

Blueprint for a President Trump Foreign Policy

Donald Trump's long-awaited foreign-policy speech last week initially generated entirely predictable reactions. His supporters were gratified by a clear and coherent enunciation of his views, which had generally been presented up to then in a scatter-shot fashion, and often seemed more like belligerent attitudes than purposeful policy. But to his critics on both the right and the left, it was very inadequate, though naturally for different reasons. On the left, he was a dangerous, uncompromising jingo-nationalist who would destroy alliances with unilateralism and blunder into wars without thinking them through (a bizarre charge given the accident-prone behavior of recent administrations). It was unfocused belligerency. On the right, his policy was deemed a mere isolationism. The slogan "America First," which was uttered once in the address, was superciliously resurrected from the Lend-Lease debate in 1941, and the loose organization of that name headed by Colonel Charles Lindbergh was deemed to be flying again, unable to make a serious moral distinction between Winston Churchill and Adolf Hitler.

Lindbergh and his fellow isolationists, most of them patriotic Americans who did not want to become enmeshed in the quarrels of Europe, were pilloried by Franklin D. Roosevelt as Nazi sympathizers, and as Communists acting in solidarity with them in obedience to the Nazi-Soviet Pact of 1939. They had no monopoly on the phrase "America First," and it did not necessarily acquire any permanent meaning. Trump made it clear that his only application of it was to define the American national interest, not ungenerously or without allies or in indifference to the rest of the world, and to provide the military and diplomatic consistency to maintain and protect that interest in consultation with allies. He was critical of

the impetuosity of the Bushes, without naming them, in plunging into areas without proper justification or planning, at immense cost in lives and money, and with little beneficial consequence for America. He particularly assailed what “all began with a dangerous idea that we could make Western democracies out of countries that had no experience or interest in becoming a Western democracy. We tore up what institutions they had and then were surprised at what we unleashed: civil war, religious fanaticism, thousands of Americans killed, lives wasted.”

He was more explicit in attacking President Obama and Secretary of State Clinton for “a reckless, rudderless, and aimless foreign policy that has blazed a path of destruction in its wake. I challenge anyone to explain the strategic foreign-policy vision of Obama and Clinton. It has been a complete and total disaster.” More broadly, he said:

America no longer has a clear understanding of our foreign-policy goals. Since the end of the Cold War and the breakup of the Soviet Union, we've lacked a coherent foreign policy. One day we're bombing Libya and getting rid of a dictator to foster democracy for civilians. The next day we're watching the same civilians suffer while their country absolutely falls apart. We're a humanitarian nation, but the legacy of the Obama-Clinton interventions will be weakness, confusion, and disarray, a mess. We've made the Middle East more unstable and chaotic than ever before. We left Christians subject to intense persecution and even genocide. We have done nothing to help the Christians, nothing, and we should always be ashamed for that. Our actions in Iraq, Libya, and Syria have helped unleash ISIS, and we're in a war with radical Islam, but President Obama won't even name the enemy, and unless you name the enemy, you will never solve the problem.

While Trump had the respect for Republican sensibilities not

to name the Bushes, it was clear that he considered George W. Bush, especially, part of the problem. He cannot have been thinking of anyone but the 43rd president when he said: "Instead of trying to spread universal values that not everyone shares or wants, we should understand that strengthening and promoting Western civilization and its accomplishments will do more to inspire positive reforms around the world than military interventions." He was naturally less genteel in dealing with Hillary Clinton: She "blames it all on a video, an excuse that was a total lie, proved to be absolutely a total lie. Our ambassador [to Libya] was murdered and our secretary of state misled the nation. She was not awake to take that call at three o'clock in the morning."

Trump paid suitable homage to the statesmen who led the Western Alliance to victory in World War II and in the Cold War, though Ronald Reagan was the only one he mentioned by name. "History will not forget what he did. . . . Unfortunately, after the Cold War our foreign policy veered badly off course. We failed to develop a new vision for a new time. . . . Logic was replaced with foolishness and arrogance, which led to one foreign-policy disaster after another." He blamed the Clinton administration for underreacting to the bombing of the American embassies in Kenya and Tanzania and to the attack on the USS *Cole*, and enumerated five weaknesses in current American foreign policy. "First, our resources are totally over-extended. . . . Secondly, our allies are not paying their fair share. . . . They look at the United States as weak and forgiving and feel no obligation to honor their agreements with us. In NATO, only four of 28 other member countries besides America are spending the minimum required 2 percent of GDP on defense."..."The countries we are defending must pay for the cost of this defense, and if not, the U.S. must be prepared to let these countries defend themselves. We have no choice."

The third weakness he identified was that the U.S. was not seen by its allies as dependable. "We've had a president who dislikes our friends and bows to our enemies."... "He negotiated a disastrous deal with Iran, and then we watched them ignore its terms even before the ink was dry. Iran cannot be allowed to have a nuclear weapon." This last line presumably means that if Iran derogates from the treaty and accelerates nuclear military deployment, President Trump will stop it militarily. If Iran adheres to the treaty's terms, whoever is president of the United States in 2025 will have to tell the Iranians, if the Trump policy is followed in the meantime, that a version of the treaty will have to be renewed or preventive military means will be taken to ensure that Iran does not become a nuclear military power. This is at least more sensible than the promises of Ted Cruz and Marco Rubio to "tear up" the treaty, which is contrary to international law and would excuse Iran from its tepid restraints after all the impounded and immobilized billions of Iranian funds have been released to it.

His fourth imputation of weakness that "our rivals no longer respect us. . . . They don't take us seriously anymore." In illustration of this, he mentioned the fact that Obama went all the way to Copenhagen to lobby for Chicago as the next Olympic Games site, and yet it came fourth; and that when Obama visited Cuba and Saudi Arabia, no one met him at the airport.

"Finally," he said, "America no longer has a clear understanding of our foreign-policy goals. Since the end of the Cold War and the breakup of the Soviet Union, we've lacked a coherent foreign policy." He promised that "we are getting out of the nation-building business and instead focusing on creating stability in the world." Trump declared that it would be his goal to "establish a foreign policy that will endure for several generations," and said that he would recruit a new team, not composed of "those who have perfect résumés but very

little to brag about except responsibility for a long history of failed policies and continued losses at war.”

I have cited so extensively from the speech because, apart from those outlets that published the entire text, very little of it was accurately summarized. Those who disliked it described it in pejorative adjectives, and supporters also gave only adjectival approval. In fact, it was sensible and plausible, a middle course between George W. Bush’s impetuosity and exaltation of inapplicable idealism over practicalities on the ground, and Obama’s feckless irresolution that has often had the character of telling America’s allies and adversaries to change roles and places, as in an after-dinner game of charades. The yelpings of some of America’s allies, such as German foreign minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier, can be discounted as the apprehension of freeloaders seeing the approach of the bill collector, rather than the pompous condescensions of European diplomats, who have tended to regard Atlantic relations for generations as a tutorial on worldliness from them to the Americans fortunate to have the privilege of defending them. The speech wasn’t isolationist in tone and it isn’t clear that a Trump administration would cut loose very much from the traditional range of American overseas and hemispheric interests, except some countries that declined to pull their weight.

Nor do I see anything to justify the normally very insightful Peggy Noonan’s view in last weekend’s *Wall Street Journal* that Trump’s foreign policy is to the left of the “hawkish” Hillary Clinton. Whatever Mrs. Clinton’s private demurrals and implications about the president whom she served, she is stuck with her record, including her attempt to pretend that the agreement between Ariel Sharon and George W. Bush over Gaza and settlements didn’t happen, her role in the abbreviation of anti-missile coverage for the Czechs and Poles and the rest of the nonsense about the “reset” with Russia, and the gradual foundering of any serious resistance to the Iranian nuclear

military program.

Following his win in Indiana, it is almost impossible to see any scenario in which Donald Trump will fail to be the GOP's presidential nominee. He and Mrs. Clinton are already exchanging fire and it will become very intense; neither of these two hardballers is going to pay any attention to a political Marquess of Queensberry. Trump has already called her a liar and an unindicted felon, as well as an incompetent secretary of state and a "facilitator" of the infidelities of her husband, whom Trump has called the greatest sexist in American history. Mrs. Clinton has returned the compliments, and these are just the revels of the May; six months of mud-slinging impend. As I have written here before, the people are more angry than Washington insiders imagined, at 20 years of misgovernment, and Donald Trump is not complicit in any of what angers them. He has his infelicities, as have been amply publicized, but his Archie Bunker followers consider them a badge of honor, and the foreign-policy speech last week and his general demeanor in the last month or so are an effort to bring Republican moderates and traditionalists down from the tree. The arguments that he is unelectable, which have become steadily more tattered and moth-eaten, are pretty lame now and the polls between the two likely nominees are close.

Since 1952, the only time a party has won three straight terms in the White House was in 1988, when the very popular Ronald Reagan helped get what amounted to a third term, for his vice president, George H. W. Bush. Donald Trump is calling for a change from 20 or more years of inadequate leadership from both parties. Once the call that it is time for a change takes hold, it is difficult to reverse it. The only method is to change the rationale for supporting the government, as in FDR's artful transition from, as he put it, "Dr. End-the-Depression" to "Dr. Win-the-War." Hillary Clinton will not be able to pull that trick this year. Donald Trump has the advantages of very high (and long-lasting) name recognition

without the baggage of incumbency. Hillary Clinton seems to be running for president for the fourth time, without ever having had the pleasure of holding that office. Nothing should be taken for granted, and it should be, as it has been for many months, good entertainment.

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