



## **Donald Trump's Foreign Policy Is Confused And Unpredictable, But Hillary Clinton Backs Endless War**

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November 8 features an awful choice. Neither Hillary Clinton nor Donald Trump should be America's next military commander-in-chief. Clinton is the Neoconservatives' best Democratic friend, in favor of every one of Washington's wars, no matter how foolish, over the last two decades. Trump is, well, the Donald, which means no one really knows what he believes and would do.

However, embarrassing unpredictability would be better than predictable imbecility. Clinton would continue with the expensive, failed conventional wisdom that masquerades as U.S. foreign policy. Trump at least might challenge Washington's proclivity for war on occasion. America can't afford to repeat the last three administrations' many mistakes.

There is little coherence to Trump's call to restore American "greatness," whatever he means. In a formal talk last April he criticized U.S. foreign policy as "a complete and total disaster. No vision. No purpose. No direction. No strategy." But what did he offer as its replacement? Nothing systematic. He promised to "always put the interests of the American people and American security above all else," but what U.S. politician would admit to the contrary?

He cited mistakes in Egypt, Iraq, Libya, and Syria, correctly noting that "these actions helped to throw the region into chaos and gave ISIS the space it needs to grow and prosper." However, while almost alone among the Republican Party candidates willing to criticize George W. Bush's misbegotten Iraq invasion, Trump followed the standard GOP line in blaming almost everything else on President Barack Obama. If there is one creator of the Islamic State, other than its members, it is Bush, whose misguided policy wrecked Iraq and ultimately the region.

Still, Trump identified genuine problems if not their solutions, such as America's overextended resources. As well as allies "not paying their fair share." But he also argued that "our friends are beginning to think they can't depend on us," that is, the very allies who do little because they expect America to pay for their defense. They should not be able to depend on Washington to continue to stand by as they fleece the U.S.

Appealing to the GOP's dominant hawkish factions, Trump attacked the Iran nuclear agreement, which offers hope of forestalling an Iranian nuclear weapon while sharpening an internal

political struggle over Tehran's future. He offered no alternative while pledging his fulsome allegiance to Israel—after having earlier bravely called for a more balanced approach to the Middle East.

Moreover, he complained that “our rivals no longer respect us.” He's concerned that no one met President Obama when the latter landed in Havana, the Olympic committee didn't choose an American site, China maintains “its economic assault on Americans jobs and wealth,” and the North Koreans continue to develop nuclear weapons. That's a bizarre mix of important and incidental.

Moreover, the only thing different under President Bush was the lack of a Cuba visit—because the GOP refused to change a policy which had failed for a half century. Only President Obama was willing to try something different. Trump said he didn't disagree with the opening, but would reverse U.S. concessions if the Castro regime didn't grant “religious and political freedom.” But no authoritarian regime will voluntarily dismantle itself. Trump apparently prefers failure if it wins him the votes of hardline Cuban-Americans.

Trump further complained that “America no longer has a clear understanding of our foreign policy goals.” True, but he then offered a superficial, minimal critique of current policy, focused on the failure to aid foreign Christians, proposals to admit Muslim refugees, and Clinton's poor response to the Benghazi attack.

Finally, he made manifold generic promises—the U.S. will be strong, reliable, and great again. It will be a good friend and follow a “coherent foreign policy.” He offered some sensible goals, but without many specifics on how to achieve them. For instance, America must “halt the spread and reach of radical Islam,” which almost certainly is beyond Washington's capability, especially if it continues to wander the globe bombing, invading, and occupying other nations.

Trump said “We must abandon the failed policy of nation building and regime change that Hillary Clinton pushed in Iraq, Libya, Egypt and Syria.” True. But instead of expecting the U.S. to defeat “the barbarians of ISIS,” as he called for in his speech accepting the GOP nomination, it would be better to expect other countries in the region, which all face a far greater threat than does America, to do so.

Some of his other ideas were less well thought out. For instance, he announced that “we have to rebuild our military.” It's a regular theme for him. Far from being “depleted,” the Pentagon is bloated, much larger than what America needs for its, rather than the world's, defense. The U.S. remains far stronger than any of its potential adversaries. It is allied with every major industrialized state save China and Russia. If Washington no longer subsidized rich friends, engaged in nation-building, and fought other countries' enemies, it could spend far less on the military. Indeed, Washington should be shedding responsibilities, not charging allies for fulfilling their duties.

“Finally, we must develop a foreign policy based on American interests,” he concluded. Sure, but what does that mean? Trump doesn't believe Americans are capable of competing economically even though the U.S. has prospered greatly in the international marketplace. He wants to “defeat terrorists and promote regional stability,” but it would be better to stop creating so many enemies and let other states confront those who most threaten them, such as ISIS.

Washington also should avoid intervening, whether to promote stability or revolution. The U.S. certainly shouldn't buttress authoritarian dictatorships, such as in Saudi Arabia, which unintentionally may encourage the sort of "radical change" which Trump criticized.

He is right about the need to seek "common ground based on shared interests" with Russia and China. Neither regime is a good one—Trump's praise for Vladimir Putin is misguided—but neither has any desire for conflict with the U.S. It is particularly foolish to push these two powers together against America—reversing Richard Nixon's 1972 policy breakthrough. On the other hand, Trump called for summits with America's Asian and European allies, which would be unlikely to result in "a fresh look" at anything. Such meetings certainly wouldn't result in enforceable promises from the others to do more.

Still, Trump deserves enormous credit for promising: "war and aggression will not be my first instinct. You cannot have a foreign policy without diplomacy. A superpower understands that caution and restraint are really truly signs of strength." Later he said he would "emphasize diplomacy, not destruction." Of course, he has said much that sounds like the opposite—that he's the most militaristic candidate, for instance. He proposed to torture terrorists and kill their families. But decrying "war and aggression" sets him apart from virtually every other Republican and most Democrats. And especially from Clinton, whom he correctly called "trigger-happy." That's true: What war has she opposed, at least before it was politically popular to do?

No wonder a large group of GOP foreign policy gurus, mostly Neoconservative and other uber-hawks, denounced Trump. With justification they questioned his knowledge and temperament, but one suspects that they were most concerned by his criticism of promiscuous war-making in the Mideast, most notably Iraq. Argued former Reagan ambassador Faith Whittlesey, "The claims of temperament and suitability (which reflect, among other things, a shameless application of double standards) are cover for policy differences and self-interest."

Bush Deputy Defense Secretary Paul Wolfowitz said he is voting for Hillary Clinton; the Council on Foreign Relations' Max Boot even appeared in a Clinton campaign ad. James Kirchick of the Foreign Policy Institute suggested that a coup might be necessary to remove a President Trump. (On the other hand, Trump has won occasional hawkish supporters, such as the Clinton administration's James Woolsey and Bush administration's John Bolton, as well as the endorsement of 88 former top military officers.)

The American people deserve better than both Clinton and Trump. On foreign policy, at least, Clinton guarantees more of the same: war-making, nation-building, and social-engineering overseas. The American people would be the losers, with more money wasted and more lives lost. She represents the hawkish extreme of the Democratic Party.

Trump's policies likely would result in plenty of harm to America and other nations. But he is not so ostentatiously aggressive, ready, even eager, to make war for no compelling purpose. The country might even occasionally find itself at peace. Small comfort, perhaps, but 2016 truly is the year of lesser evils.

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