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Trump's China Policy Has Not Come Yet

Despite having only been in the Oval Office for six weeks, President Donald Trump has shocked the world—allies and adversaries alike. World leaders should have anticipated some of the shockwaves of the second Trump presidency, but many still felt unprepared and at sea. Hardly had international observers recovered from Trump's dramatic meeting with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky at the White House when he delivered his first address to the joint session of the Congress last week, vilifying his predecessor, Joe Biden, and the Democrats in an astonishing way, and thus representing a deep split in U.S. politics in front of the world.

Except for self-promotional phrases and often unreliable and ambiguous numbers related to Social Security corruption and inefficiency of the bureaucracy, Trump focused on the MAGA agenda that helped him win the election. Among those priorities are illegal immigration, economic inflation, the federal budget deficit, and anti-wokeness—domestic issues meant to stoke Trump's base.

Regarding foreign policy, Trump's address sent a strong message to Congress on U.S. unilateralism, exceptionalism, and transactionalism. Trump was proud of withdrawing from what he termed the “unfair” Paris Agreement, the “corrupt” World Health Organization, and the “anti-American” UN Human Rights Council, further distancing the United States from levers of influence and the liberal international order. Trump has fundamentally changed the position of the United States on the Russia-Ukraine war and passed the buck to the Europe.

China was mentioned six times in the address, mostly in the context of trade, tariffs, and investment. Taiwan was mentioned only once, when the Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Company was cited by Trump as an example of investment to the United States

Trump's China policy can be regarded as cautious and moderate for now, especially considering the strategic competition between China and the United States in the past decade. However, this is only the beginning of the Trump administration, and his China policy has not fully unfolded. Both sides are crossing the river by feeling the stones, with a turbulent world as a background.