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A post-American world emerges



President Trump sits alone at the Group of 20 summit. (Felipe Trueba/European Pressphoto Agency)

by [Fareed Zakaria](#)

In London last week, I met a Nigerian man who succinctly expressed the reaction of much of the world to the United States these days. “Your country has gone crazy,” he said, with a mixture of outrage and amusement. “I’m from Africa. I know crazy, but I didn’t ever think I would see this in America.”

A sadder sentiment came from a young Irish woman I met in Dublin who went to Columbia University, founded a social enterprise and has lived in New York for nine years. “I’ve come to recognize that, as a European, I have very different values than America these days,” she said. “I realized that I have to come back to Europe, somewhere in Europe, to live and raise a family.”

The world has gone through bouts of anti-Americanism before. But this one feels very different. First, there is the sheer shock at what is going on, the bizarre candidacy of Donald Trump, which has been followed by an utterly chaotic presidency. The chaos is at such a fever pitch that one stalwart Republican, Karl Rove, [described the president](#) this week as “vindictive, impulsive and shortsighted” and his public shaming of Attorney General Jeff Sessions as “unfair, unjustified, unseemly and stupid.” Kenneth Starr, the onetime grand inquisitor of President Bill Clinton, went further, [calling Trump’s recent treatment of Sessions](#) “one of the most outrageous — and profoundly misguided — courses of presidential conduct I have witnessed in five decades in and around the nation’s capital.”

But there is another aspect to the decline in America’s reputation. According to a [recent Pew Research Center survey](#) of 37 countries, people around the world increasingly believe that they can make do without America. Trump’s presidency is making the United States something worse than just feared or derided. It is becoming irrelevant.

The most fascinating finding of the Pew survey was not that Trump is deeply unpopular (22 percent have confidence in him, compared with 64 percent who had confidence in Barack Obama at the end of his presidency). That was to be expected — but there are now alternatives. On the question of confidence in various leaders to do the right thing regarding world affairs, China’s Xi Jinping and Russia’s Vladimir Putin got slightly higher marks than Trump. But German Chancellor Angela Merkel got almost twice as much support as Trump. ([Even in the United States](#), more respondents expressed confidence in Merkel than in Trump.) This says a lot about Trump, but it says as much about Merkel’s reputation and how far Germany has come since 1945.

Trump has managed to do something that Putin could not. He has unified Europe. As the continent faces the challenges of Trump, Brexit and populism, a funny thing has happened. [Support for Europe](#) among its residents has risen, and plans for deeper European integration are underway. If the Trump administration proceeds as it has promised and initiates protectionist measures against Europe, the continent's resolve will only strengthen. Under the combined leadership of Merkel and new French President Emmanuel Macron, Europe will adopt a more activist global agenda. Its economy has rebounded and [is now growing](#) as fast as that of the United States.

To America's north, Canada's foreign minister [recently spoke out](#), in a friendly and measured way, noting that the United States has clearly signaled that it is no longer willing to bear the burdens of global leadership, leaving it to countries such as Canada to stand up for a rules-based international system, free trade and human rights. To America's south, Mexico has abandoned any plans for cooperation with the Trump administration. Trump's approval rating in Mexico is [5 percent](#), his lowest of all the countries Pew surveyed.

China's leadership began taking advantage of Trump's rhetoric and foreign policy right from the start, announcing that it was happy to play the role of chief promoter of trade and investment around the world, [cutting deals with countries](#) from Latin America to Africa to Central Asia. [According to the Pew survey](#), seven of 10 European countries now believe that China is the world's leading economic power, not the United States.

The most dismaying of Pew's findings is that the drop in regard for America goes well beyond Trump. Sixty-four percent of the people surveyed expressed a favorable view of the United States at the end of the Obama presidency. That has fallen to 49 percent now. Even when U.S. foreign policy was unpopular, people around the world still believed in America — the place, the idea. This is less true today.

In 2008, I wrote a book about the emerging "[Post-American World](#)," which, I noted at the start, was not about the decline of America but rather the rise of the rest. Amid the parochialism, ineptitude and sheer disarray of the Trump presidency, the post-American world is coming to fruition much faster than I ever expected.