm of the EU, immediately [instructed](#) European companies not to comply with Washington's demand to cease trading with Iran. Those firms deciding to pull out would require the EU's authorization to do so. The commission went on to set up a mechanism that would allow firms affected by the sanctions to sue the American government in the national courts of member states.

Russia and China, co-signatories to the JCPOA, concurred with the EU.

"We are deeply disappointed by U.S. steps to reimpose its national sanctions against Iran," [said](#) the Russian foreign ministry. "This is a clear example of Washington violating U.N. resolution 2231 [on the Iran deal] and international law."

China's foreign ministry also [regretted](#) Washington's decision and urged all involved parties to stay on track for full implementation of the 2015 accord.



The unanimously adopted Security Council Resolution 2231, passed under Chapter VII of the U.N. Charter, had endorsed the Iran denuclearization pact, making it part of international law. It included a [call for](#) “promoting and facilitating the development of normal economic and trade contacts and cooperation with Iran.”

As if brazenly violating international law weren’t enough, the Trump administration decided to [penalize](#) U.N. member states for abiding by that resolution — a frontal attack on a rules-based international order. Fearing U.S. sanctions, some European companies had [already backed off](#) their Iranian investments and trade before August 7th. Consider that an apt illustration of a Trumpian world in which it’s the lawbreaker who punishes the law-abiding.

## Trump on NATO

As a businessman occupying the White House, Donald Trump has introduced a profit-and-loss paradigm to foreign policy — be it cross-border trade or military budgets. That helps explain his continual drumbeat of criticism about how other NATO members are not spending enough on defense.

At the July NATO summit in Brussels, Trump was implacable on that issue, summing up his position [in this way](#) to CBS News:

“Many of those countries are in NATO and they weren’t paying their bills.”

A typical Trumpian claim, it bore no relation to reality. As German Defense Minister Ursula von der Leyen [explained](#), “NATO does not have a debt account.”

Apparently, the president confused direct and indirect contributions to NATO. In 2017, NATO’s budget was \$1.652 billion. Member states [contribute](#) according to an agreed-upon formula related to a country’s GDP. The U.S. contributes 22.14% of that budget, Germany 14.65%, France 10.63%, and Britain 9.84%. All paid on time.

Then there are [indirect contributions](#) to NATO. These are related to how much equipment and manpower a member state volunteers to a certain military operation, of which the best known at the moment continues to be the U.S.-led war in Afghanistan launched after the 9/11 attacks almost 17 years ago. In order to facilitate and encourage such contributions, NATO leaders agreed in 2014 to increase their spending on defense to at least 2% of their GDP by [2024](#). Many are on course to do so. Recently, however, Trump upped the ante, suggesting that the figure be [4%](#), a goal even the U.S., with by far the largest military budget in the world, does not now reach.

Currently, the U.S. is [spending](#) 3.6% of its GDP on its military. That amounts to \$683 billion (and the military budget Trump just signed raised that to [\\$717 billion](#)), or 71% of total NATO defense spending. That is what led the American president to [describe](#) the present situation as “disproportionate and not fair to the taxpayers of the United States.” Unsurprisingly, Trump failed to compare like with like. Defense of country is normally defined in terms of a possible aggressor. In that sense, the European members of NATO are focused on Russia. Collectively, NATO’s EU members [spend](#) \$254 billion on defense, or 10 times Russia’s \$24.2 billion defense budget.

By contrast, since the end of World War II, the Pentagon has equipped itself to fight wars

across the world and dominate both the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans. That explains why, of the 20 aircraft carriers in service around the globe, 10 [belong](#) to its navy. Constructing an aircraft carrier takes years and is hugely expensive, apart from the support ships it needs to form a complete carrier task force. But as a well-armed, aircraft-equipped, floating part of sovereign U.S. territory, powered by dual nuclear reactors, it is unmatched in its lethal power. This is what led former defense secretary William Cohen to [state](#) that, without “flattops,” the United States would have “less of a voice, less of an influence.”

In stark contrast, among Washington’s European allies, Britain has [just one](#) aircraft carrier, as does [France](#). Notably, their carriers rarely steam past the Horn of Africa or the Persian Gulf.

Britain is already past the 2% mark for defense spending and France is just .2% short of the agreed-upon target. Since May of last year, France has been governed by 40-year-old President Emmanuel Macron, a staunch advocate of the closer integration, financially and otherwise, of EU members. In a September 2017 speech, he floated the idea of a joint enterprise to allow Europe’s militaries to coordinate and react swiftly together. As a result, this June, ministers from Belgium, Britain, Denmark, Estonia, France, Germany, the Netherlands, Spain, and Portugal [signed](#) a letter of intent in Luxembourg to form the European Intervention Initiative (EII). It would exist outside the EU’s structures and be focused on joint planning for future natural disasters, crisis intervention, and the evacuation of citizens from hostile countries, among other things.

At present, its aims remain modest, but the key point is simple. The principle that European militaries should act collectively without the involvement of the Pentagon is to be put into practice. That is likely to prove but one more step on the path toward turning Albright’s indispensable nation into an increasingly dispensable America. If Donald Trump or his successor persists in weakening NATO, he or she will only encourage the Europeans to build on the EII concept.

### A Climate-Denying President Is Rebuffed at Home

As a global opposition to Donald Trump begins to form, on one issue, climate change — that affects all humanity — a distinctly American opposition is preparing to join the growing international one. In June 2017, Trump withdrew from the Paris climate agreement, while [appointing](#) an unparalleled crew of climate-change deniers to his administration and reneging on President Barack Obama’s [pledge](#) by 2025 to reduce America’s greenhouse gas emissions by 26% to 28% (from 2005 levels).

To the relief of most of the planet’s inhabitants, Trump’s withdrawal proved to be a solo act, with the remaining 194 signatories remaining firmly on board. Their representatives were among the 3,000 diplomats and observers who [assembled](#) in Bonn, Germany, in May to deliberate on giving the agreement further clout. To the consternation of the Trump administration, the next crucial meeting, a Global Climate Action Summit, will take place in September — and guess where? — in California.

That state’s governor, Jerry Brown, has been a [key figure](#) in rallying support for the Paris Accord and opposition to Trump’s climate-change deniers at the state and local levels. [Along with](#) former New York mayor Michael Bloomberg, Brown has sponsored the We Are Still In coalition. In November 2017, the two of them published a [remarkable report](#) showing that cities, states, and businesses representing more than half of the U.S. economy and

population had declared their support for the agreement.

“If these non-federal actors were a country,” it pointed out, “their economy would be the third largest in the world, bigger than all but two national parties to the Paris Agreement.”

In his withdrawal statement, Trump [stated](#) that

“the United States will cease all implementation of the nonbinding Paris accord and the draconian financial and economic burdens the agreement imposes on our country.”

That accord’s main aim was to keep the global temperature rise below 2 degrees centigrade from the preindustrial level.

“I was elected to represent the citizens of Pittsburgh, not Paris,” Trump added.

Within a few hours, Pittsburgh Mayor Bill Peduto [tweeted back](#),

“I can assure you that we will follow the guidelines of the Paris Agreement for our people, our economy & future.”

Pittsburgh is one of [405 municipalities](#) representing 70 million Americans that have signed on to a Climate Mayors initiative, which has only grown in the past year. More than 80 American cities — even some, like San Diego, run by Republicans — have committed to a future of 100% renewable energy. In fact, Trump’s decision actually spurred some cities to make new efforts to accelerate the pace of change. New York [decided](#) to electrify its bus fleet and pledged to divest from fossil fuels, while suing the world’s largest oil corporations for their role in escalating sea-level rise, heat waves, and other natural disasters. It also promised to abandon coal-fired electricity, as did Los Angeles.

Donald Trump is not going to change. He has declared his intention to seek reelection in 2020 and will continue to nurture his base by endlessly demonstrating his version of Make America Great Again. The [54 million](#) followers he has on Twitter generally seem to applaud the macho bluster with which he conducts his bouts of disruptive diplomacy. So don’t expect him to moderate either his ultra-unilateralist policies or the style in which he delivers them.

The question for the future is this: To what extent can the incipient anti-Trump movement globally and domestically coalesce in ways that will set our world on a new course — one that will make Donald Trump and his Washington cronies the dinosaurs of Planet Earth?

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