

Will and Haass vs. Trump

What we have here is a failure to appreciate the president.

by Conrad Black



It is distressing to see my friend of nearly 40 years, George Will, writing such words of [mournfully](#) as he did last week of the end of the Liberal World Order. One expects, a year into an administration that went to war in the election campaign against the entire political class in both parties and among the national media (such as George Will) and the foreign-policy establishment (and Richard Haass is one of the very best of them), that there will be panic below decks. One hears it every day from Joe Scarborough and Wolf Blitzer and their legions of screeching sound-alikes. But George Will and Richard Haass are eminent men, flag officers on this ship. That George Will has a cultural and temperamental problem with Donald Trump is no surprise, and neither is Richard Haass's concern that the Western Alliance is crumbling (though that, if true, has more to do with the Alliance-deaf previous two administrations and the flabby complacency of most of

America's so-called allies).

George Will is one of the country's outstanding polemical writers, but he should not be squandering that talent on mind-reading and misrepresenting the president. John Bolton absolutely does not think and will not be "suggesting that the United States should seriously consider embarking on war crimes." George has no standing to say that "Trump has no convictions." Whether or not George or others agree with it, the president has done his best to enact the program the voters approved when they elected him. He has appointed judges who believe they should carry out the law and not the current political reinterpretation of what that great paragon of modern liberal jurisprudence Eliot Spitzer described as "a flexible constitution." Trump has drastically reduced illegal immigration, reformed and reduced taxes, deregulated, stimulated economic growth, succeeded in gaining China's serious cooperation in dissuading North Korea from gaining a nuclear first-strike capacity, and armed the Ukrainians with anti-tank weapons and committed to providing Eastern Europe with anti-missile defenses. He is working to reduce the U.S. trade deficit, has assisted importantly in raising oil production by 5 million barrels a day, and emancipated the American people from President Obama's mad promise to reduce American carbon use by 26 percent in the next twelve years (in the Paris climate agreement), while the world's leading polluters, China and India, pollute more, and Western Europe does nothing, though with great unctuousness.

With a more suave individual enacting the same policies, George Will would, on past form, be an appreciative supporter; it is very dismaying that such a substantive person and eminent commentator and old friend is unable to distinguish often annoying (though usually rather entertaining and even refreshing) Trump flimflam and posturing from the substance accomplished by an administration that has, despite the continuing war with most of the political class, had the most

successful first year of any newly elected administration since Eisenhower's, if not Franklin D. Roosevelt's. It is also worrisome, given his stature, that George Will is not setting a more thoughtful example, and has gone back to snide name-calling, as in his still-remembered reference to George H. W. Bush as emitting "the tinny 'arf' . . . of a lapdog." Donald Trump as a public personality is an acquired taste, or not, but, like all holders of high public offices, he has the right to be judged on his record.

George Will presupposes that "this scatterbrain's Swiss-cheese-style tariffs are too sloppy to reflect forethought." Mr. Will is not a trade wonk and the whole point is to shrink the trade deficit. Steel and aluminum were as good a place to start as any. Of course China will compromise; the trade specialists will work out something so complicated that no one can figure it out, but the result will be a sharp reduction in the present imbalance in China's favor, and some repatriation of jobs to the U.S. At the least, George Will should give the president some credit for opposing Chinese theft of American technology. The takeaway from the initiative to reduce the trade gap with China is that the administration is confident that the North Korea arrangement is already practically in place. Trump said to the *New York Times* at the time of his visit to China several months ago that he had indeed deferred taking action with China on the trade front because of the need for China's entire cooperation to deter Pyongyang from nuclear military deployment by a method short of precise American attack on its military targets. His assertion to the Chinese and North Koreans that if North Korea did not desist, the United States would eliminate the North Korean nuclear program militarily, should promote an agreement a little like that over missiles in Cuba in 1962: no nuclear weapons in either Korea, a divided peninsula, and no attempt at regime change. Both sides would get what they originally wanted.

The Iran agreement was insane: It gave Iran ten years to

become a nuclear power, if it chooses to honor the porous and ineffectual monitoring program the treaty provides. But the agreement covers only fissile material, not the Iranian missile program or Iran's development of a nuclear warhead compact enough to be delivered by a missile, and both of these activities are proceeding apace. The method to combat this is essentially the same formula that has been employed with North Korea, though without a Chinese analogue: draconian sanctions and explicit threats that, if a reasonable agreement that no such nuclear military capability will be sought is not concluded, there will be U.S. military interdiction of it. Once the Iranians realize the administration is serious, they will act rationally. The portrayal of this policy as the aspiration to commit "war crimes" is shameful and outrageous.

And neither Mr. Will nor Mr. Haass shows the least recognition of the fact that Donald Trump is the only possible savior of the nuclear non-proliferation system. It must be said for the Iranians that at least they correctly identified the hypocrisy of the existing non-proliferation regime: a club that others could join if they didn't seem likely to be irresponsible, although all were piously urged to abstain and leave a monopoly of ultimate military power in the hands of the incumbent cartel-members, who haven't really done anything to fulfill their promise to disarm (nor should they, as the whole concept is insane). The five founders of the United Nations achieved nuclear military status; then India had to do so as China had, Pakistan because of India, and Israel was a special case. South Africa renounced its status when the apartheid system was dismantled. Ukraine renounced the nuclear capability it inherited from the Soviet Union and all major powers guaranteed its borders, a promise Putin's Russia has flagrantly violated, and President Trump is the only head of a guarantor country who has done anything about it.

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absolute and relative decline in American history.

If I did not have such high regard for Richard Haass, I would fear that he had taken leave of his senses in writing, as he did last week, that the Trump administration had taken the “decision . . . to abandon the role [the U.S.] has played for more than seven decades” in the world. It is difficult to imagine what possessed him to utter such nonsense. The whiplash between George W. Bush’s almost mindless promotion of democracy (even to setting up a prefabricated failed state in Iraq and supporting anti-democratic parties in democratic elections, as in Gaza, Lebanon, and Egypt) and the feckless pacifism and appeasement of the Obama administration certainly shook the confidence of the world – whether friend or foe – in the United States. Richard Haass purports to believe that declining to ratify the Paris climate accord and to join the Trans-Pacific Partnership, and seeking to renegotiate the \$70 billion trade deficit with Mexico and drastically amend the Iran nuclear arrangements, are evidence of Trump’s scuttling of America’s preeminent and indispensable role in the promotion of democracy and the free market, which goes back to Roosevelt’s Quarantine speech in Chicago in 1937. This is bunk; Trump is returning to that policy.

Richard also decries that “the U.S. is experiencing unprecedented attacks from its own president on the country’s media, courts, and law-enforcement institutions,” and relates this to the rise of “authoritarianism” in such places as Turkey, Russia, and China, and to Britain’s Brexit vote. Trump isn’t the problem, but among the symptoms of the problem are that the director and deputy director of the FBI have been fired for cause as the Bureau virtually became the dirty-tricks arm of the Democratic National Committee, and that, as the Center for Media Studies and Pew Research have both recorded, 90 percent of national-media comment on Trump is hostile. Trump may have aggravated some of the current nastiness, but his chief offense has been breaking ranks with

the bipartisan coalition that produced the only period of absolute and relative decline in American history.

If Trump succeeds, the abrasions he sometimes causes will be worth enduring. I commend to my hand-wringing friends the wisdom of dual citizen (Australian and American) Nicole Kidman, who advised her Hollywood peers to have some respect for the elected president and some understanding that if he does well, the country does well. These are almost the only sensible words that have been heard from Hollywood since Ronald Reagan left there for Washington in 1980 (to have dinner at George Will's house).

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