

December 20, 2025

## In Search of the President's Worldview

First let me preemptively caution those who may find disparaging remarks about the President—regardless of whom he or she may be and whatever they may have done or said—to be off-putting. You may not wish to read on. That said:

I've been trying to understand the fundamental political philosophy of the current occupant of the White House—or even if he has one—ever since he first stepped on stage in the initial Republican Presidential primary debate in 2008. Like most Americans at the time—or so I thought—I dismissed him as an obnoxious blowhard, with his adolescent name-calling and misguided bluster; a man just seeking the limelight with no real chance of electoral success. “How,” I thought, “could this man think he could command serious consideration for the Office of the President of the United States?” It appeared to be just an ego trip for him, satisfying a wish to be on the ‘big stage.’

Of course, I was sadly wrong. But was there, in fact, some coherent worldview that he possessed that shaped the thinking of this man who, however quixotically, sought to possess the most powerful office in the western world?

I have never believed that America came *first* with him. He has shown repeatedly over the decade since

that first debate that nothing takes precedent over his own self-aggrandizement. Yet, that basic question remained a puzzle. Had he actually possessed a plausible set of foundational beliefs or had he instead fashioned an entire edifice of policy positions designed to gain favor with a fanatical segment of the American electorate, or was it a combination of the two? What do we really know?

What one can say, viewing his actions from a distance—as most Americans must—is that we know he is not a man with much personal integrity. A convicted fraudster, a convicted sex offender, a convicted felon, and a compulsive liar. And his most severe criminal indictments were dismissed when he received his ‘get-out-of-jail-free’ card in the 2024 election.

But he is also a shrewd manipulator, knowing when he must remain silent—always avoiding testimony before Congress or a grand jury in which case his compulsions to speak off the cuff with whatever falsehoods served his immediate purpose would likely have earned him that jail sentence—while seeking out divisive issues to keep himself in the public eye, and often divert attention from his misdeeds. And within his powers, whether as head of his corporate empire or now as President, he wields threats against those who dare to cross him. As the columnist David Brooks once wrote of would-be autocrats: ‘never admit error’ and above all ‘never be boring.’<sup>1</sup> Whatever else

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<sup>1</sup>Brooks, David. Opinion Column in the *New York Times*, November 7, 2025.

this man is, he is not boring.

We also know that: (i) he was born with a silver spoon in his mouth, and (ii) he has been a life-long teetotaler (the latter is perhaps the only thing he shares in common with Joe Biden, apart from his soon becoming the only other octogenarian President). Despite his obvious affinity for extravagant parties, where sex, drugs, and alcohol were common aphrodisiacs (to which his fellow party-goers have testified that only the first of these was his true obsession<sup>2</sup>), one is still tempted to believe that these two facts have given him a visceral revulsion to inner city crime and the attendant misery of the down-and-out side of America's drug problem. It's much easier to take a high-handed approach to dealing with these problems and reach for the stick rather than addressing the underlying social and economic causes of the human tragedy they represent. His attacks on boats in the Caribbean and the Atlantic coast of Central America—perhaps exceeding the limits of Presidential authority—claiming without evidence that they are transporting drugs to the United States, along with his frequent false claims that immigrants to the US are drug dealers (and other forms of miscreants) are in line with this overtly overzealous militant response that likely ensnares innocents in his freewheeling police actions.

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<sup>2</sup>'Don's Best Friend': How Epstein and Trump Bonded Over the Pursuit of Women  
*New York Times*, December 18, 2025

We also have good evidence that this man has long been a mercantilist at heart. A protectionist who'd welcome trade barriers that restrict imports to ease the competition they pose for American producers by punishing America's trading partners who can offer goods desired by American consumers at more attractive prices. As a university professor of economics, I'm left to wonder if he skipped class or slept through the Econ 101 lecture on *comparative advantage* and the mutual benefits of free trade.

With the on-again-off-again erratic imposition of tariffs, he has blatantly exposed another side himself, one that manifestly transcends both his domestic and foreign policy: the transactional nature with which he seeks 'deals' that benefit him personally, and by extension, once he was in the White House, that benefit selected American businesses, at least in the short run. These strategies worked to some degree for the man in his business dealings, where he could count on his large cadre of lawyers to keep him personally out of legal jeopardy—and throwing his subordinates under the bus, when it was the simplest solution—while extracting short-term financial rewards.<sup>3</sup>

He has taken just this approach now as President, suggesting that government should be run like a business enterprise, or more precisely like *his* business enterprise. Making use of the US Department of Jus-

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<sup>3</sup>See the discussion of his business practices in Lichtman, Allan. 2017. *The Case for Impeachment*.

tice as his own private law firm, all the while relying on the conservative Supreme Court to enhance his power. And they've obliged by seemingly resurrecting the 'Imperial Presidency' that was once rejected by Congress and the Court in response to the flagrant miscreant behavior of a paranoid President Richard Nixon.

And so, it is from this regrettably somber perspective of the President, that his Administration's new *National Security Strategy* was read.<sup>4</sup> It is a long document (29 pages), the details of which have been picked apart by historical pundits and a host of national commentators. Their focus has weighed toward: (i) the Administration's deprecating remarks concerning America's traditional allies in Europe, referring to their preference for achieving mutual benefit through joint action via their united alliances as a precursor to their demise, and (ii) the proclamation that the primary focus of US foreign engagement going forward will be in this hemisphere, ie. the Americas, in which the United States is depicted as a kind of Big Brother Protector, who must be appeased to receive any American largess.

I am sure the President didn't write this document, although he surely approved, and I find it exceedingly unlikely that many Americans will ever bother to read it. But in an attempt to answer the questions posed

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<sup>4</sup><https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2025/12/2025-National-Security-Strategy.pdf>

above, it is instructive to skip to section IV, part 1: the *Principles* of **The Strategy**.

It begins with a list of pseudo Orwellian double-think: the President's 'foreign policy is pragmatic without being "pragmatist," realistic without being "realist," principled without being "idealistic," muscular without being "hawkish," and restrained without being "dovish." *It is not grounded in traditional, political ideology.*' [*italics added*]

Couple this litany of evasive language with the statement later on in the document proclaiming a doctrine of "flexible realism" that is to guide policy decisions—presumably this is the *faux realism* defined by the President. A more accurate depiction of this Administration's policy pronouncement is that *the policy is not grounded at all, apart from the whims of a mercurial President.*

The document goes on to proclaim that "all nations are entitled to a 'separate and equal station'." The insensitivity of the reference with its racial connotations to the phrase 'separate but equal' is deplorable, but perhaps appropriate to the xenophobia made explicit in the doctrine. And once again we discover that an Orwellian twist is imposed—here, on those words 'separate' and 'equal.'

'Separate' goes beyond the jingoism of the President's imperious bluster to encapsulate a desire that other nations also adopt this nationalist extremism, thereby breaking or avoiding commitments to inter-

national cooperation. However, the current and prior Administrations of the President have already shown that he is not above intervention, denying what would otherwise have appeared at first blush to be a hands-off approach consistent with the notion of ‘separate . . . station[s].’

He has demonstrated it with various types of support to authoritarian leaders and autocratic wannabes, including those in Turkey, Hungary, Honduras, France, Germany, and Brazil (before Bolsanaro was defeated in the election and again subsequent to his trial and imprisonment). He has also shown deference to the dictators in North Korea and Russia, both of whom have played him on the international stage like a fiddle.

An ‘equal station,’ we discover in the document, does not refer to the usual notions of equality of income, well-being, or opportunity. It means all nations should cling to their own cultural traditions and fend off influences from beyond their borders. These ‘influences’ could include participation in organizations such as NATO, designed for mutual defense; the World Trade Organization (WTO) intended to promote economic growth through free and fair trade; the World Court, set up to deal with international criminals, including those involve in war crimes; the Paris Accords, addressing global warming; the Law of the Sea Treaty, which defines the rights and responsibilities of nations in their use of the world’s oceans;

and the World Food Program (WFP) and the United Nations Children's Fund, (UNICEF), devoted to disseminating aid to needy countries to fight hunger, disease, and lack of educational opportunities.

Why would the President care enough to promote such a foreign policy as 'separate and equal station(s)'? One can only surmise that he is afraid of international cooperation, which could strengthen alliances and foster interdependence among other nations resulting in them becoming more formidable international competitors, and, as one commentator put it, the policy of 'America First' becoming a policy of 'America Alone.' Best, he must judge, that all other nations are also 'Alone.'

— Milton H Marquis