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Trump's first executive orders: domestic security, energy, and trade

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President Donald Trump signed 42 executive orders and memoranda on the day of his second-term inauguration. These primarily addressed border security and illegal immigration, energy production, federal administration staffing, and trade policy. He also declared a state of emergency at the southern US border.

Executive orders are official documents through which the president directs the actions of the federal government, often used to bypass Congress. Memoranda carry less weight, are not recorded in the Federal Register, and their budgetary implications are not subject to review.

Trump made a series of decisive and occasionally controversial domestic policy decisions, with less emphasis on foreign policy. His exceptional level of activity on his first day in office was intended to demonstrate effectiveness to voters – hence the public signing ceremony, which took place in a Washington sports arena.

Commentary

- **Most of the executive orders focus on domestic policy and fulfil key promises Trump made during the presidential campaign.** In his efforts to curb illegal immigration, he declared a state of emergency at the southern border of the United States, reinstated the 'remain in Mexico' policy (requiring asylum seekers to wait outside the US while their applications are processed), suspended the refugee admission programme, and revoked birthright citizenship for children of illegal immigrants born on US soil. To boost energy production, Trump declared a state of energy emergency, facilitating the initiation of extraction projects. He also authorised new offshore drilling and the exploration of oil and gas deposits in Alaska. The president introduced significant changes affecting federal administration staffing, notably freezing new hires (with some exceptions related to national security) and issuing an order making dismissals easier.
- **The new president's first moves focused far less on foreign policy, yet they have already revealed his scepticism towards multilateral institutions and agreements.** Trump reinstated his first-term decisions to withdraw the US from the WHO and the Paris Agreement on climate change. He also ordered the renaming of the Gulf of Mexico to the Gulf of America and the reversion of the name of North America's highest peak, Denali, back to Mount McKinley. Additionally, he suspended US development aid for 90 days to allow for a review. In a separate memorandum, Trump ordered a reorganisation of the

National Security Council (NSC).

- **The memorandum on US trade policy lays the groundwork for potential future tariff increases but may also signal Trump's interest in renegotiating trade agreements.** The document directs federal agencies to conduct a detailed analysis of trade balance disparities with other countries. Particular attention is given to Mexico, Canada, and China, with assessments focusing on revising existing trade agreements with the US, as well as issues related to illegal immigration and drug trafficking. Additionally, the president ordered an analysis of the US industrial sector to evaluate the justification for future tariffs. He also suspended the enforcement of the TikTok ban in the United States for 75 days, which could indicate a willingness to negotiate with Beijing on other matters, such as a new trade deal.
- **Some of Trump's executive orders are likely to be challenged in US courts or face opposition from other countries.** More than twenty states have filed lawsuits against the order revoking birthright citizenship for children of illegal immigrants, arguing that it is unconstitutional. Legal challenges may also target other decisions, such as the removal of employment protections for a significant group of federal workers or the rollback of environmental regulations for new extraction projects. Mexico has protested against the renaming of the Gulf of Mexico and Trump's decision to designate drug cartels as terrorist organisations. The latter move could pave the way for US intervention on Mexican territory.