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Research 1

Donald Trump and the Use of Machiavelli's Principle in Foreign Policy: An Analysis of Power Strategies and Pragmatism

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Introduction:

The foreign policy of great powers has always been a fertile field for analyzing the strategies pursued by leaders in managing international relations, especially when these policies are characterized by sharp pragmatism and a realist approach based on power and interest.

Donald Trump's political approach, often described as practical and pragmatic, has long been likened to various historical and philosophical frameworks. However, a deeper analysis reveals that his ideology closely aligns with the principles of Niccolò Machiavelli, the 16th-century Italian philosopher. Known for his pioneering works "The Prince" and "Lectures on Levi". Machiavelli's political philosophy remains infamous for its unjustified embrace of power as an end in itself, disregarding moral considerations. By focusing exclusively on gaining and maintaining power, Machiavelli provides a perspective through which to understand Trump's "America First" doctrine and political tactics.

This research aims to analyze Donald Trump's foreign policy from a Machiavellian perspective, by understanding and analyzing how he employs principles such as force, political cunning, and manipulation of opponents to achieve U.S. goals.

The study seeks to provide insight into the extent to which Machiavellian thought is deeply ingrained in Trump's foreign policy, and whether this approach has led to diplomatic successes or isolated the United States from its traditional partners.

The importance of this research stems from the fact that it sheds light on one of the most prominent transformations in American foreign policy in the modern era, and places it within a philosophical framework through which the dynamics of power and influence pursued by Trump during his term in office (2017-2021) can be understood. This includes the possibility of predicting the broad outlines that will govern his foreign policy during his current presidential term.

Search divisions:

The research will be divided into three sections, each of which will include two requirements, as follows:

Chapter One: Machiavelli's Theoretical Foundations and Their Impact on Trump's Policy

- **The first requirement:** The concept of Machiavellian thought and its basic principles
- **The second requirement:** Pragmatism and political realism as the basis of Trump's policy

Chapter Two: Practical Applications of Machiavellian Thought in Trump's Foreign Policy

- **The first requirement:** dealing with opponents according to the principle of threat and negotiation
- **The second demand:** withdrawing from the Iranian nuclear agreement and the maximum pressure strategy.

Section Three: Predicting Donald Trump's Foreign Policy During His Current Presidential Term

- **The first requirement:** relations with major powers
- **The second requirement:** Policy towards the Middle East.

Chapter One

Machiavelli's Theoretical Foundations and Their Impact on Trump's Policy

Machiavelli's *The Prince* is a guide for rulers on how to attain and retain power, emphasizing political realism rather than idealism. Machiavelli's main argument is that the effective exercise of power requires pragmatism, adaptability, and often ruthlessness. While traditional political and philosophical theories of the time were based on moral or religious frameworks, Machiavelli deliberately excluded moral considerations from the political decision-making process. In his famous statement, he declared that rulers must be prepared to act immorally if it serves the interests of the state, arguing that "the end justifies the means".

First requirement:

The concept of Machiavellian thought and its basic principles:

Niccolo Machiavelli (870–934 AH/1469–1527 AD) is considered one of the most famous political thinkers known to modern times. His fame is due primarily to his adoption of a different approach than that which was prevalent in political writings in the Middle Ages and earlier. His fundamental point of difference is that he was the first European thinker to raise, in an unambiguous and clear manner, the issue of the separation between politics and morality. Machiavelli devoted most of his writings to producing a new concept of politics as a positive science separate from religion and morality. He was simply inclined to rid politics of any external consideration and to make it an independent science in its own right. Therefore, Machiavelli is considered the father of modern political thought, having had an incredibly profound influence on modern Western civilization. Many political thinkers believe that Machiavelli played an important role in the development of thought, as he established a new approach to politics, with ideas that heralded attempts to transcend religious thought. This turning point in transcending religious authority that was prevalent in European political thought in the Middle Ages was followed by other more serious transformations by Voltaire, Montesquieu, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, and other liberal Enlightenment thinkers.

This is why Machiavelli is considered an important turning point in the history of political thought. Below we review the basic principles of his thought:

- The basic principles of Machiavelli's thought:

The end justifies the means: This principle is considered one of Machiavelli's most prominent ideas. He believes that the ruler must strive to achieve his goals and maintain his power by any means necessary, even if these means are immoral.

- **Separating politics from morality:** Machiavelli called for dealing with politics as a science independent of morality and religion. Stressing the need to make decisions based on reality and interest, rather than morality.

- **Using religion as a political tool:** Machiavelli believed that religion could be an effective means of uniting the people and strengthening the ruler's authority, and not an end in itself.

The importance of history and practical experience: Machiavelli emphasized the necessity for rulers to benefit from the lessons of history and past experiences in making political decisions, believing that events recur and that learning from the past helps in understanding the present and planning for the future.

Second requirement:

Pragmatism and political realism as the basis of Trump's policy

Machiavellianism, pragmatism, and political realism are overlapping concepts in the field of political thought, but each has unique characteristics and principles:

Machiavellianism:

Definition: Derived from the ideas of Niccolò Machiavelli, particularly in his book *The Prince*, it focuses on using any means necessary to achieve political goals, regardless of moral considerations.

- The basic principle: “The end justifies the means,” meaning that achieving the goal justifies the use of any means, even if unethical.
- Traits: Emphasis on force, deception, and cunning as tools for maintaining and expanding power.

Pragmatism:

- Definition: A philosophy that focuses on results and process, where the validity of an idea or policy is linked to its practical success.
- The basic principle: “Knowledge is measured by its practical results,” meaning that ideas are evaluated based on their effectiveness in practical application.
- Traits: Flexibility, focus on practical solutions, and avoiding adherence to theoretical principles if they hinder achieving the desired results.

Political realism:

- Definition: A theory of international relations that focuses on the concept of power and national interest as decisive factors in international politics.
- The basic principle: “Politics is about power and interest,” where states are seen as actors pursuing their national interests in an anarchic international system.
- Features: Emphasis on the importance of military and economic power, recognition of the selfish nature of states, and expectation of conflict as a natural part of international relations.
- Donald Trump's policies can be considered a blend of political realism, pragmatism, and Machiavellianism, as reflected in the practices and approaches he has adopted during his presidency. Here's an explanation of how each of these philosophies is embodied in his policies:

Political realism:

- Focus on national interests: Trump has adopted the slogan “America First,” reflecting his focus on promoting American national interests in his domestic and foreign policies.
- Dealing with major powers: Trump has pursued pragmatic policies toward countries like Russia and China, seeking to achieve balances that serve American interests without focusing on ideologies.

Pragmatism:

- Focus on practical results: Trump's policies focused on achieving tangible results, such as improving the economy and reducing unemployment rates, regardless of the means used.
- Flexibility in Negotiation: Trump has demonstrated a willingness to negotiate with various parties, even traditional adversaries, if it benefits the United States.

Machiavellianism:

- Using unconventional means: Trump has not hesitated to use controversial means, such as imposing severe economic sanctions or withdrawing from international agreements, to achieve his political goals.
- Ignoring ethical considerations: At times, Trump's policies have seemed to ignore traditional ethical standards, focusing on achieving goals by any means possible.
- Ignoring ethical considerations: At times, Trump's policies have seemed to ignore traditional ethical standards, focusing on achieving goals by any means possible
- This combination of the three philosophies reflects a political approach focused on achieving American national interests in practical and effective ways, with a willingness to use unconventional means and ignore some traditional moral considerations when necessary.

Chapter Two

Practical Applications of Machiavellian Thought in Trump's Foreign Policy

Donald Trump's application of principles is evident in his domestic and foreign policies. By prioritizing results over morality, Trump echoes Niccolò Machiavelli's advice to rulers: Focus on achieving practical results and consolidating power, even if it means undermining traditional norms, institutions, or values.

Trump's foreign policy decisions embody Machiavelli's argument that a leader's primary obligation is to secure the state's power and interests, regardless of moral considerations or international criticism.

First requirement:

dealing with opponents according to the principle of threat and negotiation

Machiavelli wrote in his book "The Prince" that alliances should only remain as long as they serve the interests of the ruler. Trump's approach to long-standing alliances, such as NATO, reflects this principle. His request for member states to increase their financial contributions to the organization was not formulated as a moral obligation to collective security, but rather as a contractual arrangement: The United States will not fulfill its obligations unless others pay what it considers their fair share.

Likewise, Trump's withdrawal from the Paris climate agreement in 2017 confirmed his prioritization of national economic interests over his global environmental responsibilities.

While many world leaders viewed the agreement as a moral imperative to combat climate change, Trump portrayed it as a deal that harmed the American economy. His decision reflected Machiavelli's advice that rulers should be prepared to sacrifice moral considerations when they conflict with the interests of the state. Trump's negotiations with foreign leaders, especially authoritarian figures such as North Korea's Kim Jong Un and Russia's Vladimir Putin, reveal a similar willingness to break with traditional diplomatic norms. For example, his summit with Kim focused on showcasing negotiations at the expense of tangible results, allowing Trump to project power and control without securing substantive commitments to denuclearization. By engaging with authoritarian leaders and ignoring human rights concerns, Trump has demonstrated Machiavellian pragmatism: He prioritized short-term geopolitical gains and the appearance of strength over moral consistency. This approach earned him criticism from his traditional allies, but it strengthened his reputation among his supporters as a leader who puts "America First".

Machiavelli believed that a ruler must control public opinion and maintain his strong grip on power through deliberate actions. Trump's domestic policies and political strategies reflect these principles, often undermining traditional democratic norms to achieve his goals.

The second demand:

withdrawing from the Iranian nuclear agreement and the maximum pressure strategy.

On May 8, 2018, US President Donald Trump announced the United States' withdrawal from the Iran nuclear agreement and the reimposition of economic sanctions on Iran. The agreement lifted some sanctions on Tehran in exchange for its commitment not to possess nuclear weapons. After the United States announced 12 more stringent conditions for reaching a new agreement, it reimposed them in August of the same year and then in November, Harsh economic sanctions, particularly on the oil and financial sectors, have forced major international companies to end their activities or projects in Iran. Trump decided to end, as of May 2019, Exemptions that allowed eight countries to purchase Iranian oil without exposing themselves to US sanctions. Trump stated at the time that the main reasons for his withdrawal from this agreement were:

- The Iranian regime's export of violence, terrorism, and chaos, confirming the existence of evidence that Iran is developing ballistic missiles and deploying them throughout the Middle East.
- He considers the Iranian regime to be the largest sponsor of terrorism and a fomenter of conflict in the region, and that this Iranian regime must not be allowed to possess nuclear weapons.
- The agreement was described as biased, enabling Iran to continue on its path to a nuclear bomb and giving the Iranian regime a financial lifeline.
- Iran is exploiting the agreement to support terrorists and build missiles capable of carrying nuclear warheads.

Section Three:

Predicting Donald Trump's Foreign Policy During His Current Presidential Term

With the start of Donald Trump's second presidential term in January 2025, Questions arise about the direction of US foreign policy under his leadership. During his first term, Trump's policies were defined by the slogan "America First," focusing on national interests and sometimes adopting a unilateral approach. In his second term, he is expected to continue this approach while strengthening some previous policies and modifying others to keep pace with changing global challenges.

Trump's foreign policy is expected to shift toward increased economic protectionism, with new tariffs imposed to protect American industries, particularly against China.

In addition, relationships with traditional allies in Europe and Asia may be reevaluated, with an emphasis on more equitable defense burden-sharing.

In the Middle East, Trump may seek to strengthen alliances with regional partners and continue counterterrorism efforts, with a focus on containing Iranian influence.

These trends point to a foreign policy that blends political realism and pragmatism, with a focus on achieving immediate American interests and adapting strategies to meet emerging global challenges.

First requirement: relations with major powers

This section will focus on the relations between the United States and Russia on the one hand, and China on the other.

- Relationship with Russia:
- Based on recent developments in the US–Russian relationship, it appears that the Trump administration is seeking to improve relations with Russia by adopting more flexible and pragmatic policies. With a focus on achieving regional stability and resolving existing conflicts through negotiation and mutual understanding, this became evident through several changes, namely:

Peace initiatives in Ukraine:

- On March 11, 2025, US National Security Advisor Mike Waltz proposed, The division of Ukrainian territory as part of negotiations to end the war with Russia, indicating a shift in the traditional American position.
- 2. Direct communications between the two leaderships:

On March 18, 2025, Presidents Trump and Putin held a phone call during which they discussed ways to end the conflict in Ukraine and agreed to halt attacks on energy infrastructure, reflecting an improvement in bilateral relations.

3. Russian praise for the new US policy

- Russia praised the major shift in US foreign policy under Trump's leadership, considering that this shift is largely in line with its vision.
- Relationship with China: In general, the relationship between the two countries is tense due to the Trump administration's strict trade policies.

While diplomatic attempts are underway to calm the situation and reach common solutions, the following are the main reasons that have led to the tension in this relationship:

- Trade Tensions:
- Tariffs: In February 2025, the Trump administration imposed 25% tariffs on steel and aluminum imports, primarily targeting China.
- Threats of Tariff Increases: On February 28, 2025, President Trump threatened to impose an additional 10% tariff on Chinese imports, prompting a firm refusal from Beijing and threats of countermeasures.
- Negotiation and calming efforts:

Diplomatic Visits: On March 22, 2025, US Senator Steve Daines, known for his support of Trump, visited Beijing and met with Chinese Vice Premier He Lifeng to discuss trade issues and the flow of fentanyl into the United States.

High-Level Contacts: On March 21, 2025, Trump announced plans for talks between the US Trade Representative, Jameson Greer and his Chinese counterpart, in preparation for a possible meeting between Trump and Chinese President Xi Jinping.

3. Other influential issues:

Drug Control: The flow of fentanyl from China to the United States is a contentious issue, with Washington accusing Beijing of not doing enough to stop the phenomenon.

The second requirement: Policy towards the Middle East

Here we will talk about the relationship with Iran and the Arab-Israeli conflict.

- The relationship with Iran:
 - In general, US-Iranian relations under the current Trump administration are characterized by increasing tensions. With economic and military pressures continuing, and mutual diplomatic attempts to resolve outstanding issues, this is due to several reasons, including:
 - Strengthening the US military presence in the Middle East: On March 22, 2025, President Trump has ordered the deployment of the second aircraft carrier, the USS Carl Vinson, to the Middle East. Extending the stay of the USS Harry S. Truman carrier strike group in response to escalating attacks on shipping in the Red Sea by the Iranian-backed Houthis.
 - Direct Threats to Iran: Trump issued public warnings to Iran, emphasizing that any attack by the Houthis would be considered an Iranian act, potentially triggering strong US responses.

2. The nuclear file and negotiations:

* Trump's Letter to Khamenei: On March 19, 2025, Trump sent a letter to Iran's Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Khamenei, Demanding a new nuclear agreement within two months, and threatening to resort to "other options" if diplomacy fails.

Iranian reactions: Khamenei rejected the American offer, describing it as a deception. However, The Iranian mission to the United Nations expressed a willingness to discuss some concerns regarding its nuclear program, but refused to fully dismantle it.

Economic sanctions:

Continuation of the "maximum pressure" policy: Since the United States withdrew from the nuclear agreement in 2018, The Trump administration has imposed strict economic sanctions on Iran, aiming to reduce its regional influence and limit its nuclear program.

4. Positions of the new Iranian administration:

Managing Disagreements: The government of Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian is seeking to "manage differences" with Washington and attempt to reach an understanding on contentious issues with the aim of lifting economic sanctions.

- The Arab-Israeli conflict:

During the current presidential term of President Donald Trump, the Arab-Israeli conflict has witnessed rapid developments. It significantly impacted the course of the Palestinian issue and regional relations. The most notable of these developments are:

Resumption of military operations in Gaza:

On March 18, 2025, Israel resumed its attacks on the Gaza Strip after a period of calm, resulting in hundreds of casualties. The United States confirmed that Israel had consulted with it prior to these operations, expressing its full support for Israel's actions in Gaza.

2. Trump's plan to rebuild Gaza:

In February 2025, President Trump announced a plan to rebuild the Gaza Strip, which includes displacing the Palestinian population and redeveloping the area into an "international coastal resort". Under US control, this plan was widely criticized, with some describing it as an attempt at ethnic cleansing, while the United Nations rejected it as a violation of international law.

3. Tension in relations with Arab countries:

Trump's plan to rebuild Gaza has sparked angry reactions from Arab countries, especially Egypt and Jordan. Both expressed their absolute rejection of any attempts to displace Palestinians to their lands.

4. Suspending normalization agreements:

In light of the recent escalation and displacement plans, some Arab countries that previously signed normalization agreements with Israel have announced a re-evaluation of their relations. Expressing concern about the growing tensions and their impact on the stability of the region.

5. Positions of Palestinian factions:

Palestinian factions, led by Hamas, rejected the proposed displacement and reconstruction plans. Considering them an attempt to liquidate the Palestinian cause, it also vowed to respond to any Israeli military escalation in the Gaza Strip.

Conclusion of the research:

After analyzing Donald Trump's foreign policies from the perspective of Machiavellian and pragmatic thought, It is clear that his strategies were based on an approach that blended political realism and Machiavellianism.

He employed force, economic pressure, and sharp negotiations as tools to achieve American interests. Through his policies towards China, Iran, Russia, and the Arab-Israeli conflict, The features of an approach based on absolute pragmatism emerged, whereby American interests were always prioritized, without adhering to the rules of traditional diplomacy or ethical considerations. Trump's experience demonstrates that Machiavellianism is not just a historical political theory, but remains a practical approach that modern leaders can embrace. However, the implications of this approach remain controversial. While it has succeeded in achieving some strategic and economic gains, However, his methods have created internal and external divisions that may affect the future of American foreign policy.

In the end, it can be said that Trump's policies represented a unique experiment in employing Machiavellian principles in international relations. Where he used force, deception and self-interest as a basis for decision-making, This calls for a deeper study into the effectiveness of this approach in achieving sustainable global stability.



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