

President Trump the politician who means business?

Which President Donald Trump has moved into the White House? The politician or businessman asks Punit Oza, Founder of Maritime NXT.

January 21, 2025



Credit: Official Portrait

Watching President Trump speak after his inauguration, both at Capitol Hill and thereafter at Capital One Arena, this question does spring to mind. Among others, I see four clear signs that it is the businessman who has checked into White House, rather than the politician.

The Team

The first sign is the team that President Trump has assembled in his second term. Unlike the first term, every single one of those team members (except maybe Sen. Rubio) is a fierce Trump loyalist, has little or no political baggage and experience, subject matter experts like Elon Musk, Scott Bessent and Doug Burgum and, willing to follow and execute the deal that their leader may eventually seal.

They have also been told to run their respective departments with the same efficiency as a private enterprise. Their comments during the hearing reconfirm this. Discussions about efficiency, meritocracy & outcome-based actions abound in all conversations.

Tariffs

After all the hype about putting immediate tariffs on Mexico, Canada & [China](#) on the inauguration day, Trump the businessman has walked back on that and not signed any executive orders on Tariffs, though he has kept the door open for a 1 February order. These are clear business tactics being used by Trump.

In his first term, he has actually placed tariffs, so no one is taking him lightly. At the same time, he has clearly given signs that he is open to a deal here. In case of China, he has gone on record now saying

that China Tariffs will depend on the “Tik Tok” deal. Running a shock and awe campaign is the best way to get an adversary to the table to negotiate and do so from a position of strength.

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My prediction is that the threat of tariffs will eventually allow Trump to strike a deal with China & others and even if a symbolic restriction will be placed by USA, I do not see it as having huge disruptive impact on trade and shipping. In fact, if he can get more American goods to be sold across the globe using the threat of tariffs, that will be good for shipping in terms of tonne-miles.

Greenland

Once again, I believe that Trump is looking at the Greenland deal as a business project. When you want to acquire a company in a hostile manner, what do you do? You scare the living daylights out of them and then give them a deal, which they will simply accept and be thankful that it is all over.

Trump’s need for Greenland is two-fold.

One, he wants exclusive economic access to the critical minerals of Greenland, which are not possible to be mined as there are only approx. 57000 people and they are neither interested nor able to mine these. These minerals are geopolitically strategic as currently China holds a monopoly on quite a few of these minerals today.

Related: [Trump holds back on tariffs on day 1 of Presidency](#)

Two, he wants military & physical access to Greenland to monitor the Russian and Chinese use of the Arctic route. If he is able to enforce the Russian sanctions and put a stop to Dark Fleet activity, that will definitely redefine trade flows and possibly have a positive impact on shipping. What is important is that he does not need to “buy” Greenland to achieve this access, he simply needs to strike a deal for this access.

Panama Canal

Same story – it is all about costs and access. Panama owes its independence to the Americans. [Panama Canal](#) was built by the Americans at their cost and risk, who operated it for decades. Eventually bowing to popular pressure, it was in joint US-Panama control for 20 plus years and finally went to sole control of Panama as recently as 1999.

While Trump is upset about the past decisions to hand over the control of the canal, his main issue is access and costs charged to US Navy and cargo vessels. He laments the fact that Panama Canal charges “exorbitant” costs for transit and completely disregards the US efforts in securing Panama’s independence, building the canal & operating it efficiently for years.

The “Chinese influence” is just another sore point, more for posturing. I believe Trump is looking to secure a “special deal” with Panama Canal for US ships and if he does secure that, American goods will become extremely competitive to export, especially to Asia and the American consumer will also be able to secure Asian goods at a cheaper price.

Another point to note is that [USA](#) is also the biggest customer of the Canal, while China and Japan are distant 2nd and 3rd respectively. Panama Canal is not going to risk losing its largest business customer. While the threat of sending troops is being made by Trump, he just wants to bring Panama to the table and negotiate the best for America.

In India, there is a saying – Elephant’s tusks are teeth, but only for show. For chewing food, the Elephant has a separate set of teeth.

A lot of rhetoric from President and Politician Trump in form of threats and comments are like these tusks – just for posturing purposes. They are laying down a path for the President and businessman Trump to strike fear in his opponents, dig his real teeth into the subject matter and get a deal done.

Once again, I believe that over the next four years, this game of fear and favour will play out. While the shipping companies will need to remain watchful, the underlying impact will be positive for global shipping.