



RECIPROCITY AND DIPLOMACY IN FOREIGN POLICY: PRESIDENT DONALD TRUMP'S TARIFFS HEGEMONIC ORDER (POLICY)

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Reciprocity, often understood as "tit-for-tat" in diplomacy serves as a foundational mechanism for bilateral and multilateral engagements in international politics. It facilitates mutual exchanges among states to pursue national interests and foreign policy objectives. This paper critically analyses President Donald Trump's tariff policy toward America's immediate neighbours shortly after taken office. The policy is viewed as hegemonic rooted not in mutual trust or cooperation, but in advancing U.S. strategic economic interests. The study explores Trump's rationale for imposing a 25% tariff on imports from Mexico and Canada, and a 125% tariff on Chinese goods, under the justification of combating illegal immigration, drug trafficking, and protecting national security. The consequences of these measures ranging from trade wars with countries across Central America, Europe, and Asia to domestic political backlash and inflations which are thoroughly examined. This paper proposes renegotiating trade laws on equitable diplomatic platforms to mitigate the crisis and prevent large-scale global trade disruptions. It also emphasises the crucial role of the World Trade Organization (WTO) in establishing fair rules for state behaviour in tariffs, markets, and investment. Utilizing secondary data from scholarly publications, government documents, and online materials, the study adopts the theory of reciprocity in international relations as its analytical framework to explain the motivations and impacts of Trump's tariff policy on global diplomacy and interdependence of states.

Keywords: America, Trade Diplomacy, Reciprocity, Tariffs, Hegemonic Order, Trump's Doctrine

Introduction

States exist in the international arena as sovereign entities, exhibit an interdependence system on one another, where decisions are taken considering the collective purpose with the intention that will benefit all. Though there emerged various contending interests that might eventually prevail, which pave the way for the might to have their policies accomplished, but still allow due rights and privileges for other states to exercise their concern, strive and manage their interest within the context of International Politics. As such, reciprocity is consistent with these principles of sovereignty, self-help, and determination that guarantee the standard behaviour to ensure collaboration and cooperation of ideas which are even central to the General Agreement

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on Tariffs and Trade (GATT), established in 1974 by twenty-three (23) countries in Geneva, with the goal of reducing tariffs and trade barriers, its relation to diplomacy, political, cultural, scientific, and military areas, as well as the relationship in the behaviour of states and kind gestures to one another in various dimensions (Keohane, 1989; Crescenz, Best & Kwon, 2010; Ayenagbo, Kimaju, Jing, Nountenin & Rongcheng, 2011; Akinyemi, 1987).

According to Osita C. Eze (2010, p. 19):

States, as key actors in the international system, share a common interest in maintaining a stable and predictable global order characterised by mutual cooperation. This does not mean that power politics are absent; at times, the use of force and the assertion of dominance can disrupt this cooperative framework, creating a tension between the principles of reciprocity and the impulse to use power as a tool of foreign policy. Over time, this tension has been partially managed through the development of rules and norms grounded in the principle of non-discrimination. One such rule is the Most Favoured Nation (MFN) principle, which ensures that any benefit or privilege granted by one state to another is extended automatically to all other states within a multilateral framework. Similarly, the National Treatment (NT) principle requires states to treat foreign entities no less favourably than their own domestic counterparts. Exceptions to these non-discrimination principles typically arise through explicit agreements—either as concessions to less powerful states or in pursuit of national interests.

Furthermore, it is established that any administration in the United States of America must follow the existing foreign policy and national interest doctrine directives, which are central to the creation of the United States, its allies abroad and by extension the entire world. These include: security, international cooperation, economic property, democracy, and human rights through the platform of diplomacy, economic, and military force alliances in the historical context of containment, interventionism and liberalism by key organizations, such as the US Department of States, Senate Committee on Foreign Affairs, the House Committee on Foreign Affairs, and the Foreign Relations of the United States Series. All these have been on ground for decades and are being reviewed for consequential purposes (Diplomacy, n.d.).

Essentially, the international community is witnessing another structural dislocation to the economic order of the world, sequel to the second coming to office of President Trump of the United States, which greatly affected the tariffs order that he has introduced in trade relations with his immediate neighbour, friends and foes. The exhibition of hegemonic power to unilaterally orders on tariffs alters the structural balance of trade laws, which has brought major



concern and uncertainty across the world. If it should be allowed to manifest itself over regulatory international institutions, saddled with the mandate in cooperation with all sovereign states, where they enjoy an equal level playing ground to exit, it might then be a precedent for other states to legislate on such assertion. Furthermore, the decision of President Trump to disengage from multilateralism in the purview of the regional trade governance system will affect trade relations with other states, dynamics of negotiations and power relations outside the World Trade Organization (WTO) (Poletti & Zambenardi, 2021; Shaw, 1997; Stoke, 2024). Therefore, President Trump imposed 50% tariffs on goods imported from Mexico and Canada into the United States. It was due to the flow of contraband drugs like fentanyl from Mexico, which has killed thousands of Americans and stopping the flow of illegal immigrants from Canada, while 125% tariff ban on China goods for its intellectual property theft which has led to forced Technological transfer to the U.S. (The White House, 2025).

According to Poletti & Zambenardi (2021, p. 1106):

Upon taking office, President Trump launched a determined effort to undermine the World Trade Organization (WTO), most notably by blocking the appointment of new members to its Appellate Body—effectively paralyzing the institution. At the same time, his administration formally withdrew from the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) and informally suspended negotiations on the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP), signalling a broader scepticism toward multilateral trade frameworks beyond just the WTO. Further challenging the foundations of the open trading system, President Trump imposed significant unilateral tariffs on goods worth billions of dollars from key trading partners, including the European Union, Canada, Mexico, and China.

Also, he has leveraged his foreign policy in the area of international trade on two main goals: to pursue fair trade in a way to ensure a down in trade deficit, preserve reciprocity, and balance in the relations of the US with its trading friends and protect the country's business interests against other states objectives and President Trump's foreign policy feels to end the de-location of manufacturing action from American territory and creates fresh jobs to ensure a strong and prosperous domestic economy, which has shaken the foundation of an international trade law of normative law after the 2nd World War to provide legal platform and regulate the trade relations amongst state in the new world liberal system (Georgieva, 2019) and has critically reversed the 70 years agreement on both the substance of trade issue and global economic administration (Manstanduno, 2019:3). His foreign policy which is purely transactional has no direction as analyst in foreign policy have questioned his capacity to maintain and sustain the long-aged United States foreign policy domination where it based its essence on robust engagements.

According to Agwu (2010, p. 34):



The sociological and social-process view of reciprocity—as a form of sanction involving self-help, reprisals, or torsion—operates at a more granular level and diverges from the understanding found in international jurisprudence. In international law, reciprocity is neither regarded as a sanction nor as a hostile act. Rather, it is seen as a mutual give-and-take dynamic that can occur in contexts of both conflict and cooperation. It is not considered a sanction because no rule of international law relies on reciprocity for its implementation or enforcement.

Essentially, the administration withdrew from mega-regional trade deals, trade and a deal-making pattern of foreign relations and international cooperation on trade. The WTO, the Group of Twenty (G20), as well as more cases will be brought to the organization for hearing. Furthermore, trade is a zero-sum game whose deficits lead to losses of jobs and production; to avoid it is to enforce aggressive tariffs bilateralism over multilateralism (Janusch & Mucha, 2007:4).

According to Goldsmith (2025, p. 13):

The ability to convey credible signals to potential adversaries—especially under conditions of uncertainty where all parties have incentives to bluff—is essential for preventing conflict. In the realm of trade, it is possible that the rules underpinning the World Trade Organization (WTO) may be revived and renegotiated. This could stem from the mutual harm caused by the trade war initiated during the Trump administration, coupled with a renewed recognition by the United States of the advantages of trade and economic openness, as well as the drawbacks of protectionism. What may emerge is a restructured WTO—more mercantilist in nature and more aligned with the interests of the largest economic powers.

As such, reciprocity is a cardinal principle in international relations and the world of diplomacy whereby a country would be in order for imposing reciprocal action or in taking appropriate retaliatory action or confer treatment similar to what it has been subjected to by another state, guiding principles in inter-state relations. (George, 2010; Akinterinwa, 2010). In essence, the paper addresses President Trump's reciprocal tariff which are the taxes levied on goods imported to the US, or plan to charge levy against global trading partners that are equal to the existing tariff which external states have prepared against US goods in return (Burga & Schneid, 2025:2).



Problem of Research Gap

The study revealed that tariffs and trade war between US and other States both on immediate neighbours and far distance in other Continents have encountered critical challenges with President Trump's administration either during his first tenure and now which set to have serious impacts on international relations, global economy and trade war. The underlying factors are that the US economy will seriously be affected to cause industries to collapse, consumers to pay higher prices on goods imported and market products, lead to high rate of unemployment, trade deficits as it might affect the US dollar in the long run. It is on these indicators that the President decided to adopt aggressive tariff and trade policies in order to save his domestic audience for the survival of American economy as it imposes significant costs on capital investment, consumer and manufacturing sectors.

Literature Review

Several studies have explored the concept of tariff in the annals of academic literature. To start with, Huzaifa & Legacy (2024) observed that trade war and tariff are growing central intersection in international relations and economic security reflecting broader geopolitical struggles and changing dynamics of global trade. They are used as national economic interest for national security and diplomatic leverage both in the short and long term. Also, Anantanaga (2022) noted the intricate web of world economic integration which makes trade war a double-edge strategies with implications that goes beyond economic transactions as it affects serious equilibrium of international commerce and supply chains, that hinder investment and innovation, while it equally gives room for protectionist measures and cooperative solutions. Fedzer & Schwarz (2021) commented that President Trump's tariff focuses on targeting countries with simulation approach which aims to approximate the choice set that each retaliatory country faces in tariff relations. To Angwaomaodoko (2024), trade and tariff policies are tools or strategies used by states to safeguard domestic industries from global trade changes as they emerge as economic confrontations. Also, Parsapour (2024) observed that trade or tariff war navigate import costs and change the trade balance between states involved in trade dispute where it aims to change the flow of trade which causes economic damage to concerned parties, while Rogers, Golar, Abdusalam & Rogers (2024) commented that tariff played important role in international trade and politics, as it is a tax on imports or exports between and among states which generate income or lead to protectionist policies by either or both parties involved. Garcia & Sposi (2025) and Lartey (2025) noted that tariff affect the following: economic theories of trade, political economy of tariffs, imports and export dynamics, sectoral analysis, agricultural sector, consumer behaviour etc. Therefore, this paper fills the gap by investigating the degree to which retaliatory policies by US towards its targeted states, as well as how other countries manage their tariffs and trade relations.

Methodology

The paper adopted qualitative research methodology using historical, descriptive and analytical method to investigate the research problem. The study design relied on a thorough review of existing literature, including scholarly articles, books and reliable internet sources. The collection procedure included a systemic search for relevant sources, followed by an extensive review and synthesis of the findings. The data collection was analysed using qualitative



approach, involving an in-depth examination and interpretation of the source to identify patterns, themes and relationship relevant to the study through rigorous and transparent process for the collection and analysis of data that ensured reliability and validity of the findings.

Table 1: Timeline of U.S. Tariff Bans on Imports since the 1930s

S/N	Nature of tariff import ban	Date of enforcement	Countries affected	Remark/Types of tariffs
1.	The Smoot-Hawley tariffs	1930	Canada, Spain France.	Placed on agricultural and industrial goods
2	The chicken/poultry tariffs	1960-1963	European countries and vice versa	Placed on chicken from the European Union and poultry tariff
3	The lumber tariff war	1982	Between Canada and the US.	Place on wood from trees.
4	Automobile war	1987	Japan East Asia	Placed on automobiles from Japan
5	Banana split	1993	Latin America, Africa and the Caribbean.	Placed on a banana from Latin America
6	Steel tariff war	2000	European countries	Placed on steel from Europe
7	Solar panels tariffs war	2018	China	Placed on the manufacturer of solar panels
8	Drugs and illegal alien tariff	2025	Canada, Mexico and China	Placed on Canada and Mexico
9	Steel, aluminium and automobile tariffs	2025	All countries	Placed on steel, aluminium and automobile

N.B.: There were retaliatory counter tariffs order by the countries affected at one time or the other.

Sources: Al Jazeera. (2025). *Before Trump: The long U.S. history of tariff wars with Canada and the world*. Retrieved from <https://www.aljazeera.com>

Interpretation of Data

The above table revealed history of American tariffs system both on other states and from other states as well to America from 1930s to date, laying emphasis on tariff order placed on goods coming and from US to other states .It could therefore be analysed that it has been systemic



outline for US to sometimes impose its tariff / trade policies on other states aggressively especially under President Trump previous and current administrations which has been hegemonic and hostile to international trade and disorganise the World Trade Organization platform. Furthermore, the paper equally noted from the above table that US has been reciprocal to the extent that it does not always give room for equal level of reciprocity gesture for any other countries in their dealings. Again, from the table highlighted, it has over the years imposed its policies not only on developed states, but on the developing global south countries with the ultimate results to satisfy domestic American consumers and industries in the final fulfilment of its strategic economic interest on trade and tariffs over other states.



Table 2: General Tariffs Placed on all Countries in the World

Reciprocal Tariffs			Reciprocal Tariffs		
Country	Tariffs Charged to the U.S.A. Including Currency Manipulation and Trade Barriers	U.S.A. Discounted Reciprocal Tariffs	Country	Tariffs Charged to the U.S.A. Including Currency Manipulation and Trade Barriers	U.S.A. Discounted Reciprocal Tariffs
Algeria	59%	30%	Moldova	61%	31%
Oman	10%	10%	Angola	63%	32%
Uruguay	10%	10%	Democratic Republic of the Congo	22%	11%
Bahamas	10%	10%	Jamaica	10%	10%
Lesotho	99%	50%	Mozambique	31%	16%
Ukraine	10%	10%	Paraguay	10%	10%
Bahrain	10%	10%	Zambia	33%	17%
Qatar	10%	10%	Lebanon	10%	10%
Mauritius	80%	40%	Tanzania	10%	10%
Fiji	63%	32%	Iraq	78%	39%
Iceland	10%	10%	Georgia	10%	10%
Kenya	10%	10%	Senegal	10%	10%
Liechtenstein	73%	37%	Azerbaijan	10%	10%
Guyana	76%	38%	Cameroon	22%	11%
Haiti	10%	10%	Uganda	20%	10%
Bosnia and Herzegovina	70%	35%	Albania	10%	10%
Nigeria	27%	14%	Armenia	10%	10%
Namibia	42%	21%	Nepal	10%	10%
Brunei	47%	24%	Sint Maarten	10%	10%
Bolivia	20%	10%	Falkland Islands	82%	41%
Panama	10%	10%	Gabon	10%	10%
Venezuela	29%	15%	Kuwait	10%	10%
North Macedonia	65%	33%	Togo	10%	10%
Ethiopia	10%	10%	Suriname	10%	10%
Ghana	17%	10%	Belize	10%	10%

Source: Tinubu Media Team



Why is President Trump using Tariffs order as Trade War?

- I. To get a better deal from trade partners across the world.
- II. To sustain the US dollar's dominant role, and such, threaten BRICS with tariffs if they abandon the US dollar (McKibbin & Noland, 2025).
- III. To protect jobs and raise tax revenue across the country.
- IV. To reduce the gap that exists between export and import.
- V. Part of Trump's critical and essential economic mission:
- VI. To use tariffs to boost US production and manufacturing capacities (Doherty, 2005:3)
- VII. To rebalance global trade by reducing dependency on foreign capital and goods.

The Geneva Conventions and Reciprocity

The application of the Geneva Conventions is not binding on reciprocity. It implies that treaties concluded for the benefit of citizens of the contracting states are usually based upon. A treaty implies reciprocal obligations for the sole and mutual benefits of the parties thereto.

According to Preux (nd, p. 26):

Article 4(2) of the Fourth Convention states: "Nationals of a state which is not bound by the convention are not protected by it." This means that the convention is of mutual benefit only for those who are part of it or who accept as binding on themselves the same obligations. Article (3) common to the four conventions states that: "Although one of the powers in conflict may not be a party to the present convention, the powers who are parties thereto shall remain bound by it in their mutual relations..."

This translates that even reciprocity is bound with special commonality and specific rule(s), while reciprocity is constituted for some crucial conditions to the recognition and enforcement of foreign judgements (Martinek, 2017:4).

Theoretical Framework

The study adopted the theory of reciprocity in international relations as its theoretical framework. It is the formal theory of reciprocity, where the behavioural response to perceived kindness or unkindness. The perceived kindness of an action is composed of two elements, the outcome of their results from the action and the action's underlying intentions where it is equity-based reference standard for the evaluation of the kindness or unkindness of the chosen outcome, while the outcome however will be perceived differently depending on the intentions involved (Falk & Fischbacher, 2000; Paris & Ghei, 2003). It is found upon the premise that co-operative diplomacy from one actor begets another from the target. The recurrence of this is the tit-for-tat strategies, which have been empirically identified in the Cold War and other troubled spots around the world (Parisi, 2024; Braddt, Colaresi & Freeman, 2006; Besley, 2021).



It helps to explain how selfish individuals may cooperate without a coercive authority; game theory has presented a platform for analysing reciprocity in international relations. States enter into reciprocal restraints on arms or trade barriers out of self-interest, states avoid retaliation that could set off an arms race or trade war or why states cooperate in spite of the lack of a coercive overall authority. It is important in generating cooperation and conflict resolution. Between states, as it is limited reaction of a state against certain behaviour that harms other countries (Ishmel, 2013:4; Larson, 1988:283) It is returning good behaviour for good behaviour and bad for bad, which stabilises co-operation by making non-cooperative behaviour unprofitable. Where both actors in a relationship insist that the value of their concessions must be equivalent and that each must be made highly conditional on the other. The broad agreement that reciprocity underscores basically are all voluntary issues, the provision of reward from one state to another actor who has initially provided a reward to oneself. The practice of reciprocity is often credited with promoting cooperation. But, for it to do so, both actors must recognise that there are benefits from their exchange that could not be derived elsewhere and discover a way to achieve that common interest (LepGold & Shambaugh, 2002; Serge Christopher, 2006; Norrlof, 2018).

Furthermore, it has long been foundational to international law and the law of war majorly with a strong and deep intuitive appeal as a condition on rules of war. The analysis of reciprocal actions taken by states can benefit from an understanding of the attribution process. A nation has the propensity to engage in reciprocity and the type of reciprocal interaction that have subsumed the multidimensional complexities of attribution of states within a continuation of conflict and cooperation (Niv-Solomon, 2024: 42; Watts, 2009: 366; Ryers, n.d.: 3; Bogumul, 2001: 468). The principle of reciprocity is central to trade co-operation and agreement, and has a role in addressing these local price externalities. In addition to the usual terms-of-trade externality, it connotes that a policy equally increases net export value at world prices which can guide states towards the efficiency frontier. The condition for reciprocity's application is that policy changes, undo the terms-of-trade inefficiencies and also undo the other inefficiencies, while trade liberalization has been gradually over two hundred years promoted upon the principles of reciprocity where it is noted as a fundamental rule by which plural parties maintain the balance of treatment by means of granting the same or equivalent rights, benefits and undertaking obligations to each other.

Essentially, the linkage of the theory to the study lies in the fact that the US often uses retaliatory measures against her immediate neighbours, Europe, China and the rest of the world to a greater proportion as a measure of give and take situation. It is to externalise his domestic policies of tariff and trade towards other states. It is to revenge against tariffs policy from other states, which could be counter-productive and beneficial to parties involved. The usefulness and linkage of the theory reveals that: it characterises certain types of interaction between States in a game theoretical framework, it induced reciprocity which eliminates the off diagonal options that is sufficient to get the players out of prisoner's dilemma and it examines how reciprocity intertwine with the principle of equality as the rights and duties of states are equal regardless of size, economic strength etc. and the benefits derive in creating peace, stability and cooperation amongst states as utilities of the advantages of the theory.



However, the defect of the theory hangs on the realm of anarchical nature of international politics, and if co-operation is to exist, whatever the results must be consistent with the principle of sovereignty, equality and self-help. Again, the problem flows from the assumption used to generate the relatively parsimonious hypothesis and a significant neglect of domestic politics. It equally involves lack of trust, undermining international law, unequal exchange, protectionism, collateral damage, power imbalances, difficult-to-implement psychological obstacles and perceived injustice which are hindrances in the application of the theory.

Consequences/Implications of President Trump's Hegemonic Tariffs Order

- It has a great dimension on both the economic and political state of countries involved (Fetzer & Scharz, 2021).
- It will reshape the entire world by embracing protectionism (Hadavas, 2025: 4)
- Decline in consumer surplus and distortion in relative prices. It will raise inflation by 1.0 to 1.2 percent, equivalent to a consumer loss of 1,600 to 2,000 dollars per household on average due to the tariff.
- It will lead to social contradiction in the American society from discontent, resistance to the international system and amount to trade imbalances. It will spark trade wars, which might slow economic growth and possibly raise prices of goods in America (Li, 2025)
- It will tend to challenge the rules of the WTO on free trade agreements and co-operation among states.
- Trump's tariffs could devastate the US economy, as China has diversified its trade, reducing reliance on US exports, and now dominates trade in Southeast Asia, Africa, and the Middle East, leaving the US heavily dependent on Chinese manufacturing companies for her domestic consumption.

Balanced Arguments on President Trump's Tariff Policy

Notwithstanding the paper's argument and position, the President's tariff policy stands to benefit US and the world at large through the manifestation of: it will raise revenue of market prices of American goods, it will get trade leverage from other states and it will create a level playing ground for countries to re-negotiate their trade relations with America. Furthermore, it will be to protect US jobs both internally and externally to stimulate manufacturing, boost American industries and lower prices for US consumers which are the goals setting of the administration.

Conclusion

President Trump of the US has imposed tariffs order on his immediate neighbours few times after coming into office, seen as punitive and unwarranted which is tend to be counter-productive from the states involved, create consumers commodity crisis within US and outside it, prone to trade wars and economic recession across the world. If not averted and rendered unproductive, then the WTO which is responsible for regulating trade and co-operation, must intervene. This policy is noted to be hegemonic in nature as it does not recognise other sovereign states' rights and benefits to even negotiate what is best for them



as trade partners, which its consequences are reciprocities of action and counteractions for the entire world in no distant time.

Recommendations

- The tariff hegemonic policy suggests that there should be renegotiation for trade law, which must be on an equal level of diplomacy to resolve the issue based on a multilateral and bilateral manner.
- There must be urgent ways to avert trade wars on a large-scale platform, which might throw out the US markets and consumers, as well as the global economies into a big recession
- There must be swift intervention from the WTO, originally saddled with the responsibility of regulating trade laws, principles and agreements among states in agreed-upon manners to take charge.
- There must be a rules-based international order to check states' excesses from one another and respect for others sovereignties

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