ISSUE 45

STRATEGIKA

Conflicts Of The Past As Lessons For The Present

SEPTEMBER 2017

THE PRACTICE OF "PRINCIPLED REALISM"

IN THIS ISSUE

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ABOUT THE POSTERS IN THIS ISSUE

Documenting the wartime viewpoints and diverse political sentiments of the twentieth century, the Hoover Institution Library & Archives Poster Collection has more than one hundred thousand posters from around the world and continues to grow. Thirty-three thousand are available online. Posters from the United States, the United Kingdom, Germany, Russia/Soviet Union, and France predominate, though posters from more than eighty countries are included.

Of Allies and Adversaries: Donald Trump's Principled Realism

By Josef Joffe

Image credit: Poster Collection, US 6304, Hoover Institution Archives.

I. US Doctrines from Washington to Obama

Foreign policy doctrines are as American as apple pie, and as old as the Republic. Start with George Washington's Farewell Address: The "great rule" in dealing with other nations was to extend "our commercial relations" and "to have with them as little political connection as possible." So stay out of Europe, and keep Europe away from us.

Echoing Washington, Thomas Jefferson promulgated the "no-entangling alliances" doctrine. John Quincy Adams decreed, "America does not go abroad in search of monsters to destroy." James Monroe told off the Europeans: Stay out, the Americas are for the Americans, North and South. Teddy Roosevelt doubled down by proclaiming the right to intervene in Latin America.

Harry S. Truman went global. The United States would support "free people who are resisting . . . subjugation by armed minorities or by outside pressures." So did Dwight D. Eisenhower: He would commit US forces "to secure and protect" all nations against "overt armed aggression from any nation controlled by international communism." John F. Kennedy famously declaimed, "We shall pay any price, bear any burden, meet any hardship, support any friend, oppose any foe, in order to assure the survival and the success of liberty."

LBJ built on Monroe and TR: The United States would intervene in the Western Hemisphere when "the establishment of a Communist dictatorship" threatened. The Nixon Doctrine pledged to shield each and all "if a nuclear power threatens the freedom of a nation allied with us or [one] whose survival we consider vital to our security."

Jimmy Carter defined any "attempt by any outside force to gain control of the Persian Gulf region . . . as "an assault on the vital interests of the United States," which "will be repelled by any means necessary. . . . ." Ronald Reagan would aid all those who "are risking their lives . . . on every continent, from Afghanistan to Nicaragua . . . to defy Soviet aggression."

Bill Clinton promulgated obligation wrapped in realism. "We cannot, indeed, we should not, do everything or be everywhere. But where our values and our interests are at stake . . . we must be prepared to do so." In particular, "genocide is . . . a national interest where we should act."

The Bush Doctrine, enunciated during the "unipolar moment," covered the whole waterfront. It was to be preventive war "before threats materialized." Nations harboring terrorists would be a target of war. In global affairs, it was unilateralism. Plus, most ambitiously, regime change: "The defense of freedom requires the advance of freedom."

Barack Obama is the odd man out. He rejected a "doctrinaire" approach to foreign policy. But when pressed, he replied, "The doctrine is we will engage, but we preserve all our capabilities." Translated: We will go low

on force and resist sweeping ambitions. "Obama entered the White House bent on getting out of Iraq and Afghanistan," *Atlantic*'s Jeffrey Goldberg reported after a series of conversations with the President; "he was not seeking new dragons to slay."

According to Goldberg, Obama was loath to "place American soldiers at great risk in order to prevent humanitarian disasters, unless those disasters pose a direct security threat to the United States." Instead of intervention, it was retraction. Obama confided that he would rather deal with "climate change," which is an "existential threat to the entire world if we don't do something about it."

Obama's angst was the overextension to which "almost every great power has succumbed." Retrenchment and strategic reticence were the hallmarks of the (unarticulated) doctrine. He opposed "the idea that every time there is a problem, we send in our military to impose order. We just can't do that." (All quotes from "The Obama Doctrine," *Atlantic,* April 2016) What could and should we do? "Come home America," George McGovern famously cried out in his 1972 campaign. Forty years later, Obama's mantra ran: "It's time for a little nation-building at home."

II. Where Does Trump Fit In?

In Riyadh in May, Donald Trump explicitly defined his approach as "principled realism, rooted in our values, shared interests, and common sense." He continued:

> Our friends will never question our support and our enemies will never doubt our determination. Our partnerships will advance security through stability, not through radical disruption. We will make decisions based on real world outcomes, not inflexible ideology. We will be guided by the lessons of experience, not the confines of rigid thinking. And wherever possible, we will seek gradual reforms, not sudden intervention. We must seek partners, not perfection. And to make allies of all who share our goals.

These nicely balanced cadences could have been uttered by any postwar president. Trump hit all the classic notes. So what about the differences? Interestingly, "principled realism" was not so much directed against Barack Obama as against fellow-Republican George W. Bush. No more "radical disruption." Gradual reforms must beat out "sudden intervention." Unlike Obama, Trump would not to be choosy when recruiting allies. Hence, "we must seek partners, not perfection."

Truman and Eisenhower, JFK and LBJ would have nodded. In the Cold War, none of them had any moral qualms when picking allies against the Soviet Union. As long as "our" strongmen demonstrated fealty to the United States, they were all welcome: dictators in Spain and Portugal, potentates throughout the Middle East, and caudillos in Latin America. Like Obama, Trump will not be "doctrinaire." Hence, his emphasis on the "lessons of experience" and the rejection of "rigid thinking." Who would want to quarrel?

Ironically, there is more continuity between Obama and Trump than meets the eye of the media. Obama had told UK prime minister David Cameron: Never mind the "special relationship," "you have to pay your fair share." Trump told a NATO summit: "Twenty-three of the 28 member nations are still not paying what they should be paying for their defense." This is "not fair" and "many of these nations owe massive amounts of money."

Who said: "Free riders aggravate me?" That was Obama, not Trump. Trump also could have tweeted this Obama line: "You could call me a realist in believing we can't . . . relieve all the world's misery." The Founding Fathers and John Quincy Adams would applaud.

American presidential doctrines are tricky. In his 1916 campaign, Woodrow Wilson ran on a plank that proclaimed: "He kept us out of the war." Six months after his reelection, he launched a war against Kaiser Bill to "make the world safe for democracy." Obama reduced US troops in Europe to 35,000. At the end of his second term, though, he started redeploying men and materiel. Given Trump's anti-NATO rhetoric, one

might have expected him to stop the flow. He did not. The deployment continued with the dispatch of a Stryker battalion to Poland as part of a multinational battle group.

Recall that No. 45 had previously denigrated NATO as "obsolete," and the EU as a failing business (it "is gonna be hard to keep together"). Recall also that at the Brussels NATO summit in 2017, the president demonstratively declined to affirm Article 5 that commits all members to come to the aid of an attacked ally. Yet the heads of Defense and State, Jim Mattis and Rex Tillerson, went out of their way to praise NATO and underscore the US security guarantee. The vicepresident celebrated America's "unwavering commitment" to the Alliance, while Jim Mattis affirmed "our enduring bond."

Ironically, Article 5 has been invoked only once—and then in favor of the United States after 9/11. If North Korea launched missiles against America, the United States again would be the beneficiary of Article 5. "Obsolete" was yesterday, and suddenly Trump was "totally in favor" of the EU.

Trump has been fingered as an isolationist. "America first" seems to corroborate the point, and the "free rider" label would apply to both Europe and the Far East. So shape up, or we ship out. But reality bites. As North Korea stoked the fires of aggression, Trump tightened the alliance bonds with Japan and South Korea. THAAD, the Army's Terminal High Altitude Area Defense, went to South Korea in May 2017 to signal to Pyongyang: The United States will defend Seoul against your missiles.

The administration also stepped up naval patrols in the Western Pacific to counter Beijing's ambitions. In the Syrian War, it is "Obama-plus": No overt boots-on-the-ground, but plenty of bombing against ISIS, which Obama had ridiculed as a "Jayvee Team." Bombing runs against ISIS have substantially increased under Trump. Instead of vacating "red lines" in Syria, as Obama did, the United States launched missiles against a suspected chemical weapons facility.

It is also Obama-plus on Iran, the "plus" referring to Trump's harsh rhetoric against Tehran's nuclear weapons program. The bet, even odds, is that the United States will not abrogate the JCPOA, the deal that is to brake Iran's nuclear effort. Nor does Trump divulge his strategy for dealing with the most urgent issue, the expansion of Iranian and Russian power across the Middle East. Ironically, the US engagement against soon-to-be defunct ISIS has cleared the way for Russia and Iran to secure a permanent foothold in the Levant. Henry Kissinger, who expelled the Soviet Union from the Arab world half a century ago, would not approve.

III. What Then is "Principled Realism?"

As far as US doctrines go, the Trump version owes more to Obama than to W. With his sweeping agenda, Bush was no realist because he ignored the difference between ambition and achievement as well as the gap between limited means and unbound ends, like implanting democracy in a barren Arab soil. Obama's lodestar was the retraction of US power; only at the end of his second term did he come to understand that great powers do not enjoy the choice of self-containment.

Trump, paradoxically, followed in Obama's footsteps, denigrating humanitarian and regime-change intervention. Instead, he touted "America first," an America that looks out for itself and flattens its profile in the world. Yet beware of doctrines and scrutinize actions. Trumpism does not spell the retrenchment of American power, but its reassertion around the globe. Still, the weight of American strategy has definitely tilted from ideals to self-interest. "Reassert yourself big-time, but mind the risk and look for a deal with your rivals"—this might be the gist of a Trump Doctrine in the making.

In contrast to Trump's overblown rhetoric, his behavior is actually quite restrained, as befits a great power that must constantly weigh risks against rewards. Nor does "America first" spell isolationism. Trump has reaffirmed alliance commitments and put his troops and missiles in harm's way, in Europe as well as in the Pacific. His bluster belies his caution. He could almost quote Obama who famously proclaimed, "Don't do stupid shit."

What is the difference between Nos. 44 and 45? Obama did not believe in American power, Trump does; but he is not given to visions of omnipotence, as was George W. Bush. If there is a Trump Doctrine beyond the measured cadences of his Riyadh address, it is not "no-force," but the "economy of force." Balance means and ends, size up present and future costs, don't go into open-ended wars, deter your enemies and protect your friends who might look like free riders, but actually amplify American power.

In his first year, No. 45 fails on rhetorical restraint, but gets decent grades on the real-life tests. It is as if there were two Trumps. One threatens South Korea with the abrogation of a free-trade pact in force since 2007. The other simultaneously deploys antimissile systems to defend the South against an attack from the North. Trump One roars, Trump Two reassures.

While the Europeans have calmed down on their security fears, what with Trump retightening the Atlantic bond, they—and America's Asian allies—still shiver when it comes to the international economy. Who will prevail? The bad Trump who is putting the axe to the liberal trading order the United States built and maintained for 70 years? Or the good Trump who understands that protectionism and trade war will damage America's economic welfare along with the well-being of its allies.

One year into Obama's first term, strategic retrenchment was already visible. But his administration was bullish on free trade, as exemplified by the pursuit of the Atlantic and Pacific free-trade pacts. Trump has nixed the latter, while allowing the Europeans to sink the former. If the prudent Trump prevails over the blustering one, realism and the sound calculation of US interests may yet reassert themselves in the international economy—as they did in the arena of grand strategy.

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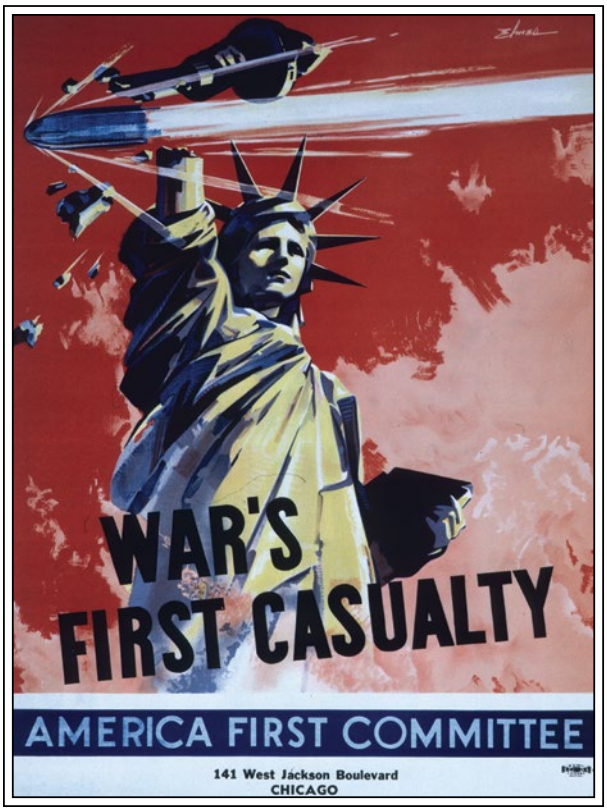
Two First Quarter Cheers for Trump's Principled Realism

By Robert G. Kaufman



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The content and trajectory of Donald Trump's foreign policy have defied the expectations of many of his supporters as well as his critics across the political spectrum. The President has moved a long way from his campaign positions of denigrating the value of America's democratic alliances and renouncing America's role as the world's default power essential to deterring hegemonic threats in vital geopolitical regions. The President has fired Steve Bannon, the paladin of a sizable segment of Trump's core constituency clamoring for American strategic retrenchment different in rationale, but similar in outcome to Obama's Dangerous Doctrine that weakened America. Instead, Trump's core national security team—Secretary of Defense James Mattis, UN Ambassador Nicki Haley, and National Security Advisor H. R. McMaster—consider America's military, political, and economic power indispensable to deterring and defeating global threats menacing to America's enlightened self-interest.

What Trump calls "Principled Realism rooted in shared values" has not crystallized into a doctrine. Moreover, the president's volatility and unpredictability—partially cultivated but also intrinsic—make any prognostications about President Trump an endeavor marinating in conditions and caveats. Yet Trump's actions speak louder and more favorably about the substance of his national security policy than his often contradictory and confrontational words on the subject. Several core premises suffuse Trump's principle realism.

First, Trump views international relations as a largely zero-sum game mandating American vigilance and a preponderance of power. His principled realism rejects categorically the illusions of globalists, liberal multilateralists, and postmodernists that international institutions and postmodern norms render the ineradicable danger of war obsolete. Trump has acknowledged—less often in word than in deed—that no adequate substitutes for American power loom plausibly on the horizon, while demanding that our allies bear a greater share of the burden for providing for their defense. In contrast to his predecessor, who saw "the arrogance of American power" as the problem, President Trump believes that the greatest dangers arise when our foes perceive us as irresolute and unprepared.

Second, Trump accords precedence to the threats emanating from great power rivals such as Russia and China rather than "unconventional threats" such as global warming or failed states. After briefly flirting with some version of Obama's feckless reset toward Putin, the Trump administration has bolstered deterrence against Russian imperialism, reaffirming the importance of NATO, rebuilding the American military, increasing American presence in Eastern Europe, resisting rather than enabling Russia's subversion of Ukraine's independence, arming Ukrainian freedom fighters, and accelerating the development and deployment of missile defense, including in Eastern Europe. Meanwhile, Trump's calculated oscillations between reaffirming the importance of NATO while pressuring our derelict allies to do more has finally

spurred some of them—most importantly Germany—to enact a sorely needed, long overdue increase in defense spending and military presence in Eastern Europe.

Likewise, the Trump administration has backed our Asian democratic allies unstintingly in the escalating confrontation over North Korea's nuclear program, reversing the dangerous erosion in American military capability, strategic clarity, and resolve emblematic of Obama's vaunted but hollow pivot to Asia. After initially flirting with an increasingly authoritarian, aggressive, and belligerent China bent on hegemony in the world's most important geopolitical region, Trump quickly disabused himself of his predecessor's illusion that either the PRC or Russia would collaborate with us to diffuse the gathering North Korean danger. Trump has wisely relied primarily on our democratic allies in the region, as well as cultivating new ones his predecessor neglected. Above all perhaps in the long run, the President has revived President George W. Bush's prescient initiative to facilitate a decent democratic India's rise as a counterweight to China and radical Islam both also existentially threatening Indian democracy.

In the Middle East and South Asia, President Trump has made substantial though tentative progress repairing the damage that the Obama Doctrine had wrought by putting distance between the United States and its traditional friends, while appeasing and enabling a virulently anti-American anti-Semitic Iranian theocracy that is using the Prozac of an unenforceable nuclear agreement to cross the nuclear threshold. Trump's better conceived and more decisively executed diplomatic, economic, and military strategy has broken the stalemate that ensued during the Obama administration's diffident fight against ISIS. Trump has succeeded in laying the framework for a tacit coalition between Israel and Saudi Arabia—both of which Obama deeply antagonized—to contain and confront Iran's hegemonic ambitions.

Third, Trump's principled realism repudiates the Obama administration's time certain approach to the employment of military force, which made withdrawal the priority over consolidating victory in favor of "one based on conditions." Unveiling his new strategy for winning the war in Afghanistan, the President emphasized "how counterproductive it is for the United States to announce the dates we intend to begin or end military options. . . . Conditions on the ground—not arbitrary time tables—will guide our strategies from now on. America's enemies must never know our plans or believe they can wait us out."

Fourth, Trump's principled realism downplays principle applied to excess, at least rhetorically. American ideals often serve, rather than undermine, America's self-interest. Historically, the most successful US grand strategies such as Truman's and Reagan's largely succeeded by reconciling power and principle. Notwithstanding Trump's unhealthy attraction to strong men such as Putin in Russia, Li Ping in China, and Erdogan in Turkey that initially led him astray, Trump's policy on this score is better than it sounds. Generally, he has given precedence to bolstering our decent democratic allies: Japan, South Korea, India, the Eastern European Members of NATO, and Great Britain. A decent democratic Israel now knows it has a friend rather than an enemy in the White House. Even moral democratic realists such as this writer defend on ethical as well as practical grounds a tacit alliance with Saudi Arabia against the greater danger of Iran as the lesser geopolitical and moral evil, in a region where an insufficient number of plausible democratic allies exist as an alternative.

Fifth, Trump's transactional view of politics distinguishes his principled realism from the more venerable versions of conservative internationalism such as Reagan's. Unharnessed to principle, the art of the deal can dangerously descend into unsteadiness, unpredictability, and expedience inimical to vindicating the national interest, rightly understood. It remains troubling, however, that Trump continues to eschew imposing American values as a categorical imperative. The United States still has a vital interest in sustaining and extending the democratic zone of peace when possible and prudent.

Sixth, Trump's economic nationalism, if carried to excess and grounded in his excessively zero-sum game view of politics, may undermine principle and realism. Though Trump has legitimately insisted on fair trade, free trade serves America's enlightened self-interest most of the time, especially with decent democratic regimes.

Seventh, Trump's principled realism strives to restore a more traditional notion of sovereignty as the cornerstone of international politics. States that cannot control their borders cannot responsibly govern

or defend themselves. Here too, Trump's salutary corrective to Obama's denigration of sovereignty will become dangerous taken as a categorical imperative rather than a strong presumption.

For all these legitimate caveats and qualifications, the rationale and results of Trump's Principled Realism have served as a salutary corrective to Obama's Dangerous Doctrine. Whether Trump's foreign policy proves ultimately to be principled and realistic hinges on whether he can harness his self-destructive impulsiveness, leaven his power politics with more principle, restore American prosperity, and realize that decent democratic allies constitute more of an asset than a burden—especially to thwart China's bid for hegemony in the world's most important geopolitical regions. As Secretary of Defense Mattis observed in April 2016, President Trump "inherited a strategic mess." President Trump cannot solve all of America's problems in a single day—a self-evident truth he often honors in the breach, creating grandiose expectations impossible to fulfill.

Even so, Trump's principled realism deserves—provisionally at least—more credit than his legion of rabid critics admits. We are less unsafe and deterrence less precarious than it was six months ago because Trump has infused American grand strategy with strategic and moral clarity sorely lacking over the previous eight years. To paraphrase the immortal words of the Rolling Stones, "you can't always get what you want, but perhaps it may turn out to be what we need." Trump's principled realism sure beats hands down four more years of Obama's Dangerous Doctrine that Hillary Clinton had in store for us.

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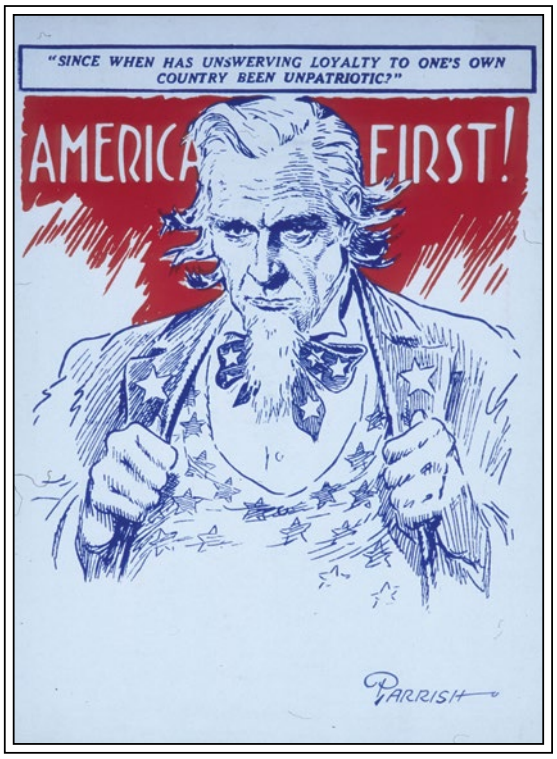

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What Can We Expect from Trump's Foreign Policy of "Principled Realism"?

By Angelo M. Codevilla

Since the Trump team labeled its foreign policy "principled realism" before carrying out much of it, the term is not a description of things accomplished. Instead, it tells us how the Trump team wants to regard the policies it may pursue and, above all, what it wants others to think of them. Being a label applied to an as-yet largely empty container, it is advertising.

This phenomenon, explored by Daniel Boorstin's *The Image: A Guide To Pseudo-Events in America* (1962), long since migrated from the world of business to politics. Its essence is to lead audiences to think about a product in ways that compensate for what the product lacks. Thus, advertisers describe the toilet paper as soft because they fear users will experience it as rough, and the laxative as fast-acting yet gentle to appeal to those who want one feature but fear the other.

Accordingly, labeling a foreign policy "principled realism" is a preemptive answer to whoever might call it unprincipled or/and unrealistic. But, absent references to the history of events and ideas, as well as to the realities that its authors find salient, the label says zero about "principles" or "reality." Neglecting to define these points of reference suggests a policy team less concerned with substance than with image—that is, one adrift on events and public opinion.

To divine what we may expect from the Trump team's foreign policy, we can rely only on its first months' words and deeds. In fact, their actions have oscillated not between "realism" and "idealism" or any other extremes, but within the narrow band between the foreign policies of Bush and those of Obama, for the team members' horizons do not extend beyond those of the administrations in which they served.

Iran is as clear an example as any. Candidate Trump vowed to "tear up" Obama's "deal" with Iran, which could be accomplished just by submitting it to the Senate for ratification. Instead, the Trump administration certifies Iran's adherence to it, and continues to observe it. Pure Obama. On the other hand, speaking in Saudi Arabia, Trump promised US support for the (Sunni) Arab world's increased efforts against Iran. Bush, plus. But then, when the Saudis and Emiratis brought pressure against Iran's only ally in the Gulf, Qatar, the US government set about not so quietly supporting Qatar, and hence Iran. Something in between Bush and Obama, and a bit of both. Seeking a properly descriptive label for this sort of thing is futile.

After Afghanistan's Northern Alliance of Tajiks and Uzbeks had well-nigh destroyed the Pashtun Taliban in 2001, the Bush administration committed some 33,000 US troops to support a central government of its own creation. Between 2009 and 2011 Obama tripled that number, then reduced it to fewer than 9,000—changing rhetorical rationales notwithstanding—to prevent the Taliban, defined as any who fight

the government, from overthrowing it. Trump had promised to leave Afghans to their own devices. But in August 2017, he told the voters that both he and they had been wrong. Having been schooled by the experts, he would keep US troops in Afghanistan and send some 4,000 more. But this time "to win." His team explained that this only meant that the Afghan government would not be allowed to fall on Trump's watch. Apart from the number of troops involved, the explicit narrowing of purpose to staving off the Afghan government's fall—rather than realism or idealism—is such distinction as exists between Trump's 2017 policy and Bush/Obama's of 2002–2016.

The Trump team's actions with regard to Russia and China have stayed within his predecessors' even narrower range.

Vladimir Putin seeks to make post-Soviet Russia great. G. W. Bush did his best to soothe him, by adhering unilaterally to the 1972 ABM Treaty's essentials while withdrawing from it formally. Thus, by sidestepping Republican demands for missile defense, Bush preserved the importance of the arsenal on which Russia's claim to great power rests. Nevertheless, in 2008, Putin annexed two of Georgia's provinces. Bush then placed token sanctions on Russia. Obama mitigated them, and sent Secretary of State Hillary Clinton to Moscow with a red "reset" button. Obama also stopped Bush's anti-Iran missile defense installations in Eastern Europe and promised Putin to restrict US missile defense programs even further. But after Ukraine revolted against Russia in 2014 and Russia seized the Crimea, Obama denounced Russian expansionism more strongly than Bush and imposed even more sanctions. He also agreed to token NATO troop deployments in Eastern Europe. But because sixteen years of Bush/Obama did not strengthen America vis-à-vis Russia, they neither braked Putin nor advanced American interests.

Donald Trump seems to have come into office intending to end the sterile standoff by agreeing on spheres of influence in Europe and the Middle East. But the Democratic party's allegations that Russia engineered his election victory precluded pursuing this possibility (with the exception of US and Russian forces' de facto mutual avoidance in Syria). Hence, if only for domestic political self-defense, the Trump team doubled down on Obama's strategy, which had doubled down on Bush's: demanding that Russia restore the Crimea to Ukraine, ramping up sanctions, and deploying token forces in Eastern Europe, but without changing the US/Russia ratio of military power. Trump promises more money for the US military, and even "many billions" for missile defense. But he has refused to change the long-standing US policy to put no obstacle in the way of Russian (or Chinese) missiles heading for America.

This is reminiscent of Franklin Roosevelt's continuity with Herbert Hoover's 1931 Japan policy: demand the restoration of Manchuria, impose sanctions, and keep token garrisons nearby. The discrepancy between ends and means did not work out well.

Continuity and consistency also characterize the Bush, Obama, and Trump administrations' words and deeds regarding China, Japan, and Korea: Try to keep Japan and South Korea in America's security orbit and essentially unarmed by offering them protection, mostly against China, but also against North Korea. Watch with wringing hands as China quietly grows its ballistic missile force and capacity to control the ocean from the land. Worry loudly as North Korea advertises its nuclear and missile programs. Ask China to rein in North Korea and smile as it promises to do so. Frown while watching China break its promise with a smile. Build defenses against a token number of North Korean missiles as part of an eighty billion US missile defense program, designed to reassure China that none of that can defend against its missiles. Worry as North Korea's threat grows and China happily offers its protection to South Korea and Japan. Worry seriously as North Korea's nuclear and missile programs acquire the capacity to strike mainland America.

In mid-2017 however, it became clear that North Korea's programs are producing nuclear-tipped missiles of sufficient quality and quantity to overwhelm the eighty billion US investment in missile defense. The Japanese and South Koreans ask how the Americans, if they cannot protect themselves against North Korea, can protect them against China. They talk of going nuclear. China redoubles its offers of protection. In short, the very premise of post-1945 US policy in the Western Pacific no longer holds. Will the Trump

administration try to restore it? Otherwise, what is America's plan for dealing with the Western Pacific under new circumstances?

Thus far, the Trump team has shown continuity and consistency with past policy: Do everything to reassure allies, short of angering China. For example, Trump's commitment to more money and game-changing technology with regard to missile defense, involving as it does only North Korea and founded on things now nonexistent, may not upset China. But it is unlikely to reassure anybody.

In sum, in the Western Pacific as well as elsewhere, the Trump team's foreign policy oscillates within narrow bands because its members have shown neither the interest nor the capacity to transcend them.

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America's Foreign Policy Crisis

By Bruce Thornton

For most of its history the United States has vacillated among different foreign policy philosophies. Today we face a world in which our rivals and enemies have been emboldened by our seeming retreat from being the dominant power a globalized economy needs to ensure order and stability. Our current inability to decide on a course of action, however, is a dangerous inflection point that may lead to increasing global disorder and the decline of America's power to protect its security and interests.

When America was a new nation, it wanted to avoid the quarrels of the Old World and its "entangling alliances," as Thomas Jefferson called them, echoing George Washington's warning against "permanent alliances." The United States should influence other nations as an "example" of ordered liberty, a sentiment famously expressed by John Quincy Adams in 1821: America should be a nation of "well-wishers to the freedom and independence of all," but one that "goes not abroad, in search of monsters to destroy."

Yet even in its youth, the United States found itself embroiled in European wars. The global trade created by the British Empire, and the Napoleonic Wars that followed the French Revolution, necessarily led to conflict with other nations—as when Britain imposed a naval blockade on trade between France and America in 1812, leading to the War of 1812. During the early stages of economic globalization, the United States received a lesson in the limits of isolationism.

Since then, the nations of the world and their interests have become even more tightly knit together. These global interconnections have made the question of American foreign policy more complex. Four broad philosophies of interstate relations have developed, and they set the terms of our current debates about America's role in the world.

"Isolationism" still runs deep in an America created by settlers who put distance between themselves and the Old World, and later migrated into the vast western frontier. Unsurprisingly, isolationism regularly recurs in our history, particularly in the aftermath of wars. After World War I, a strong strain of isolationism set the tone of American foreign policy in the following two decades, most obviously in the Senate's refusal to ratify the 1919 Versailles Treaty. As Theodore Roosevelt said, in words published posthumously, "I do not believe in keeping our men on the other side to patrol the Rhine, or police Russia, or interfere in Central Europe or the Balkan peninsula." In our day, the long, unfinished wars in Iraq and Afghanistan have aroused in many Americans a similar "pox on both your houses" sentiment towards foreign conflicts in distant lands. Barack Obama campaigned for president in part on promises to end both those wars—and indeed in Iraq he honored his pledge, removing American troops in 2011.

Subsequent developments, particularly the rise of Islamic State and the brutal Syrian civil war, have reaffirmed, for many, that hasty disengagement will create chaos and require the United States to reengage in order to protect its interests and security. Even President Trump, who opposed the Iraq war and campaigned at times as an isolationist, has been putting more troops into the Middle East, despite opposing such a move during the presidential campaign.

A second foreign policy approach has been dubbed "Jacksonian" by historian Walter Russell Mead. Briefly, Jacksonians recognize that conflicts with foreign nations will arise and that American security and interests will require the use of force abroad. But when going to war, our goals should be to use overwhelming, even brutal, force to end the conflict quickly and at the least cost in American lives and resources. Victory should be definitive and indisputable, and "limited wars" to achieve idealistic aims should be avoided. As Mead writes, "Either the stakes are important enough to fight for––in which case you should fight with everything you have––or they are not, in which case you should mind your own business and stay home." Though magnanimous in victory, Americans should eschew prolonged nation-building or further interference in other

countries. America should fight to defend its interests and security, or to punish unjust aggression against it, but not to destroy international monsters.

Jacksonian foreign policy resembles "realism." Like Jacksonians, realists put America's interests and security as the most important foreign policy goals. During the Cold War, realists believed that the containment of communism required alliances and coalitions with unsavory anticommunist countries despite their illiberal or authoritarian governments. Realists hold that America must also be ready not just to commit military forces to fighting regimes that threaten our interests, but also to station troops and military assets to bases abroad in order to deter aggression. Isolationism or swift, limited engagements are not feasible in a world of expansionary regimes that require alliances like NATO and a constant US military presence abroad to keep conflicts from erupting into major wars.

The fourth major view of American foreign policy can be called "moralizing internationalism," to use historian Corelli Barnett's phrase. Economic interdependency among nations, technological developments improving human life, and the success of liberal democracy and free-market capitalism in creating global order and economic cooperation have all led to transnational institutional norms and structures intended to secure these improvements and expand them throughout the world. Nor is the aim purely altruistic, as proponents argue. America's interests and security are dependent on the adoption of the Western model by other nations. Though the "soft power" of diplomacy, negotiation, and foreign aid should be preferred for achieving these goals, American force should be used when necessary in a way calculated to create the conditions for effecting this improvement by eliminating those who would oppose it.

This ideal of using war to create a better world has been a powerful component of US foreign policy for more than a century. In 1917, Woodrow Wilson argued for US involvement in World War I as a way to make the world "safe for democracy" and "to vindicate the principles of peace and justice in the life of the world." All peoples should "prefer the interests of mankind to any narrow interest of their own," since "the common purpose of enlightened mankind has taken their place." In the last days of the Soviet Union, George H. W. Bush in his 1991 State of the Union address similarly spoke of a "new world order," in which "diverse nations are drawn together in common cause to achieve the universal aspirations of mankind––peace and security, freedom and the rule of law."

His son George W. Bush, in the 2002 National Security Strategy, similarly defined US foreign policy as promoting a "single sustainable model for national success: freedom, democracy, and free enterprise," for "these values of freedom are right and true for every person, in every society." Later, in his second Inaugural Address, he added, "The survival of liberty in our land increasingly depends on the success of liberty in other lands. The best hope for peace in our world is the expansion of freedom in all the world." And Barack Obama, despite his policy of reducing American involvement abroad, in his 2009 Cairo speech spoke of universal political goods such as "the ability to speak your mind and have a say in how you are governed; confidence in the rule of law and the equal administration of justice; government that is transparent and doesn't steal from the people; the freedom to live as you choose. These are not American ideas; they are human rights. And that is why we will support them everywhere." Obama, of course, preferred "soft power" for achieving these aims over the large-scale military force that accompanied Woodrow Wilson's and George W. Bush's efforts to turn these ideals into reality.

Most Americans adopt one of these views of foreign policy, or shift between them, or even endorse two or three simultaneously, depending on circumstances such as the length of the conflict, its seeming lack of progress, and its costs in lives and resources. The wars in Iraq and Afghanistan are examples of this inconsistency. At first, both wars were supported as righteous, Jacksonian punishments of a savage enemy. As the wars grew more difficult, dissatisfaction led some to favor withdrawing. Likewise, nation-building—when it seemed able to repeat the successes in Germany and Japan after World War II—garnered support. Most Americans were moved by the photos of Iraqi women whose purple thumbs showed they had voted in a free election. But the violent refusal of the occupied peoples to cooperate with our nation-building program

in order to achieve the boons of freedom, democracy, and prosperity soured voters on the nation-building projects.

At this moment, we seem to be in a "soft" Jacksonian mood regarding the complex conflicts in Syria and Ukraine. Voters responded positively to Donald Trump's campaign promise to "bomb the [expletive] out of ISIS," and, so far, do not seem worried about his escalation of troops in the region. They cheered the cruise-missile attack on the Syrian air base, and the dropping of the "Mother of All Bombs" on an ISIS cave complex in Afghanistan. Of course, this mood can shift rapidly depending on events. The longer the conflict persists, and the more casualties and costs are incurred, the more impatient the voters will become. And when our political leaders are hostages to biennial ballot-box accountability, the vox populi cannot be ignored.

But this vacillating foreign policy has led to the dangerous world we inhabit today. The United States is facing challenges to its global authority and its role in being the "sheriff" of the global marketplace, to use foreign policy theorist Robert Kagan's metaphor. Russia is annexing territory, threatening NATO members, and is for now the hegemon in the Middle East. Iran is trying to create a "Shia Crescent" from Iran to Bahrain, and developing nuclear weapons to buttress its ambitions. China is conducting a slow-motion takeover of the South China Sea, at the expense of our allies South Korea and Japan, and some of the major sea-lanes vital for global trade. And the thug-regime in North Korea just developed an intercontinental missile capable of reaching Alaska, and continues to work on nuclear warheads that can be delivered by missiles.

This state of affairs is in part the consequence of America's retreat under the foreign policies of the previous administration, policies approved by the millions of Americans who twice elected Barack Obama as commander in chief. So now what? Do we stay in Fortress America, emerging only to punish attacks on the homeland? Do we continue to act as a flaccid "soft power" scorned by brutal men willing to kill indiscriminately to achieve their goals? Should we aim for a "limited war" of air strikes, leaving our proxies to do the heavy lifting? Or should we pursue a "hard" Jacksonian response that involves a full commitment of military resources and lives, with all the "exorbitant risk" and uncertainty that Henry Kissinger reminds us always attends the use of lethal force?

Hard questions indeed—but the answers cannot be formulated without taking into account the American people. In any conflict, the enemy has a metaphorical vote, but the citizens have a literal one. Their will is the "x factor" whose value no theory of foreign policy can calculate or predict. Whether America remains in retreat or reverses course, it will be because that's what the American voters want—until the resulting instability drives voters to demand a change.

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Discussion Questions

1. The Trump administration has characterized its emerging national security strategy as "principled realism." How might such a policy actually work abroad?
2. What is the difference between a "Jacksonian" and a "realist" foreign policy?
3. Is a realist foreign policy amoral in its pessimistic appraisal of human nature?
4. How did we characterize the foreign policy of Ronald Reagan? Neo-isolationist? Realist? Jacksonian? Neo-conservative?
5. What best characterizes the current foreign policy doctrine of the respective Democratic and Republican establishments?

POLL: "Principled Realism" means intervening abroad

- ☐ Almost never.
- ☐ Only when narrow US interests are involved.
- ☐ Only when US interests—and those of our allies—are involved.
- ☐ Only when US interests—and those also of the postwar global order—are at stake.
- ☐ Only when defending any of our interests has a sure chance of success.
- ☐ As often as we feasibly can to shape the world in our image and thus lessen global tensions

Suggestions for Further Reading

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- Joseph Bosco, "Trump's 'Principled Realism'," *RealClear Defense* (September 21, 2017). https://www.realcleardefense.com/articles/2017/09/21/trumps_principled_realism_112342.html
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IN THE NEXT ISSUE

North Korean Nukes

Military History in Contemporary Conflict

As the very name of Hoover Institution attests, military history lies at the very core of our dedication to the study of "War, Revolution, and Peace." Indeed, the precise mission statement of the Hoover Institution includes the following promise: "The overall mission of this Institution is, from its records, to recall the voice of experience against the making of war, and by the study of these records and their publication, to recall man's endeavors to make and preserve peace, and to sustain for America the safeguards of the American way of life." From its origins as a library and archive, the Hoover Institution has evolved into one of the foremost research centers in the world for policy formation and pragmatic analysis. It is with this tradition in mind, that the "Working Group on the Role of Military History in Contemporary Conflict" has set its agenda—reaffirming the Hoover Institution's dedication to historical research in light of contemporary challenges, and in particular, reinvigorating the national study of military history as an asset to foster and enhance our national security. By bringing together a diverse group of distinguished military historians, security analysts, and military veterans and practitioners, the working group seeks to examine the conflicts of the past as critical lessons for the present.

Working Group on the Role of Military History in Contemporary Conflict

The Working Group on the Role of Military History in Contemporary Conflict examines how knowledge of past military operations can influence contemporary public policy decisions concerning current conflicts. The careful study of military history offers a way of analyzing modern war and peace that is often underappreciated in this age of technological determinism. Yet the result leads to a more in-depth and dispassionate understanding of contemporary wars, one that explains how particular military successes and failures of the past can be often germane, sometimes misunderstood, or occasionally irrelevant in the context of the present.

Strategika

Strategika is a journal that analyzes ongoing issues of national security in light of conflicts of the past—the efforts of the Military History Working Group of historians, analysts, and military personnel focusing on military history and contemporary conflict. Our board of scholars shares no ideological consensus other than a general acknowledgment that human nature is largely unchanging. Consequently, the study of past wars can offer us tragic guidance about present conflicts—a preferable approach to the more popular therapeutic assumption that contemporary efforts to ensure the perfectibility of mankind eventually will lead to eternal peace. New technologies, methodologies, and protocols come and go; the larger tactical and strategic assumptions that guide them remain mostly the same—a fact discernable only through the study of history.

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