

Opinion **The FT View**

How to respond to Trump 2.0

America's partners must defend their values as well as their interests

THE EDITORIAL BOARD



President Donald Trump throws pens into the crowd after signing executive orders at an arena in Washington. It is vital not to focus too much on the more performative elements of his agenda © Jim Watson/AFP/Getty Images

The editorial board YESTERDAY

Donald Trump has started his second term as predicted: with a fusillade of executive orders, memos, vows, musings and overheated rhetoric. The world has had at least a year to brace itself for the return of the America First agenda to the White House. No one can say they are surprised by this approach, or by most of Trump's initiatives — radical and divisive as some of them are. Even so, his full-throated unleashing of the animal spirits of American capitalism has unnerved some traditional allies. Now the world has to decide how to respond to the whirlwind that seems set to accompany, if not encapsulate, Trump's second administration.

America, too, has a big question to answer. Much of the focus in the opening days of Trump's new presidency has been on issues that secured his re-election, in particular reducing immigration and cutting back what his supporters call the "[deep state](#)", otherwise known as the federal government. He is right to attend to the concerns of the voters who sent him [back to the Oval Office](#). But how should Americans respond if, as his opponents fear, he indulges his baser instincts and starts undermining the pillars of its democracy?

There is a simple answer to both questions: values in addition to interests. Trump's withdrawal from the [Paris climate accord](#) cannot, for example, become an excuse for the E.U. to slow its decarbonisation agenda: it should, though, ease the regulatory

the EU to slow its decarbonisation agenda, it should, though, ease the regulatory burdens and simplify its rules.

On the domestic front, too, now is the time to pick the right fights. US courts should be prepared for a battle royal over Trump's more controversial initiatives, such as his bid to end birthright citizenship, which is enshrined in the 14th amendment of the constitution.

Trump's opening foray has underlined a widespread sense that an era has ended. It has met a wearied response from America's allies, who see it as intensifying the threats to the multilateral order. But it is important to note that many elsewhere in the world view Trump more favourably and like the idea of a more inward-looking America. It is possible, too, that some of his initiatives may have desirable outcomes. It will take more than Trump's threat of tougher sanctions on Russia to bring Vladimir Putin [to the table](#) to negotiate a fair peace deal in Ukraine. But the president's blunt — and unexpected — warning this week was a step in the right direction, as well as a reminder of how he sees unpredictability as an asset.

More broadly, allies have to accept that some of Trump's prescriptions may prove a much-needed call to action. Just as in his last term he prodded Nato's members to spend more on defence, this time his backing for less regulation and bureaucracy and lower taxes will force EU leaders to confront with greater urgency the continent's problem of competitiveness.

These are early days. The fact that Trump has not started a new [trade war](#) with [China](#) or Europe does not mean one will not be under way next week. Whatever unfolds, it is a time for cool heads. Anwar Ibrahim, Malaysia's prime minister, [told the Financial Times this week](#) that he and other east Asian leaders thought that, after an initial period of turmoil, the global trading system would survive intact. We have to hope he is right.

Trump is now at the [height of his powers](#), controlling both houses of Congress, with a conservative majority on the Supreme Court and with the following wind of re-election. At home and abroad, it is vital not to be distracted by the more performative elements of his agenda, to accept that sometimes he may be right, but most of all to stand up for what matters. The political capital of second terms can dissipate rapidly — if rashness and hubris prevail.

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