



The Trump Administration will be Hawkish

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November 18, 2016

Donald Trump's presidential transition is in transition. With Chris Christie and Mike Rogers out, Trump loyalists bickering with Republican establishment types, a purge of lobbyists, and a president-elect known for helter-skelter management, the incoming administration's policy direction remains unclear. That's especially true of foreign policy, the area where candidate Trump was most at odds with GOP orthodoxy.

That said, I predict, in contrast with many in Washington, that Trump's presidency will prove conventionally hawkish. Trump is likely to jettison his vaguely non-interventionist campaign rhetoric, make nice with allies, and maintain tense relations with Russia and China. He'll support the current wars and may start more.

That outcome would be a relief to Washington's foreign policy establishment, which fears Trump's isolationist tendencies and largely supported Hillary Clinton. But anyone hoping for a more restrained and peaceful foreign policy should be worried by an interventionist President Trump with the weight of U.S. military power behind him.

Trump inherits U.S. wars that span seven foreign nations and powers to start new ones at his discretion. He'll command military forces committed by treaty to defend more than 50 nations, which requires threatening war on their behalf. Contrary to Trump's claims that U.S. armed forces are a "disaster" and in "shambles," they remain far superior to all others and capable of quickly delivering mass destruction virtually anywhere.

Trump's lack of experience in public office, ignorance about foreign policy, and penchant for shifting positions makes it tough to predict how he'll manage these responsibilities. But his personality, positions, and the politics he'll face as president-elect give reasons to doubt that his administration will take an isolationist turn away from wars and allies.

Trump is known for his self-regard, impulsiveness, vindictiveness, and sensitivity to slight. That doesn't mean he'll treat international relations like a celebrity Twitter spat or that he would really bomb Iran because its sailors made rude gestures at ours. But Trump's personality hardly inspires confidence that he'll soberly navigate crises and separate the national interest from personal pique.

Nor did Trump take reliably non-interventionist positions as a candidate. Yes, he attacked Republican rivals and Hillary Clinton for supporting the Iraq and Libya wars. But Trump only opposes past wars. When those wars began, Trump was a cheerleader. He criticized nation-building but praised the Iraq surge, and suggested plundering Iraq's oil. He

sensibly criticized Clinton for wanting to depose Bashar al-Assad in Syria but supports heavier bombing.

Trump's election also boosts the odds of war with Iran. Like most Republicans, Trump says we should withdraw from the Iran nuclear deal. That would likely further destabilize the region and put Iran back on the path to building nuclear weapons. Most Congressional Republicans would then likely advocate bombing. Trump hasn't explicitly agreed, but his rhetoric isn't reassuring.

Trump's views on allies are also friendlier than they initially appear. Musing about exiting the NATO treaty or Asian alliances is certainly at odds with modern foreign policy conventions. But Trump seems to view such talk as a way to get more from allies. He essentially argued in the final debate that unconditional support for allies leaves you without leverage over them. Trump also seems likely to accept minor increases in allied efforts. His false claim that NATO changed counterterrorism policies because of his critique is suggestive. He may be less interested in squeezing the maximum out of allies than in shows of deference and praise for his deal-making prowess.

But what sort of hawk will President Trump be? One possibility is the Republican establishment socializes Trump. That wouldn't affect Trump's stances on Iran and ISIL but would mean getting tougher, not friendlier, with Russia and China, while keeping current alliance commitments. The other possibility is that Trump remains at odds with the establishment and sets a Jacksonian course. That means hostility to international cooperation, including alliance commitments, pragmatic dealings with big rivals, and willingness to attack weaker states and Islamist insurgents.

The second possibility sounds more like the guy we saw during the campaign. Still, I bet that the power of the status quo will make Trump into more of an establishment hawk. Keep in mind that something similar occurred with Presidents Bush and Obama. As a candidate, George W. Bush was skeptical about nation-building. After the September 11 attacks generated broad support for wars and subsequent nation-building efforts, he became their champion. Obama campaigned on his opposition to the Iraq War before retaining most of Bush's security policies, including the scheduled withdrawal of U.S. forces from Iraq, while expanding the war in Afghanistan and drone strikes. Though Obama became a critic of the foreign policy establishment's "playbook," he struggled to escape its conventions.

Three factors constrain presidents from ditching established foreign policy. The first is the continuous nature of policy. Policies outlast those that make them. So do the agencies that execute policies. Diplomats, military officers, and civil servants ensure that commitments endure. With concerted effort, presidents can buck the bureaucracy, but that takes focus that Trump seems to lack. His disinterest in policy detail and inexperience suggest that he'll manage loosely and rely on aides.

Appointees to foreign policy posts are a second constraint. With limited time and thousands of spots to fill, presidents naturally turn to the foreign policy establishment housed in think tanks, law firms, and consultancies. These experts, who are highly interventionist and pro- alliance, regardless of party, gain considerable sway, especially when the president is inexperienced and focused elsewhere. Trump increasingly relied on Washington insiders as his campaign advanced. His defense proposals reflect that. It would be difficult for Trump to find enough non-

interventionist experts to fill key security posts, if he were inclined to try. And if rumors about likely appointees are even part right, he isn't. No one among Rudy Giuliani, Michael Mukasey, Jeff Sessions, Duncan Hunter, Jim Talent, and John Bolton seems likely to favor a turn away from military interventions and alliance commitments.

Finally, there's Congress, whose members naturally defend policies that they helped make. Ideally, Trump's election would alarm legislators into constraining his war-making powers. But the Republican majority didn't do that even with a Democratic president fond of unauthorized bombing campaigns. They instead criticized his passivity. The incoming Congress will press Trump to maintain present alliances and wars, or worse.

Public opinion is a potentially countervailing factor. The American electorate is consistently more skeptical of wars and military hegemony than elites, and its appetite for war remains limited. Still, the public, including Trump voters, is supportive of allies and aggressive efforts to combat ISIL. Moreover, security issues typically lack electoral importance because their direct consequences for voters are limited. Leaders can usually buck public opinion without losing votes. Public opinion then constrains Trump's hawkish moves only if he anticipates high costs.

U.S. institutions — the Electoral College and an increasingly unconstrained presidency — have produced exceptional danger. Unparalleled powers of destruction will soon pass to a novice politician famous for impetuosity, vengefulness, grandiosity, ignorance of policy basics, and contempt for intrusive facts. His rhetoric about wars during the campaign was flippant and bellicose. Checking presidential war powers should now be a bipartisan fixation. But by adopting more conventionally-hawkish views and placating Republican leaders, Trump may avoid restraint.

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