

## In the Name of “America First”

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Despite the self-congratulatory tone of both his Davos Speech and State of the Union Address, President Trump has not yet obtained the confidence of the leaderships of major US allies or their populations. Nor has Trump been able to point the way to the establishment of more positive diplomatic relations with American rivals that could guarantee global peace in the long term. After a full year in office, Trump's dealings with both US allies and rivals have not yet appeared to possess any discernible "method." Nor is there any true Trump "doctrine" except for a vague and ill-defined ideological conception of "America First" whose proclaimed aim is nuclear superiority and "unmatched power"—in the presumption that "weakness is the surest path to conflict."<sup>1</sup>

According to insider accounts, President Trump has appeared more interested in TV coverage of his presidency than his daily executive intelligence briefing papers.<sup>2</sup> Trump's White House remains dysfunctional and although some of his advisors and cabinet members want to bring a semblance of control to the Trump White House, they do not appear to be able to control the President himself. In October 2017, Republican Senator Bob Corker had already stated, "I know for a fact that every single day at the White House, it's a situation of trying to contain him"; Corker also affirmed, "A lot of people think that there is some kind of 'good cop, bad cop' act underway, but that's just

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<sup>1</sup> "Around the world, we face rogue regimes, terrorist groups, and rivals like China and Russia that challenge our interests, our economy, and our values. In confronting these dangers, we know that weakness is the surest path to conflict, and unmatched power is the surest means of our defense. For this reason, I am asking the Congress to end the dangerous defense sequester and fully fund our great military. As part of our defense, we must modernize and rebuild our nuclear arsenal, hopefully never having to use it, but making it so strong and powerful that it will deter any acts of aggression. Perhaps someday in the future there will be a magical moment when the countries of the world will get together to eliminate their nuclear weapons. Unfortunately, we are not there yet." Remarks by President Trump in State of the Union Address, White House (January 30, 2018) <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/remarks-president-trump-state-union-address/>

<sup>2</sup> Michael Wolf, *Fire and Fury: Inside the Trump White House* (Henry Holt Co, 2018) Wolff's book has obtained considerable attention due to its focus on the key personalities who have been 'working' in a truly dysfunctional White House. Yet the book provides virtually no critical analysis as to how Trump has confronted deeper domestic and foreign policy issues.

not true.”<sup>3</sup> In August 2017, Corker had previously claimed that Trump had not yet demonstrated “the stability nor some of the competence” that he needed to be successful. And Trump still has not shown that competence. Corker likewise warned that Trump’s reality TV show antics could start World War III.<sup>4</sup>

It is true that Trump did not create the very dangerous global situation—and he himself has publicly acknowledged its dangers and has blamed it on his predecessors. But the problem is that Trump’s arrogance, impatience, policy flip-flops, irresponsible tweets, refusal to engage in long term diplomacy, only exacerbate the already deep crisis and polarisation of the global alliance system that began prior to Trump’s arrival to power—but that is being made even worse by Trump.

By contrast with Trump’s claims “unmatched power”—even if such a thing could be obtained—will not guarantee peace. There is a real danger that his stated quest to obtain US military and nuclear supremacy will actually provoke conflicts—if not major power war. Trump’s crude rhetoric, contradictory policies, and foreign policy blunders, risk breaking up the primary guarantors of global peace. The UN could be one of the first international organisations to collapse in impotence, but NATO and the EU could break up as well—in the process of Trump losing the confidence of America’s major ally, the UK.

Trump’s policies in the Indo-Pacific furthermore risk undermining South Korean efforts to reach out to North Korea, while his actions have concurrently exacerbated tensions between China and Taiwan. Trump is furthermore playing fire with Iran—and with many militant Islamist groups—through his support for Jerusalem as the capital of Israel, while concurrently isolating the US internationally. Contrary to his previous claims that he

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<sup>3</sup> Jonathan Martin and Mark Landler, “Bob Corker Says Trump’s Recklessness Threatens ‘World 3 War III’” New York Times (October 8, 2017)  
<https://www.nytimes.com/2017/10/08/us/politics/trump-corker.html?>

<sup>4</sup> Jonathan Martin and Mark Landler, *ibid*

hoped to strike a “deal” with Putin, the Trump administration’s tilt toward Ukraine against Russia in the conflict over Crimea and eastern Ukraine risks the collapse of 1997 NATO-Russia Founding Act.

Stronger support for Kiev also risks pushing Moscow and Beijing into an even closer alliance, while engaging in new arms race. In his State of the Union address, Trump labeled both Russia and China as “rivals that challenge our interests, our economy, and our values.”<sup>5</sup> And in judging by his policies toward both North Korea and Iran,<sup>6</sup> Trump appears to be literally groping for presumed military “solutions” to issues that can only be dealt with by engaged and concerted diplomacy.

## **Trump and the UK**

For all the effort that Vice President Mike Pence spent in February 2017 to reassure US allies that the Trump administration would support both NATO and the EU, Trump himself has continued to propagandize in support of far rightwing anti-NATO, anti-EU groups. But Trump’s ideological convictions not only risk the further break-up of the European Union after the UK’s exit (Brexit)—a costly initiative that Trump himself supported—but he also risks alienating the UK itself—a major US ally, just after Brexit. Ironically, Trump’s bumbling diplomacy does not even know how to effectively deal with the UK—a country which could potentially be one of his own strongest political allies in supporting his approach to foreign policy. But given Trump’s diplomatic blunders, the UK will soon find itself in

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<sup>5</sup> Remarks by President Trump in State of the Union Address, White House (January 30, 2018) <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/remarks-president-trump-state-union-address/>

<sup>6</sup> “To make the world safer from rogue regimes, terrorism and revisionist powers, we are asking our friends and allies to invest in their own defenses and to meet their financial obligations. Our common security requires everyone to contribute their fair share. My administration is proud to have led historic efforts at the United Nations Security Council and all around the world to unite all civilized nations in our campaign of maximum pressure to de-nuke the Korean peninsula. We continue to call on partners to confront Iran’s support for terrorists and block Iran’s path to a nuclear weapon.” Trump’s speech to the World Economic Forum” WEF (January 26, 2018) <https://edition.cnn.com/2018/01/26/politics/read-trump-davos-speech/index.html> Trump policies have been aggravating relations with North Korea and Iran, and not contributing to “common defence”

a wedge between Trump's America First policies and the European Union which will try to make Brexit as costly for the UK as possible.

Trump has made himself virtually *persona non grata* in the UK. 1,863,708 persons signed a petition against his taking part in an official state visit immediately after Prime Minister Theresa May invited him to the UK in January 2017. The petition stated in part: "Donald Trump's well documented misogyny and vulgarity disqualifies him from being received by Her Majesty the Queen or the Prince of Wales. Therefore during the term of his presidency Donald Trump should not be invited to the United Kingdom for an official State Visit."<sup>7</sup>

On November 29, to matters worse, Trump's Twitter account retweeted three posts made by the extreme rightwing British First deputy leader Jayda Fransen that featured anti-Muslim propaganda videos. Fransen then claimed that Trump's pro-rightwing anti-Muslim tweet had been shared with Trump's nearly 44 million followers. "GOD BLESS YOU TRUMP!"<sup>8</sup> Prime Minister May's official spokesperson then declared that it was "wrong for the President" to have shared the videos. London mayor, Sadiq Khan, of Anglo-Pakistani background, stated that "Britain First seeks to divide communities through their use of hateful narratives which peddle lies and stoke tensions."<sup>9</sup> Mayor Khan asserted that any official visit from Trump to Britain would not be welcomed. But the comment which perhaps best summed it up was that of Stephen Doughty, a Labour

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<sup>7</sup> The petition reads: "Donald Trump should be allowed to enter the UK in his capacity as 5 head of the US Government, but he should not be invited to make an official State Visit because it would cause embarrassment to Her Majesty the Queen." <https://petition.parliament.uk/archived/petitions/171928>

<sup>8</sup> Brian Naylor, "Trump Retweets Incendiary Anti-Muslim Videos From Controversial Group 6 (November 29, 2017) <https://www.npr.org/2017/11/29/567159205/trump-retweets-incendiary-anti-muslim-videos-from-controversial-group>

<sup>9</sup> Laurel Wamsley, "Trump's Retweets Of Extremist Group Cause Firestorm In U.K." NPR November 30, 2017 <https://www.npr.org/sections/thetwo-way/2017/11/30/567541702/trumpsretweets-of-extremist-group-cause-firestorm-in-uk>

MP, who stated: By sharing these posts, Trump shows that he “is either a racist, incompetent, or unthinking—or all three.”<sup>10</sup>

Donald Trump then decided to at least temporarily cancel his London visit so he would not be present for the opening of the new US embassy in February. The UK government is still hopeful that a working visit can be arranged for Trump later in 2018, but any official visit, as was the case for Trump’s official state visit to France, appears dubious.<sup>11</sup>

Prime Minister May needs to discuss US-UK defence and security relations, and after Brexit, the UK additionally needs to search for new trade deals with the US and other countries.<sup>12</sup> Prime Minister May therefore counts on Trump’s support; she cannot afford to alienate him despite popular anger. On the one hand, despite Trump’s promises at Davos, reaching trade deals with the US may not be as easy as supporters of Brexit may have hoped. On the other, in addition to the political difficulties the UK will face with Scotland and Northern Ireland after Brexit, among many other questions, the EU looks like it will raise the costs of Brexit as high as possible—despite initial hopes for a “soft” exit from the EU. The Brexit process may end up costing the UK economy £350m a week—the same amount

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<sup>10</sup> Laurel Wamsley, *ibid*

<sup>11</sup> Trump had claimed (falsely) on Twitter that the reason for calling off the trip was his displeasure at Barack Obama having sold the current embassy for “peanuts” and for building a replacement for \$1bn (£750m). “Bad deal,” he wrote. But the embassy’s plan to move from Mayfair to Nine Elms in London was first reported in October 2008, when George W. Bush was still president. Citing security and environmental reasons, the US State Department agreed to sell the current embassy building to the Qatari Diar Real Estate Investment Co, which planned to turn it into a luxury hotel. The site’s value was estimated to be £500m before it was made a listed building, but would have diminished the value because of restrictions on development. Heather Stewart and David Smith, *The Guardian* (12 Jan 2018) <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2018/jan/12/donald-trump-visit-to-london-called-off-amid-fears-of-mass-protests>; “Davos 2018: Trump and May plan UK visit ‘later this year’” *The National* (January 25, 2018) <https://www.thenational.ae/world/europe/davos-2018-trump-and-may-plan-uk-visit-later-this-year-1.698806>

<sup>12</sup> After this talk, Downing Street announced that a working session will still be held with Trump, 10 probably in the summer. The Stop Trump coalition, which includes MPs from several parties, trade unionists and campaigners, has pledged to hold the largest anti-racism demonstration in British history once he comes to the UK. See website “Another Europe is Possible” <https://www.anothereurope.org/stop-trump/> See discussion, Hall Gardner, *World War Trump*. 11

that the 'Vote Leave' campaigners had promised would remain in the country after it exited the EU.<sup>13</sup>

## **Trump and Macron**

As compared to the situation in the UK, Trump was more easily able to arrange an official visit to France for the July 14, 2017 Bastille Day military parade. Yet much as has been the case with the UK, where Trump supported far right political parties, he has done the same with France. In fact, as late as April 2017, prior to the French presidential elections, Trump had expressed his preference for the rightwing anti-EU, anti-NATO National Front leader Marine Le Pen.

Contrary to Trump's hopes (and those of Vladimir Putin who appeared to back either Le Pen or François Fillon), the neo-liberal pro-EU pro-NATO *En Marche!* presidential candidate, Emmanuel Macron, won the French presidency over Le Pen. Once in power, President Macron appropriately countered Trump's "America First" claims by proclaiming his own motto, "Planet First." And against Trump's nationalist ideology, Macron has hoped to strengthen the European Union and its defence capabilities.

Yet by contrast with the rage that Trump has caused in the UK, there were only some limited protests in France against Trump when he came on an official visit on Bastille Day. And despite the fact that Trump had supported his political opponent, Trump and Macron appeared to get along, perhaps because Macron reminds Trump of his son-in-law, Jared Kushner—as the two are both into finance.

Overall, the French president handled Trump's visit to France brilliantly. But then again, France has a long history of wining and dining various dictators. It really can't be determined

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<sup>13</sup> Chris Giles, "The real price of Brexit begins to emerge" Financial Times (December 18, 2017) <https://www.ft.com/content/e3b29230-db5f-11e7-a039-c64b1c09b482>

objectively which official visit to Paris was more spectacular: Chinese President Hu Jintao's dinner with Jacques Chirac when the Eiffel Tower glowed red in the fog in January 2004; Putin's visit to the Versailles palace under President Macron in May 2017; Qaddafi's stay in December 2007 in a bedouin tent in the park of the l'hôtel Marigny, under President Sarkozy; or Trump's visit to Bastille Day military parade on the Champs-Élysées on the July 14th 2017—which Trump now intends to emulate in the US!

As previously stated, Emmanuel Macron defeated the far right National Front candidate Marine Le Pen in the April-May 2017 French presidential elections; yet the Far Right is not totally destroyed in France and could return in the near future depending on whether or not Macron's strongly neo-liberal policies succeed. Despite Trump's firing of alt-right propagandist Steve Bannon (who has actually begun to lose his support among American far right movements), the fact that Trump has not strongly denounced alt-right movements continues to provide such movements hope that they can eventually come to power in France, Germany, Austria, Denmark, Holland, Italy and elsewhere throughout Europe and elsewhere.

After the Neo-Nazi and KKK clashes with counter-protestors in Charlottesville, does Trump have any idea of what these groups really represent for the US, Europe and the world?

### **Global Diplomacy**

Trump has definitely not shown any clear method or skilful diplomatic acumen in the way he has approached the North Korea question at a time when the world is on the edge of a number of regional wars. In such a dire global situation, the US needs more effective diplomacy and not less. And yet the Trump administration has been trying to cut the US diplomatic corp through significant budget cuts in the State Department and by driving out large numbers of highly qualified career for-



eign service officers. So far Trump has not yet appointed an envoy to key countries such as Saudi Arabia, Germany, the European Union, Egypt and Jordan<sup>14</sup>—or even South Korea.

Trump appears to believe that he can cut US State Department expenses and those of other US governmental agencies (but not the Pentagon) by engaging in leader-to-leader diplomacy. Yet good diplomats are needed to know the personalities and socio-political movements that influence those leaders. Diplomats are also needed to analyse what kinds of US policies will prove to be most constructive and effective. A “leader-to-leader” approach to foreign policy will not work because a leader’s personal “deal” with Trump might be opposed by others in the political hierarchy (who could stage a coup) or by major factions in the larger society (who could start protest movements).

An Ambassador and staff is needed symbolically to show that the US has a real interest in the country—and that Washington does not consider certain countries as mere “shitholes”. Trump’s alleged “shithole countries” comment may lead a number of African countries to augment their already close political-economic ties with China.<sup>15</sup>

And the potential failure to engage in effective diplomacy due to efforts to cut State Department personnel could actually end up costing trillions of dollars. Such losses could be due to economic opportunities that were missed because the Foreign Service was not given the resources or lacked the expertise to explore possible opportunities—or because diplomacy on the cheap could result in more political fiascos and wars.

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<sup>14</sup> Kevin Liptak and Nicole Gaouette, “Amid nuclear tensions, South Korea tops Trump's long list of unfilled diplomatic posts” CNN (January 19, 2018) <https://edition.cnn.com/2018/01/18/politics/trump-ambassadors-cha-nomination/index.html>

<sup>15</sup> Ismail Einasche, “Trump’s Insults Will Nudge African Nations Closer To China” NPR (January 16, 2018) <https://www.npr.org/sections/parallels/2018/01/16/578264298/trumps-insults-will-nudge-african-nations-closer-to-china>

## Israel and Jerusalem

Trump's sudden announcement that the US would recognize Jerusalem as the capital of Israel represents a major diplomatic fiasco. It flies against historical UN policy—while also isolating the US. Unlike previous presidents, Trump has taken steps to recognize Jerusalem as Israel's capital. This action is seen as fulfilling Congressional legislation that has already been passed—even though Trump has thus far delayed the actual move of any US embassy facilities from Tel Aviv. The policy is not yet fully implemented, but it has already caused considerable diplomatic damage.

In addition to stalling the possibility of Israeli-Palestinian talks that were being considered prior to Trump's arrival in office, such a highly symbolic issue could undermine the effectiveness and authority of the United Nations. 128 UN members voted against Trump by supporting the General Assembly resolution that stated that the status of Jerusalem—which is claimed as a capital by both Israel and the Palestinians—can only be settled through peace negotiations.<sup>16</sup>

The Trump administration thus risks isolating the US on this issue and others. Major US allies—Britain, France, Italy, Japan and Ukraine—were among the 14 countries in the 15-member council that voted against Trump's Jerusalem policy.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> For a proposed confederal solution as an offshoot of the two state solution, see Hall Gardner, 18 *Averting Global War* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), Chapter 5. See also, Hall Gardner, *NATO Expansion and US Strategy in Asia* (Palgrave MacMillan, 2013); Hall Gardner, *World War Trump*.

<sup>17</sup> The nine countries that voted against the resolution were: the United States, Israel, Guatemala, Honduras, the Marshall Islands, Micronesia, Nauru, Palau and Togo. The 35 nations that abstained were: Antigua and Barbuda, Argentina, Australia, Bahamas, Benin, Bhutan, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Cameroon, Canada, Colombia, Croatia, Czech Republic, Dominican Republic, Equatorial Guinea, Fiji, Haiti, Hungary, Jamaica, Kiribati, Latvia, Lesotho, Malawi, Mexico, Panama, Paraguay, Philippines, Poland, Romania, Rwanda, Solomon Islands, South Sudan, Trinidad and Tobago, Tuvalu, Uganda, Vanuatu. For reactions of leaders throughout the world: "World reacts to US Israel embassy relocation plan" Al Jazeera (December 6, 2017)

Trump then threatened to cut US funding or trade deals with those countries that did not back his policy on Jerusalem. These countries include recipients of US aid and key allies such as Egypt, Afghanistan, and Iraq. Trump's threats also appear to include the UK, which hopes to make post-Brexit trade deals with the US....

After his statements in his State of the Union Speech,<sup>18</sup> in which he complained that “dozens of countries” voted against US policy toward Jerusalem, how many allies is Trump going to alienate just because they did not support a very controversial policy toward Israel? More immediately, Trump's pro-Israeli- and pro-Saudi policy not only risks further militarising Iran and giving militant pan-Sunni Islamist groups, such as Al Qaeda and offshoots of ISIS, a new lease on life, but such policies could soon result in the break down cooperation between Israeli and Palestinian security forces in the West Bank.

### ***Trump and Iran***

Trump's repeatedly strong criticism the Iran Nuclear accord (JCPOA)<sup>19</sup> risks undermining that treaty negotiated with the Europeans, Russia and China. Trump's criticism could potentially result in the proliferation of nuclear weaponry in the Middle East—given Trump's support for the Saudi nuclear program,

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<http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2017/12/world-reacts-israel-embassy-relocation-plan-171205175133734.html>

<sup>18</sup> Last month, I also took an action endorsed unanimously by the Senate just months before: I recognized Jerusalem as the capital of Israel. Shortly afterwards, dozens of countries voted in the United Nations General Assembly against America's sovereign right to make this recognition. *American taxpayers generously send those same countries billions of dollars in aid every year. That is why, tonight, I am asking the Congress to pass legislation to help ensure American foreign-aid dollars always serve American interests, and only go to America's friends.* Emphasis mine. “President Donald J. Trump's State of the Union Address” (January 30, 2018)

<https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/president-donald-j-trumps-state-union-address/>

<sup>19</sup> When the people of Iran rose up against the crimes of their corrupt dictatorship, I did not stay silent. America stands with the people of Iran in their courageous struggle for freedom. I am asking the Congress to address the fundamental flaws in the terrible Iran nuclear deal. “President Donald J. Trump's State of the Union Address” (January 30, 2018) <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/president-donald-j-trumps-state-union-address/>

plus the possibility that Riyadh could look to Islamabad for nuclear technological supports. The Iran Nuclear accord is not perfect, but issues of Iran's missile and terrorism need to be handled through separate multilateral diplomacy, including the Missile Technology Control Regime.<sup>20</sup> But instead of seeking a diplomatic solution, the Trump administration has been politicizing US intelligence—much like George W. Bush did to justify the 2003 war with Iraq—upon the threat of war.<sup>21</sup>

What is really needed is an international conference that brings Iran and Saudi Arabia together to discuss all the issues of dispute between the two countries. Such a conference could potentially be set up in the aftermath of secret European diplomacy—given the fact that Trump has sided too strongly with Riyadh.<sup>22</sup>

In the meantime, however, Washington has purportedly given Israel a green light to attack Iranian-backed *Hezb'allah* militias in a “preventive” war. A very dangerous confrontation—that could cost a many lives on both sides given *Hezb'allah*'s burgeoning missile capabilities—appears to be looming on the horizon. But such a major conflagration could be averted—if Tel Aviv would soon engage in full-fledged diplomacy and reach out for a peace accord with *Hezb'allah* and Iran in which both sides promise not to attack the other, while reducing the considerable missile and weapons build-up on both sides of the Israeli-Lebanese-Syrian borders.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> See my commentary, Hall Gardner “Response to Three Questions on the Iran Nuclear Accord, the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA)” <https://www.hallgardner.com/contrepoints>

<sup>21</sup> Lawrence Wilkerson, “I Helped Sell the False Choice of War Once. It’s Happening Again” *New York Times* (February 5, 2018) <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/02/05/opinion/trump-iran-war.html>

<sup>22</sup> French president Macron has hoped to mediate between the US and Iran. Maysam Behravesht “Commentary: Macron steers France to a new Mideast role” Reuters (December 20, 2017 <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-behravesht-macron-commentary/commentary-macron-steers-france-toa-new-mideast-role-idUSKBN1EE21C>).

<sup>23</sup> Idan Landau, Another Unnecessary War (February 9, 2018) <http://lobelog.com/another-unnecessary-war/#more-43227>

## South and North Korea

Given the truly dangerous situation on the Korean peninsula, which Trump himself recognises,<sup>24</sup> one would think that picking a US ambassador to South Korea would have been a top priority for the Trump administration. Victor Cha had been chosen to be the US ambassador to South Korea in December 2017. Cha was approved by South Korea, but was unexpectedly dumped by Trump in January 2018—to the dismay of Seoul.

In addition to opposing US economic pressures on South Korea due to its trade surplus with the US, Cha was on record as stating with respect to North Korea: “no U.S. policy should be composed only of sanctions, military exercises, and diplomatic isolation.”<sup>25</sup> This statement, plus Cha’s opposition to a possible “preventive strike” on North Korean nuclear weapons infrastructure, appears to have made it impossible for Cha to work with Trump—who will not accept an independently-minded ambassador.<sup>26</sup> Cha has argued that a “strike (even a large one) would only delay North Korea’s missile-building and nuclear programs,

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<sup>24</sup> But no regime has oppressed its own citizens more totally or brutally than the cruel dictatorship in North Korea. North Korea’s reckless pursuit of nuclear missiles could very soon threaten our homeland. We are waging a campaign of maximum pressure to prevent that from happening. Past experience has taught us that complacency and concessions only invite aggression and provocation. I will not repeat the mistakes of past administrations that got us into this dangerous position. We need only look at the depraved character of the North Korean regime to understand the nature of the nuclear threat it could pose to America and our allies. Remarks by President Trump in State of the Union Address, White House (January 30, 2018) <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/remarks-president-trump-state-union-address/>

<sup>25</sup> Clint Work, “Trump Finally Taps Ambassador to South Korea” *The Diplomat* (December 16, 2017) <https://thediplomat.com/2017/12/trump-finally-taps-ambassador-to-south-korea/>

<sup>26</sup> Victor D. Cha, an academic who served in the George W. Bush administration, raised his concerns with National Security Council officials over their consideration of a limited strike on the North aimed at sending a message without sparking a wider war — a risky concept known as a “bloody nose” strategy. Cha also objected to the administration’s threats to tear up a bilateral trade deal with Seoul that President Trump has called unfair to American companies. Last week, the administration imposed new tariffs on imports of washing machines and solar energy panels, a move criticized by the South Korean government. [David Nakamura](https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/disagreement-on-north-korea-policy-could-derail-white-house-choice-for-ambassador-to-south-korea/2018/01/30/3a21191c-05da-11e8-94e8-e8b8600ade23_story.html?utm_term=.5ad64e0a3013) and [Anne Gearan](https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/disagreement-on-north-korea-policy-could-derail-white-house-choice-for-ambassador-to-south-korea/2018/01/30/3a21191c-05da-11e8-94e8-e8b8600ade23_story.html?utm_term=.5ad64e0a3013), “Disagreement on North Korea policy derails White House choice for ambassador to South Korea” *Washington Post* (January 30, 2018) [https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/disagreement-on-north-korea-policy-could-derail-white-house-choice-for-ambassador-to-south-korea/2018/01/30/3a21191c-05da-11e8-94e8-e8b8600ade23\\_story.html?utm\\_term=.5ad64e0a3013](https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/disagreement-on-north-korea-policy-could-derail-white-house-choice-for-ambassador-to-south-korea/2018/01/30/3a21191c-05da-11e8-94e8-e8b8600ade23_story.html?utm_term=.5ad64e0a3013)

which are buried in deep, unknown places impenetrable to bunker-busting bombs. A strike also would not stem the threat of proliferation but rather exacerbate it, turning what might be a North Korean moneymaking endeavor into a vengeful effort intended to equip other bad actors against us.”<sup>27</sup>

A so-called “bloody nose” attack on North Korea could kill millions in South Korea and Japan, including Americans living abroad—the only people whom appear to concern Trump. Trump appears to be pushing for a “preventive” military intervention—in a dangerous effort to stop, or at least, stall North Korea’s nuclear program. Already the US cruise missile strikes on Syria in early 2017 failed to significantly change Syrian policy. And it also appears dubious that if the US does strike North Korea, that Iran and Hezb’allah will hear that “message” by demonstration effect.<sup>28</sup>

Trump has, at least two times, publicly undercut the efforts of his own Secretary of State Rex Tillerson to start negotiations with North Korea. Yet it appears that South Korea’s President Moon Jae-in has taken the Trump administration by surprise by initiating discussions with the North—even if Trump belatedly took credit for those discussions. But here, it appears dubious that the new Korean “sunshine policy” will be fully backed by Trump. Just as there were tensions between the George W. Bush administration and South Korean president in Roh Moo-hyun (2003-08), there already appear to be tensions between Trump and President Moon Jae-in—who was one of Roh’s closest advisers.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Victor Cha, “Victor Cha: Giving North Korea a ‘bloody nose’ carries a huge risk to Americans” Washington Post January 30, 2018 [https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/victor-cha-giving-north-korea-a-bloody-nose-carries-a-huge-risk-to-americans/2018/01/30/43981c94-05f7-11e8-8777-2a059f168dd2\\_story.html?utm\\_term=.a589cc977584](https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/victor-cha-giving-north-korea-a-bloody-nose-carries-a-huge-risk-to-americans/2018/01/30/43981c94-05f7-11e8-8777-2a059f168dd2_story.html?utm_term=.a589cc977584)

<sup>28</sup> See Hall Gardner, World War Trump

<sup>29</sup> Clint Work, “Trump Finally Taps Ambassador to South Korea” The Diplomat (December 16, 13 2017) <https://thediplomat.com/2017/12/trump-finally-taps-ambassador-to-south-korea/>

South Korea is not happy about Trump's threats to place sanctions on the South Korean economy due to its trade surplus with the US—at a time when China has also engaged in sanctions against South Korea and when Seoul is engaged in an dangerous existential conflict with North Korea. Already President Moon was reluctantly forced to accept US THAAD missile defence deployments (intended to protect US troops) in South Korea—MD deployments that are strongly opposed by both Beijing and Moscow, and which have, in effect, resulted in the tightening of the Sino-Russia alliance in the Indo-Pacific.

It will only be possible to examine more closely how the policies of the Trump administration and of South Korea will impact each other and how both will impact North Korea in the aftermath of the Korean Winter Olympics. The question as to whether North and South Korea can deepen their negotiations, and whether or not the US will continue to support South Korea's new sunshine policy, remains to be seen. Or will Trump and Kim Jung Un enter into a new series of teenager tirades—which could result in a nuclear shooting match?

### ***Trump' Nuclear and Military Build-Up***

With his new tax cuts expected to increase the national debt by more than 1 trillion dollars over a decade, Trump has been boosting the role of the military in foreign policy decision-making—while gutting the State Department and other US government agencies. Trump has concurrently boosted US military and nuclear spending—with a new emphasis on tactical nuclear weaponry as shown in the January 2018 Nuclear Posture Review. In such a way, Trump appears to be placing the option of military “solutions” prior to potential diplomatic ones.

The true nature of Trump's dysfunctional White House can be seen in the observations of the former chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Admiral Mike Mullen. In late December 2017, Mullen claimed that, although National Security Advisor H.R. McMaster and Defence Secretary James Mattis have been

able to hold back Trump so far, their ability to continue to restrain such a “disruptive” and “unpredictable” president was limited. Mullen asserted: “We’re actually closer to nuclear war with North Korea and in that region... than we’ve ever been.”<sup>30</sup> Mullen then stated that he does not see any opportunities to solve North Korea question diplomatically at this particular point. Mullen ended the interview by putting the onus on the Chinese to engage in diplomacy, while Beijing, for its part, has been pressing the US to take leadership and responsibility.

One thing is clear: It is very dubious that North Korea will give up its nuclear and missile program, although it may accept a temporary freeze. US diplomacy is going to have to deal with that factor.<sup>31</sup> But Trump appears to flip-flop between moments when he says he might talk to the “little rocket man” and other moments when it is “fire and fury”—with Trump claiming that he possesses even bigger nuclear missiles than Pyongyang and that US nuclear missiles actually work....

## **China/Taiwan**

After his post-election telephone call to the Taiwanese president, Tsai Ing-wen, Trump’s actions have begun to undermine what Henry Kissinger called the “constructive ambiguity” of 1972 Shanghai Communiqué which established the “One China Policy.”

Trump’s pro-Taiwan approach angered Beijing at a time when China-Japan-US tensions have been rising in the South and East China seas. Trump did publicly affirm to Beijing that he would support the One China Policy—in order to make certain that Chinese leader Chinese leader Xi Jinping would speak to him! Yet it is clear that Beijing does not entirely trust Trump.

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<sup>30</sup> ABC News “Adm. Mike Mullen discusses the global challenges facing President Donald Trump 15 with Martha Raddatz” (December 31, 2017) on <http://abcnews.go.com/ThisWeek/video/chair-jointchiefs-staff-admiral-mike-mullen-joins-52069186>

<sup>31</sup> For a discussion of US options for North Korea, see Hall Gardner, *Averting Global War* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), Chapter 7. See also, Hall Gardner, *World War Trump*.



In December 2017, the Chinese envoy to the US, Li Kexin, speaking at the embassy of People's Republic of China in Washington D.C., told hundreds of people that calls by U.S. Navy vessels at ports in Taiwan would violate China's "Anti-Seccession Law" of 2005. Such naval port calls, he warned, could automatically spark a Chinese military response.<sup>32</sup> While it has been argued that Congress actually watered down the measure, the dilemma raised here is that naval port calls to Taiwan are not the only issue that is causing tensions between the US and China.<sup>33</sup>

Beijing's threats to Taiwan have been accompanied by Chinese military pressures in the South and East China seas—impacting Philippines and Japan, among other regional powers. Even though Trump has recently praised China for strengthening sanctions on North Korea (after previously condemning Beijing for not being very helpful), Trump has concurrently been threatening a trade war with China. For its part, China has been threatening to move away from the purchase of oil in dollars and to move toward Yuan-based transactions.<sup>34</sup> In addition, Trump's rapid and ill-considered dumping of Obama's Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) has already given China an edge in its efforts to develop a massive regional trade pact, the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP). The RCEP, combined with China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and its military build-up—in which Beijing expects to become first rank military power by 2050—all threaten "America First" hegemony.

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<sup>32</sup> See analysis, J. Michael Cole "Analysis: Chinese Envoy to the U.S. Threatens War Over U.S. Navy Port Calls in Taiwan" Taiwanese Sentinel (December 11, 2017) <https://sentinel.tw/prc-en-voythreatens-war-tw-port-calls/>.

<sup>33</sup> See Hall Gardner, *Averting Global War* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), Chapter 8. See also, Hall Gardner, *World War Trump*.

<sup>34</sup> Keith Johnson, "China's Bid to Upend the Global Oil Market" *Foreign Policy* (January 18, 2018), <http://foreignpolicy.com/2018/01/18/chinas-bid-upend-global-oil-market-petroyuan-shanghai/>

## ***NATO, Russia and Ukraine***

While Trump's presidential election image was pro-Russian and anti-Chinese, the Trump administration has now shifted toward a generally pro-Ukrainian anti-Russian and pro-Taiwan anti-Chinese stance—despite many of Trump's own statements to the contrary.

While Trump has been criticized for being pro-Putin, US policy has definitely tilted in the direction of Ukraine, not Russia, since he became President. It is true that Trump has not appeared to be rushing to support Ukraine, yet he is nevertheless being pushed in that direction. His UN ambassador Nikki Haley stated in February 2017 that “Eastern Ukraine of course is not the only part of the country suffering because of Russia's aggressive actions. The United States continues to condemn and call for an immediate end to the Russian occupation of Crimea... Crimea is a part of Ukraine. Our Crimea related sanctions will remain in place until Russia returns control of the peninsula to Ukraine.” Haley did insist that “We do want to better our relations with Russia. However, the dire situation in eastern Ukraine is one that demands clear and strong condemnation of Russian actions.”<sup>35</sup>

More recently, the US Congress approved \$350 million in security aid for Ukraine in its National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA). This includes \$47 million for “defensive lethal” weapons. President Trump has thus far agreed to the licensing for sniper systems, but export licenses for much of the “heavier” equipment requested by Ukraine, including the Javelin antitank missile system, have not yet been approved.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Ambassador Nikki Haley, “Remarks at a UN Security Council Briefing on Ukraine” 21 U.S. Mission to the United Nations New York City (February 2, 2017) <https://usun.state.gov/remarks/7668>

<sup>36</sup> Nikolas K. Gvosdev, “Trump's Ukraine Lethal Aid Approval Is Not A Gamechanger” National Interest (December 21, 2017) <http://nationalinterest.org/feature/trumps-ukraine-lethal-aid-approval-not-gamechanger-23744>

For its part, Moscow is not sitting by idly. The Russians have just withdrawn from the Joint Center for Control and Coordination, which monitors the hazardous ceasefire in southeast Ukraine. This represents a step that could soon lead to an escalation of violence throughout the region.

And although Trump may not be moving to fully support Ukraine in all its demands, Trump's shale energy policy hopes to expand US shale energy exports to take over Russian energy markets in eastern Europe, and thus supply Ukraine among other states in the region.<sup>37</sup> The dilemma is this: There will be no diplomatic settlement to the Ukraine-Russia clash until the US withdraws its promise to bring Ukraine into NATO as repeated at every NATO summit since 2008, and only once the US and Europeans eventually recognize Russian sovereignty over Crimea—as a part of a negotiated deal that involves Ukrainian political economic interests as well.<sup>38</sup>

### **In the Name of “America First”**

In sum, Trump's policies and actions risk breaking up the UN, NATO and the EU—in the process of losing the confidence of its major ally, the UK. Trump is risking war with North Korea, while likewise exacerbating tensions with China over Taiwan and Henry Kissinger's ambiguous “One China” policy. Trump is also playing fire war with Iran due to his political-economic efforts to undermine the Iran nuclear accord, while his policies also conflict with European political-economic interests in Iran. In addition, militant pan-Islamist movements will oppose his strong support for Saudi Arabia and Israel—in the process of isolating the US internationally from its own friends and allies

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<sup>37</sup> Hall Gardner, “Ukraine: A New Plan” American Affairs (Summer 2017). Hall Gardner, World War Trump.

<sup>38</sup> See Hall Gardner, A Critical Response to NATO Rethink, Realign, React (Paris: FRS, 2016); 24 <https://www.frstrategie.org/publications/notes/a-critical-response-to-nato-rethink-realignreact-15-2016> Hall Gardner, “Ukraine: A New Plan” American Affairs (Summer 2017). Hall Gardner, World War Trump.

due to Trump's support for Jerusalem as the capital of Israel, which in turn is threatening war with *Hezb'allah*, if not with Iran as well. Trump's tilt toward Ukraine against Russia is furthermore risking the collapse of 1997 NATO-Russia Founding Act, and leading Moscow to strengthen defence ties with China.

All this in the name of America First.

There appear to be four possible scenarios for Trump:

He can voluntarily step down, but it is dubious he will do that because he simply can't accept failure—only “success.”

A second scenario is that he can go down in disgrace kicking and screaming like Richard Nixon, but in the process of dragging the country into domestic turmoil in a global situation that, in many ways, is even more dangerous than the Vietnam war era.

A third scenario is that he begins to change his act and stop playing in “reality TV.” If Trump truly wants to be “successful” as he claims and if he truly wants to put his name on world history just like it glowers on his buildings, he can start acting immediately more like a statesman—much like Ronald Reagan did in his second term. But this is making a dubious assumption that Trump could actually change his personal behaviour—and that it is not already too late to do so.

The fourth scenario is WORLD WAR TRUMP.