

Trump's Foreign Policy Is Coming into Focus

by Conrad Black



Gradually, almost imperceptibly, the outline of a coherent Trump foreign policy is emerging and succeeding. The elements were to withdraw from the role as the default war-maker in the Middle East without creating a vacuum, render Russia less adversarial without facing it down into the arms of the Chinese, and revitalize the Western Alliance to a plausible notion of multilateral contributions and not just an American military guarantee for everyone, *ex gratia* and *pro bono*.

At the same time, there would be unrestricted war on terrorist organizations, a revival of nuclear non-proliferation by direct and overbearing threats to North Korea and Iran, and the reconstruction of America's status as the world's preeminent economy by tax reductions, deregulation, renegotiation of trade treaties, and encouragement of energy self-sufficiency.

There have been some unfortunate moments from a presentational standpoint, but it is a good plan and it is working.

Changing the Game in the Mideast

Turkey had attempted to masquerade as the patron of the Arabs and was sent packing in remembrance of the Arabs' 500 years of involuntary enjoyment of Turkish occupation, and after a regional musical chairs game with ancient rivals Iran and Russia, all pretending a common cause in Syria. Turkey was left standing when the music stopped and largely has reconciled with the United States. The two countries will operate joint patrols to keep the Kurds from aggravating Kurdish discontent within Anatolia (Turkish Asia Minor).

Turkish President Erdogan is a distasteful and inconstant ally, but more manageable than the Russian leader Putin, and a Lincolnian statesman compared to the Iranian ayatollahs. The Trump Administration is not prepared to accept permanent involvement of U.S. ground forces in the Middle East. But neither will it accept the creation of vacuums there which foment terrorism, as after Obama's petulant and abrupt departure from Iraq. This led to the swift rise of ISIS, the disintegration of Shiite Iraq, and thrust 60 percent of the country's population into dependency on Iran. The entire American effort there: two invasions under the Bushes and Obama's wind-down, handed Iran the greatest accretion of its influence since the height of the Parthian Empire nearly 2,000 years ago.

Now, making a partial virtue of the failings of the previous two administrations, the crumbling of Iraq and Syria, formerly two of Israel's most fanatical enemies, strengthens Israeli security, and the encroachments of the Arabs' ancient enemies and oppressors, the Turks and Iranians, bring Egypt and Saudi Arabia into quasi-alliance with Israel. ISIS and al-Qaeda effectively have been smashed, the United States doesn't care if Russia has a naval base on the Mediterranean (since Russia could not challenge the U.S. Sixth Fleet in the Mediterranean

without bankrupting itself). The Russians protect Syrian President Bashar al-Assad and his Alawite faction, and the Turks and Americans protect the secular adversaries of Assad and keep the Kurds out of Turkey, protecting Kurdistan from the Turks.

Obviously, the war in Yemen has to end without an Iranian victory and the pressure on Iran must be maintained until this dismal theocracy in Teheran either repents of its ambition for an arc of influence, or collapses from internal anger at its comprehensive corruption and failure.

The Arab powers have greater concerns than continuing to try to distract the Arab masses from the misgovernment inflicted on them with the red herring of Israel, and no one cares a jot about the Palestinians, as the inexcusably delayed movement of the U.S. embassy to Jerusalem demonstrated. The bedraggled and discredited PLO leader, Mahmoud Abbas, should soon make a deal which implicitly includes the Egyptians uprooting Hamas in Gaza with America's and the world's blessing. Palestine will have to accept a narrower West Bank and a deeper Gaza strip in compensation, with a secure road between them. It will settle down as another dusty, but industrious little country, and the last piece of the puzzle will be Hezbollah—one peep from it and all the neighboring forces will be pleased to dispatch it.

Given the importance of the factors in play, the Trump Administration cannot allow the fracas over purported “journalist” Jamal Khashoggi, a Saudi citizen and member of the Muslim Brotherhood, to derail progress in the Middle East. His murder is one of the stupidest and most barbarous acts in the unenlightened history of the House of Saud, and has been hyped to the rafters by the Democrats and their media ciphers, but will be talked out effectively by Trump and Secretary of State Pompeo. It was a disgusting crime, but these are frequent in the Middle East and no significant part of the world's future can be mortgaged to the victim.

Khashoggi was no great friend of America, despite the mournful caterwauling of the increasingly desperate Democrats, and some well-meaning Republican dupes (like Senator Lindsey Graham, who padded around the Middle East 15 years ago with John McCain demanding fair treatment of the Muslim Brotherhood).

Upending Popular Wisdom on Russia and China

The fixation of the Democrats, and of some gullible Republicans such as Marco Rubio, on the Russians, and the unutterable but now scarcely audible nonsense about collusion between the Russian government and the Trump campaign in 2016, has caused many Americans to forget the strategic correlation of forces in the world. But the president and his close advisors have realized that Russia could only be dangerous if it were so coldly rebuffed before the whole world that it were driven into the arms of China.

Despite the [passing hubbub](#) about his comments in Helsinki (which essentially meant that Trump had more confidence in the assertions of Russian intelligence than in the partisan fabrications of former U.S. intelligence chiefs John Brennan and James Clapper, with some reason), the president has succeeded in shifting America's attention to the fact that China is its only rival for strategic preeminence in the world.

Trump has struck up and retained a cordial personal relationship with Chinese President Xi Jinping, but has steadily moved to break down China's trade surplus with the United States, encouraged China's neighbors to join hands in resisting Chinese hegemony in the Far East, and used the preeminence of the United States Navy to assure that the Chinese effort to convert the South China Sea into Chinese territorial waters does not succeed.

The fretful assertions that China would surpass the United States as a power, economically and otherwise, in the next 20 years, have died away, as did the claims that Japan would

surpass America as an economic power and the USSR as a military power. Now, it is even acknowledged by popular wisdom, Trump-haters, and the somewhat broader and more international category of anti-Americans, (though many of them are Americans), that prejudging the outcome of that contest is unwise.

As he opened relations with China and triangulated the super power rivalry with the Soviet Union in 1972, Richard Nixon said that the world's five great centers of strategic strength (in terms of population, industry and technology) were the United States, USSR, Western Europe, Japan, and China. Now the Russians are itinerant international troublemakers, inelegantly and inconsistently trying to replicate the feat of Charles de Gaulle in reminding the world of the importance of France, but they are a crumbling custodian of vast geopolitical possibilities, awaiting the development of mature and efficient political institutions. Europe is a cocoon for the containment of Germany, paying [Danegeld](#), for notorious historical reasons, to the working and agrarian classes, but only the British and French retain the remotest concept of how Great Powers conduct themselves. Japan is almost as reticent, but stirred to greater activity than the Europeans by their proximity to China.

Trump and Xi understand that they are the rivals, and there is no real military issue; it is economic predominance and the prestige of the nations. The Americans retain the advantage—the world's greatest democracy and promoter of democracy. China has no institutions of any public trust except, up to a point, the armed forces. The United States, as in the times of James Monroe and John Quincy Adams, is unchallenged in its hemisphere. Western Europe is slumbering quiescently and is, to an adequate extent, an American ally, and palsied Russia is waiting to begin the primordial task of trying to devise political institutions that will serve its legitimate aspirations. Japan seeks American assistance as a bulwark

against resurgent China. This is a constellation that President Trump is steadily strengthening, and it is one that, with continued management, cannot fail to win, and will not try to bar China from being the first of the world's great nations to regenerate itself. In this process, though not in some of its more jingoistic manifestations, China should not be discouraged.

No one would call Donald Trump a sophisticated geopolitician, (including Donald Trump). But in practice, he is. He is not a historian, but he is a realistic analyst of the present and is building a fine future for his country. Americans sense this, and will respond to it.

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