

Inquiring Minds topic October 5, 2018

Whither U. S. Foreign Policy? A Summary of Political Opinion

Topic by Bill Schlackman; Albert Myers, Moderator

Questions, Wither U. S.

- 1. How would you contrast U. S. Foreign Policy after the end of WW II and the policy after the start of the Trump administration?**
- 2. What do you believe will be the consequence if President Trump is able to follow through on his foreign policy?**
- 3. What type of foreign policy you prefer to see?**
- 4. What do you think the underlying policy of the United States ought to be?**
- 5. How do you view the evolution of American Foreign Policy?**

All articles from Foreign Affairs, March - April 2018

Charles Kupchan, American Exceptionalism 1.0

How could Americans elect a president so at odds with what their country stands for? Yet "America first" is less out of step with U.S. history than meets the eye. President Trump is not so much abandoning American exceptionalism as he is tapping into an earlier incarnation of it. Since World War II the country's exceptional mission has centered on vigorous export of U.S. power and values. But before that American exceptionalism meant insulating the American experiment from foreign threats, shunning international entanglements, spreading democracy through example rather than intrusion, embracing protectionism and fair (not free) trade, and preserving a relatively homogeneous citizenry: In short, it was about America first. That original version of American exceptionalism-call it American exceptionalism 1.0 vanished from mainstream politics after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor. But it retained allure in the heartland. It is today making a comeback across the political spectrum as Americans have tired of their role as global policeman and grown skeptical of the benefits of globalization and immigration.

AMERICAN EXCEPTIONALISM 2 0

Then came attack on Pearl Harbor, which, as Arthur Vandenberg, a Republican-senator and one. time isolationist wrote in his diary, "ended isolationism for any realist" so began

the era of American Exceptionalism 2.0. The United States could no longer shield itself from the world and share the American experiment by example, it would have to run the world by more actively projecting its power and values. Ever since the 1940s, internationalists have enjoyed political dominance, while isolationists have become political pariahs. Under American Exceptionalism 2.0, an aversion to foreign entanglement gave way to a strategy of global engagement. The Cold War set the stage for the country's core alliances in Europe and Asia as well as a global network of diplomatic and military outposts.

Unilateralism yielded to multilateralism. In 1919 and 1920, the Senate rejected U.S. participation in the League of Nations three times; in 1945, it ratified the UN Charter by a vote of 89 to 2. The United States also assumed a leading role in the panoply of institutions that have undergirded the postwar rules-based international order. And it continued to pursue its messianic mission, but through more intrusive means, from the successful occupations and transformations of Germany and Japan after World War II to the ongoing and less successful forays into Afghanistan and Iraq. The American dream remained central to this updated version of exceptionalism. The postwar industrial boom generated bipartisan support for open trade; And especially after the civil rights movement of the 1950's and 60's American exceptionalism lost its magical tinge, replaced by a conviction that the melting pot would successfully integrate a diverse population into one civic nation. Preaching pluralism and tolerance became part of spreading the American way.

Americans have become democratic, but illiberal alternatives to the American way are more than holding their own. The collective wealth of the West has fallen below 50 percent of global GDP, and an ascendant China is challenging the postwar architecture meaning that Washington can no longer call the shots in multilateral institutions. It was easy for the United States to advocate a rules-based international order when it was the one writing the rules, but that era has come to an end. Today, U.S. ideals are no longer backed up by U.S. Preponderance, making it harder to spread American values.

AMERICAN EXCEPTIONALISM 3.0

With American Exceptionalism 2.0 stumbling and Trump's effort to revert to the original version not the United States can either abandon its' narrative or craft a new one. The former option may seem tempting among the nation's political and economic trials, but the costs would be too high. American exceptionalism has helped the country sustain a domestic consensus behind a grand strategy aimed at spreading democracy and the rule of law. With illiberalism on the rise, the globe desperately needs an anchor of republican ideals-a role that only-the United States has the power and credentials to fill. Failing to uphold rules-based governance would risk the return of a Hobbesian world, violating not just the United States' principles but also its interests. Indeed, it is precisely because the world is potentially at a historical inflection point that the United States must reclaim its exceptional mantle. Doing so will require adjustments to all dimensions of the exceptionalist narrative.

For starters. the United States should find the prudent middle ground between the isolationism of American Exceptionalism 1.0 and the overreach that has accompanied Pax Americana. Some scholars have suggested that the United States embrace "offshore balancing; letting other countries take the lead in keeping the peace in Europe, Northeast

Asia, and the Persian Gulf with Washington intervening only in a strategic emergency.

The United States' main problem of late has been the self-selection of embroiling itself in unnecessary wars of choice. Balancing is indeed the right choice; but in the strategic theaters of Europe and Asia a U.S. retreat would only unsettle allies and embolden adversaries.

The United States needs to end its days as the global policeman, but it should remain the arbiter of great-power peace while emphasizing diplomatic, rather than military, engagement outside core areas. The United States must also rebalance its alliances and partnerships. But the United States cannot afford to drift back to unilateralism; only collective action can address many of today's international challenges, including terrorism, nuclear proliferation, and climate change. The United States should therefore view itself as the leader of an international posse, defending rule-based institutions when possible and putting together "coalitions of the willing."

Although Trump's diplomacy lacks tact, he is right to insist that U.S. allies shoulder their fair share. And in areas where the United States transitions to an offshore-balancing role, it should help organizations such as the Gulf Cooperation Council, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, and the African Union become more capable stewards of their respective regions.

Although the United States messianic-mission should remain at the core of its exceptionalist narrative, the country must transition from **crusader back to exemplar**. Leading by example hardly means giving up on democracy promotion but it does entail engaging in a world of political diversity and respectfully working with regimes of all types. Still, Americans must always defend universal political and human rights; to do otherwise would be to abandon the ideals that inform the nation's identity. Trump's failure on this count is not serving to reclaim an earlier version of American exceptionalism but denigrating it.

Finally, a new version of American exceptionalism must embrace the idea that the United States' increasingly diverse population will integrate into an evolving national community imbued with the country's long-standing civic values. The United States must demonstrate unity amid diversity. The melting-pot approach of American Exceptionalism 2.0 is the right one. Reversing socioeconomic segregation and immobility will take heavy investment in public schools and community colleges.

Effective border control, a rational approach to legal immigration, and a fair but firm way to deal with undocumented immigrants would assure Americans that diversity is the product of design, not disorder. National service and other programs that mix young Americans could encourage social and cultural integration and produce a stronger sense of community.

If nothing else, the rise of Trump has demonstrated that American Exceptionalism 2.0 has run its course. But try as he might, Trump will fail in his bid to respond to today's challenges by going back to the past. Looking beyond Trump, the United States will need a new exceptionalism to guide its grand strategy.

Letting Go, Gideon Rose .

Nobody really knew what to expect when Donald Trump became U.S. president. Would Foreign Affairs be disrupted or the status quo maintained? Would he blow himself up or escape unscathed?

One year in, the answer is yes. If you squint, U.S. foreign policy during the Trump era can seem almost normal. But the closer you look, the more you see it being hollowed out, with the forms and structures still in place but the substance and purpose draining away. The best analogy might be to health care—something else the administration came in hell-bent on overhauling, only to find it more difficult than expected. In foreign policy, too, the Trump administration came to power promising a revolution. But the White House has failed to kill the existing approach outright and has grudgingly contented itself with hopes that it will die of neglect anyway. In the board game Diplomacy, the rules state that “if a player leaves the game, or otherwise fails to submit orders,” the player’s country is deemed to be in “civil disorder.” The country’s pieces stand in place, defend themselves if attacked, and let the game proceed around them. That’s basically what’s happening with the United States now. Confronted with this unprecedented situation,

[Sarah Margon](#) traces the decline of human rights as a concern in this White House, as even the pretense of caring about other countries’ misbehavior has been dropped and the president embraces a new crop of friendly tyrants. Trying to rule the world by dominance rather than persuasion has not worked well in the past, and there is little doubt that if tried again, it will fail again. The rules of Diplomacy note that civil disorder does not have to be permanent: “A player who temporarily fails to submit orders may, of course, resume play if he returns to the game and still has some units left.” What the world will look like when that eventually happens is anybody’s guess.

The Rise of Illiberal Hegemony, Barry Posen, Foreign Affairs, March/April 2018

Barry Posen suggests that consciously or not, the Trump administration is following a new grand strategy, one of liberal hegemony. It has "pared or abandoned many of the pillars of liberal internationalism" but still seeks to retain the United States superior economic and military capability and role as security arbiter for most of the regions of the world.

Trump still seeks to retain the United States' superior economic and military capability, and role as security arbiter for most regions of the world, but he has chosen to forgo the export of democracy and abstain from many multilateral trade agreements. In other words, Trump has ushered in an entirely new U.S. grand strategy: illiberal hegemony. The better way to understand Trump's approach to the world is to look at a year's worth of actual policy. For all the talk of avoiding foreign adventure and entanglements, in practice his administration has remained committed to geopolitical competition with the world's greatest military powers and to informal alliances it inherited.

Adam Posen sees the global economy moving forward calmly and steadily, with broad-based growth really kicking in. But here, too, problems have been deferred, and a prolonged abdication of U.S. leadership will cause real trouble

The World After Trump, Jake Sullivan, Foreign Affairs, Mar./April 2018

[Jake Sullivan](#) examines the surprising resilience of the liberal international order. Other countries appreciate what the United States created, even if Washington doesn't.

But unlike his predecessors Trump has displayed relatively little interest in translating his impulses into action. That can potentially allow the system around him, including voices outside government, to play a more powerful role than usual.

The United States is the only country with the sufficient reach and resolve, and something else as well: a historical willingness to trade short term benefits for long term influence. It has been uniquely prepared to accept a leadership role of an international order in which it feels as though the maxim from Thucydides' famous Melian Dialogue is often inverted: the strong suffer what they must and the weak do what they can. The U.S. foreign policy community should prepare for the world after Trump. It is tempting to conclude that all hope is lost. That conclusion, however is not only unproductive it is also wrong. In every dimension, from technology to security, development to diplomacy, economic dynamism to human capital, the United States' advantages are still significant. The opportunity remains to reconstitute the old consensus on the new terms.

Trump's Lucky Year, Eliot A. Cohen , Foreign Affairs February 28, 2018

Being in office has done little to moderate Trump's belligerent rhetoric, improve his commitment to facts, or alter his views on trade and international agreements. Over the course of 2017, he insulted foreign leaders on Twitter, openly undermined his secretary of state, and attacked the FBI and the CIA. He continued to praise dictators, such as Egyptian President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi and Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte, and refused to mention Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty—which enshrines the idea that an attack against one NATO member is an attack against all—when visiting NATO headquarters in Brussels. His subordinates gamely echoed the promise of “America first,” assuring both the public and themselves that Trump's use of that phrase had nothing to do with Charles Lindbergh's isolationist and anti-Semitic America First Committee, founded in 1940.

Still, the world did not blow up. World War III did not break out. A case can be made that all things considered, Trump has ended up being a highly erratic, obnoxious version of the Republican normal. He has been strong on defense (he increased the Pentagon's budget, although not as significantly as it had hoped), willing to use force (he launched cruise missiles at Syria as punishment for its use of chemical weapons), and committed to allies (enthusiastically in the case of Israel and Japan, grudgingly in the case of the Europeans). Although he has been more of an economic nationalist than some might like, the thinking goes that he remains within the bounds of GOP tradition.

Yet this reassuringly non-apocalyptic foreign policy was a product of good fortune, not restraint, and of the resistance of subordinates rather than the boss' growth. Trump was remarkably lucky in 2017. He did not experience any external shocks and paid no visible price for alienating the United States' friends. But at the same time, no part of the world is conspicuously better off for his efforts. Instead, the preexisting fissures in the international system are either the same or getting worse; no U.S. adversary is noticeably weaker, and some are getting stronger; and the president's behavior has devalued the currency of the United States' reputation and credibility. Sooner or later, his luck will run out. And when it does, the true costs of the Trump presidency will become clear.

IT COULD HAVE BEEN WORSE, Foreign Affairs, March /April 2018

In some ways, 2017 demonstrated the sheer difficulty of reversing the massive postwar governmental consensus on U.S. foreign policy. To be sure, in its pronouncements, the Trump administration ostentatiously walked away from the promotion of human rights and the maintenance of world order as [animating principles of U.S. foreign policy](#). Speaking at the UN, Trump himself identified the sovereignty, security, and prosperity of the American people as his sole objectives. But congressional mandates and the sheer inertia of previous policies got in the way of “America first.” And so human rights violators were still sanctioned, the United States agreed to ship antitank missiles to Ukraine, and relations with Mexico were uneasily patched up. The executive branch predominates in foreign policy, but Congress set limits, particularly with regard to Russia, and the courts had their say, blocking Trump’s attempt to rewrite U.S. immigration law by executive fiat.

In addition to the intrinsic limits on presidential power, there was the resistance of what some of Trump’s supporters darkly call “[the deep state](#).” This is a misnomer: there is no U.S. equivalent of what the Turkish military was 30 years ago, or what the Pakistani military and intelligence service remain today. But there is no doubt that career diplomats, intelligence officials, civil servants, and military leaders share a deeply rooted consensus about U.S. foreign policy and security. And this consensus unquestionably diverges from Trump’s worldview in its support for free trade, U.S. alliances (particularly NATO), and the U.S.-led global order. Many of Trump’s senior political appointees do not share his worldview. Moreover, the Trump administration has been one of the slowest on record to fill positions—candidates for less than 40 percent of the key roles had been confirmed by the end of 2017. As a result, there has been plenty of room for officials to continue policies they prefer rather than pursue those that might please the president.

Some put their faith in the administration’s “grownups”—Secretary of State Rex Tillerson and the three generals, John Kelly (White House chief of staff), James Mattis (secretary of defense), and H. R. McMaster (national security adviser). These officials, the argument goes, have placed their guiding and restraining hands on the shoulders of the impulsive and poorly read commander in chief. This argument has some merit. After all, Mattis genially talked Trump out of advocating torture by suggesting that he always got more out of prisoners by offering them beer and cigarettes—a mild but effective fib, given that generals do not usually interrogate jihadists. When the memoirs are finally written, we may learn of more disasters averted in this way. Of the grownups, Tillerson is the least important, his background as the reclusive CEO of Exxon Mobil having turned out to be poor preparation for leading the State Department. The benign junta, as it were, of Kelly, Mattis, and McMaster is a different matter: closer to the president and more visibly respected by him. But there are important differences among them.

A YEAR OF TRUMP

For the Trump administration, 2017 was a year of adjusting, however haphazardly, to a world that many inside and outside the president’s camp consider increasingly dangerous. There was no major crisis along the lines of the Bay of Pigs or 9/11, but enough disturbing events are in train. Throughout Trump’s first year in office, North Korea continued developing nuclear weapons and the intercontinental ballistic missiles it would need to [carry them to the United States](#). Fiery rhetoric on both sides (including Trump’s threats of “fire and fury”) and

heightened sanctions on Pyongyang did not bring the confrontation any closer to resolution. And through its rhetoric and continued military buildup, including in the South China Sea, China made clear that it would not act as the United States' sheriff in East Asia. Meanwhile, McMaster's insistence on the denuclearization of North Korea and his repeated talk of "preventive war" made peaceful and honorable accommodation seem further off than ever. In the coming year, the United States will face a choice: aimed at disarming or even overthrowing the North Korean regime or a humiliating abandonment of the reddest of redlines. As the year unfolded, it became increasingly apparent just how actively Russia had intervened in the 2016 U.S. presidential election. Allegations about the Trump team's possible connections to Moscow dominated the news, as federal prosecutors doggedly pursued senior campaign officials and even secured a plea bargain from Trump's dismissed national security adviser, Michael Flynn. Meanwhile, the president remained remarkably cordial toward Russian President Vladimir Putin and apparently ordered no retaliation for Moscow's astonishing effort to disrupt U.S. politics and discredit the United States' democratic processes. Ultimately, Congress and the State Department overrode the White House to impose more sanctions on Russia. But the situation remains unstable: the antitank missiles that the United States sent to Ukraine will surely kill Russians, and Putin is unlikely to react well to that. And a Europe increasingly preoccupied with its own populist and secessionist movements presents more opportunities for Russian subversion.

In April, Trump hosted Chinese President Xi Jinping at his Florida resort, Mar-a-Lago, and in November, Xi reciprocated in Beijing. The state visits were successful in the sense of being cordial and theatrical, but Trump's National Security Strategy, released in December, still identifies China as one of the United States' major competitors. The administration's consistent support for Japan, including its decision to increase sales of advanced weaponry to Tokyo, is unlikely to warm the relationship with China. Nor is its standoff with North Korea: In the meantime, China's steady acquisition of military power, its menacing posture toward Taiwan, and its use of economic aid and investment as a tool of geopolitics are accelerating. China's rise is, if anything, more disturbing than it was a year ago. 2017 demonstrated the sheer difficulty of reversing the massive postwar governmental consensus on U.S. foreign policy.

In the ongoing war against jihadists, the Trump administration scored a major success by completing the campaign to help Iraq eliminate the physical footprint of the Islamic State, or ISIS. Although Trump was quick to take credit—and his administration did indeed increase resources and lift restrictions on U.S. military commanders—at most his administration expanded and accelerated an effort launched by the Obama administration. At the end of the year, Isis no longer held territory in Iraq, but this did not destroy the group any more than killing Osama bin Laden finished off al Qaeda. Meanwhile, vast swaths of Mosul, Iraq's second-largest city, lie in ruins. Shiite militias are operating there and in Sunni regions. Next door in Syria, the regime of Bashar al-Assad has won its war for survival thanks to assistance from Iran, Hezbollah, and Russia, while U.S.-backed rebels found themselves isolated and outgunned. Israel now faces an emboldened Hezbollah and the possibility of a more permanent Iranian military presence in Syria. Trump did improve relations with Egypt, but, reflecting Russia's new assertiveness in the Middle East, the Egyptian government is now buying Russian military hardware and allowing Russian military aircraft to deploy from Egypt.

For that matter, the Israeli prime minister spent more time in Moscow than he did in Washington in 2017. Trump inherited these predicaments from his predecessor, but he did not, and perhaps could not, turn them around.

In the Persian Gulf, Trump more firmly aligned the United States with Saudi Arabia and the smaller Gulf states and against Iran. He signaled his desire to walk away from the Iran nuclear deal and showed little interest in the ferocious proxy war that the Arab states are waging in Yemen against Iran. The administration appears to be placing its bets on the new Saudi crown prince, Mohammed bin Salman, an ambiguous figure who is promising to open opportunities for women and modernize his society while aggressively confronting Iran and shaking down wealthy members and associates of the royal family. The administration has been noticeably silent about such excesses, as well as about the de facto Saudi kidnapping of the Lebanese prime minister in November.

On trade, shortly after taking office, Trump decisively dropped the Trans-Pacific Partnership. (Large international economic arrangements led by China took its place.) More consequentially, he began renegotiating the North American Free Trade Agreement, which he had repeatedly threatened to abandon altogether. Even though Trump promised to replace multilateral trade agreements with bilateral ones, he has failed to follow through

Elsewhere, crises percolated, most notably in Venezuela, as a state of over 30 million people continued its decline into chaos. But in Latin America (with the exception of Mexico), as in other parts of the world, there was not so much friction as absence: the United States was simply not playing much of a role one way or another. And throughout his first year, Trump acquired a global reputation for being unreliable, temperamental, and deceitful. According to the Pew Research Center, 93 percent of Swedes polled said they had confidence in U.S. President Barack Obama, but only ten percent said they felt the same about Trump. Of course, this may say more about Sweden than the United States, but in Canada, Germany, and the United Kingdom, the numbers were almost as bad. And foreign officials have begun talking openly about how, in the words of Chrystia Freeland, Canada's minister of foreign affairs, "our friend and ally has come to question the very worth of its mantle of global leadership." The costs of such a deterioration in U.S. standing are long term. They may not be visible yet, but they will come into the open in a moment of acute stress.

Meanwhile, the Trump administration has not solved any of the problems it inherited, nor does it appear to have any solutions in view. After denouncing excessive involvement abroad, it increased, not decreased, the deployment of forces to active war zones. In Afghanistan, for example, Trump raised the number of U.S. troops with no clear objective beyond persistence. Other moves were dramatic but essentially meaningless. The administration's unilateral recognition of Jerusalem as Israel's capital was bemoaned by foreign policy experts, but there is no evidence that Abu Dhabi, Cairo, or Riyadh cared much about it. At most, it was a minor pinprick to an Israeli-Palestinian peace process that had flatlined years before.