

POLITICAL REFLECTION

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**Back to the Hardest:
The U-turn of Turkish Foreign Policy**
by Dr Federico Donelli

**The State and Society
In Contemporary Turkey**
by Dr Görkem Altınörs

**Why should Democratic Governance be a
Matter of International Concern?**
by Anthony Ellington Wenton

**Why did Turkey Crash the 'Western-
promoted' Gains of PKK-led Kurds?**
by Associate Professor Ali Balci

Interview with
Dr Sharifullah Dorani
on
American Foreign Policy
under the Trump Presidency
by Dr Rahman Dağ





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POLITICAL REFLECTION

“ADVANCING DIVERSITY”

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Interview with Dr Sharifullah Dorani on American Foreign Policy under the Trump Presidency

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Since Mr. Trump has been elected as president, the foreign policy of the US has been shaken, at least it seems that way. Starting economic war with major economic powers, China and Europe, discussing of withdrawing US forces from Syria and Afghanistan and pressing over immigration issues (Mexican wall) do not only reshape domestic but inevitably influence foreign policy. Major of the interview, therefore, will be on US foreign policy under the Trump Administration. Based on your latest book, titled as “America in Afghanistan: Foreign Policy and Decision Making From Bush to Obama to Trump” which is published by I.B.TAURIS, I believe you will present an explanatory insights on possible changes in US foreign policy under Trump Presidency.

Please let me start with most popular concept of twitter diplomacy of President Trump.

Rahman Dag: Daily statements of Trump in twitter and dramatic official statements occupy the world agenda in each time. Some thought that he has been changing the embedded position of the US in the world's politics. Do you agree with that? Is there a real dramatic change in foreign policy of the US?

Before I answer your questions, let me thank you for the interview; it really is an honour! Also, I'd like to add that my answers, in parts, are derived from my book, *America in Afghanistan: Foreign Policy and Decision Making from Bush to Obama to Trump*, which has just been published by I.B. Tauris and Bloomsbury.

The Donald Trump Administration's foreign policy will make more sense in the light of having oneself familiarised with one of the most controversial

and dividing presidents in the US history, Trump, his particularities, including his belief system, and the context in which he operated in. I would, therefore, like to analyse Trump's characteristics at some length, as the analysis will, hopefully, make it easier for your readers to make more sense of my answers to the remaining questions. Trump's viewpoints were said to be based on a number of schools of thoughts, including 'mercantilism' or 'economic nationalism', populism or Jacksonianism, authoritarianism and pragmatism, as well as certain 'character deficiencies'.

As the name suggests, the realist theory of mercantilism argues that economic activity should be based within a nation's borders and should be employed to primarily build a strong state. For mercantilists, according to Max Fisher, foreign (trade) policy is 'a series of deals, each divided between a winner and a loser'. The US was meant to win every single deal because it was the strongest party, but, in actuality, both adversaries and allies 'ripped off' the US. As will be seen below, traces of these views are found in Trump's approach, leading to changes in US foreign policy. I discuss them below.

Others claimed that Trump was influenced by nationalistic populist ideals. They supported Israel; parted with political correctness; argued for an aggressive response towards terrorism (though wary of so-called 'Forever Wars'); opposed talks with Iran and North Korea; felt sceptical about the UN; argued for the restoration of torture and the opening of Guantánamo; doubted the existence of climate change science; felt suspicious of Wall Street; distrusted the political establishment and the business elites and wanted to have their destiny in their own hands; disliked the left-wing; backed up middle-class entitlement programmes; felt mistrustful of the

outside world; opposed voting rights, same-sex marriage, gender equality, 'soulless globalism', especially free trade, 'international alliance' and 'the immigration of non-whites' – they saw immigration as an existential threat to the US.

For them, 'Radical Islamic Terrorism' was at 'global existential' war 'with the Judaeo-Christian world' led by the US.

They viewed Islam in 'deeply xenophobic terms'. For them, 'Radical Islamic Terrorism' was at 'global existential' war 'with the Judaeo-Christian world' led

by the US. Generally speaking, they thought in 'apocalyptic' terms and believed things were extremely 'bad' in America and needed fixing. They shared a '1940s view of fortress America', that is, America should be insular and focus on American needs, rather than police or build the outside world.

Trump's standpoints during the 2016 election and his presidency were *consistent* with most, if not all, of these populist ideals. Hillary Clinton

called these ideals (and half of Trump's supporters) 'racist, sexist, homophobic, xenophobic, Islamophobic – you name it'. For Obama and the cultural left, these Jacksonian views were as close as 'hate crime'. These views have shaken US foreign policy, as I discuss their impact in the answers to the questions below.

There were others who argued that authoritarianism (some even went as far as fascism) was found in Trump's approach because he was fond of strong and nationalist leaders (such as Russian President Vladimir Putin who has 'very strong control over' Russia), required not only loyalty but also 'subservience', and insulted those who disagreed with him or belittled him. The ex-FBI director James Comey compared the president in his book, *A Higher Loyalty: Truth Lies and Leadership*, to a 'Mafia' don, who 'never stops talking' until he 'pulls all those present into a silent circle of assent'. Like a mafia boss, for Trump 'it's all about how do you serve the boss, what's in the boss's interests'. Again, as I discuss below, this aspect of Trump's characteristics has had foreign policy ramifications.

While Rebecca Seales claimed that Trump was conservative on several issues, James Kitfield argued that 'Trump is neither conservative nor neoconservative.' He was not conservative because he ran for the presidency in 2000 through the Reform Party that stood for moderate views but lost the nomination to Pat Buchanan. He was not neoconservative because avoiding 'a new Cold War' with Russia and disapproving of spreading democracy were two policy suggestions that would disappoint the neoconservatives.

For James Kitfield and many others, including former President Barack Obama, however, *pragmatism* (or what worked) seemed to guide his vision. This likewise has been evident in Trump's foreign policy, especially during the time when the so-called 'grown-ups'/ the 'adults in the room' (Trump's experienced advisors) were present in the administration. His remarks to work with Russia and Assad to defeat the common enemy, ISIL, his admittance that the US would not be able to overthrow Assad due to Russian and Iranian support, or his meetings with North Korean leader to defuse tension over North Korea's nuclear programmes could justify this view.

Trump's lack of experience in politics could be another factor that Trump's foreign policy is in chaos.

Trump's lack of experience in politics could be another factor that Trump's foreign policy is in chaos. Candidate Trump never called himself a politician, as he hated the profession. For Trump, US politicians such as Clinton and Obama were 'all talk, and no action'. Politicians, including career diplomats and naive academics, were 'stupid and incompetent' and

were ‘terrible negotiators’ and, consequently, turned the world into ‘a total mess’. All they worried about was how to learn about nuances and how then to carefully consider them before making a decision. The world was tough and what the US lacked was great negotiators/dealmakers to work out the best deals for the US. Foreign policy was not about experience or academic knowledge, or else Ronald Reagan would have never made a great president. Clinton, however, disagreed, accusing Trump of being delusional and living in his own reality. Comey equally believed that Trump was ‘untethered to the truth’. Being ignorant of foreign policy (and staffing his administration with inexperienced staff), and being devoid of the nuances that he eagerly dismissed, has led him to make foreign policy suggestions (as discussed below) that have truly ‘shaken’ US foreign policy and, as your question states, occupied ‘the world agenda’.

One anonymous US official revealed: ‘Meetings with him veer off topic and off the rails, he engages in repetitive rants, and his impulsiveness results in half-baked, ill-informed and occasionally reckless decisions that have to be walked back’. Bob Woodward in his book, *Fear: Trump in the White House*, and John Bew in his article in *New Statement America*, claim that many within the administration are worried that his ‘erratic behaviour’/lack of foreign policy experience could put the US ‘on the path to World War Three’. When Trump was told that Assad again launched a chemical attack on civilian, Trump acted wildly, saying: ‘Let’s fucking kill him! Let’s go in. Let’s kill the fucking lot of them’. Defense Secretary Jim Mattis, one of the adults in the room, advised against such a decision.

While the Taliban believed that Trump was ‘non-serious’ and said ‘anything that [came] to his tongue’, many in the Middle East, however, believed that Trump ‘must be smoking bad hashish to say such crazy things’.

Michael Wolff in his explosive book on Trump, *Fire and Fury: Inside the Trump White House*, disputed the notion that Trump had a stable mind, but the White House doctor disagreed with Wolff. While the Taliban believed that Trump was ‘non-serious’ and said ‘anything that [came] to his tongue’, many in the Middle East, however, believed that Trump ‘must be smoking bad hashish to say such crazy things’. Trump won the election against the expectation of almost every political pundit, and many could not believe that the

American voters elected a candidate who made misogynistic, racist and anti-Muslim comments; someone who apparently did not pay federal tax for most of the past ‘20 years’ and then proudly defended his actions by saying he ‘took advantages of the laws of the nation’.

Citizen/candidate/ Trump was not well read. He got his information from the cable channels, especially Fox News. These channels at times could be inaccurate. To make matters worse, President Trump apparently does not listen to his immediate advisors (even to his military and intelligence officials) but himself because he was very 'clever'. He single-handedly turned 'the \$1 million' loan from his father into a company now worth, in his words, more than '\$10' billion. Trump believes he is 'superior in every way', and possesses boundless confidence in his ability to cut deals that put 'America First'. According to Trump, a man who could make 'high-end real estate deals' could find a solution to all American problems. In the 1980s, he even offered himself as someone who was able to broker a nuclear deal between the US and the Soviet Union.

So, was Trump, who chides US allies and praises its foes, an ideologue or a pragmatist? Many claim that Trump proved to be contradictory, inconsistent, unpredictable, vague, controversial, wrong on facts, and even dishonest, making it hard to pinpoint what school of thought, if any, Trump's beliefs were based on. I, however, found Trump to have been consistent in pursuit of his foreign policy agenda – an agenda that has been, in most parts, influenced by populist ideas and some mercantilist views (as well as his character deficiencies). He has managed to destroy, if not fully but at least partly, the Obama legacies: described as a commitment to climate change, opening to Cuba, the Iran agreement, a pledge to multilateralism, and the Obama Health Care. As you see, Trump, to borrow your words, is beginning to change 'the embedded position of the US in the world's politics'. Actually, he has scared the entire world. More shocking is the fact that US foreign policy decisions are tweeted. Yes, you guessed it right, by no one but the President of the United States of America!

Trump's populist agenda has created strong domestic opposition. More than 120 Republican experts did not support Trump's radical views and declared Trump unfit for presidency. The mainstream media press, including the *Washington Post*, the *New York Times*, and CNN, were critical to the extent that made Trump believe there was a 'witch-hunt' against him. The cultural left (and Congress, especially the House in which Democrats have now gained the majority) apparently vowed to oppose any Trump policy derived from his Alt-Right perspective. Low-rank US officials equally appeared to oppose his views and leaked confidential information to hurt Trump and his senior advisors, including Michael Flynn and Jeff Sessions. The American people (and many outside the US) staged numerous protests to show their opposition to Trump's radical viewpoints/policies. Trump got 'the lowest approval rating of any incoming president in modern history'. In short, Washington, DC, itself has turned into a war zone for Trump.

Trump's populist agenda has created strong domestic opposition.

To be fair, as Stephen M. Walt claims in his article in *Foreign Affairs*, Trump has some 'valid and important insights into America's current problems': such as the rise of immigration, the loss of jobs, corruption in the political system, globalisation's failure to deliver as was expected, NATO states' failure to pay their fair share, China taking advantage of the US, to name but a few. However, his populist approach to deal with these problems was not the right one. As will be seen below, more than two years into his presidency, he has done a lot of damage to US interests and standing in the world; he has hardly made 'America Great Again' on the global stage.

RD: President Trump has been asking for compensation from European countries as the US paid a tremendous amount of money to sustain NATO against the then Soviets and now Russia, and also asking for new tax regulations with Canada, Japan, and Europe. Do you think that he is seeking to reduce the cost of global security that the US has been paying in order to re-establishing the US national interests?

After WWII, America played an important part in establishing and policing global security by creating organisations, such as the UN and NATO, as well as signing numerous security pacts with countries (like Japan and South Korea) to support them should they engage in conflict with common adversaries (for example, North Korea). Using 'anti-Washington populist sentiment', Trump on numerous occasions made it clear, however, that the US cannot be 'the piggy bank that everybody is robbing' and therefore can no longer afford to police the world for free, as his country already owes nearly \$20 trillion in national debt. For him, the 28 countries of NATO have not been paying their fair share of defence (that is, what they originally agreed to pay), and NATO was 'obsolete' because it did not focus on terrorism. In a speech in Europe, Trump removed a reference to Article 5 at the last minute without the knowledge of his team. As far as security alliances in Asia and elsewhere are concerned, Trump said they should pay

Trump has hardly made 'America Great Again' on the global stage.

the US for the costs his country incurred for protecting them. If not, the US 'must be prepared to let these countries defend themselves,' even if they had to develop nuclear weapons.

Equally, Trump is not happy with America's contribution to the UN. His populist advisors, as well as NSA John Bolton, deeply dislike the

organisation. Following its 2017 cuts, it is likely that the Trump Administration makes further cuts to its UN budget.

So, yes, Trump is worried about the costs of keeping international security, as it is not in US national security. Unlike his predecessors, Trump does not

seem to think that global security and prosperity is linked to US security and prosperity.

I'd think that Trump, in the short run, will continue to pressurise allies to increase their defence spending, and, in the long run, renegotiate military and other deals/agreements to get the wealthiest allies in which US has military bases – such as Germany, Japan, South Korea, and Saudi Arabia – to reimburse the costs the US incurs from protecting them in one way or another. The pressure has already paid to some extent, especially with regards to countries that lack a democratic system; Saudi Arabia, for example, in 2018 made deals with the US worth more than \$400 billion. Despite the rhetoric/predictions, many foreign policy experts do not believe that Trump would dismantle NATO or undermine commitments to come to the defence of NATO states and Asian allies (such as Japan and South Korea). He referred to those charges 'just another lie'. Sometimes his rhetoric could be part of his 'FUD Doctrine', that is, 'create fear, uncertainty and doubt' in order to make a better deal. As will be explained in response to question 10, he certainly has created all these emotions in the European capitals.

RD: If so, then, does it mean that the US has been losing its superpower position in the world? And actually, accepting a multi-polar world system in terms of economy and politics?

After the collapse of the Soviet Union in the early nineties, the US remained the only undisputed superpower. But ever since America has been losing its dominant role in world affairs, and the power of other countries have grown to an extent they influence international affairs independently of US desires. Their rise has certainly questioned the US's status of being the 'indispensable' nation that Madeleine Albright referred to at the end of last century.

It is true that the US is still the leading power when it comes to international organisations – such as the UN, NATO, the International Monetary Fund, and the World Bank – but powerful countries, China and Russia in particular, seem to be distancing themselves from those bodies and instead have created their own multilateral institutions that provide both security and loans.

Many foreign policy experts do not believe that Trump would dismantle NATO or undermine commitments to come to the defence of NATO states and Asian allies.

In the Middle East, the US has failed to isolate and eventually remove the Iran regime, because other countries, such as Russia and China, do not allow it. Iran's influence in the region since the US invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq has dramatically increased.

The Bush, Obama and now Trump Administrations have failed to pressurize Pakistan to abandon terrorism as a strategy to achieve its geopolitical goals in the region, especially in Afghanistan, due partly to the support Pakistan receives from China. Despite US genuine efforts in Afghanistan, it has not succeeded in defeating the Taliban and other terrorist groups. As I analyse in my book, Pakistan's interference in Afghan affairs was the single biggest cause (the mother of all the problems) that the US and the allies could not stabilise Afghanistan. But all the above three US administrations have been unable to persuade or compel Pakistan to drop its support for the Taliban and other terrorist groups in Afghanistan.

Likewise, Turkey, when it comes to regional affairs, acts independently of US wishes, as we have seen in the case of Kurdish groups that have been fighting ISIL. These groups are supported by the US, but Turkey sees them as terrorists and made it clear that the country was extremely unhappy with US support for them. US support for those groups has been one major factor that caused Turkey to get closer to Russia.

In Asia, Africa and Latin America, the US could not contain China's economic growth and political influence. China continues to step up militarization in the South China Sea.

India equally is more influential in the India Ocean and Southeast Asia. It (like China and Russia) keeps economic relations with Iran despite Trump's sanctions on the country.

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And then there is Russia! It annexes territories, apparently interferes in (US) elections, builds more weapons and sells them to US foes (for example, Iran), holds peace talks on her soil on the conflicts in Afghanistan and Syria, and works against the interests of the US in the Greater Middle East.

All these countries mentioned, especially Russia and China, do not view the US as the only power, and they have established orders governed by their own rules. Democracies are being reduced and instead autocracies (supported by countries like China and

Russia, and even the US itself) are on the rise, as we witnessed the lasting results of the Arab Spring.

It is true that the US has got the world's 'only global military capability', but that ability cannot be used to influence foreign affairs, especially the results of those 'Forever Wars'. Or else we would have seen a successful end to the Afghanistan War and the war in Syria – the Assad regime would have long gone.

The US in conjunction with the allies could have had more sway in international affairs. But Trump doubts American internationalism. He is suspicious of security and economic agreements/organisations, which jointly ensure that a rules-based international liberal order is preserved. Military might without respect to these international institutions, and without respect for the interests of others, would not turn the US into a liberal leader of the alliances, but a 'reckless' and a 'rogue superpower'. New surveys by Pew Research Centre reveal that Europeans are now more likely to 'trust' Vladimir Putin and Xi Jinping than Trump. According to Susan B Glasser from the *New Yorker*, the European Union in many ways acts as if it is now the 'stewards of a vision of America leadership in the world' that the Trump-led US seems to have given up.

The US National Intelligence Council's Global Trends' prediction in 2008 was that by 2025 'the international system will be a global multipower one'. Mathew Burrows and Roger George argue that it was time we changed our mind-sets with the events. However, many would disagree with the above statement because the US still possesses tremendous soft power that none of the other powers mentioned above do. It will be decades before China or others really challenge US soft power. They do admit though that Trump's nationalism would speed up the process of reducing US soft power.

RD: How do you associate this issue with the discourse of "Make America Great Again"?

Borrowing the slogan of his idol, Ronald Reagan, the 70-year-old Trump, the oldest president elected in US history, promised to 'Make America Great Again': that is, more *secure*, *wealthier* and more *influential* on the global stage. How he intends to do this?

First, America should adopt an intense realist approach and has to stop being the policeman of the world and instead focus on its needs at home.

Trump is suspicious of security and economic agreements/organisations, which jointly ensure that a rules-based international liberal order is preserved.

Second, the US has made some bad deals over the years. Trump would withdraw from them and cut new deals that will allow millions of jobs to *come back* to America; Trump held many of these deals responsible (explained below) for stealing jobs from America and creating them elsewhere, especially in China. Third, he would stop immigrants coming to the US. He saw them responsible for both terrorism and organised crimes. Consequently, he signed the immigration executive that banned the citizens of seven (then six after dropping Iraq) predominantly Muslim countries and planned to build a 'wall' on the US southern border with Mexico. Fourth, he wants to increase military spending to rebuild the military and enhance intelligence and cyber capabilities. In addition, the US left in early-2019 the Intermediate-range Nuclear Forces Treaty signed in 1987 with the Soviet Union; Trump plans to enhance US nuclear capabilities.

As seen, his populist/mercantilist agenda is solely focused within America. The agenda has failed to translate the 'America Great' doctrine into a coherent foreign policy doctrine that can make American great on the global stage. Conversely, America is argued to be in retreat, as other powers are filling the gaps. His radical ideals are therefore said to be based on false assumptions, and they might make America *less* safe, *less* wealthy and *less* influential. By invoking American interests 'so nakedly', he might force many European, Asian and the Middle Eastern allies to make their own deals with a resurgent Russia and a rising China. As David Ignatius puts it, '[u]ndoing globalization isn't possible. But undermining America's leadership in that system would be all too easy.' This leads us to the next question.

RD: As some argue, do you think that he did start an economic war in the world and that will change liberal world order?

His radical ideals might make America *less* safe, *less* wealthy and *less* influential.

As far as Trump's intense realist approach is concerned, the US was meant to win every single deal because it was the strongest party, but it was deceived by both friends and foes in every single one of them. For example, in the early 1990s when America was financially weak due to the burden of winning the Cold War, yet

Japan's economy was booming, because during the Cold War period Japan had employed a more mercantilist trade policy while simultaneously benefiting from US security protection. For people like Trump, the Cold War ended and Japan had won because it had eaten US 'economic lunch'. That 'searing geopolitical event...shaped Trump's thinking'. Indeed, as Journalist Thomas Wright stated, Trump has long been against US alliances and trade agreements.

The President would, therefore, liberate America from ‘the infection’ of foreign regulations and influences, including many ‘broken and embarrassing’ multinational trade agreements, which stole millions of US jobs and cost billions of US dollars in trade deficit. Instead, as I explained above, Trump promised to make bilateral agreements with states from a position of strength that focused on American interests first.

One of the agreements he opposed was the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), which for Trump was ‘the single worse trade deal’ ever signed in America. Another was the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) trade agreement that the US, Japan and ten other countries had signed, because it indirectly made possible for China to benefit. Trump sees China as ‘a national security and economic threat’ because it steals from the US money, technology and jobs, thus ruining the US’s future. He made it clear from the start that he would rewrite trade agreements, and if China did not accept them and refused to revalue its currency/stop intellectual property theft, he would label China a currency manipulator, alter the longstanding One China policy and impose punitive economic measures, such as heavy tariffs on Chinese goods coming into the US. China, incidentally, is ‘the third-largest U.S. trading partner and largest creditor’.

To distinguish himself from previous politicians, he did fulfil his ‘combative’, ‘protectionist’ and anti-free trade pledge by applying \$250 billion worth of trade tariffs on Chinese goods, and China retaliated by applying \$110 billion of trade tariffs onto US goods. Furthermore, he took America out of numerous trade deals, including NAFTA and TPP. For many, these foreign policy moves amounted to trade wars and they warned of the consequences: ‘a global economic downturn’. His administration, however, has been involved in renegotiating some of these deals with the aim to make them serve American interests. Evidently, Trump’s new NAFTA deal is ‘pretty much the same as the old one’.

Trump’s policy preferences were feared to turn the rules-based liberal order constructed/led by the United States since the end of WWII into ‘a possibility a Hobbesian one where might makes right’, where we could see a similar situation (rising nationalism, militarism, intense realist competition/power politics/ arms races) to that of the first half of the twentieth century in which two world wars happened. Indeed, as was the case then, we now witness that nationalist views are on the rise in Britain (Brexit), France (the French political party led by Maria

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Le Pin), Germany, Holland, Italy, Spain, Poland and Hungary, which is extremely worrying because they can constitute a destabilising force to the unity of the European Union. Trump's election has certainly energised these parties/movements in Europe and beyond. Moreover, there are arms races between many countries, Russia and the US in particular. These weapons will not be turned into flowers and gifted to one another. The geopolitical/military competitions and power politics between nations – especially between China/Russia on the one hand and the US and allies on the other, Pakistan and India, Saudi Arabia and Iran, to name but a few – could at any time trigger these weapons and launch the world into WWII.

Critics, however, claim that the rules-based liberal order was a 'myth'. It was a cover for the US' hegemonic ambitions and for 'imperialism'. Where were the rules, as some experts ask in Robert Kagan's article, when the US used 'coercion' 'violence', 'instability' and 'hypocrisy' to achieve its imperialistic goals? It is a liberal order that the US often broke, e.g. the Trump Administration supports democracy and human rights in Venezuela but props up dictators in the Middle East, or the Bush Administration invaded Iraq without a UN authorisation. If the liberal order really existed, they claim, the US (and, to some extent, the European allies) have played a role in undoing it.

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The defenders, on the other hand, claim that the US only has broken rules in exceptional circumstances to prevent the rise of radicalism: communism yesterday and radical Islam today. Kagan claims that we should not forget that the rules-based liberal order has produced a 'revolutionary transformation of human existence' after five thousand years. He gives as an example the economic and human rights enjoyed by billions of human

beings; or how racialism and tribalism have given way to cosmopolitanism and globalism.

Trump's intense mercantilist/populist approach can indeed be a threat to the economic liberal order, however flawed it has been. Jacksonians, mercantilists and conservatives always wanted a reduced role for the US in international institutions. They believe that preserving the order was costly. They do not seem to think that the US 'would prosper if a united, free world prospered.' For them, US involvement in the past 70 years has not benefited the US. Trump seems to be following their vision and it will affect, if not gradually 'change', the rules-based economic order.

RD: How has the US foreign policy of Afghanistan and Syria changed since Mr. Trump got into power?

In relation to the Afghanistan War, Citizen Trump belonged to, what I call in my book, 'the pessimistic camp' or the 'populist camp'. Between 2012 and 2014, in a series of widely quoted tweets and comments, Trump claimed that the US spent billions of dollars, lost thousands of lives, and thousands of US servicemen and women came home with serious problems, and yet the 'ungrateful' Afghans, who hated America, complained. US forces trained Afghan security forces, and yet they killed their trainers. Americans would construct a school today, and the insurgent groups would explode it tomorrow. The US would start all over again. The Afghanistan War was a 'waste' of American money and lives and consequently was not in US national interests. Not ending the foreign policy 'disaster' known as the Afghanistan War meant that Obama was lost in Afghanistan; the US needed strong leaders (like Trump himself) who knew what they were doing.

As early as October 2015, Candidate Trump in an interview with CNN characterised US intervention in Afghanistan as a 'terrible mistake', but a short while later, he claimed that it was Iraq that he referred to as a mistake. Afghanistan was not a mistake because more than 20 terrorist groups operated in the country and it was next to nuclear Pakistan. Furthermore, the National Unity Government would collapse in 'two seconds' after US forces left and hence the US had to stay engaged, even though he hated 'so much' remaining involved.

Trump's contrasting views and his comparison of the situation in US inner cities to the status quo in Afghanistan demonstrated that Trump, like Obama, was profoundly ambivalent about Afghanistan: he understood the strategic importance of the country and concurrently saw it as a burden to the US because things in Afghanistan were extremely chaotic and perhaps unresolvable.

The Afghanistan War was a 'waste' of American money and lives and consequently was not in US national interests.

In relation to Pakistan, a country linked closely to the Afghanistan War, President Trump in his first 2018 tweet stated that 'the United States has foolishly given Pakistan more than 33 billion dollars in aid over the last 15 years, and they have given us nothing but lies & deceit, thinking of our leaders as fools. They give safe haven to terrorists we hunt in Afghanistan, with little help. No more!'

In relation to Syria, candidate Trump wanted to ascertain who US allies were. The US supported groups he did not know who they were. He feared

that the US might end up having worse people in power in Syria than Assad. US support for such people would make a mess in Syria, too.

These were some of his beliefs regarding the US's role in the Greater Middle East, Syria, Afghanistan and Pakistan in particular. On 21 August 2017 Trump announced his administration's South Asia strategy that covered the Afghanistan strategy. President Trump seemed to have heeded the advice of the pro-engagement area experts, which I explain in detail in my book. His policy had subtle differences compared to that of Obama's Afghan policy. Trump approved the deployment of more US troops; did away with both Obama's micromanagement (as the Pentagon from then, *not* the White House, was to decide how many troops to be deployed and what authority to be given to them) and his setting of public deadlines for troops withdrawals (as only conditions on the ground were decisive factors); unlike Obama and Bush, publicly warned Pakistan to shut the sanctuaries and abandon its support for the Taliban and the Haqqani network; and called on India – a country Trump saw as a close friend in the region – to assist the US in bringing stability in Afghanistan by expanding its ties with the NUG, especially its economic assistance.

The objective of the military surge was to compel the Taliban (and indirectly Pakistan) to make a negotiated settlement with the NUG. Trump's Afghan policy seems to have paid off, as Trump's intensified pressure on Pakistan led to peace talks in Qatar between US Special Envoy Zalmay Khalilzad and the Taliban representatives. Many hope that these talks would bring an end to Afghanistan's 40-year long conflict. But as I cover it in my book, there are a number of obstacles before an eternal peace is secured.

The objective of the military surge was to compel the Taliban (and indirectly Pakistan) to make a negotiated settlement with the NUG.

As for Syria, however, he continued with Obama's policy of 2015 by mainly supporting the Kurdish groups with the goal to 'wipe out' ISIL. As explained below, the policy has met considerable success.

Incidentally, as the grown-ups are gone, however, his instincts and his populist/pessimistic viewpoints (explained above) are beginning to impact even his Afghan and Syrian strategies. His instincts tell him

that '[w]hen you're digging yourself deeper and deeper into a hole, stop digging.' His populist base keeps questioning him about why he is still engaged in long and endless wars. Trump seems to be getting impatient about the lack of tangible results in Afghanistan, so he wants to stop 'digging'. A few months ago he announced to withdraw half of US troops from Afghanistan; the announcement was tweeted at a time the peace talks

were being conducted in Qatar! There is a fear that Trump, in order to feed his populist base, might use the peace talks as an excuse and end US engagement prematurely in Afghanistan, especially when domestic pressure is mounting and the 2020 US presidential election is fast approaching.

The same is the case in relation to Syria as he believes ISIL is defeated and what is the point to leave the 2000 or so US troops in there. The number is too small to curtail the influence of Russia or Iran in the region.

However, his experienced advisors believe both unilateral decisions (regarding Afghanistan and Syria) would prove disastrous and the decisions, therefore, have met stern opposition, especially from Congress, because pulling out US troops from those two countries, without establishing stability in the region, would have severe consequences, which I spell out in response to question 9. Mattis resigned over the decisions and Senior Republican Senator Lindsay Graham was incensed. Trump's decision to withdraw from Syria was seen as a betrayal of Washington's Kurdish allies, making the Kurd leaders believe that the US saw them more as 'mistress than bride'. Equally, the decision relating to Syria would leave US European allies high and dry. Moscow and Tehran were said to be the beneficiaries and their influence would dramatically increase. Many, including a number of Republicans, claimed that Trump was repeating Obama's mistake of hastily withdrawing from Iraq? They added that US presence would ensure that US allies are protected (not just against Russia and Iran, but also against Turkey that view Kurdish troops as terrorists) and one-third of Syria, which Assad and his allies do not control, is not plunged into chaos. Due to domestic pressure (and persuasion), Trump decided to leave around two hundred troops in Syria after the April withdrawal. Troops pull out from Afghanistan has not yet been executed.

Trump lacks a coherent Greater Middle Eastern strategy. Joining hands with Israel and Saudi Arabia to contain Iran is not good enough to deal with the factors that cause the numerous conflicts and wars in the region.

Trump lacks a coherent Greater Middle Eastern strategy.

RD: How do you place the North Korea issue into the US-China relations?

Trump's views/policy regarding China has already been discussed. As for your particular question, Candidate Trump made it clear that China has control over North Korea and the US has control over China, so he would get China to make North Korean leader Kim Jong Un 'disappear in one form or another very quickly'. While he did not elaborate on how China was capable of wiping out North Korea, he, however, pressurised China to use its influence to compel Kim Jong Un to talk to the US. Bilateral negotiations

between the North Korean leader and Trump took place twice and it seems China played a positive part in facilitating them.

The idea of the two leaders sitting together and talking was unimaginable in the first few months of the administration and was in itself an accomplishment and good for world peace. While Trump in the Singapore Summit provided security guarantees and a prosperous future for North Korea, and North Korean leader stated that his country would stay committed to complete denuclearization in the Korean Peninsula, the summit (and the one in Vietnam early this year), produced nothing of substance. The different perspectives the US and China had regarding North Korea have remained unchanged.

China does not see a nuclear-armed North Korea as a threat to its stability, but the US and its regional allies do. China, North Korea's largest trading partner and chief political supporter, wants a peaceful end to US-North Korean relations, as it fears that a war between the US and North Korea could destabilise the region, as it can result in millions of refugees and negative economic impacts. War between the two countries seemed plausible at the beginning of the Trump Administration when the two leaders personally attacked each other and Trump warned to reduce North Korea to rubble by pressing his 'much bigger & more powerful' nuclear button.

China believes that US sanctions on North Korea, which have also caught Chinese companies, have been counterproductive and did not compel North Korea to give up its nuclear and ballistic-missiles programmes. Furthermore, China was not happy with warnings of regime change from Washington, DC, and with the joint military exercises by US and South Korean forces in the region.

China does not see a nuclear-armed North Korea as a threat to its stability, but the US and its regional allies do.

China wants its 'freeze-for-freeze' proposal to be implemented whereby the US and South Korea are required to put a stop to their joint military exercises and North Korea is meant to halt its missile and nuclear programmes. Trump has put a halt to those exercises, but North Korea has not denuclearised. US military and intelligence officials, therefore, distrust North Korea and believe that the country plays Trump; North Korea is accused of having

broken the terms of earlier agreements. China, on the other hand, believes that North Korea is still a trustworthy partner, adding that the US was equally to blame for the breach of the past agreements. Until China and the US are not on the same page regarding North Korea, not much would be changed.

Incidentally, while the US blames China for not doing enough to compel North Korea to denuclearise, China accuses the US of using North Korea's drive for nuclear weapons as a pretext to maximise its presence in the region. China, therefore, opposes America's deployment of US Terminal High Altitude Area Defense system in South Korea. While previous presidents saw the presence of 30,000 US troops in the region as a strategic necessity, Trump seems to be displeased with it due to, as explained above, costs. The possibility of withdrawing them has made both Japan and South Korea nervous. Japan did not develop nuclear weapons because it looked (and trusted) to the US for security. That trust appears to be eroding.

RD: There is a huge debate on similarities and differences in Iraq and Venezuelan cases. While former Bush administrations tried to solve Iraqi and Middle Eastern issues with direct military intervention, President Trump employs diplomatic and humanitarian methods to get a result in Venezuela. It is right that the Iraqi case was based on terrorism and weapons of mass destruction and Venezuelan case bases on humanitarian issues and democracy. However, does it still imply a methodological distinction between previous presidents and Mr. Trump?

As I cover them in my book, four major factors influenced the invasion of Iraq.

Firstly, the 9/11 terrorist acts killed nearly 3,000 Americans and George W. Bush and his advisors believed that Saddam somehow had aided al-Qaeda in engineering the terrorist attacks. They feared that Saddam had WMD and could give them to terrorists. Consequently, the next attack would be catastrophic for the US. Secondly, there was a lot of domestic support for the invasion of Iraq due to the 9/11 terrorist acts. Thirdly, there were plenty of pro-invasion advocates in the administration, especially the neoconservatives, and they influenced Bush, Cheney and Rumsfeld to take action. Finally, they hold false assumptions about the missions/US capabilities: having previously defeated Saddam's forces in Kuwait in 1991 and the Taliban in late-2001, they believed that Iraq would quickly be liberated and the administration would move to the next country on the 'Axis of Evil List': Iran. We know what happened in Iraq and Afghanistan, so the Bush Administration could not make it to Iran.

China opposes America's deployment of US Terminal High Altitude Area Defense system in South Korea.

RD: Are these factors present today?

As far as Trump's belief system is concerned, candidate Trump denounced costly US engagements such as peacekeeping operations, humanitarian

programmes and 'the nation-building business' and promised to reduce America's contribution to them considerably and instead spend the money on building infrastructure in America, which the previous administrations had allowed to fall into 'disrepair' and 'decay'. Indeed, as Trump took office, the US owed nearly \$20 trillion in national debt. Also, candidate Trump did not see the US responsible for promoting democracy and defending the oppressed. He apparently saw the world as 'threatening' and 'inhospitable' to those values. Unlike Bush, candidate Trump did not believe the US had 'a right to lecture' the world: interfere in foreign affairs of other nations. When American officials did give that right to themselves in the past, they acted 'arrogantly'.

Candidate Trump firmly believed that for the past 15 years if US presidents did not do 'anything' in the Middle East and instead went to 'the beach', the US would have saved '\$6 trillion' and thousands of US lives, and the Middle East would have been stable. It was a 'beauty' (the biggest mistake) to remove Saddam Hussein, Muammar Gaddafi and Hosni Mubarak from power because their removals destabilised the Middle East. The strong men in the Middle East would have ensured that ISIL was never constituted and that the region never fell into the current chaotic situation.

However, those isolationist/nationalistic outlooks, to my surprise, do not seem to be the case in relation to the Trump Administration's policy on Venezuela; a country that is on Trump's list of 'Axis of Evil'. The other two were Iran and North Korea. Trump remarked that the US 'to help [the

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Venezuelans] regain their freedom, recover their democracy and...we are prepared to take further action if the Venezuelan government continues on its goal of imposing authoritarian rule.' The administration recognised Juan Guaido as the country's interim president and does not accept the legitimacy of the Venezuelan regime of Nicolas Maduro. Trump asked the Latin American leaders (like Bush asked European heads of states before the Iraq invasion) to deal with 'this very real crisis'. Trump apparently pressed them to consider a military action because

the Maduro regime has become a national security threat to the US and the world. It seems that Maduro's internal policies are another WMD threat that is getting exaggerated. As it was the case before the Iraq invasion with France, Germany, Russia, China and the UK, the Latin American countries are split on how to respond and reportedly most oppose using a military option to remove Maduro, who enjoys the wholehearted support of China, Russia, Turkey and Iran.

As far as public opinion within the US is concerned, there is little domestic support for a military intervention in Venezuela as it was for the Iraq invasion. As stated above, ordinary Americans are fed up with the 'Forever Wars'; they certainly want to avoid another one. However, many argue that Trump is defeated at home due to a hostile Congress; the embarrassment of the government shutdown; constant talks of impeachment; the presence of several (possibly very damaging) investigations into possible links between the Trump campaign team and Russia by numerous bodies, including the Special Counsel Investigation led by Robert Mueller (though his report found no link); sex scandals; and being engaged in an unwise battle with the mainstream media press. So Trump might want to accomplish achievements overseas (or at least ease off domestic pressure) and thus intervene in Venezuela might be the answer.

The so-called adults have departed from the administration and now we see some regime-change advocates, including NSA John Bolton and (neoconservative) Special Envoy for Venezuela Elliott Abrams. Furthermore, Secretary of State Pompeo is subservient to Trump's nationalism and follow his boss's orders dutifully. Patrick Shanahan, who, unlike Mattis, has no military or decision-making experience, might equally not oppose Trump's decision to go for Maduro. The absence of the adults in the room and the presence of a 'team of morons' might prove to be a decisive factor that could lead the Trump Administration to invade Venezuela. The likelihood would increase if Maduro uses violence to suppress his opponents or harm/arrest US diplomats in the country; a country, like Iraq, has plenty of oil!

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RD: Answers of previous questions might have already replied to this one, but still it should be asked. Does Mr. Trump's statement that ISIS has been totally eliminated suggest the era of the global war on terror has come close to end?

Statements like ISIL is 'wiped out', 'obliterated', or 'defeated', do not represent the reality on the ground. I do not think ISIL is 'totally eliminated' for several reasons.

First, as the Bush Administration in 2003 was preparing for the Iraq invasion, it believed that the Afghanistan War was successfully ended because the Taliban and al-Qaeda were 'history'. Equally, a few months after the Iraq invasion, the administration implied that the mission was

accomplished. More than 17 years later, more than 20 terrorist groups, *including* ISIL and al-Qaeda, operate in Afghanistan; and we have also witnessed what happened in Iraq (Zarqawi-led al-Qaeda and later ISIL) during these years.

Second, yes, ISIL has lost some 95 per cent of its territory in Syria and Iraq (though not in Afghanistan) it controlled in 2014. But there are contrasting reports about the number of ISIL fighters who are still around. Some claim them to be 2500; others, such as a UN report of August 2018, believe that there are some '31,100' ISIL fighters active. How can one justify the claim that ISIL is wiped out when there are thousands of them about?

Third, regardless of the number, ISIL could quickly (as al-Qaeda and the Taliban did) reconstitute, especially when the group's more capable foe (the US) intends to leave the theatre of war.

Fourth, S.V. Date is right to claim that 'ISIS will remain a regional and global threat even after their military defeat.' It is because, as Seth Jones adds, ISIL's terrorist activity is political, and it would take decades to defeat the group's terrorist activity. Trump saw it shortly after he tweeted that he was withdrawing US troops from Syria: ISIL-engineered suicide attack took the lives of four Americans in Syria. The group is likely to increase those terrorist attacks abroad, especially in Europe, as it has lost its territory in Syria and Iraq. Trump's own intelligence and military officials do not agree

with the President and they are unhappy about the pull-out, especially when US forces are not directly engaged in fighting as they only arm and advise. Reportedly, in the past four years, only four Americans died, but 968 Kurdish fighters lost their lives. (Similarly, since 2014 in the war against terrorism/Taliban, 45,000 Afghan security forces have been killed compared to less than 72 international forces.)

ISIL is more a dangerous group than al-Qaeda, as it tries to fuel sectarian violence by blasting Shia mosques and gatherings in both Iraq and Afghanistan.

ISIL is more a dangerous group than al-Qaeda, as it tries to fuel sectarian violence by blasting Shia mosques and gatherings in both

Iraq and Afghanistan. This has caused a great deal of worries/anxiety/fear among the ordinary Afghans and Iraqis.

Again, we see that Trump allows populist ideas to drive his Middle Eastern policy even at risk of showing himself weak on terrorism; an accusation he levelled against Obama. For the US, its Syria policy 'come with toxic side effects': worsening ties with Turkey as US reliance on the Kurdish groups that Turkey (and Syria's Arab majority) view as a threat to its own national

security. Therefore, when Erdogan promised to eliminate any remaining ISIL fighters in the region, and there was no need for US troops to be present, Trump apparently told him: 'Syria is yours.' (It is feared that Trump might get fed up with the Afghanistan War and tell Pakistan: 'Afghanistan is yours.')

But gifting counties to regional powers to facilitate US exit from the Greater Middle East before dealing with the root causes of the region's wars/conflicts, would have severe consequences: there would be a momentous rise in global terrorism, drug production, illegal immigration, and most frightened, nuclear proliferation – escalation in nuclear rivalry in the region was capable of triggering war (perhaps WWIII) in which Pakistan and India might not hesitate to launch nuclear weapons against each other; at the very least, significant damage to the US, the UN and NATO future power and standing. The US would have no choice but to enter Afghanistan, Syria and Iraq once again, this time, though, a less hospitable environment. The US has already seen during WWI and WWII that staying out of world affairs can be extremely costly. The Global War on Terror would only end when the root causes of terrorism (such as endemic corruption, poverty, unemployment and regional interference) in the region are identified and dealt with.

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RD: It seems that there has been a crack between EU and US foreign policy commonality. These actors have different approaches to Iran's nuclear deal, tax and immigration issues, and NATO's economic burden. How can it be interpreted in terms of the western alliance?

The European Union and the US now have different approaches to foreign, and even domestic, policies. These differences have indeed affected the transatlantic relationship.

As explained above, Trump is not happy with US spending on NATO. The US pays about 67 per cent (not 90 per cent, which Trump claims) of NATO, about \$31 billion, but NATO states, Germany in particular, pay 'too little'. He further implied that he would not accept the European states 'using' the US against Russian – they should lead. Germany and other surrounding countries should come to Ukraine's defence. He might not kill US forces to defend the Baltic States should Russia invade them, he once said.

Trump described the European Union as a 'foe' when it came to trade. Trump is displeased with '\$151 billion trade surplus' the European Union runs, Germany and Ireland being the chief offenders. Therefore, he imposed steel and aluminium tariffs on European exports in 2018, and there is still the possibility he imposes a 25 per cent tariff on car imports from Europe.

As for immigration, Trump believed that the Europeans extended an invitation to ISIL by accepting Syrian refugees. He saw no solidarity in Europe to stop refugees, who posed 'a national security threat' to the continent. He was quick to claim credits for predicting terrorist attacks by refugees in Europe. Candidate Trump vowed to avoid what 'stupid' European politicians could not: 'a Trojan Horse' scenario. He told Americans that refugees were like an ill 'snake', which would bite the host, once recovered. The prime example was the terrorist in Orlando whose parents came from Afghanistan. Europe sees refugees as a problem, but does not view them as a national security threat or a snake.

Trump sees Iran as 'the single gravest threat, national security threat' and the 'world's largest state sponsor of terrorism.' For him, the Iran deal was one of the worst deals the US ever made, which strengthened US foes in the region and weakened US friends, Israel in particular. To the dismay of Brussels, he unilaterally withdrew from the deal and imposed sanctions on Iran. To compensate for Obama's 'lack of support for Israel', he moved the US embassy from Tel Aviv to the contested city of Jerusalem, a move that was against US (and the European Union) long-term policy that claimed the future of Jerusalem to be decided through negotiations between Israel and

Palestinians. To make matters worse, he threatened his European allies with secondary sanctions if they carried on with the Iran deal; a move seen in Europe as America's bullying.

Trump believed that the Europeans extended an invitation to ISIL by accepting Syrian refugees.

The Trump Administration seems serious about taking on Iran. For Trump, 'Iran's chief exports are bloodshed and chaos...We cannot let a murderous regime continue these destabilizing activities... It's also time for the world to take on another rogue regime,' whose

leaders keep calling 'Death to America' and promise the destruction of Israel. Europe is as opposed to military action against Iran as it was against the Iraq invasion in 2003.

European leaders have been divided on how to approach Trump. According to Tomas Valasek, the director of Carnegie Europe, they have tried various strategies with Trump, from the 'buddy-buddy approach' of President Emmanuel Macron of France and Ms. May, to 'the cooler attitude' of

Chancellor Angela Merkel of Germany. But they discovered that none of the approaches worked; Trump treated each one of them like ‘a competitor’.

Many Europeans now believe that Trump uses the strategy of ‘divide and rule’. Trump supports illiberal leaders, such as Andrzej Duda of Poland and Viktor Orban of Hungary, but chides other liberal ones. He does so in order to divide Europe and make deals with individual countries (to secure better outcomes for the US) as opposed to a united Europe.

After Trump withdrew from the 2015 Climate Change deal and the Iran agreement and after his support for Brexit and nationalistic groups in Europe (highlighted above), European leaders tend to stay away from him. Support for nationalistic groups has heightened social tensions and nationalism in Europe, which can constitute a serious threat to the continent’s long-term future; liberal European leaders take any threat to the unity of the continent very seriously. Furthermore, much of the European Union’s prosperity relies on liberal trade for both goods and services and cancellations of trade deals (or the liberal order) could affect the European Union’s economy. Valasek is not incorrect to say that ‘Trump is becoming politically toxic in Western Europe...No one wants to be seen smiling with him after being berated on Twitter. Even more, Mr Trump’s insults and his unpopularity among European voters make him harder for European leaders to do what he wants them to do, like increase military spending, even when they think they should do it.’ Actually, associating with Trump for a European leader has become like ‘it’s the kiss of death.’

Many Europeans now believe that Trump uses the strategy of ‘divide and rule’.

More and more Europeans argue that Europe must invest in its own security and defence and should no longer rely on US leadership. Furthermore, EC should build *coherence*. Things that are important to Europe – such as liberal values, climate change and open market economy – should be eagerly pursued. Trump should face a united Europe with a strong approach. But issues like terrorism, Brexit and the migrant problem have forced the bloc to focus more at home. It has not taken any tangible step to minimize its dependence on the US. Europeans think that relations went sour with the US in the past (like the disagreement over the Iraq invasion in 2003), but things soon improved. Hopefully, as they assume, this will be the case once Trump’s presidency is over, especially when the majority of Americans have positive views of Europe and most in Congress value the transatlantic relationship.

However, for the relationship to sustain, it is important that the European Union pays close attention to the US’s genuine concerns. We have now seen some signs of this. For example, when Trump stated that troops should also

come from NATO allies, NATO responded in November 2017 by announcing that it would send some 3,000 more troops to Afghanistan. NATO's contribution was an attempt to address the US's concern that the former was not serious about its contribution to the Afghanistan War.

RD: The turning points of the US administration have sharpened after Trump has been elected the new president. While the Trump administration has begun to focus more on nationalism, the US-Russia relationship has witnessed another conflict of interest in the Middle East. What is your opinion about the future of Trump-Putin conflict in the Middle East? Do you think that Trump will maintain to pay less attention to the issues of the Middle East and so, Russia will soon replace the US as hegemonic power of the region?

Russia has certainly been trying to increase its influence in the Greater Middle East. It has earned the trust of many countries. There are a number of factors that have helped Russia rise as a new power in the region.

First, Obama was not interested in the Middle East and Trump has not developed a coherent strategy for the region so Russia stepped into the vacuum left by the US. Second, Putin's 'strongman image' is liked by many authoritarian heads of state but they are unsure of Trump (previously Obama) and his commitment. Putin's intervention in Syria in 2015, which saved the Assad regime, won the trust and admiration of the rulers in the Middle East. They assume that once Russia promised, it would fulfil no matter what.

Third, Syria enabled the Putin-led Russia to find for herself a great platform to influence the numerous Middle Eastern conflicts – those between Saudi Arabia and Qatar, Iran and Saudi Arabia, Israel and Iran and Syria and Turkey – as all these countries have a stake in the outcome of the war in Syria. As a result, as Liz Sly reports in the *Washington Post*, regional leaders have been more on the phone with Putin than they have been with

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Trump; they have visited Moscow more than they have visited Washington, DC. Unlike what Obama feared, Putin has not embroiled Russia in those lasting conflicts and has been skilful in avoiding choosing sides. He has kept Russia's relations good with both Iran and Saudi Arabia; Turkey and Syria; Israel and Iran.

In 2017, Putin managed to persuade King Salman of Saudi Arabia to cut oil production, showing Putin's influence within the Kingdom. Russia has sold more than \$2 billion worth of arms, including advanced S-400 missile system to Turkey, invested in oil pipelines in Iraq, made many business

deals (in gas and oil) in the region, and opened military bases/intelligence-sharing centres, including in Iraq and Syria.

Fourth, Russia cares less about the human rights record of a country, and this makes it easier for the authoritarian leaders of the region to deal with her. Fifth, Russia exploits the conspiracy theories, especially those centre on terrorist groups working for the US to destabilise the region but Russia is there to defeat them. Evidently, more and more ordinary Middle Easterners buy into them due to US failures to defeat those terrorist groups. That is certainly the case in relation to Afghanistan. As I explain in my book, Russia (and Iran) exaggerated the ISIL threat (and US 'failure' to defeat terrorism and curb opium production), and used the Taliban as a 'Trojan Horse' for numerous purposes, including to hurt/pressurise the National Unity Government and its NATO/US backers, to have bargaining advantage over America (regarding broader international matters such as Crimea or the Iran agreement), to gain more influence in Afghan affairs, and to 'outdo one another in a regional competition'. Or else if Russia (and Iran) really sought to defeat ISIL, then the obvious choice would have been to support the Afghan National Security Forces. If Russia (and Iran) truly wanted the Taliban to reconcile with the NUG, then bolstering the Taliban's military capabilities was the worse obvious option. If Russia (and Iran) really wanted to defeat terrorism in the region, then spreading rumours that ISIL, in reality, worked for the US with the aim to destabilise Russia, China and Iran were really unhelpful in the 'New Great Game' in Afghanistan.

Sixth, Russia has established a close relationship with groups that fight governments supported by the US. Examples could include the Taliban in Afghanistan and the Libyan warlord Khalifa Hifter. This policy positions Moscow to play an important part in the future of the country. Most importantly, these opportunistic moves are designed to find leverage over the US in international affairs.

However, I do not think we will see a return of the Cold War where the US and the Soviet Union competed for loyalty. Russia's financial, political, military and diplomatic abilities are limited compared to the US and that is why Putin plays it carefully. For example, there are 45000 US troops in the region, but Russian forces in

Syria are nowhere closer; over the past five years Russia made \$24 billion worth of arms deals but the US made more than \$81 billion. The only difference is that Russia uses its power and influence much more effectively than the US does.

I also think that Trump will face significant opposition at home if he removes all US troops from Syria, and it would be a bad move for his re-

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election. Mattis last year rejected the idea that the US was walking away from the region. He added 'I make clear Russia's presence in the region cannot replace the long-standing, enduring and transparent U.S. commitment to the Middle East.' I would agree with Mattis that Russia would not 'replace' the US in the Middle East for the reasons explained above. However, I would also add that Russia is much more *relevant* today than it was a decade ago.



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