

Nikki Haley: The Bold Scold of the Trump Administration

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As governor of South Carolina, Nikki Haley didn't have much need to worry about foreign policy. Yet for reasons unknown (other than perhaps her Indian heritage), Donald Trump tapped her to be the U.S. ambassador to the United Nations. There, she has performed to perfection, offering a model of the hubris and lack of awareness that consistently characterize U.S. foreign policy.

What makes America different from other nations when it comes to foreign policy is the certainty that it is the right—indeed, the duty—of Americans to run the world. That means telling everyone everywhere what they should do, not just internationally, but in their own nations, too.

U.S. officials believe they know how other societies should organize their governments, who foreign peoples should elect, what economic policies other nations should implement, and what social practices foreigners should encourage and suppress.

There is precedent for Washington as all-seeing and all-knowing. A sparrow cannot “fall to the ground apart from the will of” God, Jesus explained. So, too, it appears, is such an event impossible in America's view apart from U.S. approval.

Washington officials rarely are so blunt, but their rhetoric is routinely suffused with arrogance. The concept of American exceptionalism is one example. The country's founding was unique and the U.S. has played an extraordinary role in international affairs, but that does not sanctify policies that have often been brutal, selfish, incompetent, perverse, and immoral. Sometimes America's actions share all of those characteristics simultaneously—such as aiding the royal Saudi dictatorship as it slaughters civilians in Yemen in an attempt to restore a puppet regime there.

In recent history, Madeleine Albright, both as UN ambassador and secretary of state under Bill Clinton, perhaps came closest to personifying the clueless American diplomat. As Washington made a hash of the Balkans and Middle East, she explained that “we stand tall. We see further than other countries in the future.” The U.S., of course, was “the indispensable nation.” Which presumably is why she felt entitled to announce that “we think the price is worth it” when asked about the reported deaths of a half million Iraqi children as a result of sanctions against Baghdad.

And, of course, there was her extraordinary exchange with Colin Powell, then chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, when she asked, “What's the point of having this superb military you're

always talking about if we can't use it?" Presumably she had no family members at risk as she planned to wage global crusades with other people's lives.

Albright has large shoes to fill but Haley appears to be well on her way. In a position that theoretically emphasizes diplomacy, the former South Carolina governor has been cheerleading for war with North Korea. Never mind that a nuke or two landing on Seoul or Tokyo would wipe out millions of people. No doubt she will cheerfully put a positive spin on disaster if the administration decides it's time for Armageddon in Northeast Asia.

Haley has also brilliantly played the sycophantic spokeswoman for the Saudi royals. Riyadh's intervention in the unending Yemeni civil war has killed thousands of civilians, imposed a starvation blockade, and led famine and cholera to sweep through what was already one of the poorest nations on earth. All of this has been done with U.S. support: supplying munitions, refueling aircraft, and aiding with targeting.

But when the Yemenis returned fire with a missile, Haley summoned her best sanctimonious demeanor and denounced Iran for allegedly making this outrageous, shocking attack possible. Apparently the Saudi sense of entitlement goes so far as to believe that Saudi Arabia's victims aren't even supposed to shoot back.

Yet Haley's finest hubristic moment may have come after the president's decision to move America's embassy to Jerusalem. Israel treats that city as its capital, of course. But Jerusalem is the holiest land for Jews and Christians, third holiest for Muslims, and the most emotional point of dispute between Israelis and Palestinians. Indeed, since conquering East Jerusalem in the 1967 war, the Israeli government has been working assiduously to squeeze Palestinians out of the city.

Congress's approval in 1995 of legislation mandating that the State Department move the U.S. embassy to Jerusalem was politics at its most cynical. Members in the Republican-controlled Congress postured as great friends of Israel while adding a waiver that they expected presidents to always employ. Everyone did so until Donald Trump. At least his decision ostentatiously puts the lie to the claim that Washington can play honest broker in promoting a Middle East peace. No sentient Palestinian could have believed so, but the president finally made it official.

That Haley kept a straight face while explaining how Washington could upset the status quo, outrage Palestinians, undercut Arab allies, and anger Muslims, yet still bring peace, harmony, and calm to the Middle East was to be expected. "We can see the peace process really come together," she declared without a hint of irony.

But her finest moment—almost Churchillian in significance—was when she responded to criticism of the president's decision, including by *the other 14 members of the UN Security Council*. On Fox News (where else?) she declared: "We have the right to do whatever we want in terms of where we put our embassies." As for foreign criticism: "We don't need other countries telling us what's right and wrong."

Of course.

What could be more obvious? Other governments have no right to make decisions about their own countries, and need to be told what's right and wrong by Washington on any and every subject, day or night, in sunshine, rain, or snow. But another element of American

exceptionalism is the fact that the U.S. is exempt from the rules it applies to other nations. Washington gets to lecture, but no one gets to tell Americans what they should do.

The sad irony is that the U.S. would have greater credibility if it better practiced what it preached, and didn't attempt social engineering abroad that's routinely failed at home. Especially nice would be a bit more humility and self-awareness by Washington's representatives. But Nikki Haley seems determined to continue as a disciple of the Madeleine Albright school of all-knowing, all-seeing, all-saying diplomacy. As such, she's unlikely to fool anyone other than herself.

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