

# NEW YORK POST

## The myth of Trump's 'global retreat'

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An increasing number of observers argue that President Trump is orchestrating fundamental changes to US grand strategy, dismantling the US-led international order and relinquishing America's overseas commitments.

It's not true.

Joe Scarborough recently lamented "America's dangerous retreat from the world," drawing a parallel to the isolationism of the inter-war period. "Under the banner of 'America First,'" reports Evan Osnos in The New Yorker, "President Trump is reducing US commitments abroad."

Misplaced as it is, this criticism isn't cut from whole cloth. Last year the Trump administration abruptly withdrew from the Trans-Pacific Partnership trade deal and the Paris Climate Accord, and has also approved cuts in funding for foreign aid and the United Nations. Trump himself has contributed to the view of America's retreat from the world with his erratic tweets and his campaign statements decrying "globalism."

Though White House officials are quick to deny accusations of retreat, they do claim they're being more selective. National Security Adviser H.R. McMaster says the Trump approach differs from the "consensus view . . . that engagement overseas is an unmitigated good, regardless of the circumstances." Instead, "there are problems that are maybe both intractable and of marginal interest to the American people, that do not justify investments of blood and treasure."

That's eminently reasonable. But it doesn't accurately describe Trump's foreign policy, which hasn't backed away from any theater in which the US military was committed or engaged at the time of his inauguration. In some respects, Trump is more interventionist than his predecessors.

Just like under Barack Obama, and George W. Bush and Bill Clinton before him, the United States continues to guarantee the defense of almost 60 nations around the world in formal treaty arrangements, along with many more tacit agreements throughout the Middle East and Asia. We're still forward-deployed all over the world, with over 250,000 troops stationed at 800 military bases and installations in some 70 countries.

In Europe, Trump's rocky personal relationship with many traditional allies hasn't upended the US commitment to NATO. In fact, NATO has expanded: Trump welcomed Montenegro to the alliance in April. And last month, the president went beyond his predecessor's interventionist

impulses in Ukraine by approving the delivery of lethal arms to battle Russian-backed separatists.

In the Middle East, Trump has increased the number of US boots on the ground by more than 30 percent. That doesn't include Afghanistan, where he ordered roughly 4,000 additional troops to go and fight. More bombs are being dropped in Iraq, Syria, Afghanistan, Libya, Somalia, Pakistan and Yemen.

Trump even ordered airstrikes against the Bashar al-Assad regime in retaliation for chemical-weapons use. The strike didn't produce any tactical or humanitarian benefit, though it was intended to reinforce America's role as policeman of the world.

While Trump has threatened to back out of the Iran nuclear deal, he hasn't followed through yet. And even if he does, he favors greater US involvement in containing Iranian influence in the region, which hardly constitutes a retreat from the traditional US posture.

In Asia, Trump hasn't reduced America's postwar role. Rhetoric aside, his administration's approach to North Korea, and to Asia more generally, is straight out of the traditional DC playbook. In his National Security Strategy, Trump singled out China as our greatest geopolitical competitor. And the president has prioritized North Korea as a threat by reaffirming the US commitment to South Korea and pushing for international sanctions.

So why do people have it so wrong? The problem comes from taking Trump's rantings too seriously. His occasional rhetoric suggesting a reduced global role for the United States is contradicted by his actions.

He isn't guided by any cohesive foreign-policy "vision" beyond knee-jerk impulses to project toughness. This means much of US foreign policy will be relegated to the professional national-security apparatus beneath Trump, which doesn't differ fundamentally from preceding administrations.

Trump hasn't forfeited America's global leadership. On the world stage, his is a new flavor of the same dish. America is still playing the futile role of global cop, still reigns as the only superpower with a globe-straddling military presence and is still picking fights in distant regions remote to US national-security interests. The fact that it is Donald Trump at the helm of all this is fooling observers into thinking more has changed than actually has.

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