

THE NATIONAL INTEREST

The Trump Doctrine, Explained

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WRITING ABOUT any president prior to the end of his (there has yet to be a “her”) administration is never an easy task. To write anything substantive about Donald Trump, as opposed to “tell-all” exposés that reveal his chaotic managerial style, his public and private feuds, and the corruption that seems to permeate the White House and has brought down several of his cabinet officers, is an even greater challenge for the serious analyst. In just eleven months beginning in January 2019, Trump, perhaps the most transactional, impulsive, and inconsistent human being ever to reside in the White House:

replaced two secretaries of defense, one of whom, an acting secretary, he had nominated for the permanent position;

replaced his national security advisor;

replaced his director of national intelligence;

replaced his secretary of homeland security;

walked out of a summit with North Korea’s Kim Jong-un;

abruptly canceled peace talks with the Taliban—undermining his own negotiator—after nearly a year of negotiations and the drafting of an agreement in principle that was ready for signature;

withdrew most American forces from northeast Syria, thereby exposing America’s erstwhile Kurdish allies to a Turkish onslaught;

became the subject of impeachment proceedings.

Colin Dueck completed his manuscript before any of the foregoing occurred. That events have moved on since then demonstrates the danger of writing about current history. It is one thing for a journalist to attempt to do so, but quite another for a respected and thoughtful academic like Dueck. His short volume, *Age of Iron: On Conservative Nationalism*, constitutes a valiant attempt to make sense of Trump’s trade, immigration, security, and foreign policies by placing them in the context of a century of Republican and conservative thinking. Ultimately, he fails because it is simply impossible to place Trump in any serious, carefully thought-out, consistent policy context.

Dueck argues that Trump is at bottom a conservative nationalist, and for that reason, the president reflects what he terms “the oldest U.S. foreign policy tradition in existence.” Moreover, as he postulates on the very first page of his book, conservative nationalism is “neither fascistic nor undemocratic”—the critique that former Secretary of State Madeleine Albright and others have leveled at Trump and his policies. “Nor,” he goes on to say, “is a conservative US nationalism historically incompatible with American engagement overseas, including the promotion and defense of democracy,” although the latter is not a Trump priority. Instead, what Dueck terms “foreign policy frustrations” since 9/11 have led to a particular form of conservative nationalism that Trump may represent, but that will surely outlast him.

THERE IS considerable merit in Dueck’s observations regarding conservative nationalism. Dueck rightly states that American nationalism harks back to the founding of the republic. It is akin to what he terms European “defensive conservative nationalism,” which prioritizes “adherence to the European state system, political realism, and concepts of nationality against progressive forms of supranational governance.”

He is on less solid ground when he asserts that such a posture relates to Europe’s affairs as it has characterized the foreign policies of statesmen ranging from George Canning and Benjamin Disraeli to Margaret Thatcher and Charles de Gaulle.

Nineteenth-century Britain confronted a very different Europe, however—one that was fundamentally at peace ever since the Congress of Vienna. On the other hand, Europe in the age of de Gaulle and Thatcher was still reeling from two world wars that had ravaged the continent. It was in the aftermath of World War II that six European states, notably France and Germany, took the first halting steps toward what ultimately became the European Union. Because they recognized the importance of reconciling Western Europe’s two most powerful rivals, both de Gaulle and Thatcher accepted a degree of European supranationalism, though they did not support steps that might someday lead to a united, federal Europe. Most notably, neither ever contemplated breaking away from the European Union (or the European Economic Community, as it was termed in de Gaulle’s day). Their policies were a far cry from that of current Prime Minister Boris Johnson, whose determination to lead Britain out of Europe received Trump’s full-throated support and encouragement.

According to Dueck, the American version of conservative nationalism comprises three distinct groups: internationalists, non-interventionists, and hardliners. Conservative internationalists support an active American role overseas, including foreign aid, forward military deployments, alliances, and military commitments. Non-interventionists resist military intervention and commitments of all kinds. Conservative hardliners support high levels of defense spending and overpowering military reaction to direct threats to the United States but shy away from foreign engagements and military interventions. One is tempted to describe these three tendencies as respectively the neocon approach, the Steve Bannon (or Cato Institute) approach, and the John Bolton approach. Given Trump’s record of rejecting proponents of each of these approaches—he hired virtually no neocons and he dismissed both Bannon and Bolton—it is not clear where exactly the president fits in.

Dueck tries to shoehorn these three approaches into the conservative reaction to Woodrow Wilson’s dogged and uncompromising determination to have the United States join the League of Nations. He describes Senators Henry Cabot Lodge and his northeastern Republican colleagues as internationalists; Robert La Follette and his followers as non-interventionists; and

William Borah and his supporters as nationalist hardliners. To some extent, Dueck's categories apply both to the conservatives of 1920 and those of one hundred years later.

To buttress his assertions about the nature of conservative nationalism, Dueck offers an exceedingly cursory sixty-six-page overview of American foreign policy—beginning with Theodore Roosevelt's policies through those of Barack Obama—that is often so short on detail that only a foreign policy expert or a Washington insider can grasp what he writes. In contrast to his review of a century of American foreign and security policy, Dueck devotes nearly thirty pages to Donald Trump's first two years in office. His clear objective is to place Trump within the mainstream of conservative American foreign policy. Yet all along the way, his observations about presidential policies demonstrate how different Trump's response to foreign developments—it is too much to call it a policy—is from those of his predecessors, however successful or unsuccessful they might have been.

TRUMP IS certainly no Teddy Roosevelt. As Dueck points out, Roosevelt's guiding principle was “don't bluster, don't flourish your revolver, and never draw unless you intend to shoot.” As his relations with Kim Jong-un amply demonstrate, Trump's approach is the polar opposite. He is full of bluster. He threatens those who might challenge him. Then he backs down. Trump has ordered the cancellation of two major American military exercises with North Korea; Kim, on the other hand, has resumed long-range ballistic missile testing.

Dueck's review of the Republican interwar administrations does point to some parallels with Trump, though they are not exactly ones that paint him in a positive light. He notes that during the 1920s, Republicans supported high tariffs, as does Donald Trump today. Of course, the consequences of those tariffs, given the huge debts that complicated the economies of both the victors and losers of World War I, contributed directly to the rise of Nazi Germany and World War II.

During the 1920s, Republican administrations called upon private citizens to act as proxy diplomats in the realm of foreign economic policy; Trump has done the same. Yet in contrast to the successful efforts of the banker Charles Dawes and the businessman Owen Young in renegotiating and reducing Germany's debt, there is little positive that can be said about the work of Trump's leading unofficial diplomat, Rudy Giuliani. Unlike the work of those unofficial diplomats of the 1920s, whose objective was to stabilize the international economy, Giuliani's involvement in Ukrainian affairs has destabilized America's foreign relations and was the proximate cause of the Democrats' efforts to impeach and remove the president.

After providing an overview of Roosevelt and Truman's foreign and security policies—which for the most part won the support of conservative Republicans, with the notable exception of Senator Robert Taft, who preferred what is currently termed “offshore balancing” over alliance commitments—Dueck turns to Dwight Eisenhower, the Republican president whose national security policies he appears to most admire.

Eisenhower supported both NATO and stationing American forces in Europe but did not intend for those forces to remain in Europe indefinitely. He signed formal defense treaties with a slew of Asian countries; led America into another multinational organization, the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization; and supported the creation of another, the Central Treaty Organization, better known as the Baghdad Pact. Dueck notes that Eisenhower was able to convince most conservative Republican nationalists to support his generally internationalist approach. He also

succeeded in leading what Dueck rightly terms “an historic change in GOP priorities on trade and foreign assistance.” He concludes his review of Eisenhower’s policies with a wholehearted endorsement:

[Eisenhower was] highly diligent, calculating, and commanding behind the scenes ... he was a fierce anti-Communist ... [yet] at the same time he looked for peaceful outcomes, was genuinely open to diplomacy, did not believe the American model easy to export, was skeptical of preventive warfare, and understood from personal experience how quickly military entanglement could spin out of control. Precisely by respecting the limits of conservative nationalism, he internationalized the Republican Party.

Turning to what he terms the “global versus national” debate within the Republican Party, Dueck points out that Barry Goldwater’s “hard tug in a conservative nationalist direction,” which incorporated criticism of the United Nations, support for military superiority, and opposition to containment, foreign aid, arms control and superpower summitry “indicated the late twentieth century direction of the Republican party.” Indeed, Goldwater’s orientation foreshadowed that of John Bolton, whose tenure came to a sudden end precisely because Trump was not prepared to accept his national security advisor’s hardline nationalistic approach, especially his opposition to summit diplomacy with America’s adversaries.

Richard M. Nixon was as staunch an anti-Communist as both Goldwater and his former boss, President Eisenhower. Moreover, like Eisenhower, Nixon adopted a less ideological, more realistic approach to foreign and security policy, what might be termed “internationalist realism.” Unlike Goldwater, however, Nixon pressed for arms control, summitry, diplomatic outreach to China and partial abandonment of Taiwan, and a desire to reduce the American military presence in Europe. On the other hand, he voiced strong support for NATO; implemented a fighting retreat from Vietnam that included the secret bombing of Cambodia; pursued the destabilization of Chile’s leftist government; provided support for Israel during the Yom Kippur War; and prompted the unilateral suspension of the dollar’s convertibility into gold.

In some respects, notably an interest in summitry, support for Israel, and a nationalist orientation in economic matters, Trump’s policies reflect Nixon’s approach. Unlike Trump, however, Nixon was an experienced foreign policy hand who, with Henry Kissinger, had a strategic sense of how best to assure America’s security in the face of both a hostile and aggressive Soviet Union and a chaotic domestic populace whose morale was being drained away by the seemingly endless war in Vietnam.

Gerald Ford’s brief presidency was followed by that of Jimmy Carter, under whom the American public’s morale did not improve. It was only with Ronald Reagan’s election to the presidency that American fortunes rebounded both internally and internationally. Liberals and Europeans alike feared that Reagan would be a reckless “cowboy” who posed a serious threat to international stability. Reagan was no such person, however. Having spent years developing his world view, and with experience as a twice-elected governor of California, Reagan was far more of a realist than many realized. As Dueck puts it, Reagan “began from a sincere set of policy beliefs, but was unwilling to risk disaster in order to maintain ideological purity.” He could demand that Mikhail Gorbachev tear down the Berlin Wall, pursue economic warfare against the Soviet bloc, coordinate with the Vatican to liberate Eastern Europe from Moscow’s grip, and initiate a major American defense buildup that included an anti-ballistic capability that rattled the Soviets.

Yet at the same time, Reagan negotiated a major arms control treaty that eliminated intermediate-range ballistic missiles, contemplated the complete abandonment of strategic nuclear missiles, and refused to be drawn into an extended Middle East conflict in Lebanon. He supported the expansion of democracies worldwide, but, with the exception of Grenada, avoided regime change. His successor, George H.W. Bush, continued Reagan's policies, with an even greater dose of realism. As Dueck writes, "in terms of foreign policy ... the presidency of George H.W. Bush ... was a kind of [sic] successful denouement to the Reagan years, managed with hands-on professionalism..." Rather than stressing grand designs, he applied the Hippocratic Oath to matters of foreign policy: "First do no harm." It is a lesson that Trump has yet to learn.

Bush did not endear himself to the right wing of the Republican Party, whose foreign policy priorities had essentially lain dormant since the days of Robert A. Taft. Dueck rightly notes that Pat Buchanan, who challenged Bush for the 1992 Republican nomination, not only tapped into those priorities but also foreshadowed much of Trump's appeal to his party's base nearly twenty-five years later. Dueck quotes Buchanan at length:

We call for a new patriotism, where Americans put the needs of Americans first, for a new nationalism where in every negotiation, be it arms control or trade, the American side seeks advantage and victory for the United States ... He [Bush] is a globalist and we are nationalists. He believes in some Pax Universalis; we believe in the Old Republic. He would put America's wealth and power at the service of some vague New World Order; we will put America first.

Reagan's former speechwriter could have written the same words for Trump's stump speeches at his campaign and post-election rallies. Dueck notes that although Buchanan did not win a single state primary, the fact that he still amassed three million votes was an indication that he had tapped into that dormant vein of Republican conservative nationalism.

Conservative internationalists drowned out Buchanan's views throughout the presidencies of Bill Clinton and George W. Bush. His views hardly fared better in the 2008 and 2012 election campaigns, in which Republicans nominated the internationalists John McCain and Mitt Romney, both of whom lost the election to Barack Obama.

Dueck devotes but two pages to Clinton's eight-year presidency, and quickly turns to that of George W. Bush, who, as Dueck rightly points out, "was initially cautious regarding arguments for multiple military interventions." Indeed, he was highly ambivalent about military adventures. I recall then-Governor Bush asking his foreign policy and national security advisors at a meeting in Austin whether they would have intervened in the Balkans as Clinton had. Apart from myself and one other, all present supported what Clinton had done. Bush's reply was telling: "My head would have stayed out but my heart would have told me to go in."

9/11 profoundly altered the president's views regarding military intervention. Moreover, it brought to the fore his sincere desire to promote democracy worldwide in the most active way possible. Dueck notes that in responding to the attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, and, initially in attacking Iraq as well, "Bush ... tapped into the uncompromising nationalism so dear to American conservatives, redirecting it toward a remarkably high-risk, assertive, idealistic and even Wilsonian strategy within the Middle East."

The Iraq War marked the high point of neoconservative influence, whose muscular, interventionist approach hardly differed from that of Bill Clinton's Balkan interventions or, for that matter, that of Barack Obama in Libya. Bush had chosen not to attack Iraq with anything like the force levels that had marked his father's war with Saddam Hussein, however. As a result, the United States and its coalition partners found themselves confronting an insurrection that morphed into a civil war. Bush ordered a surge of American forces in 2007 that only temporarily stabilized Iraq. As the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan dragged on, public opinion tired of both.

Barack Obama and Donald Trump both capitalized on public disillusion with Middle East wars. There was also growing bipartisan public resistance to America's long-standing support for lowering barriers to free trade. As Dueck notes, in the years leading up to the 2016 election, "perhaps half of Republican voters—contrary to GOP establishment preferences—had turned sour on the benefits of globalization. No Republican presidential candidate had quite captured that frustration in previous cycles." Actually, no Democrat had done so either. It was significant, therefore, that all four candidates who lasted through their respective party primaries—Democrats Hillary Clinton and Bernie Sanders and Republicans Ted Cruz and Donald Trump—all advocated trade restrictions and in particular opposed American participation in the Trans-Pacific Partnership that the Obama administration had initiated. Having defeated Cruz and won the nomination, Trump, more than Clinton, tapped into popular discontent with longstanding internationalist American policies. It proved to be a major factor in his successful run for the presidency.

DUECK ASSERTS that, despite criticism that Trump has no worldview, "[his] public statements during a period of roughly thirty years revealed, if not a fully elaborated ideology, then at least a broad perspective with a certain amount of continuity. And that perspective was one of populist American nationalism." To support his assertion, Dueck cites various Trumpian pronouncements over the years—though he doesn't specify which—such as "we don't win anymore" and "defending nations for nothing." It would have been helpful if Dueck provided citations for these quotes. In fact, the first was a statement that Trump made during his 2016 campaign, the second was from a 1990 interview in *Playboy* magazine—hardly the venue for serious thinking, even if Trump meant what he said.

In any event, during the 2016 campaign Trump articulated what Dueck terms

a kind of Fortress America, separated from transnational dangers of all kinds by a series of walls—tariff walls against foreign exports, security walls against Muslim terrorists, literal walls against Hispanic immigrants ... for longstanding and hardline nationalists like Pat Buchanan this was music to their ears—vindication, after decades in the wilderness.

Trump's views may reflect grassroots Republican opinion, but it is unclear whether his behavior as president—although it appears to reflect several of his campaign promises—fits neatly into any of the three categories that Dueck lays out in his opening chapter. He is certainly no internationalist, yet neither is he a non-interventionist in the Buchanan mold.

Turning to what he terms the "global versus national" debate within the Republican Party, Dueck points out that Barry Goldwater's "hard tug in a conservative nationalist direction," which incorporated criticism of the United Nations, support for military superiority, and opposition to containment, foreign aid, arms control and superpower summitry "indicated the late twentieth century direction of the Republican party." Indeed, Goldwater's orientation foreshadowed that of

John Bolton, whose tenure came to a sudden end precisely because Trump was not prepared to accept his national security advisor's hardline nationalistic approach, especially his opposition to summit diplomacy with America's adversaries.

Dueck defines non-interventionists as having a "deep resistance to American military intervention, bases, and alliances abroad." Yet Trump has backed away from his initial impulse to relegate NATO to the dustbin of history. Nor has he closed down a single American overseas base. Moreover, despite his famous reluctance to criticize Russia's Vladimir Putin, he has not attempted to block the deployment of American forces to the Baltic states. Indeed, he signed an agreement with his Polish counterpart to increase the roughly 4,500 troops stationed there and to provide for a permanent division headquarters on Polish territory—a move that Russia bitterly opposes.

Neither has Trump withdrawn all American troops from the Middle East. Indeed, whereas Obama prematurely withdrew American forces from Iraq, only to redeploy them in the face of the ISIS onslaught, Trump has retained the approximately five thousand troops that were operating in Iraq when Obama left office. Similarly, despite ordering a full-blown study of American military presence in Afghanistan, presumably in order to justify their withdrawal from that country, the United States continues to support more than ten thousand troops there.

It is arguable that Trump most closely reflects the views of what Dueck calls conservative hardliners, since like they, he opposes nation-building efforts, non-military foreign aid, and humanitarian intervention; disdains international institutions; and supports a strong national defense. Yet hardliners also tend to look askance at engagement with adversaries. Trump, on the other hand, seems to relish such engagements far more than he does interactions with allied leaders. It is not just with Putin that Trump seems at ease. He flaunts his personal relationships with Kim Jong-un and China's Xi Jinping, and has reached out to Iran's Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei. He seems to have better relations with Turkey's Recep Tayyip Erdogan than with the leaders of other major NATO allies, although Erdogan's commitment to NATO is questionable given his increasingly warm relations with Putin.

It is probably more accurate to say that Trump has no particular ideological perspective (though the conflation of his business and the national interest regularly draws scrutiny). It is for that reason that there is no telling what the president might decide from one day to the next. Indeed, Dueck quotes Trump's own explanation of his modus operandi "I play it very loose ... I prefer to come to work each day and see what develops ... I ... protect myself by being flexible. I never get too attached to one deal or one approach." As Trump goes on to describe his negotiating approach: "The best thing you can do is deal from strength, and leverage is the biggest strength you have." It is in that context, rather than from ideological underpinnings, that Trump's support for strong defenses—the hallmark of conservative nationalists—must be understood.

On the other hand, a major motivating factor for the president is his determination to deliver on his 2016 campaign promises, especially as from his very first day in office he signaled his intention to run again in the 2020 election. Dueck notes that Trump's hard line on illegal immigration, "while perhaps not foreign policy strictly speaking—certainly had foreign policy implications, and had to be considered part of an overall effort by the president to fulfill campaign promises relating to the security of U.S. borders." Actually, Trump explicitly linked immigration to security. When he declared a national emergency in February 2019 in order to fund a border wall with monies that Congress had appropriated for other accounts, he stated:

“We’re going to confront the national security crisis on our southern border, and we’re going to do it one way or the other.” It was a campaign promise he has remained determined to fulfill, come what may.

Trump’s desire to move forces out of the Middle East and Afghanistan likewise was prompted by his campaign promise to bring “endless wars” to a close. And his berating of NATO allies for not allocating sufficient funds for defense spending reflected another box in his list of campaign promises that he sought to check.

Dueck goes on to describe the team that Trump initially assembled, and some of the first changes he made to that team, which Dueck asserts “led to a somewhat more conventional policy making process.” Because he was writing at about the halfway point of Trump’s term, he mentions that the president dismissed H.R. McMaster and replaced him with John Bolton, but does not offer any in-depth analysis of the implications of Bolton’s appointment. He neither explains why McMaster was fired, nor points out Bolton’s diametrically-opposite approach to policy, notably his essential rejection of the national security strategy that McMaster, and his deputy Nadia Schadlow, who left with McMaster, jointly produced.

Indeed, Bolton was anything if not unconventional. He essentially terminated the long-standing nsc practice of convening senior agency leaders to discuss policy alternatives to present to the president. More tellingly, he advocated for a far more aggressive policy toward North Korea, Iran, and Russia that many observers, and ultimately Trump himself, worried could lead to war.

Dueck also could not have anticipated that Trump would tire of Bolton’s aggressiveness and replace him with Robert O’Brien. O’Brien’s career as an arbitrator and negotiator promised a return to long-standing government coordination processes, as well as a more deliberate approach to dealing with both allies and adversaries. In effect, Trump was to some degree returning to the approach he had jettisoned together with McMaster, whom he once called to say that he was missed, providing further evidence that the president really had no ideological moorings of any kind.

In discussing Trump’s personnel changes, Dueck asserts that despite seeming policy differences among Trump’s top national security officials, “as in any administration, the president was ultimately the one in charge of key foreign policy decisions, and no potential cabinet member or leading advisor would have either accepted or been nominated for the position had they not grasped that fact.” In the context of most administrations, Dueck’s observation would simply be a truism. It is not evident, however, that what was the case in the past applied to the first three years of Trump’s administration.

On the contrary, a number of Trump’s senior appointees believed that they could, at a minimum, moderate the president’s worst impulses. For example, then-Secretary of Defense James Mattis successfully mitigated the president’s hostility toward the NATO alliance. He failed, however, to dissuade the president from attempting to withdraw all troops from Afghanistan or from trashing America’s key allies, and resigned as a result. McMaster likewise attempted to moderate Trump’s negative attitude toward America’s military presence in Afghanistan. He also was far more hostile to Russia than Trump. The president fired him. Bolton tried to pull Trump in the other direction—that is, toward a more aggressive stance vis-à-vis potential adversaries, including the North Koreans, with whom Trump was determined to negotiate. He too was fired. As it happens, Trump has also taken a swipe at O’Brien, observing on Twitter, “National

Security Adviser suggested today that sanctions & protests have Iran ‘choked off,’ will force them to negotiate. Actually, I couldn’t care less if they negotiate.”

LIKE THE person who suffers from the delusion that he or she can change the behavior of a prospective spouse who has already been divorced four times, these men really do seem to have believed that they could influence Trump, in spite of his well-advertised approach to decisionmaking. Only Mike Pompeo, first as director of the Central Intelligence Agency and subsequently as secretary of state, and more recently, O’Brien, seem to have acted in accordance with Dueck’s observation regarding potential advisors and agency heads. It is likely that after three years of Trump’s management style, other potential appointees no doubt will do the same, and it is equally likely that the president will tire of them anyway.

Dueck argues that despite Trump’s preference for better relations with Russia, “the US government could not have mounted a hardline policy against Russia without the president’s own support, or at least his acquiescence.” There is no denying that the Trump administration “continued to bolster its military presence in Poland; increased American sanctions against Russia; reaffirmed its security commitments to NATO members; introduced direct military aid to Ukraine; and made no diplomatic concessions to Russia in Europe.” There is, however, a significant distinction between approval and acquiescence. Trump did not actively promote any of the aforementioned policies. Most notably, he delayed implementing additional sanctions against Russia before finally approving them under bipartisan Congressional pressure.

Trump had little to say about commitments to NATO; it was his senior agency heads who reiterated those commitments. His inaction on Crimea was certainly a concession to Russia “in Europe,” and his withdrawal of forces from Syria a concession to Moscow outside Europe. Finally, while it is true that he agreed to the Congressionally-approved transfer of Javelin anti-tank systems to the beleaguered Ukrainian military, he only did so after a whistleblower provoked a major scandal by alleging that Trump demanded that Ukrainian president Volodymyr Zelensky publicly launch an investigation of his political opponents in exchange for the delivery of the missiles. That demand, and the outcry it provoked, led directly to Trump’s impeachment by the House of Representatives.

Like his review of Trump’s European policy, Dueck’s outline of Trump’s policies with respect to other security issues, along with trade and related commercial issues, have in many cases been overtaken by events, some reflecting well on the president and others less so. The killing of ISIS leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi was certainly a triumphant moment for the president. On the other hand, ISIS has not been defeated, as he has frequently asserted, and it now has a new leader. Trump’s abandonment of the Syrian Kurds has enhanced Russia’s position in Syria. Moscow now operates not only from a recently leased air base in that country, but has established a new helicopter base in northern Syria. Trump’s withdrawal from the Iran nuclear accord has furnished Tehran with an excuse to expand its nuclear development program beyond the limits set out in that agreement. The killing of Quds Force leader Qassim Suleimani may ultimately yet prove to be problematic. Trump’s talks with North Korea’s Kim Jong-un have gone nowhere. His efforts to reach a trade agreement with China have only begun to bear some fruit. His withdrawal from the Trans-Pacific Partnership led both to a new trade agreement among many of the same nations and, for the first time, a modest agreement between most of those nations and China.

Dueck concludes that “the actual foreign policy choices, perspectives, and outcomes of the Trump Administration are in practice a hybrid or mixture of the nationalist with the conservative

internationalist.” In practice, that may be the case, but not necessarily because of any particular orientation on Trump’s part. What Dueck calls “Trump’s recognized unpredictability” appears to be driven primarily, if not solely, by just two factors: to nourish his narcissism and to aggrandize his family’s fortunes—a reality that Dueck completely overlooks, or perhaps deliberately ignores. How else to explain the president’s outsized references to his own greatness; his frequent shout-outs to his golf courses and hotels; China’s granting of trademarks to his daughter Ivanka; or, most recently, after Dueck’s book went to press, the president’s ill-fated attempt to host the G20 summit at his money-losing Trump National Doral Miami hotel and country club?

HAVING DISCUSSED Trump’s policies, Dueck attempts to demonstrate why the president is more a symptom of conservative policy orientation rather than its cause. He cites polling that suggests that in general, Trump’s views regarding not only trade, but immigration, traditional alliances, and military interventions are not all that far removed from those of Americans of all political stripes, though they tend to be harsher and inchoate. Yet, he rightly points out that, in other respects, Trump’s policies do not fully reflect conservative views, which have not radically changed. Thus, Republican voters still tend to be internationalist. They are not-pro Putin. They are not uniformly opposed to free trade any more than Democrats are—and perhaps Democrats take an even harder line on this issue.

Dueck concludes with an outline of his own views as to what a conservative foreign policy should look like. In general, he adopts the conservative internationalist line favored by Eisenhower and Nixon. He is wary of military interventions, nation building, and supranational institutions such as the International Criminal Court and the Human Rights Council.

On the other hand, he rejects “offshore balancing” and disengagement from America’s commitments overseas. He sees Russia, like China, as a major challenge to American supremacy, while not discounting the threats posed by Iran, North Korea, and terrorism. He also emphasizes the importance of employing non-military tools, notably diplomacy, to further American objectives. In all of these respects, he cleaves to the Washington consensus on major security priorities, which H.R. McMaster and his nsc team outlined in their version of the national security strategy. It is a consensus that Trump not only has rejected, but actively ridicules.

Dueck certainly recognizes that public opinion continues to shift toward a more inward-looking American security policy. His book represents an effort to demonstrate that there is an ideological underpinning to Trump’s behavior that is based on that shift. Ultimately, however, Dueck fails to convince. Trump’s behavior has little to do with ideology. It has everything to do with Trump’s self-interest, and for that America continues to pay a very costly price.