



By: [Chris Patten](#)

# Is Trump dragging the divided West into another war in the Middle East?



Over the centuries, “the West” has come to represent much more than a geographic region. It now embodies the enduring legacy of ancient Greece and the Roman Empire, the cultural achievements of the European Renaissance, the evolution of political philosophy, and the spirit of exploration and discovery.

Since the end of World War II, however, the term has taken a more explicitly geopolitical and security-oriented meaning. From the mid-1940s until the fall of the Berlin Wall, Europe and its allies often defined themselves not only by their shared ideals but also by their opposition to the Soviet Union.

US President Donald Trump, in one of his many inane remarks about history and global affairs, **claimed** that the European Union was established to “screw” the United States. In fact, the opposite is true.

After 1945, Europeans were eager for America to remain actively involved rather than turn inward, as it had after World War I. Left to their own devices, European countries risked drifting into yet another conflict, potentially forcing the US to intervene again to restore peace.

To prevent that, European leaders urged the US to maintain its presence on the continent as a bulwark against the growing threat of Soviet communism.

In response, the US encouraged Europe to pursue greater economic and political integration, leading to the establishment of the European Coal and Steel Community and, eventually, the European Common Market.

Both were seen by the US as essential to ensuring long-term peace and prosperity among its transatlantic allies and preventing the continent from impoverishing itself through trade wars and protectionist policies.

## The US has abandoned the leadership role

In 1949, NATO was established to defend Europe against Soviet expansionism. Together, the US and an increasingly integrated Europe laid the foundation for what we now call “the West” – a group of countries bound by democratic values and a strong commitment to multilateral cooperation.

The postwar order was underpinned by America’s status as the world’s leading economic and military power.

As the Soviet Union collapsed – largely due to Western unity and resolve – former communist states transformed into market-oriented democracies, with relatively little violence apart from the tragic wars in the Balkans.

**Trump continues to dismantle the international order by undermining institutions and values that he neither understands nor respects**

But regrettably, the US has abandoned the leadership role it naturally assumed during the postwar era, as Trump continues to dismantle the international order by undermining institutions and values that he neither understands nor respects.

Since returning to the White House, Trump has shown even less regard for democratic norms and the rule of law than he did during his first term.

His recent actions call to mind Vice President J.D. Vance’s **description** of Trump as “America’s Hitler” (before he seized the opportunity to ride Trump’s coattails to the US Senate and, ultimately, the vice presidency).

While I would not use such strong language, Trump is undoubtedly an authoritarian and a corrupt bully. Like a medieval monarch, he appears to believe that everything is his to claim simply because he wants it.

## Trump doesn't care for the liberal democratic order

Given his authoritarian tendencies, it is hardly surprising that Trump doesn't care for the liberal democratic order. In his view, other leaders are there to be instructed, not consulted.

Any hint of disagreement is likely to provoke retaliatory economic measures, often in the form of tariffs on their exports to the US.

The recent G7 **meeting** is a prime example. The group of the world's leading industrialized countries once had an eighth member: Russia. But after Russian President Vladimir Putin's regime illegally annexed Crimea in 2014, the group's other members rightly **expelled** it, turning the G8 back into the G7.

### Trump continued to blame Ukraine for being invaded

Yet despite Putin's ongoing war in Ukraine, Trump opened the summit in Canada by **calling** for Russia to be readmitted.

Much like his Oval Office **confrontation** with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky in February, Trump continued to blame Ukraine for being invaded.

Russia's record of unprovoked aggression appears to matter little to him. Once again, he gave the clear impression of being in Putin's pocket.

## America's allies must confront a sobering reality

Today, it is difficult to identify any values that most liberal democratic leaders still share with Trump. As a result, America's allies must confront a sobering reality: the US – once the undisputed leader of the free world – is no longer a reliable partner.

While it was once widely believed that powerful countries had a responsibility to consider the interests of weaker ones, Trump views the world differently. In his eyes, America's strength gives it the right to act as it pleases, and other countries should simply accept the consequences.



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This mindset helps explain Trump's decision to bomb Iran's nuclear sites rather than use diplomacy to persuade the Islamic Republic to abandon its nuclear ambitions.

But while Trump has **celebrated** the outcome of his “very successful attack,” Western unity and cooperation are far more likely to encourage Iran to play a more constructive and peaceful international role.

To be sure, Iran's dangerous and repressive regime is, at least in part, the result of serious mistakes Western countries have made in dealing with the country over the past 70 years. The most notable example, of course, is the US-backed overthrow of its first democratically elected government in 1953.

The question now is whether Trump's decision to bomb Iran has compounded these errors and dragged an already divided West into yet another bloody war in the Middle East.

If so, it hardly inspires confidence that global stability and the international order are in the hands of a dangerously unstable leader.

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