

#### *Authentic Trump versus the Trump Administration: Donald Trump as Foreign Policy Disrupter*

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**D**onald Trump's potential to be a disruptive force in both national and international politics was fully in evidence during the 2016 election campaign and has been more than realized since his inauguration. The extent of the eventual disruption that will mark his legacy will depend on a combination of intended and unintended consequences of his actions. The way he stirs the international pot may lead other states to look at problems with fresh eyes and consider possibilities that they might otherwise have dismissed.

The international consequences of Trump are bound up with his character and domestic policies. His embrace of nationalist impulses, his contempt for his political opponents and the rule of law, his incessant boastful, malevolent, and false statements, his lack of empathy and curiosity, have all affected the image of the United States—and not for the better.

For those seeking to advise foreign governments it creates an unusual predicament. In Western democracies Trump is much disliked and this limits the ability of their governments to flatter and make a fuss of him. Even those leaders who have tried to be friendly—Japan's Shinzo Abe, France's Emmanuel Macron, Canada's Justin Trudeau—have achieved little for their efforts. Female leaders—Germany's Angela Merkel, the UK's Theresa May—barely seem to get a hearing. Trump has spoken most warmly about his meetings with dictators—such as China's Xi Jinping or North Korea's Kim Jong Un. Russian President Vladimir Putin is clearly a source of almost forbidden fascination. Given the allegations surrounding the 2016 election, Trump has to be careful not to give credence to the charge that he is a Russian puppet. That has led him to keep his distance, although a summit between the two has now been scheduled for mid-July in Helsinki.

Trump has not grown into the presidency but instead has allowed the presidency to reflect his character. This character was not shaped through public service or elected office, but instead by a playboy lifestyle, real estate deals, a popular TV show, and a talent for controversy. This explains his interest in his ratings and dominating the news agenda, however outrageous or incorrect his tweets, and his reliance upon Fox News for

his information while he avoids official documents of any length. His chaotic style of management, with his supporting staff churning regularly, adds to the unpredictability and disruptive behavior. It may well be that behind the showmanship and egotism the wheels of government grind on as before, producing formal policies that display remarkable continuity with the past. But on occasion the Authentic Trump comes through, shifting U.S. policy in new and often disruptive directions.

The Authentic Trump has a transactional approach, with outcomes often expressed in zero-sum terms, so that what one gains the other must lose. The framework is always the ‘deal,’ which will be a reflection of negotiating skill and instinctive judgment, as well as the issues at stake and the relevant power balances. Thus if the country has gone wrong in the past it was because of bad deals; things will be better in the future because of good deals, which he, Trump, is uniquely able to deliver. The logic of this is for other states engaging with Trump to let him claim victory, but this does not really work because these other leaders have to sell the results of their negotiations back home, and usually Trump’s demands simply cannot be met with symbolic but largely meaningless gestures.

But Trump and Trumpism cannot simply be dismissed or ignored by other states and their leaders. However tempted they might be to treat with him contempt and dismiss his demands, this approach carries obvious pitfalls. Because of the U.S. role in international trade and finance, his most vexatious threats and demands must be addressed. His domestic opponents wish him to fail, and can give reasons why his demands will be rebuffed and prompt damaging counter-measures. But because other countries are obliged to address the realities of American power he may still get results.

The slogan of ‘America First’ is entirely consistent with belief in zero-sum transactions and the primacy of the deal. It establishes the President’s role as negotiator-in-chief. He claims he is needed because in the past others have exploited U.S. goodwill and its readiness to accept responsibilities for their prosperity and security. He presents the U.S. as having been suckered by its supposed friends and partners as well as by its enemies and rivals. The U.S. has put disproportionate resources into collective defense and has suffered from unfair trade.

There are serious conceptual and empirical problems with this worldview, but not all of it is fanciful and it has substantial support in the United States. This has grown with Trump’s advocacy. A modest version of this approach would argue for a rebalancing of the international trading and alliance systems. An extreme version would potentially threaten both systems. The critique from the old foreign policy establishment asserts that because of this approach a rules-bound international order is now in jeopardy. Sometimes this order is described as being ‘liberal,’ a term which is unlikely to commend it to Trump or his supporters and is at any rate only partly true—perhaps more so in the economic sense of free markets and open trade than in wider political terms. Nor was this order really that orderly. Nonetheless it was more liberal and orderly than anything that had gone before and was founded on a general consensus that multilateral initiatives were necessary when addressing issues that transcend borders even if that meant accepting restrictions on a national freedom of maneuver. There was value in looking for collective solutions to global problems. The games could be non-zero-sum, with benefits for all parties.

In the period after 1945 until at least the end of the twentieth century, the rules as they developed supported international order more than they undermined it. These rules did not impose disproportionate burdens on the U.S. In fact, as they were wholly consistent with the interests and values of the U.S. and its allies, others viewed them as an expression of western hegemony. For a number of reasons—the 2003 invasion of Iraq, the dogmatic promotion of a ‘democratic agenda,’ and the 2008 financial crisis—this order and these rules have

come under a progressive challenge. Whatever would have been the policies of a President Hillary Clinton, it seems probable that this order, however described, would have been judged to have peaked. It could not be extended because of the polarization of the American system. No administration could be sure of getting the two-thirds majority necessary for a treaty to be passed in the Senate.

Trump does not even pretend to support multilateralism as a way of doing business. To a degree this reflects the growing strength and confidence of Russia and China, which makes it much harder for the U.S. to get its way in the Security Council. International institutions are now sources of restraint rather than facilitation. The U.S. has begun to leave these institutions or reduce its active role within them. The situation is particularly serious on trade, as negative and reciprocated action has already begun. The issue of alliance cohesion is different, though related. The Trump administration policies reassert past commitments, including with U.S. security guarantees, but the Authentic Trump's statements reveal a more questioning attitude with regard to the readiness of the allies to play their part, especially in terms of defense expenditure.

One response to this situation is to declare this Presidency aberrant. When Trump ceases to be President things should return to normal. Another is to recognize that not only will it be difficult to erase the messages and practices of this period but also that the sentiments as expressed are not necessarily so aberrant. The issue for allies, particularly in NATO, is that it is not clear why the European allies are unable to cope with Russia on their own. Germany, France, and the UK each have much higher GDPs than Russia. The exception to this is the nuclear sphere, where non-nuclear states have no answer to Russian nuclear strength without the United States, unless it is believed that the UK and France could or would take its place.

For all these reasons it would be unwise for the United States's allies to assume that Trump is just a phase to be endured and that life will eventually return to normal. They may need to come to terms with a world in which the U.S. takes a far less active leadership role. Indeed, it is already notable that there have been a series of U.S. initiatives—withdrawing from the Paris Climate Change Convention, the Iran deal, the move of the U.S. Embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem—in which the allies have not followed and are seeking to carry on with established policies without the U.S. (albeit with difficulty).

How these adjustments are to be made and where they will lead will depend on what else is going on—for example, more trouble in the Eurozone or new crises over Ukraine or in the Middle East. The idea that NATO countries need to think about security issues without the United States has now taken root. It is more difficult to see how multilateral institutions, many of which are largely of American design, can function without the United States. The obvious comparison is with the American failure to join the League of Nations after the Treaty of Versailles.

To the extent that the U.S. has an active foreign policy this will probably largely reflect the specific dynamics of individual regions. This point can be illustrated by comparing two moves taken within weeks of each other: first abandoning the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) and preparing to re-instate sanctions on Iran; second the 12 June summit in Singapore with North Korean leader Kim Jong Un. The curiosity lies in the fact that the JCPOA was far more tightly drawn and verifiable than anything that could be achieved with Korea. Indeed the Trump-Kim communiqué was remarkably vague on how the grand aspirations about the 'complete denuclearization of the Korea peninsula' could be met.

Other than that the first deal was negotiated by Barack Obama and the second by Trump, what else needs to be said? Trump began in office by expressing his distaste for both regimes and their nuclear policies. If

anything, the North Korean crisis appeared to be the more severe, as Kim was accelerating both his country's nuclear and missile testing programs. Unlike Iran, however, which was always reluctant to talk to the Americans, as being akin to supping with the devil (literally), a summit was a North Korean aspiration. The summit became possible because the South Korean leader Moon Jae-In saw a chance to revive intra-Korean talks, which he had long supported, and out of this came a North Korean proposal for a summit between Kim and Trump. A small country with a repressive, dynastic regime, a feeble economy, and a terrible human rights record wished to meet on equal terms with the U.S. president.

It was an offer that in the past American presidents had found easy to refuse, but it appealed to Trump's ego. Also the other regional powers, especially China and to a degree even Japan, had become anxious over the war of words of 2017, and preferred a diplomatic process. By and large the North Korean arsenal was assumed to be defensive in intent as well as a means to raise the country's international standing. A diplomatic process therefore suited the region. The risks lie not in diplomacy, unless concessions to the North become excessive, but the consequences of an eventual U.S. discovery that North Korea has no intention of denuclearizing except in unlikely conditions.

With Iran the situation was different. Although the nuclear deal was doing its job, and the administration had no better alternative for containing Iran's nuclear program, its regional role was contentious. The JCPOA appeared as disconnected from the swirl of local political tensions. Key American allies (who also happened to be close to Trump) such as Israel, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) feared Iranian policies and wanted to ensure that the U.S. resisted Iran's aggression. The risks here therefore are only partly about nuclear weapons development and more about how far the U.S. is prepared to go supporting those campaigning against the Iranian regime, and whether there is a possibility of an all-out regional war. But there is also a question of whether the internal vulnerabilities of the regime are aggravated by the crisis and a real opportunity arises for some sort of discussion with Teheran about its economy and regional aspirations.

The two big questions are whether Trump has a strategy to deal with Russia and China. There was a time when a key objective of the U.S. was to maintain predominance. Rhetorically that would still seem to be the case, certainly when it comes to military capabilities, but not with the extensive U.S. network of alliances and partnerships. Here there is a tension with 'America First.' Of the two countries, Russia is the most overtly hostile, but its economy is small (certainly relative to its population and geography) and its security focus is largely on the former Soviet space, although it has an influence on wider European and Middle Eastern affairs. Russia has become important because of the rapid deterioration of its relations with NATO countries. From Russia's perspective this is because it is resisting a hegemonic push, expressed in a combination of 'color revolutions' and NATO/European Union enlargement. From the West's perspective, there have been land grabs, most recently, Crimea, and attempts at political subversion, through Russia's information warfare, cyber attacks, and gifts to right-wing parties. This is the area of greatest ambiguity in the Trump administration. Senior officials maintain a highly critical attitude towards Moscow and enforce sanctions, while the Authentic Trump makes more emollient statements and asserts his desire for better relations with Putin. Trump is not alone on worrying whether it is wise to freeze out Putin and abandon conversations on arms control. The issue, which will soon be addressed, is whether the master deal-maker will require much from Putin, for example in getting out of the Donbas if not Crimea, in return for easing off on sanctions, and, if he takes unilateral action without gaining the backing of allies, whether that will do further damage to NATO.

China is a different matter. Its economy is commensurate with its size. It represents a serious economic competitor to the U.S. globally, and a geopolitical competitor, at least in the Asia-Pacific region. It is not itching for a fight but is happy to be patient. It has taken the view that Trump is damaging the position of the United States and that it is unwise to interfere while he is doing so. Patience is likely to be rewarded as countries begin to lean more towards Beijing, accepting its largesse and favors in return for whatever political demands it may impose without the U.S. being able or willing to act as a counter. One risk here is that China may overestimate its position and push against an erstwhile American ally in a way that even Trump cannot ignore.

For the moment China finds itself in the firing line over trade. Here the Authentic Trump has taken the lead, with his deeply embedded protectionist beliefs rising to the fore. He has initiated a trade war with China and, as it retaliates, is preparing further escalation. At some point China might decide to retaliate by targeting the American economy's indebtedness. It is a major creditor. Trump might have been in a position to get considerable support from allies to enforce a change in Chinese trade practices, which in many areas are highly suspect. He has, however, decided to wage trade wars with his allies as well, rubbing salt into the wound by using specious 'national security' rationales. They too are fighting back. Authentic Trump has claimed that it is easy to win trade wars but it really is not. The Trump Administration may soon have to decide whether the damage to American businesses is worth the effort, and there are some signs are that the President may slow down his offensive because of this. If he does not this is the area that probably represents the biggest danger to a successful presidency (if that is to be measured by economic growth). It is at the heart of the tension between the impulses of Authentic Trump and his administration's need to pay attention to legal, practical and political constraints.

This tension is evident in all areas of foreign policy. It may be manageable so long as the key institutions are not damaged irretrievably or some unexpected crisis aggravates rather than eases the tensions. But inflammatory rhetoric and even half-baked policy initiatives have corrosive effects. They have already changed the way that the country is viewed by those many countries that have viewed the United States as a friend, partner, and protector and are no longer confident that they can continue to do so.

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