

Trump's Foreign Policy Legacy

Five years ago candidate Donald Trump burst onto the political stage like a breath of fresh air. The first aspirant to America's highest office since the end of the Cold War to recognize that this country's political, military, economic, and moral resources were not deployed in a balanced manner, he sought to protect and enhance her rationally defined security and economic interests. On world affairs in particular, he started saying things that could have come straight from [Pat Buchanan](#), Ron Paul, [Paul Gottfried](#), or [yours truly](#).

Now Donald Trump is leaving office with the distinction of being the first president since Jimmy Carter (elected 1976), and only the second since Dwight Eisenhower (elected 1952), who did not start or reignite a war or create a new failed state. Despite this success, he was unable to carry out most elements of [his early foreign policy agenda](#).

From the outset Trump said he loathed the strategy of global full-spectrum dominance: why must the U.S. be engaged everywhere and [play the world's policeman](#)? NATO was obsolete, its core mission over, and Trump said [he'd be fine if it broke up](#), as well as demanding that its members should pay their full share.

Trump also pledged to seek better relations with Russia. He criticized the [regime-change mania](#) of successive administrations, pointing out the disastrous fruits of toppling Saddam Hussein. [Syrian President Bashar al Assad he promised to leave alone](#), focusing on degrading ISIS instead. Not once did he mention "promoting freedom, democracy and human rights," or "confronting tyranny and evil," or "making the world a better place" in the image of the exceptional nation.

All that was abhorrent to the bipartisan Swamp. Under the four

preceding presidents it embraced what neoconservatives Robert Kagan and William Kristol had called the [*Benevolent Global Hegemony of the United States*](#). They agreed that America's unassailable military might was vital to the continuance of the "[rules-based global order](#)." The result was a series of military interventions in the Balkans, Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya, and less overtly in Syria and Oman. The consensus was codified in George W. Bush's [2002 National Security Strategy](#), which declared that the U.S. would promote free and open societies in every continent, and [his own pledge](#) to end the era of "destructive national rivalries." A decade later, the Obama Administration's [2012 Defense Strategic Guidance](#) asserted that [the task of the United States](#) was to "confront and defeat aggression anywhere in the world."

Trump was perceived as a threat to the utopian goals which were profitable and intoxicating to the Swamp, causing neoliberal globalists and neoconservative never-Trumpers to join forces and demonize him. That campaign started in earnest on April 27, 2016, [when Trump gave his first major foreign policy speech](#). He noted that after the Cold War our foreign policy "veered badly off course," with Iraq, Libya, and Syria as examples of flawed interventions that have spread chaos and helped the rise of ISIS. U.S. foreign policy "is a complete and total disaster" devoid of vision, purpose, direction, and strategy, [he said](#). [He promised](#) to look for new advisors in the field of foreign policy, and to shun the establishment responsible "for a long history of failed policies and continued losses at war."

"America First will be the major and overriding theme of my administration," [Trump concluded](#). His was a simple summary of the purpose of every state known to history: the *raison d'état* has been the principle of foreign policymaking from Akkad until today. [He also declared](#) that he would not try "to spread universal values that not everybody shares or wants," and that [he would not](#) "go abroad in search of enemies."

The Permanent State was horrified. “America First” was duly associated with “anti-semitism and U.S. nationalism in the lead-up to World War II,” [CNN screamed](#). “Anti-semitism” and “U.S. nationalism” were thus seamlessly sewn together, paving the way for the contemporary coupling of “neo-nazism” and “white nationalism.” A Bloomberg writer went a step further and [claimed that “Trump’s new slogan”](#) was a “toxic” phrase long excluded from “respectable discourse” and reminiscent of the “Nazi era.”

This was an early example of the establishment’s increasingly shrill Trumpophobic discourse based on logical fallacies. The one quoted above was a case of false equivalence: Trump wants to put America’s interests above all others; Hitler said he wanted the same for Germany; *ergo* Trump equals Hitler. This was just the beginning of Trump’s subsequent [reductio ad Hitlerum](#).

Dozens of *ad Hominem* and other fallacious assaults on Trump were repeated daily. Most recently, the assertion that [his call on supporters](#) “to walk down Pennsylvania Avenue... to the Capitol and we’re going to try and give... our Republicans, the weak ones... the kind of pride and boldness that they need to take back our country,” was an incendiary call to arms is an example of *post hoc ergo propter hoc*. Since the storming followed Trump’s claim that the election was stolen and that there should be a march to the Capitol, *ergo* the entire incident was caused by the claim and the call to the walk.

But back to 2016. In November of that year it seemed that Donald Trump, a despised interloper triumphant against all odds and forecasts, had a historic chance turn over a new leaf. His win was akin to Ronald Reagan’s first victory in 1980: an instinctive foreign policy realist was back in the Oval Office for the first time in over three decades. Trump’s appeal to foreign policy realism under the slogan “America First” would have been easily recognized and accepted by Reagan, but was shunned by his less worthy successors.

To Trump's misfortune, discarding the neurotic urge to run the world—and accepting that it cannot be molded according to the bipartisan definition of “who we are”—was even less acceptable to the controllers of the American permanent state in 2016 than the Reaganite notion of the Evil Empire was tolerable to their predecessors 35 years earlier. All essential elements of the intelligence and national-security apparatus, as well as the military-industrial complex and the mainstream media machine, mobilized to resist Trump's endeavor to bring back realist criteria into definitions of “interests” and “threats.”

Trump's victory opened the possibility of a radically new grand strategy. “America First” was a call to return to diplomatic realism based on the recognition that the United States is a great power—and, for the time being (but not for ever) the globally predominant power—in a world of lesser powers which act in accordance with the rational calculus of promoting their security, prosperity, and cohesion in a competitive world.

That was not to be.

[Tomorrow Part II]

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