



Michel Lipchitz (AP)
Demonstrators hold up a poster of Ayatollah Khomeini on December 10, 1978.

and institutions remain dominated by capitalist principles and Western countries. But the United States and the members of the European Union successfully engage the ‘communist’ China in trade and commerce and investment in mutually beneficial manners. The ‘exchange’ and not the ‘loss’ of sovereignty is a price given for the sake of the other three components of national security---- national security, integrity, and socioeconomic development. In other words, the threat of external domination or a dependent position in a ‘patron-client’ like relation is vastly reduced once the state secures the first three goals of national interest. The historical evidence from the Western powers, including the United States, shows that the road to development is arduous and travels through different stages. The initial phase of a ‘protectionist nation-state building can follow with the second phase of political opening (and democracy) and free trade in the service of national development.

Political leaders must decide on the balance between national security and development goals and the exchange of sovereignty in the ever-changing complex world of nation-states, corporations, financial and legal institutions, and international Intergovernmental and nongovernmental (IGOs and NGOs) organizations.

■ ■ **Former president Trump’s unilateral withdrawal from the JCPOA led to renewed anti-imperialist sentiments in Iran. How warranted and justified do you find such sentiments?**



Chip Somodevilla (Getty)
President Trump formalized his intentions to withdraw from the Iran Deal

The Trump presidency moto was (White) ‘America First,’ and its foreign policy promised ‘no more wasteful wars’. It embraced, in contrast with neoliberals in the Obama and later the Biden administration, a rapprochement with Russia, negotiated with North Korea, defied and punished China for its success in competing with the US, and punished Canada and the European allies through the imposition of tariffs on coal and steel and a host of other products. And, in defiance with all previous US agreements, including the 1967 UNSC resolution 242, it moved the US embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem under the so-called ‘Abrahamic Accord.’ more instrumental in the death of the agreement. Iran’s economic growth bounced back during the two years of the JCPOA but pressure on Iran remained. Yet, the United States remained stead-

fast in its anti-Iran campaign throughout 2016-17, maintaining a military presence in Iran’s neighboring countries while helping with Saudi Arabia, Qatar, the UAE, and Turkey in the Syrian, Libya, and Yemeni theatres.

The Trump administration’s unilateral imposition of the most severe sanctions on Iran extended it to any third party dealing with Iran. The United States imposed its will on other international players with the threat of sanctions and punishment for any entity daring to deal with the Islamic Republic. As a sovereign country, the United States has the right to stop dealing with any country or entity in the international community, or even imposing unilateral sanctions. However, punishing other international actors for a violation of the US laws is nothing short of imposition of ‘extraterritoriality.’

Given the weight of the US hard and soft power, many countries and economic entities decided to abide by the sanctions. There is no doubt that the Trump administration’s withdrawal from JCPOA sounded the imperialism alarm in Tehran. But the Trump administration’s domestic policy also defied the country’s liberal values and tradition. President Trump represented an ‘anomaly’ in the U.S. polity structure and behavior. The Biden administration’s return to the negotiations for a possible return to JCPOA demonstrates the United States’ will for the long-term resolution of Iran’s nuclear issue, in contrast with the narrower vision of the Trump administration’s vision of (white) nationalism.

The U.S. withdrawal from the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) in 2018 was in violation of the UN-supported agreement. It took years of hardworking efforts to reach the agreement. The Trump administration claimed that since the agreement was not a treaty, which would have required the US Senate approval, it was under no obligation to follow an agreement signed by the Obama administration in 2015. The U.S. was one of six major countries involved in the negotiation, the others being France, the UK, the Russian Federation, China, and Germany. The European powers long stood for the rule of international law, exemplified by their push for the creation of the European Union, the World Trade Organization, the International Criminal Court, and a host of other conventions and agreements in the promotion of global cooperation, peace, and human rights.

The EU-3 decision to ignore the gross US violation of international law solidified the perception that US imperialism is at play. The EU-3, obedience to the unlawful will of the United States questioned the EU commitment to its rhetoric about global peace and cooperation and resonating the European historical colonial behavior in the imposition of its will through coercion, albeit with the US command. What proved the death nail to the JCPOA coffin was the reaction of the three European players in the JCPOA. France, the UK, and Germany ashamedly accepted the US position and decided to not only ignore the US gross violation of international law but to surrender their national sovereignty and prestige to the whims of the Trump administration.

■ ■ **Some scholars argue that Big Tech companies, as omnipresent and omniscient (in terms of their power of surveillance) they have become, form a new version of imperialism in our times. To what extent, if any, do you agree with that description?**

It is no secret that multinational corporations (MNCs) are responsible for much of the global production, commerce, investment, finance, and trade. For example, multinational corporations (MNCs) employ less than one percent of the global workforce, but 200 of the largest MNCs have sales equivalent to almost 30% of the world’s GDP, and 1% of them own 50% of the total stock of all foreign

direct investment. In the United States, for example, the top 500 industrial corporations control over two-thirds of the business resources and collect over 70 percent of all US profits, where they represent only one-tenth of one percent of all US companies. The corporate political clout and influence also cannot be ignored. The US Government Accountability Office (GAO) reports that 95 percent of corporations paid less than 5 percent of their income in taxes, and 6 in 10 paid nothing at all in federal taxes from 1996 through 2000. Corporations have long been blamed for global inequality within and among countries and peoples, as they represent capitalism (survival of the fittest) and the interest of their dominant shareholders over the voiceless and politically powerless laborers hired globally at near subsistence wages. Corporations’ control of capital and technology also gives them tremendous political power to manipulate and even control political actors in investment-targeted countries. The dependency and World System theories discuss capitalism and the role of the MNCs in the core-periphery-semi-periphery divide. The neo-Marxist theory also postulates that free trade equals neo-imperialism.

The evidence from world politics paints a more nuanced state of the global political economy. I contend that capitalism, despite its variations in the extent of the private-public ownership and authority designation continuum, is indeed the undercurrent global mode of production. Furthermore, there are nearly two hundred nation-states (193 countries are members of the United Nations) on the world stage competing for resources and power, which is commonly expressed as ‘national interest.’ Furthermore, the state of global relations among States and non-state actors (IGOs and NGOs, Transnational forces) is ever more complex, given the technological innovations and the advent of globalization of trade, investment, finance, transportation, and communication. What to watch for is the role of the state in the complex relations among global actors and forces determining the distribution of wealth and power. Such distribution is not confined to benefit the ‘nationals’ of any particular state or global entity but to reward people across the globe based on their economic class and political power. Therefore, the winners of today’s global system come from different national backgrounds and are in different countries. There are winners and losers in the global system, e.g., laborer vs. business; importers vs. exporters; powerful vs. powerless.

As the world system theory suggests, there is mobility among countries in the core-semi-periphery-periphery divide in the world capitalist system. The state plays a central role in its dealing with the management of national resources and human capital and political organization necessary for effective and ultimately good (effective public-private, and democratic) governance. Globalization, thus, is a double-edged sword, it provides for opportunities and fosters serious challenges to decision-makers for the state and non-state actors. As one study in 2020 suggests, “it is more realistic for the government of a host nation to concentrate its efforts on upgrading existing subsidiaries and also to encourage local manufacturers and producers to become multinationals, so as to reap the fruits of their labor. And also, laws must be put in place so as to discourage corrupt practices, and policies must be put in place to encourage the inflow of FDI and also protect local strategic industries. In principle, stricter sanctions and penalties have the hammering potential to curb corrupt activities. Moreover, it should be noted that each individual nation irrespective of region, language, or culture would require a different mix or combination of policies depending on its institutional and technological profile.”