

**RESHAPING INTERNATIONAL ORDER:
U.S. FOREIGN POLICY
UNDER THE DONALD J. TRUMP ADMINISTRATION**

Yannis A. Stivachtis

**(RIEAS Senior Advisor and Associate Professor of Political Science and
Director of the International Program at Virginia Tech, USA)**

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It has been since the announcement of the results of the U.S. Presidential elections on 8 November 2016 that the world has been waiting with a certain degree of nervousness and apprehension to find out how the newly elected leader of the Free World will contact his country's foreign affairs. Despite that more than six weeks have passed since Donald Trump's inauguration, one may argue that still today there is more uncertainty surrounding the foreign policy of the world's greatest power than at any time in the post-World War II era, if not longer. So, the question is: what would President Trump's foreign policy be?

International relations scholars and political analysts have had a difficulty in answering this question and this is mainly due to four reasons: first, the incoherent manner in which President Trump attempted to present his administration's foreign policy during his electoral campaign; second, the negative nature of the electoral campaign itself which did not allow any of the two candidates to present in some depth the core principles and parameters of their foreign policy and debate about them; third, President Trump focused most of his attention on internal issues, such as the economy and immigration, and what he said with regards to foreign policy was often contradictory; and fourth, the policy statements that the Secretary of

Defence and the Secretary of State articulated during their confirmation process but also during their recent visits abroad stand in sharp contrast with many of the positions that President Trump presented during the electoral campaign and repeated since then.

The purpose of this paper is twofold: first, to attempt to identify the main parameters and directions of the U.S. foreign policy under the Trump Administration by focusing on what the President has said during his election campaign but also since his inauguration; and second, to offer an initial analysis of the implications of the President's positions for world politics by focusing on specific countries and world regions.

The Pillars of President Trump's Foreign Policy

During the election campaign, Donald Trump provided some details about specific international issues and attempted to articulate a strategic vision. Albeit the incoherence of its presentation, this vision does exist and if one looks at the substance of what President Trump has said, one can discern a rather radical foreign policy. In fact, President Trump proposes a redefinition of U.S. foreign policy based on current realities and not on the conditions that shaped the country's approach to international order during the Cold War. It is a foreign policy based on the idea of 'America first', meaning that American strength should be maximized in order to serve American interests.

The End of Multilateralism

President Trump's understanding of the current international situation is that the United States is overextended and, as a result, its national interests are not fully served and its foreign policy goals are not attained. President Trump's view is that in its efforts to help other countries, Washington is entangled in complex relationships that create unwanted risks and place additional burdens on the United States. At the same time, according to what it seems to be the President's argument, Washington's commitments to global order are not matched by those countries either in capability or in intent. Thus despite their economic strength and industrial capacity, U.S. allies have taken for granted that Washington will bear the primary burden for the maintenance of international order without at the same time providing significant support towards achieving this end. As a result, President Trump is of the opinion that relations between the United States and its allies

should be re-negotiated and if not agreement is reached, then the development of bilateral relations should be pursued with countries that are capable and prepared to actively support the United States in its efforts to achieve its national interests world-wide in return for guarantees from Washington.

It seems that President Trump holds a similar view on international trade. According to this view, the U.S.' primary concern should be the development of commercial relations that are beneficial to the Washington's interests. President Trump made it clear during his electoral campaign that he strongly believes that the current international trade regime, based on the notion of free trade, has not benefited the United States. Washington's recent withdrawal from the Trans-Pacific Partnership and the Trump Administration's commitment to re-negotiate NAFTA are indicative of this approach. At the center of President Trump's approach is the belief that the primary economic need is to create trade relations that will increase job availability in the United States. Many economists may suggest that free trade will increase the country's GDP, but for President Trump this is not enough since free trade does not deal with critical societal issues. As he has recently put it, "Free trade should also be fair trade". As a result, the previous goal of achieving economic growth through free international trade without paying attention to societal consequences is no longer acceptable. Hence, the terms under which most international trade agreements have been structured are unacceptable to the Trump Administration.

Moreover, President Trump's skepticism about the contemporary relevance of multilateralism to U.S. interests also applies to international trade. Consequently, one should expect that emphasis will move away from large multilateral free-trade agreements, which are too complex to fine-tune to the U.S. interest, and instead be placed on bilateral treaties that can be reshaped to serve Washington's interests. The important point is that in negotiations of this kind and magnitude, the United States, as the strongest economic power in the world, holds the upper hand. As a result, Washington can achieve favourable outcomes.

In sum, the key to President Trump's approach to foreign affairs is the recognition that the Post-World War II period of multilateralism is over, and that continuing to act otherwise is harming the United States' interests. This would have important consequences for international order and the function of many global and regional organizations like the United Nations, the World Trade Organization, and NATO.

U.S.' European Policy

President Trump's doctrine of American overextension and the remedies to it can be exemplified in his approach to NATO. According to his reading, the United States has been involved in various military operations, such as in Afghanistan and Iraq, without the NATO allies providing the necessary strategic support to aid U.S. efforts to bring these operations to a successful and speedy end. Although many NATO member states have provided what support they could or what support they wanted or what support their domestic pressures allowed them to provide, that level of support has been, according to President Trump, below the real capabilities of the NATO allies.

According to President Trump, despite their current economic strength and industrial capacity, NATO member states have taken for granted that Washington will bear the primary burden for their defence both in terms of finance and military capabilities. Moreover, President Trump has clearly noted that on many important issues involving the United States, Washington has not received the political and practical support of many NATO states. For example, France and other NATO allies objected to the U.S. intervention in Iraq and did not provide significant support. President Trump is aware of the principle that NATO members have no obligation to join in 'out of area' operations initiated by the United States but he believes that in these important – for Washington - instances the organization has been irrelevant to U.S. strategic needs. This seen as creating a strategic and political imbalance in the sense that the United States is liable for the defence of Europe but European allies are not committed to the defence of the U.S. interests. As a result, President Trump is of the opinion that the transatlantic partnership should be renegotiated. As it was mentioned previously, in case that renegotiation is not possible the alternative seems to be the U.S. withdrawal from NATO and the development of bilateral relations with countries that are capable and willing to actively support the United States in its efforts to achieve its interests in return for guarantees from Washington.

During the recent deliberations between U.S. and NATO officials it became clear that one way in which America's European NATO partners could satisfy some of the conditions set by the Trump Administration is by buying American military equipment. Indeed, already agreements have been reached that would allow the United States to sell a significant amount of military hardware to its European allies thereby increasing the flow of cash into its treasury. In this way, the Trump Administration can use money from arms sales to increase its defence budget, support the U.S. industry, and strengthen the American economy. Therefore, the Trump Administration's foreign policy is directly linked to the President's

domestic economic policy.

President Trump's view on foreign trade has a direct impact on the relations between the United States and the European Union in the sense that President Trump will seek to re-negotiate the US-EU trade agreements with the goal of achieving a new settlement that would significantly increase the benefits for the U.S. economy. But if such an agreement is not reached, the United States may attempt to negotiate trade deals with individual EU member states thereby undermining the very existence of the European Union.

At the same time many European countries, such as France and the Netherlands, experience a wave of strong support for populist political parties and there are fears that the election of Donald Trump could boost support for right-wing and left-wing populist movements across Europe. With so many important elections taking place in the coming months, there are concerns that isolationism and populism will be major vote-winners in many European countries.

But perhaps the most important challenge facing the European countries has to do with Russia. Due to President Trump's stance on NATO, many European governments are afraid that the United States will abandon Europe at a time when the region is facing the threats of a resurgent Russia in the east and conflict and unrest in the south. Moreover, the close relationship between the new American President and Russian President Vladimir Putin has raised alarms in those areas of Europe, such as in Poland and the Baltic States, where Russian influence was once much greater, and where Russia maintains a high level of interest.

During her recent trip to the United States, British Prime Minister Theresa May made a pledge to President Trump to keep NATO intact and maintain good relations with the European Union despite the Brexit. However, it remains to be seen if the United States and its European partners will work together and address the economic, political, and security challenges facing Europe.

U.S.' Russia Policy

The United States' central preoccupation in foreign policy under the Trump Administration will be what the President himself prefers to call 'radical Islamic terrorism'; a concept that the new National Security Adviser General McMaster has advised against its use. Whether in its Al Qaeda or ISIS form, 'Islamic radicalism' is regarded by President Trump as an intolerable menace not only because terrorist attacks can be escalated but, most importantly, because the psychological burden of terrorism on the American society is enormous.

For President Trump, a long period of military operations in the Middle East that have not produced the expected results does not mean that a solution is unattainable. It appears that he believes that the terrorist threat cannot be defeated without the use of a smart military strategy coupled with overwhelming power. Therefore, President Trump is ready to work with any country that is prepared to dedicate resources to this goal and to share risks. This includes Russia, which has for quite some time had an internal problem with 'Islamic radicalism'. Not only has Russia significant capabilities it could deploy but, most importantly, as the Russian involvement in Syria demonstrates, Moscow has the will to do so.

Despite Russia's involvement in cyber activities during the U.S. presidential elections, President Trump thinks that his electoral victory had nothing to do with the Russian interference and that a new start in U.S.-Russian relations is possible. Moreover, unlike what Democrats and many Republicans believe, he strongly asserts that during his presence in the White House, Russia will not repeat such activities not only because he would be tough in his response but, most importantly, due to the fact that the U.S. and Russian interests coincide. In the President's view, Washington and Moscow could agree on the neutralization of Ukraine meaning that Kyiv would have economic and political ties with the United States and the European Union, but Ukraine would not be part of any alliance system, nor would its territory be used for the stationing of Western forces. Like Moscow, which wants a buffer zone to separate Russia from the NATO countries, the United States wants the creation of a buffer to protect allies in Eastern Europe. But beyond that it seems that the new American administration does not have any overriding interest in Ukraine. Russia, on the other hand, wants a degree of autonomy in Eastern Ukraine and retention of its interests in Crimea. But for President Trump, the Ukrainian issue can be managed in the context of joint military operations against 'Islamic radicalism'. At the same time, President Trump is aware of the economic problems facing Russia, especially as a result of the sanctions imposed by the Obama Administration, and he sees this situation as providing him with a strategic leverage to secure Russian cooperation.

U.S.' China Policy

A hostile situation is slowly developing between the United States and China as President Trump continues to pursue a hard stance towards Chinese trade policy and China's efforts to become the dominant power in the East Asia. President Trump believes that a relationship of asymmetrical interdependence exists between the United States and China and this asymmetry is in favour of Washington in the

sense that Beijing depends on Washington more than Washington depends on Beijing.

It is generally accepted that China is a large economy that is highly dependent on exports to the United States. In fact, Beijing has offered an economic environment where American companies can transfer production and increase their revenue and profits while the American industrial base is diminishing at home. President Trump is determined to alter this situation by making use of the strategic advantage over China offered by the asymmetry in the relations between the two sides and compel Beijing to re-negotiate the bases of the U.S.-Chinese relations. President Trump's decision to communicate directly with the President of Taiwan and his willingness to at least indirectly disregard the traditional 'One China' policy, as well as his recent strong position towards Beijing's activities in the South China Sea are indicative of his approach.

At the same time, it seems that President Trump's decision to withdraw from the Trans-Pacific Partnership has paved the way for China to increase its influence in the greater Asia-Pacific region, which will make Beijing an even greater threat in the eyes of the U.S. Administration. Moreover, with so many regional flashpoints that involve both the US and China, such as North Korea and Taiwan, the Trump Administration will most likely find itself at odds with China in the near future, setting the stage for a potential showdown between these two leading world powers that will certainly have significant implications for regional and global order.

U.S.' Asia-Pacific Policy

The most important shifts in President Obama's geopolitical orientation has been the replacement of the U.S.' emphasis in the Middle East with a strong emphasis in the Asia-Pacific region. This is not coincidental since this region has been the source of much of the most recent growth for the global economy. In addition, the Asia-Pacific region has been the home of the primary rivals to the U.S.' hegemonic position in the global system, most notably China.

Currently, India and the countries of Southeast Asia watch with nervousness to see if the efforts of President Obama's Administration to improve and strengthen relations with the countries of the region will be maintained by the Trump Administration, or if they will experience the gradual effects of the U.S. withdrawal and isolationism.

The same holds true for the other countries in the broader Asia-Pacific region, such

as Japan, Australia, and South Korea, which have all been close allies of the United States. Japan and South Korea now question the U.S.' willingness to contain and possibly reverse China's rising assertiveness in the region. This perception is mainly due to President Trump's position that was discussed previously, namely his belief that despite their current economic strength and industrial capacity Japan and South Korea do not adequately contribute to military operations involving the United States. According to President Trump, this creates a strategic imbalance in the sense that the United States is liable for the defence of Japan and South Korea but those allies are not committed, or are not committed to full extent to the defence of the American interests elsewhere and the burdens associated with the maintenance of global order. Instead, as protests against the presence and activities of the U.S. troops in South Korea demonstrates, these countries become critical to U.S. foreign policy and interests. As a result, the bases for the partnership between the United States and each of these countries should be re-negotiated on a bilateral basis. Only those countries that are willing to actively and heavily support the United States' interests will receive guarantees from Washington. In other words, President Trump advocates the re-examination of the U.S. relations with Japan and South Korea to assure that such relationships remain of value to both sides. Like in the case of NATO, one should expect that U.S. arms sales may be a way in which America's East Asian allies may demonstrate their commitment to Washington.

While the hard stance of the United States towards China is a delightful development for Taiwan, which has always been willing to support the United States and its interests in return for international recognition, Australia's relations with the United States appear to enter into a new phase. This is due to President Trump's very harsh critique of Australia's handling of the refugee situation. In fact, President Trump has recently blamed the agreement reached between Canberra and the Obama Administration according to which 1,250 refugees will be sent from Australia to the United States. He claimed that Australia did to contact a proper vetting of the refugees and therefore Canberra was sending to the United States the next 'Boston bombers'. President Trump categorically stated that unless these refugees are submitted to and pass the U.S. screening process, they would not be allowed to enter the United States.

U.S. Policy in the Middle East and North Africa

Due to the preoccupation of President Trump's Administration with the fight against 'Islamic radicalism', the Middle East will remain a key focus of the U.S.' foreign policy. Since the very beginning of his electoral campaign for the

Presidency of the United States, Donald Trump has offered competing and contradictory narratives with regards to this region. On the one hand, the President has called for a turn inward, which would result in the United States playing a lesser role in the Middle East. On the other hand, he has made several relatively clear policy statements concerning the region, including an increase in military efforts to destroy the Islamic State and a desire to stop Iran from developing nuclear weapons, as well as Teheran's capabilities to deliver them. To this, one may add the President's willingness to back Israel's positions in the region, as well as Benjamin Netanyahu's 'one state' solution to the Palestinian-Israeli dispute. At the same time, President Trump's recent Executive Order restricting the entry to the United States to people coming from Iraq, Iran, Somalia, Libya, Yemen, Syria, and Sudan has been perceived in the wider Middle East as a 'Muslim ban'; a fact that has the potential of complicating further the relations of the United States with regional states.

Given the complexity of the situation in the Middle East and the long involvement of the United States in the region, it will be very difficult for Washington to completely withdraw from the region for the next few years.

U.S.' Africa Policy

Sub-Saharan Africa has been a region that has been of marginal interest to many U.S. administrations. As Madeleine Albright once noted when she was asked about the relatively low commitment of the Clinton Administration to Africa in comparison to other world regions: 'some regions are more important than others'. In a recent questionnaire sent to the Department of State by the White House officials, a justification was requested for continuing providing aid and other forms of assistance to African states and their corrupted regimes while this money could stay in the United States and help with the development of the American economy in the benefit of the American worker. This is an indication that under the new U.S. Administration, sub-Saharan Africa will be marginalized once again. One should expect that the withdrawal or minimization of aid will have significant implications for regional development and stability. The question is what the Trump Administration would do to contain the spill over effects of possible humanitarian crises in the region (conflicts and diseases) that would have the potential of reaching the United States.

U.S.' Central and South America Policy

As the most immediate neighbors of the United States, Central and South American countries are watching anxiously to see what President Trump Administration's policies will be regarding issues such as trade and immigration.

So far, President Trump's regional focus has been primarily on Mexico and Cuba. Given his Administration's commitment to build the wall between the United States and Mexico in conjunction with its claim that Mexico will eventually pay for it, one should expect that the relations between the two countries will be severely strained. The cancellation of Mexico's President's visit to the United States in response to President Trump's Executive Order calling for the building of the wall is indicative of the developing situation. The problems between the two countries will also be augmented as a result of President Trump's wish to renegotiate the NAFTA agreement, while threatening companies that invest in Mexico. Likewise, the recent rapprochement between the United States and Cuba that the Obama Administration pursued could be jeopardized by an increasingly hard line position taken by the new U.S. administration towards Havana.

In contrast, President Trump has not said very much with regards to South America, but given the Trump's Administration hard line on many international issues it is likely that the goodwill towards the U.S. that President Obama generated in the region will gradually diminish, particularly among the region's most left-leaning countries.

Conclusion

Despite its initial presentational incoherence, President Trump has now provided a quite developed strategic vision for the United States and its role in world affairs. This vision calls for a radical departure from the post-World War II U.S. foreign policy. In fact, President Trump has called for a redefinition of U.S. foreign policy based on the idea of 'America first', which implies that American strength should be maximized in order to serve U.S. interests. At the core of President Trump's approach to foreign affairs is the recognition that the Post-World War II period of multilateralism comes to an end, and that continuing to act otherwise is harming Washington's interests. As a result, President Trump's foreign policy will reshape international relations and this reshaping would have important consequences both for international order and the function of global and regional organizations.