

## Trump Is Giving In to the “Blob”: Bandow

Fareed Zakaria

April 12, 2018

President Trump was right when he said recently that it's time for US forces to exit Syria, argues Doug Bandow for *The American Conservative*. But as the White House considers a tough response to the alleged use of chemical weapons by Bashar al-Assad's forces, it is becoming increasingly clear that, once again, the Washington foreign policy “blob” is winning.

“The use of chemical weapons is atrocious, but so is the use of bullets and explosives against civilians. The Assad regime is criminal, but so are many other governments around the globe, including US allies such as Saudi Arabia, which is prodigiously killing civilians in Yemen. Washington cannot fix Syria at any reasonable cost, if at all,” Bandow says.

“Letting Trump be Trump was never a panacea. He is wrong on the nuclear agreement with Iran, for instance, and his musings about military action against Venezuela were bizarre at best. But the more fundamental problem is that no one is letting him be himself when he demonstrates good sense. And so, he's giving in to the Blob—perhaps his attention span lagged, he didn't care enough to fight, or he feared overriding people in uniforms with stars on their shoulders.”

### With Allies Like These...

Turkey might be a NATO ally, but the United States shouldn't depend on it when it comes to planning for military action in Syria that might bring it dangerously close to direct confrontation with Russia, suggests Simon Tisdall for *The Guardian*. Thank blossoming ties between Ankara and Moscow.

“Turkey's close collaboration with Russia – critics would call it subservience – is a relatively recent phenomenon. The two countries came to blows in November, 2015 when Turkey shot down a Russian military jet for alleged airspace violations. Moscow retaliated by imposing economic sanctions,” Tisdall writes.

“To the dismay of NATO and the EU, the subsequent rapprochement has been rapid, fueled by shared self-interest, especially in Syria. Both [Recep Tayyip] Erdoğan and Putin want to shape any post-war settlement to their advantage. To this end they launched, with Iran, the so-called Astana peace process, rivaling talks overseen by the UN.

“Erdoğan and Putin share another aim: curbing US influence in the Middle East. And for Russia, courting Turkey brings additional benefits – sowing discord within NATO and limiting US military options in Syria when, as now, push may come to shove.”

### **Team Trump Is Reconsidering TPP. The Feeling Isn't Mutual**

Republican senators **said Thursday** the Trump administration is studying the possibility of rejoining talks on the Trans-Pacific Partnership, following the President's **decision to withdraw from the trade deal last year**. Good luck with that, **says Keith Johnson in Foreign Policy**. The **11 remaining nations** aren't likely to want to get burned by America again.

“Many of the member states shudder at the idea of re-opening contentious, years-long negotiations just to try to coax the United States back into the club,” Johnson writes. “Chile's outgoing president said [in February] that Washington would have to take the revised deal as is if it wanted back in. And a top Canadian trade official **said** the United States would get no special treatment if it wanted to rejoin. Even Japan, which wants the United States back in, **warns** Washington against renegotiating the whole thing.”

### **Russia Sanctions Aren't Going Quite According to Plan**

The **announcement last week of new US sanctions against seven Russian oligarchs and 12 companies they own or control** grabbed headlines. Washington better hope they work better than previous economic sanctions, because trade has actually been surging, **notes Andrea Thomas in the Wall Street Journal**.

“The US and Europe's largest nations, including France and Germany, saw exports to and imports from Russia skyrocket in 2017 after three years of decline. Both now stand at their highest levels since 2014, the year Russia invaded Ukraine and annexed Crimea, prompting the US and its European allies to impose curbs,” Thomas writes.

“Initially, the sanctions worked, compounding the effect of weak oil prices and accelerating a sharp drop in the ruble's exchange rate. In 2015, trade between the EU and Russia fell more than 25%.”

Still, while “sanctions can inflict much damage in the short term, their potency wanes as businesses, and in some cases governments, work to circumvent the barriers and rebuild

economic ties.”

“Investment from some European countries has also risen sharply.”

### **Don't Blame China, Blame Western Hypocrisy – and Decadence**

China is a growing economic and political power. If the West wants to hold its own, then it needs to drop the economic hypocrisy – and take a hard look in the mirror, **writes Martin Wolf in the *Financial Times***.

“The US can huff and puff about Chinese theft of intellectual property. But every catch-up nation, very much including the US in the 19th century, seized the ideas of others and built upon them,” Wolf writes.

“The idea that intellectual property is sacrosanct is also wrong. It is innovation that is sacrosanct. Intellectual property rights both help and hurt that effort. A balance has to be struck between rights that are too tight and too loose. The US can try to protect its intellectual property. But any idea that it is entitled (or indeed able) to prevent China from innovating its way to prosperity is mad.”

“China is, in any case, not the real threat. That relationship can surely be managed.”

“The threat is the decadence of the West, very much including the US — the prevalence of rent extraction as a way of economic life, the indifference to the fate of much of its citizenry, the corrupting role of money in politics, the indifference to the truth, and the sacrifice of long-term investment to private and public consumption.”

### **What Happened to the “Trump Effect”?**

Just a year ago, the so-called Trump Effect on immigration seemed genuine, when “the number of people caught crossing America’s southern border illegally fell to a 17-year low of 11,127,” ***The Economist* says**. Today? Not so much.

“On April 5th, the [Department of Homeland Security] announced that Border Patrol agents apprehended 37,393 people in March, an increase of more than 200% on the previous year. The number of unaccompanied children caught entering illegally jumped by 300%, and the number of families detained while attempting the journey surged by nearly 700%,” *The Economist* says.

### **US in Ever-Shrinking Company on the Death Penalty: Report**

The world is increasingly turning its back on the death penalty, **according to a new report from Amnesty International**, with the number of executions in 2017 falling 4 percent

from 2016, to 993 executions across 23 countries.

“In addition to Guinea, Mongolia abolished the death penalty for all crimes taking the total of abolitionist states to 106 in 2017,” the report says. “Most executions took place in China, Iran, Saudi Arabia, Iraq and Pakistan – in that order.”

“China remained the world’s top executioner – but the true extent of the use of the death penalty in China is unknown as this data is classified as a state secret; the global figure of at least 993 excludes the thousands of executions believed to have been carried out in China.”

Amnesty adds: “For the 9<sup>th</sup> consecutive year, the USA remained the only country [in the Americas] to carry out executions.”