

Trump's Failures and Their Consequences

特朗普的失败及其后果

SOURCE

Dangerous and New Situations: Fudan International Strategy Report 2020
危局与新局:复旦国际战略报告

Jan. 14, 2021

AUTHOR

Wu Xinbo 吴心伯

Dean of the Institute of International Studies, Fudan University

2020 has been a year of great defeat for Trump. This is not only manifested in his defeat in the presidential election but also in the full culmination of the ill consequences brought about in the United States by his administration. His bad influence will not disappear with Trump's departure.

Failures of Internal Governance

In 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic has had a tremendous impact on the world, and the United States, in particular, has paid a heavy price. As of December 31, the number of deaths in the United States due to the COVID-19 was as high as 340,000, exceeding the loss of U.S. lives during World War II. The United States has the world's most advanced medical technology and the best medical experts, but it has failed in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The most important reason for this is that Trump did not play his due leadership role. His election-first political orientation, a strong anti-intellectual mentality and contempt for professionalism, and an exaggerated and even self-deceiving leadership style have caused the U.S. epidemic to spin out of control, with tremendously catastrophic consequences.

Affected by the out-of-control epidemic, the United States suffered its worst economic depression since the 1930s. The longest economic growth cycle in the history of the United States came to an abrupt end. Tens of millions of people became unemployed, thousands of companies went bankrupt, and the financial circumstances of a large number of low- and middle-income families deteriorated, putting their lives in danger. In response to the pandemic, the Trump administration launched a \$2.3 trillion bail-out, bringing the 2020 fiscal year budget deficit to \$3.13 trillion, equivalent to 15.3 percent of GDP, far exceeding the safe margin of three percent. By the beginning of December 2020, the total national debt will reach \$27.41 trillion, which is equivalent to more than 130 percent of the estimated GDP in 2020, a record high. The U.S. economy has shrunk by about 4 percent in 2020.

In 2020, large-scale protests against racial discrimination and violent policing broke out in the United States. The protests, triggered by the death of George Floyd, a black man, by violent law enforcement, swept across the United States. Serious violent conflicts broke out in many cities, reminding many of the turbulent 1960s. Although racial discrimination in the United States is a systemic disease, the strong racist tendencies exhibited by Trump himself exacerbated racial conflicts in the United States after he took office. The racial conflicts in Charlottesville from the summer of 2017 were a warning, and the widespread Black Lives Matter protests in the summer of 2020 were a much larger a bigger outbreak of the racial conflicts of the United States under Trump.

The Trump administration has brought polarization in the United States to a state of divisive politics. Political polarization is the product of intensified and out-of-control political struggles in the United States in the post-Cold War era. From Clinton to Bush to Obama, political polarization and partisanship have intensified. During the

Trump administration, polarized politics evolved into divisive politics. Trump sees himself as the president of some Americans, not the president of all Americans. He has mainly relied upon political fundamentals to advance his political agenda and has consolidated his political position by dividing rather than uniting citizens. The consequence of divisive politics is to draw completely partisan lines with political antagonism, with no room for cooperation or compromise. This was on full display in the Senate's approval of Justice Barrett. Trump's divisive politics has transformed the "United States of America" into a "Separatist States of America."

Trump challenged the American political system and made American political culture obscene. Trump has a penchant for appointing relatives and cronies. He has attached great importance to the loyalty of his officials, has interfered with the judicial process, has challenged the independence of the Federal Reserve, detests Congressional checks and balances, and hates media oversight. He has severely eroded the system and norms of American politics and has become the third president in U.S. history to be impeached.

Trump's challenge to the results of the 2020 U.S. presidential election has caused unprecedented damage to the U.S. political system. Although the election results showed that the Democratic candidate Biden had won a significant victory, Trump refused to admit defeat on the grounds of election fraud by the Democrats and instructed his supporters to challenge the election through various means—from street protests to judicial proceedings. As a result, the lawsuit initiated by the Attorney General of Texas to challenge the election results of four key states was supported by the attorney generals of 17 other states and 126 Republican congressmen. Clearly, Trump has damaged the political system of the United States. Even when the Electoral College voted to confirm the results of the election, Trump still refused to admit defeat. If that were not enough, Trump is also a habitual liar who is accustomed to perverse attacks on political opponents, and his uncouth words and deeds on the international stage have utterly tarnished American political culture.

Reckless Foreign Policy

In the four years that he has been in power, Trump has set a historical record for the number of U.S. "withdrawals." Driven by the concept of "America First," the Trump administration has adopted a brutal approach to international mechanisms that "do not agree" with this concept. From the Paris Agreement to the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, from the Universal Postal Union to UNESCO, from the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty to the World Health Organization, the Trump administration's unscrupulous withdrawal from one group after another has severely damaged international mechanisms and the international order and has weakened international cooperation in many fields. This is especially so with the withdrawal from the WHO during the COVID-19 pandemic, risking the world's ruin and fully exposing the Trump administration's extremely selfish and intolerant mentality and modus operandi of recklessness and arrogance.

The Trump administration has also severely damaged the alliances of the United States. Brazenly launching a trade war against a group of allies, withdrawing from the Paris Agreement and the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action that European allies attach great importance to, initiating sanctions against German-Russian cooperation on the construction of the Nord Stream 2 oil and gas pipeline project, unilaterally deciding to withdraw U.S. troops from Germany, pressuring Japan and South Korea on the issue of military expenditure sharing—this series of measures has harmed the interests of allies and aroused serious dissatisfaction with Washington. The degree of separation between allies and the United States is almost unprecedented, and this is undoubtedly a major failure of American diplomacy.

The Trump administration's strategic competition with China has shifted to strategic confrontation, bringing China-U.S. relations to its lowest point since the establishment of diplomatic relations. Trump initiated comprehensive and strategic competition with China, provoking the largest trade war in human history. Trump has done everything possible to technologically blockade and suppress China, and the political attack on China is akin to a repeat of the Cold War. The intensity of diplomatic confrontation has never been seen before. The Trump administration's frenzied suppression and containment of China neither blocked China's development nor made the United States greater. He has caused fierce turbulence in relations between major powers, destroyed

the vital cooperation of major powers in international affairs, threatened the security of global production chains, value chains, and supply chains, and trampled on international rules and order, fully exposing the arrogance and madness of American hegemony. This is an extremely disgraceful page in the history of international relations.

In the four years that Trump has been in power, under the slogan of “America First,” he has unscrupulously pursued his own personal interests, regardless of the bottom line, the antagonism, destructiveness, and danger of which have been fully revealed. The United States has shifted from acting as the creator and defender of the existing international order to its greatest disruptor, and its reputation and credibility in the international community have suffered more than ever before. Trump’s huge failure in responding to COVID-19, serious racial and social conflicts, hopeless political polarization and confrontation, unprecedented disputes over the outcome of the general election, and on and on have also riddled with holes the myth of the superiority of American institutions and morals. This is Trump’s failure, and it is also the tragedy of the United States.

Grave Consequences

Trump’s rise to power is a product of the sharpening of American social contradictions and American political dysfunction. Trump’s administration, in turn, intensified political and social contradictions internally and exacerbated the tension between the United States and the international community. Serious governance failures wiped out Trump’s re-election efforts, but the consequences of his administration will not disappear with his departure.

From an internal point of view, Trump won more than 70 million votes in the 2020 election, showing that Trumpism still has a strong appeal and a solid social foundation and will continue to have an important impact on the political and social ecology of the United States. In the future, such forces will attempt to anoint a new Trump-like figure to the throne, as they did in 2016. On the other hand, the forces represented by the Democratic Party will also actively seek to shape the trend of American politics and society, especially by seizing the opportunity of Biden’s administration to advance its policy preferences. In the future, internal competition in the United States will still be fierce, and political and social turmoil may become the new norm for the United States in the medium and long term.

Externally, Trump’s four years of misbehavior have reduced the world’s expectations for the leadership of the United States and confidence in the United States in playing a responsible role in international affairs to a new low not seen since the end of the Cold War. In a multi-polar world, the pace of decentralization is accelerating, and the world needs new forces to promote cooperation and governance. In the next decade, the development of regional and cross-regional cooperation, the further growth of emerging economies and their more active role on the international stage, Europe’s pursuit of “strategic autonomy,” and the creation of new mechanisms of cooperation will accelerate the pace of international political and economic restructuring in the post-hegemony era.

To what extent can the Biden administration heal the trauma wrought by Trump? At home, Biden will seek to alleviate political divisions and racial conflicts. However, the state of polarization is beyond cure, and racial discrimination is a systemic disease. These are hardly expected to change significantly in the short term.

Internationally, Biden will attempt to repair alliances, restore U.S. influence in international institutions, and restore U.S. leadership. However, the world is no longer the world of the past, and the United States is not the United States of the past. No matter how determined Biden may be and no matter how rich his team’s experience in governance may be, in the face of a changed reality, it is hard to escape a sense of powerlessness.

READ RELATED ANALYSIS

<http://opensource.csis.org/features/beijing-narrative-us-decline>.

CITE THIS DOCUMENT

Wu Xinbo, “Trump’s Failures and Their Consequences” [特朗普的失败及其后果], Fudan University International Strategy Report, 2020 edition.