

Focus: The Second Trump Administration Swings Into Action (Summary)

Essay: The Launching of the Second Trump Administration

Takuya Sasaki (Senior Specially Appointed Professor, Department of Law and Politics, Rikkyo University)

The second Trump administration has now taken office. While Trump's political base appears to be solid, he barely won the popular vote in last year's presidential election and the Republican Party enjoys only a slim majority in both the House and the Senate. American society has never been more divided than it is now. Nevertheless, Trump's victory has enormous political and social implications as the electoral outcome has demonstrated again a serious distrust of the existing elite class and dissatisfaction with the status quo among many voters. Accordingly, Trump's return to power can essentially be understood as symbolizing a "new normal" for America's politics and democracy. Trump has ushered in a fundamental shift in US foreign policy by seeking to maximize national interests in transactional dealings backed by power and to dismantle the liberal international order. As seen in the Biden administration's trade policy of maintaining the broad framework of the "America First" agenda, Trump's political influence had already become enormous. In just the few weeks since Trump's second inauguration, the United States and the international community have apparently crossed the Rubicon, entering uncharted territory.

1 The Domestic Divide as Seen in the 2024 US Presidential Election and Its Impact on US Foreign Policy

Naoko Funatsu (Research Fellow, The Japan Institute of International Affairs)

The division of American society has manifested itself in political division, now seen as a given in American politics. With no resolution of this political divide anticipated over the short term, this issue is likely to plague American politics over the medium to long term. The winner of the 2024 US presidential election was the candidate who focused on issues that appealed to the independent voters in closely divided states. The issues over which this election was fought – among them economic nationalism, climate change measures, abortion rights, and immigration policy – all divide American public opinion into conservative and liberal camps, with the political opposition between conservatives and liberals rooted in social values. These disputes rooted in social values arise in the context of a debate over which side has the legitimate claim to "American-ness," and compromises are seemingly impossible. Political division has had a significant impact on foreign policy, and the Trump administration is formulating a foreign policy that restrictively defines American national interest and that in part constitutes a backlash against the liberal concept of DEI that the Biden administration had been promoting. If domestic division encourages "America First" diplomacy, the consequences will be reduced US involvement in the international community, leading ultimately to a shake-up in the international order and confusion among the international community.

2 The Second Trump Administration and Congress: Will a Unified Republican Government Lead to Policy Reform?

Satoshi Machidori (Professor of Political Science, Graduate School of Law, Kyoto University)

This paper examines the relationship between the second Trump administration and the US Congress – clarifying the historical development of the US political system and the relationship between the president and Congress under that system as well as the characteristics of the post-2010s era during which “narrow partisan divides amidst polarization” have become the norm – and then considers the feasibility of specific policies advocated by Trump. Although the president has a great deal of influence over the policy process today, Congress remains an entity that cannot be ignored. The second Trump administration began as a unified Republican government, but the close margin between the two major parties in both the House and the Senate has had a significant impact, and the administration has been forced to work hard to maintain unity within the Republican Party. As a result, it is likely that the only policies that will be passed even with a unified government through 2027 will be those that Congressional Republicans can fully unite behind and agree to, meaning that Trump could well end up making surprisingly few policy reforms of a truly unique nature. In fact, policy evolution may slow still further under the divided government that will probably emerge from the 2026 midterm elections.

3 The Second Trump Administration’s Policy Directions: A New Normal Built on “Half the Nation”

Kazuhiro Maeshima (Professor, Sophia University)

This paper discusses the policy directions of the second Trump administration in the United States. Trump has been announcing various policy initiatives since just before his official inauguration on January 20, 2025, and he has been issuing presidential decrees after taking office. The change of administration has led to a major change in the vectors of US domestic and foreign policy. Nevertheless, the results of last year’s presidential and congressional elections make clear that public fragmentation has not abated at all: an approval rating survey conducted immediately after Trump’s inauguration revealed the worst level of division in history. Since Trump will be advancing his policies based on this division, it is quite unclear how they will actually work out.

4 The Second Trump Administration’s Foreign Policy: Immediate Issues and Points of Interest

Satoru Mori (Professor, Faculty of Law, Keio University; Deputy Director, Keio Center for Strategy [KCS])

This article makes a preliminary examination of US trade and defense policies announced in the form of presidential memorandum and executive order within two weeks after the inauguration of the second Trump administration. It mainly considers the implications of these policies and the issues they raise based on information available as of early February 2025. The presidential memorandum titled “America First Trade Policy” reveals that Canada, Mexico, China and other countries could be subjected to additional tariffs on various grounds, including trade imbalances in addition to immigration and fentanyl flows. Existing trade agreements could be reviewed and measures restricting trade are likely to be imposed. These steps would not only have a negative impact on other economies but also lead to the destabilization and contraction of international economic exchange. In the area of defense policy, the new administration has announced its intention to scrap the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) doctrine and move ahead with developing an Iron Dome missile defense system. It remains to be seen how the budget cuts undertaken by the Department of

Government Efficiency led by Elon Musk will affect existing plans for a US defense buildup.

5 The New Administration and Issues in Japan-US Relations

Mieko Nakabayashi (Professor, Center for International Education, Waseda University)

This paper analyzes the current state and prospects of Japan-US relations in the context of significant foreign and domestic policy shifts initiated by the second Trump administration inaugurated in January 2025. Under its “America First” agenda, the administration has departed from traditional multilateralism, calling for increased defense contributions from NATO allies, leveraging tariffs in trade negotiations, and adopting a more confrontational stance toward China. Domestically, it is pursuing the restructuring of federal agencies and substantial reductions in foreign aid, raising concerns about the consequences for the liberal international order. In the security arena, it has welcomed Japan’s enhanced defense posture, and the February Japan-US summit confirmed strengthened bilateral cooperation between the Self-Defense Forces and the US military in Japan’s southwestern region. Uncertainties remain, however, regarding the consistency and durability of these commitments. Meanwhile, bilateral cooperation in economic security — particularly in areas such as AI and semiconductor supply chains — is steadily deepening. Coordinated and strategic engagement by Japan and the United States will also be essential to maintaining regional stability as countries in the Global South, including India and ASEAN member states, embrace independent diplomatic strategies amid escalating US-China rivalry.