

Toward a Nationalist Internationalism: The Case for Building a National Conservative Alliance

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KEY TAKEAWAYS

A coalition of likeminded states—an international nationalist alliance—is both possible and likely to benefit the Trump Administration's reformist agenda.

The Administration needs a strategy that focuses on building this coalition of states and parties to reassert democratic power and national sovereignty.

Such a coalition will have a much better chance of success while Washington retains its position of moral leadership in a freer and more democratic world.

The Trump Administration has launched an ambitious program of domestic reforms focused on reining in out-of-control institutions both inside and outside government. At the same time, it has begun a necessary reformulation of U.S. foreign policy, challenging bureaucratic inertia and stale ideological assumptions about everything from trade to international security in an effort to meet the most pressing global challenges facing the country today. Both of these efforts, foreign and domestic, are intended to bring the U.S. government and a recalcitrant broader establishment into alignment with the real interests of the American nation rather than those of a transnational elite whose globalist dreams have dominated American policy for decades.

This America First policy is a healthy corrective to decades of post-nationalism, both at home and

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abroad. However, there is a real risk that, if mismanaged, America First could be reduced to “America Alone,” leaving both the American nation and the Trump Administration’s reformist political agenda significantly weaker than it could be. This scenario, in which the Administration is left with no substantial network of like-minded international political allies (whether governments or sub-state movements), is highly plausible. It is also entirely unnecessary.

The Trump Administration is waging its domestic political struggles within the larger context of a nearly global democratic-populist revolt of national populations around the world (especially in Europe and Latin America) that are demanding a reassertion of national sovereignty over globalism and seeking to take back control from supranational institutions, unaccountable bureaucrats, and the cultural progressivism advanced by transnational nongovernmental organizations (NGOs). In other words, there already exists a latent network of “national conservative” governments and political movements that face the same challenges and opposing forces as the Administration faces. These potential allies could be united relatively easily by their shared political goals and interests and could benefit significantly from reinforcing each other.

However, lack of consistent strategic attention by the Administration has already led to a number of unforced errors and missed opportunities that may have helped to cost conservative political forces multiple national elections, leaving America further isolated. This could make the Administration’s common-sense national conservative policies appear to be on the losing side of global trends, diminishing popular support and potentially ruining a once-in-a-generation opportunity for truly transformative American leadership through the establishment of a new worldwide political default.

A concerted effort to build a political alliance of national conservative states and democratic movements, on the other hand, could bolster the momentum behind their ideas writ large, shifting the window of international norms and perceptions in a way that legitimizes conservative democratic populism and further secures each of their similar domestic political projects. If they fail to unify, however, each of them (even the United States) is likely to find itself more easily isolated and crushed by the power of a self-consciously international political alliance of the Left that seeks to defend progressive globalist institutions and bureaucratic control collectively across borders.

Linked Domestic and International Challenges

The situations facing the Trump Administration in the domestic and international political spheres are worth outlining in some detail. They are connected, and both can be addressed by the same foreign policy strategy.

Domestically, the Trump Administration's overriding priority can arguably be characterized as the revival of democratic power over oligarchic power. This means facing down the permanent administrative bureaucracies and an activist judiciary, along with a vast complex of NGOs and other institutions such as universities and public-sector unions. Together, these unelected and largely unaccountable institutions have saddled the country with a structurally leftist policymaking and culture-setting apparatus.

Breaking this elite oligarchy's stranglehold on American government and public life was at the heart of the popular mandate delivered to the Administration in the landslide 2024 election. Functionally, that means reasserting (in cooperation with Congress) rightful presidential control of executive branch agencies, purging ideological radicalism from public institutions and reversing their political weaponization, and restoring democratic-national sovereignty, including by regaining control of national borders and immigration law.

The Administration also seeks to reverse the hollowing-out of the American economy, a consequence of decisions made by a leadership class enamored of theories selling globalization, far from genuinely free trade, and mass migration as universal goods without any downsides. That will mean rebalancing trade, labor, energy, and regulatory policies in order to restore America's industrial base and reestablish economic security for the nation's working and middle classes. Like reasserting national sovereignty and taming the bureaucracies, this revitalization is at the heart of the popular political promise of "making America great again."

Internationally, the Administration's goals reflect these domestic priorities. More than merely a matter of abstract economic benefit, reindustrialization is a strategic necessity, given that the United States faces a rising China that currently possesses a tremendous advantage in manufacturing capacity, which is fundamental to military power. Military and economic strength are intimately connected, and both will need to be revitalized in order to meet growing competition from China, protect national sovereignty, and restore the "peace through strength" provided by hard deterrence and global respect for American might.

However, after having been squandered by decades of mismanagement by Washington elites, American power is not what it once was. The United

States must adapt to today's realities, including to its own limitations. That means conserving American power by avoiding overreach, resisting pressure to engage in foreign intervention when and where vital American interests are not at stake and focusing instead on "nation-building" at home, and reasserting America's interest in a secure, stable, and prosperous Western Hemisphere.

At the same time, the Administration is keen to refocus American attention and assets on Asia in order to counter the threat from China, the only other power that is currently capable of genuinely challenging the United States on the global stage. As Secretary of Defense Pete Hegseth recently put it in Manila, the Trump Administration's explicit goal "is to truly prioritize and shift to this region of the world in a way that is unprecedented."¹ This will take more than rebalancing regional priorities, however; it will require pushing U.S. allies to do more to pull their own weight, especially in regions like Europe and the Middle East where Washington aims to free defense capacity.

These domestic and international challenges are interlinked. In both spheres, the national conservative reforms the Administration aims to achieve are opposed by the same international network of globalist-Left political, legal, and institutional structures (both state and non-state). These include political parties, international courts and forums, NGOs and activist groups, think tanks, philanthropic donors and foundations, media propaganda outlets, and digital "fact-checking," "anti-misinformation," and "anti-hate" organizations that target and lobby for the censorship of political opponents. In many cases, these organizations work hand-in-glove with politically friendly governments, including aid agencies and intelligence services, with many allegedly nongovernmental institutions functionally serving as cutouts for state influence.²

This transnational institutional network helps to agitate for and implement the globalist Left's shared ideological priorities across borders. On migration, for instance, networks of well-funded "humanitarian," legal aid, "immigrant services," and advocacy NGOs encourage and facilitate the trafficking of migrants in addition to exploiting lawfare and manipulating bureaucratic proceduralism to hinder the deportation of illegal aliens.³ Such activity is mutually beneficial to the wide range of stakeholders involved, including leftist political parties, NGOs seeking funding, certain wealthy donors and corporate interests, and even foreign states and criminal organizations, serving to bind them together in shared purpose.

The primary function of this transnational network, however, is to help contain populist opposition forces and maintain the establishment Left's

power. Nowhere is this more obvious than in the example of censorship and information manipulation. Here, the output of allegedly independent academics, think tanks, and NGOs (such as the U.K.-based Center for Countering Digital Hate, an affiliate of the British Labour Party) is routinely used to justify efforts by governments and international bodies around the world to silence populist and conservative voices, cover up the consequences of establishment-Left policies on issues like migration, and carefully shape global norms and perceptions. These efforts then inform national and regional internet regulations that (because the internet is a global information space) effectively aim to censor information worldwide.⁴

As Vice President J.D. Vance pointed out to British Prime Minister Keir Starmer, infringements on free speech in a country like Britain “actually affect not just the British but also...American technology companies and by extension American citizens.” In truth, censorship regulations function as potent transnational political weapons.⁵ It is for this reason that U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio recently announced a visa sanctions policy to target “foreign officials and persons who are complicit in censoring Americans,” noting that free speech is “a birthright over which foreign governments have no authority.”⁶ Far more remains to be done on this front before such censorship networks can be dismantled, however. This includes defeating major threats like the European Union’s Digital Services Act, which effectively claims to exercise global legal authority over online speech.⁷

The Left’s international coordination also serves as a powerful propaganda weapon in its own right. International press outlets can turn to a wide array of in-network institutions as preferred sources of ready-made opinion and vice-versa, creating a self-reinforcing feedback loop of ideological validation. This enables the Left to lock populist and nationalist conservatives into a global narrative in which they are permanent outsiders and dangerous norm-breakers, diminishing their electoral viability and justifying their political persecution.

The effort to contain populists increasingly extends to mutual support for radical lawfare and the prosecution of political opposition. In France, for example, leading opposition candidate Marine Le Pen has been banned from standing for election in 2027, and courts in Romania canceled an election to prevent poll-leading populist Călin Georgescu from winning, alleging—but failing to provide evidence of—Russian interference. Georgescu was subsequently arrested and barred from running again. This allowed a leftist candidate to prevail in a rerun election. Most infamously, of course, British elites coordinated with American Democratic Party politicians to fabricate

the “Russiagate” conspiracy in an attempt to overthrow the first Trump Administration and then prosecute and imprison the President.⁸

While ostensibly local to each nation, all of these political developments were enabled and supported by leftist internationalism. In each case, international context (such as foreign interference) was employed as a key justification for action, and in each case, leftist NGOs served as sources of what could be portrayed as independent information and analysis, reinforced narratives funneled to the press, instigated legal action, and agitated for government intervention. For example, it was a leftist Romanian NGO, the Association for Technology and Internet, part of an international network of nearly 50 pro-censorship NGOs, that helped to instigate the overturning of the Romanian election by circulating an open letter claiming that the election violated the EU’s Digital Services Act and calling on authorities to intervene.⁹

Such cases also highlight the likely extent of direct coordination and intelligence sharing between leftist governments as well as aligned NGOs. At least in the Romanian case, European officials openly indicated that they had a direct hand in instigating the lawfare scheme and planned to take similar action elsewhere: Former European Commissioner Thierry Breton, for example, boasted that “[w]e did it in Romania, and we will obviously have to do it in Germany, if necessary” (referring obliquely to Germany’s February 2025 elections, in which right-wing populists were polling strongly at the time).¹⁰ This would hardly have been the first instance of the EU and left-wing European states interfering in national politics in order to subvert or remove conservative governments. In Poland, for instance, the EU leveraged a freeze of funds, citing alleged “rule of law” concerns, in order to undermine the incumbent conservative Law and Justice Party in elections and then immediately released those funds to the subsequently elected center-Left government. The new Polish authorities then undertook an aggressive campaign of lawfare against the opposition, including the arrest of political figures and takeover of media institutions.¹¹ Hungary, with its conservative government, faces very similar pressures as do others outside the EU, such as Israel.

As the U.S. State Department recently observed in a paper on “The need for Civilizational Allies in Europe,” this kind of “democratic backsliding not only impacts European citizens but increasingly affects American security and economic ties, along with the free speech rights of American citizens and companies.”¹² All of the above examples reflect a broader transnational campaign by the global establishment Left against populist and nationalist political parties and figures who are seen as a shared threat to the

entrenched control of technocratic progressive regimes and the prevailing liberal-internationalist world order. Facing a growing challenge to their political dominance, leftist states, parties, and institutions around the world have reacted by drawing together more tightly and advancing increasingly antidemocratic measures.

Unfortunately, the globalist Left has a significant advantage over the national democratic Right precisely because, by its historical nature, the Left is intentionally and intensely international (or rather post-national). Its ambitions and action are global in scope, and it possesses a tradition and practice of transnational solidarity that is key to its method of wielding power. In contrast, conservative governments have a natural tendency to focus on their own homelands' national sovereignty and affairs and to eschew significant international cooperation.

This is a mistake: Left-wing politics will always attempt to leverage international cooperation and transnational networks to isolate and undermine political enemies, including the United States under the Trump Administration. To allow this advantage to continue unchecked would be to permit the multiplication of the forces that can be brought to bear to impede the Administration's domestic and foreign policy agenda, thereby putting America's interests, values, and national sovereignty at risk. If the Administration wants to achieve lasting change toward national conservative ends, it will have to combat the Left's *global* institutional advantages and narrative inertia, not just domestic political rivals. Most important, it will need to break the globalist Left's power over what is considered normative. That will require demonstrating that national conservative states are normal, numerous, and not going anywhere.

Breaking the Normative Stranglehold

There is strength in numbers and solidarity. Having a network of international political allies obviously provides for greater diplomatic lobbying power and room for maneuver as well as significantly more resilience in responding to political and ideological attack. A robust grouping, for example, could coordinate joint responses to leftist lawfare, ideological and economic bullying from supranational organizations like the European Union, and other forms of antidemocratic suppression and coercion. If collectively strong enough, it could even serve as an effective deterrent and prevent such behavior.

A strong international grouping also stands to be far more able to combat the transnational networks of NGOs, foundations, and other institutions

that serve so effectively to advance the projects of the globalist Left. Because these organizations are international, effective constraint of their malign activities requires an international response; otherwise, one of the international Left's key tools for coordinating subversive ideological and antidemocratic activities would be allowed to continue its operations unimpeded and unmatched. That includes progressive cultural campaigns effectively "astroturfed" by transnational activist NGOs and their opaque donor networks (which may include foreign actors such as China).¹³

Most important, assembling an international political alliance is a necessary step toward the effective reshaping of international political, cultural, and legal norms. This is a critical task, and its importance should not be underestimated. The international Left has maintained a firm lock on the setting of global norms and perceptions for decades, leveraging its domination of narrative-shaping institutions like the United Nations, international courts and law schools, global media, human rights and "democracy-promotion" NGOs, and key funding bodies like the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) to exile dissenting nations and political parties from global polite society by defining them as abnormal, backwards, and dangerous, thereby inducing others to refrain from close cooperation with them lest they be tainted by association. This method, which serves to isolate the Left's political enemies and render them easier to suppress, has been used most frequently on smaller states like Hungary and Israel but today extends even to portraying the United States as an isolated rogue state trampling global norms.

This normative stranglehold can and must be broken. Even a relatively small international grouping of aligned nations, when led by the United States, would be capable of moving the global "Overton window" and redefining perceptions of what is considered possible and normal.¹⁴ On an array of issues plagued by carefully constructed taboos, such as the enforcement of immigration controls, this has the power to trigger preference cascades in which what once was taken to be unthinkable or impossible suddenly becomes the new normal. To achieve this would be to break the most important political advantage of the globalist Left: the carefully cultivated idea that there is no practical or moral alternative to their status quo. From there—once nations around the world knew they would not be cast out from the club of developed, forward-thinking states if they failed to toe the old party line—support for common-sense alternatives would be free to snowball.

For nationalist, populist, and conservative-minded states and parties, the tangible advantages of working together are manifold. It is unfortunate,

then, that such solidarity remains almost nonexistent largely because Washington has yet to make it a priority. Instead, the situation has grown increasingly tenuous. In Canada, a massive electoral polling lead for the Conservative Party in April 2025 elections—in which the Conservatives appeared poised to end more than a decade of rule by the radical-Left Liberal Party—evaporated at the last minute, leading to a Conservative defeat.¹⁵ This ended a chance to flip a crucial potential political partner in the Western Hemisphere. In Australian elections in May, the incumbent Labor Party government reversed record-low popularity to defeat a national conservative coalition. And in Romania's rerun election, a conservative nationalist lost out to a progressive globalist.¹⁶

In all of these elections, each of which was close-run in outcome, a more disciplined and strategic approach to messaging by the Trump Administration might have been changed the outcome. In Canada, undisciplined remarks from the Administration about annexation aided the left-wing incumbent.¹⁷ In Australia, lack of reassurance on the Administration's trade policy helped to undercut the political Right's economic arguments.¹⁸ And in Romania, opposition campaigners expressed frustration that the Administration held their campaign at arm's length, declining photo opportunities and other messaging that could have eased their isolation relative to the EU-backed candidate.¹⁹ By contrast, the more recent victory of populist-conservative Karol Nawrocki in Polish presidential elections appears to have been aided by the Trump Administration's strong support, which included a public endorsement.²⁰

Elsewhere, other conservative and nationalist parties also fear that on the current haphazard course they may stand to lose rather than gain from the new Administration in Washington. Hungary's conservative government, for instance, made a massive political bet on the reelection of President Trump, vocally supporting him and his proposed policies (such as on the war in Ukraine) despite consistent media outrage, lawfare, and economic punishment from Brussels and the international Left. Now conservative political elites in Budapest report deep concern that if no diplomatic and economic benefits from Washington materialize in exchange for this early loyalty before the country's next election the gamble could prove politically disastrous, potentially delivering a nation that has been one of Trump's most consistent political allies in Europe into the hands of their mutual enemies.²¹

Meanwhile, liberal-technocratic regimes like those of France, Germany, and the European Union as a whole appear to have been emboldened to target populist-nationalist parties and states with increasingly antidemocratic measures, including lawfare, political censorship, banning of

opposition parties, and cancelling of elections. If action is not taken to deter them from pursuing such actions, the Trump Administration could soon face a world with far fewer viable political allies. Some national sovereignty-minded states and parties may also increasingly choose to turn to China and Russia for support should they find none forthcoming from Washington. This would be disastrous.

None of this is to argue that it would necessarily have been ideal in every respect for American interests if any one of the above elections had gone the other way or that Washington ought explicitly to intervene in such electoral politics; it is simply to point out that the Administration exercises global political influence whether it chooses to wield it strategically or not.

If the Trump Administration wants to achieve its agenda, including restoring norms of democratic-national sovereignty and secure borders, defeating the global forces of progressive cultural revolution, inducing greater realism about military and economic affairs, and successfully taking on China, it would benefit significantly from explicitly aligning its foreign policy with these objectives by working to cultivate international political alliances, reward loyal foreign supporters, build worldwide momentum behind its key ideas, and reshape global norms in its favor. In other words, it should adopt a policy that could be described as nationalist internationalism.

Toward a Nationalist Internationalism

The prevailing global liberal order is no longer an appropriate vehicle either for securing America's national interests on the world stage today or for achieving the goals that the Trump Administration seeks on the home front. It corrodes the United States economically, overextends American military power, advantages China, facilitates decadence and freeriding by allies, and helps to promote an ideology of globalist progressivism that destabilizes societies, dissolves borders, degrades national sovereignty, and undermines democracy in favor of entrenched rule by a technocratic elite. The reality is that "the global liberal project is not enabling the flourishing of democracy. Rather, it is trampling democracy, and Western heritage along with it, in the name of a decadent governing class afraid of its own people."²²

What is needed is a new foundation on which to build an alternative international framework that is more favorable to a strategy of putting the American Republic first—one that dispenses with naïve globalism and champions the nation-state while maintaining peace and advancing prosperity. The United States neither can nor must build this new framework alone, however; around the world, many other nations and political parties

are also increasingly dissatisfied with the status quo and would welcome a chance to join Washington in such a project. The Trump Administration need not go it alone.

The United States currently has the strategic opportunity to build an international nationalist political alliance. This alliance can serve as a platform for nations collectively to push back against supranational and transnational interference in their political and cultural affairs, deter lawfare and censorship, resist infringements on national sovereignty, and begin to dismantle the antidemocratic influence of the globalist Left and its institutions. It would allow for alignment and coordination on shared interests, including containing and reversing illegal migration, promoting law and order, conserving traditional culture, and encouraging economic, demographic, and civilizational revitalization. And it would functionally unite the political Right into a global force, ending the isolation of conservative, nationalist, and populist states and parties and building lasting legitimacy and momentum for the core ideas and ideals of the Trump Administration (as well as millions of people around the world). Ultimately, such an alliance can form the foundation for a new 21st century international structure that is more advantageous and sustainable for the United States and fellow democratic nations.

This U.S.-led political alliance could unite around the following principles:

- The sovereignty of the nation-state;
- The freedom and duty of nations to defend themselves and secure their own borders;
- The freedom of nations to determine and enforce their own laws democratically;
- The freedom of national populations, as represented by democratic majorities, to determine their own governance and national future;
- The freedom of nations to determine and conserve their own culture, demography, and national identity as they see fit;
- The freedom of national populations to give voice to injustices and hold governing authorities and institutions accountable to the democratic will;

- The freedom of popular political parties, candidates, and voters from deliberate censorship, suppression, and exclusion from governance or the democratic process; and
- The freedom of nations from supranational and transnational coercion, pressure, and interference.

Whatever specific form this alliance takes, in serving to bring together and legitimize the government and agendas of conservative and nationalist-populist states, its very existence would begin to shift international political norms and forge a path forward for national conservatism globally.

Moreover, such an alliance would have the opportunity to facilitate the construction of a resilient international network of connections that extends beyond national governments to include cooperative links between conservative political parties, think tanks, NGOs, and philanthropic donors. The very existence of such a network (currently lacking) would help to make national conservative political trends far more resilient, bolstering conservative governments and aiding the comeback of conservative parties in the event of losses. The Trump Administration therefore ought to take the lead in building such a network, including by potentially reorienting and repurposing existing tools such as U.S. embassy activities and organizations like the International Republican Institute.

As an example, partners could share information on the activities of NGOs that undermine national sovereignty and advance the Left's ideology, including by collaborating to track and collate data on NGO financing streams. Recent work by the Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE), particularly in its tracing of USAID funding, has revealed that artificial intelligence and other digital tools provide an unprecedented opportunity to uncover and combat the Left's transnational patronage and influence networks. This is urgently needed, given the scale of such activity; for instance, a recent report utilizing novel analysis found that the European Union has quietly spent some €650 million to finance a network of at least 349 NGOs and academic projects with a mission to censor and undermine populists and conservatives globally.²³ International cooperation between aligned states, including the sharing of otherwise inaccessible data and, if necessary, joint legal action, would make it much easier to combat this kind of transnational information warfare and malign influence.

For national conservatives around the world, including the Trump Administration, the best thing they could do to solidify their political future

would be to make their political ideals a movement with global moral, cultural, institutional, and diplomatic weight. Only then will they be able to defuse the globalist Left's most important advantage.

Conclusion: Forging a New Path

The Administration's common-sense policy of "America First" does not mean that the United States either needs to or should go it alone. Building a coalition of likeminded states—an international nationalist alliance—is both possible and likely to benefit the Trump Administration's reformist agenda.

An overly self-absorbed strategy faces a number of weaknesses, the most crucial of which is that it risks allowing the internationalist Left, which has dominated global norms for decades, to isolate and undermine any state that attempts to chart its own course. Countries face significant incentives to toe the line; any alternative to this coercive globalist order must therefore be equally advantageous for countries to join—or at least help to negate the Left's most common weapons of compliance. An international coalition of conservative, nationalist, and populist states has the potential to do exactly that, weakening the globalist Left's hegemony by breaking its ability to isolate and manipulate a growing multitude of dissenting states and parties, decisively shifting international norms in favor of democratic national sovereignty, and liberating each member to pursue its own interests—including the Administration's own battle with America's entrenched managerial state and the Left's transnational network of institutions that support it.

The fact that the Trump Administration rightly seeks to adopt a more pragmatic and realist foreign policy does not mean that it can afford to ignore the realities of today's highly ideological international politics. The Administration may not be as interested in ideological policymaking as the globalist Left is, but the globalist Left's political ideologues *are* interested in it. To defeat the Left's international networks and free the United States to pursue its national interests, the Administration will have to adopt a self-consciously political strategy, both at home and abroad, that seeks to establish a new political normal by building solidarity with like-minded states and parties that can help to reinforce the changes Washington would like to see in world politics, including the reassertion of democratic power and national sovereignty.

This does not mean that Washington must or should violate its own principles by attempting to dictate how other nations ought to run their own affairs; on the contrary, it simply means allowing the basic principle of democratic national sovereignty to serve as the basis for cooperation

between those with an interest in freeing themselves from the straitjacket of the globalist Left's normative order. Together, such a coalition will have a much better chance of success while Washington retains its position of moral leadership in this new, freer, and more democratic world.

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