

## In an Unstable World the U.S. Loses

*Sean Randolph – March 19, 2026*

Today's world order is less stable and less secure than any time since World War II. The system we've known for decades, built on security alliances and growing markets, largely kept us safe and prosperous while lifting billions around the world from poverty. No one would say it's perfect — the list of failures is long. But with the U.S. as its designer, guarantor, and chief beneficiary the stability it delivered has fueled the economy and kept our adversaries at bay. Now our isolation is deep and deepening. This is happening not by circumstance but by choice.

Let's start with trade. As the U.S. imposes one-off deals on global partners, those same partners are working to reduce barriers with each other and build new structures that limit their reliance on the United States. The European Union just announced a Latin American trade agreement with Mercosur and another landmark trade agreement with India. The EU and Australia are talking.

Beijing is benefitting. In a recent visit by Canada's Prime Minister Mark Carney the two sides agreed to tariff reductions and Canada opened the door to more imports of Chinese EVs. The message was clear: Canada will be less reliant on the United States. Another Canadian pact is in the works with India. Similar visits by the Presidents of Spain and France, Germany's Chancellor, and the UK's Prime Minister suggest a realignment of interests as the United States indiscriminately bludgeons both friends and foes, disrupting markets and what had been growing agreement on how to respond to Chinese mercantilism. Seeing an opening, Beijing is portraying itself as a defender of trade and stability and as a more reliable partner. Its credibility is questionable and European and other leaders court China at their risk. But opening that door is on us.

Public attitudes also show diminished faith in the U.S. Polling shows that the U.S. has unfavorable ratings in Europe of between 62% and 84%. In a recent German poll only 27% considered relations between the U.S. and Germany to be good, with the perception of the U.S. as a partner dropping sharply: just 38% saw the U.S. as a partner on Ukraine, 31% on dealing with China, 23% on promoting democracy, and 21% on

promoting trade. Even some in Poland, a close friend and ally, are questioning the relationship. Closer to home the number of Canadians flying to the U.S. has dropped 20%, leading airlines to cut flights, and many Canadians are choosing not to buy U.S. products.

After a year in office the President's vision is coming into focus. At the heart of the narrative is power and its exercise. Of course, using power is part of governing and it sits in the background behind diplomacy. In normal times, though, it's a last resort — something that's implicit as nations pursue their interests. What has changed today is that power is at the forefront.

The President has no time for international organizations or multilateral processes. They dilute the unilateral exercise of power. Witness the U.S. withdrawal from the Trans-Pacific Partnership and more recently from the World Health Organization, the Paris Climate Accords, and a swath of other agencies. We discard them at our risk. While messy, they mediate differences, forestall conflicts and advance shared interests. They are, in other words, global civic buffers that support stability.

Why should we be concerned if this lets the U.S. command the center stage? Leaving aside the merits of expanding trade, safeguarding health, addressing climate change, and helping the world's poorest, there's one big problem: this leads to a world that's more unstable. It's also one where, with damaged relationships, the U.S. ends up weaker.

Case in point: we denigrate Europe, threaten to annex Greenland, and attack Iran on our own (Israel of course is a partner), then ask our allies to dig the U.S. out of the hole we've dug when the war closes the Strait of Hormuz. Should we be surprised if they're skeptical?

Presidential adviser Stephen Miller believes there's no "international community", that "international niceties" don't matter, and that we live in world "that is governed by strength, that is governed by force, that is governed by power." Period. There's a kernel of truth there, but in the end he's wrong. Nations and their leaders have for centuries worked to build the institutional "niceties" that mitigate the use of force and raise us above the jungle. Ignoring them returns us to a world of tooth and claw, devoid of values, where might makes right and it's everyone for themselves.

We benefit from alliances and relationships based on shared purpose, which help bring a degree of security and prosperity to the world. In the short term we might win without them, but in the long term our opponents gain and the U.S. loses.

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