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### **Abstract**

## **Eliminating the Constraints on Trade Policy – The Strategy that Underpins US Negotiations in the Trump Administration**

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For those steeped in the ruling paradigm of international trade relations based on gradual liberalization and strengthening rules of trade, the trade policy of the administration of President Donald Trump often appears chaotic, contradictory and economically uninformed – and viewed from the paradigm’s perspective it largely is. The ruling paradigm, however, is not the only paradigm regarding international trade relations. The Trump administration is following an alternative narrative whereby trade is viewed as a zero sum game where a country can only win by garnering concessions from trade partners by hard bargaining or guile. When nefarious trade practices are found, or poor negotiation outcomes identified, swift and strong action is required to rectify the disadvantageous outcome. This alternative paradigm has a long history but has, until now, never informed a U.S. administration’s trade policy since the rules-based multilateral trade institutions were established at the end of the Second World War. The rules-based system imposes constraints on the ability to move swiftly and decisively when the need for action is identified. Removing these constraints is a central facet of the Trump administration’s trade strategy. This article explores the alternative paradigm and the steps being taken to remove the constraints on freedom of action in trade policy.

Keywords: alternative paradigm, constraints, freedom to act, ruling paradigm, Trump administration

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