Trump To Pick Foreign Policy Realist As Afghanistan Ambassador

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According to anonymous Wall Street Journal sources, President Trump is set to pick William Ruger as the U.S. ambassador to Afghanistan, in a move that would have major consequences for U.S. foreign policy and meaningless wars across the globe.

Ruger, a scholar at the Cato Institute and a vice president for research at the Charles Koch Institute, is also an Afghanistan veteran and a naval reservist. He is a dyed-in-the-wool conservative realist who has been a consistent voice for a troop pullout from not just Afghanistan, but also from the Middle East, including Syria and Iraq.

This comes after President Trump selected retired Army Col. Douglas Macgregor as ambassador to Germany, and shows an elevation of foreign policy realists in an administration that has often struggled to manage the president's nationalist vision with bureaucratic inertia in Washington.

The nomination has not been officially declared but has been widely reported. Ruger has been tight-lipped about the process and according to the Wall Street Journal has undergone vetting for the last three months, corresponding with his Twitter silence. When I reached out, he refused to confirm or deny the nomination.

This move would have wider political implications. Ever since Trump's campaign speech in South Carolina in 2016, there has been a tension between his vision and the broader party and governmental establishment. As Tucker Carlson's book pointed out, there was a palpable shock when Trump thundered that humanitarian wars and especially the Iraq War were a once-in-a-century mistake. Every opposition to Trump, from the Never Trump movement to the current resistance, spawned since then.

But the Trumpian retrenchment instinct never really shaped policy. There are a few reasons for that, including his lack of knowledge about diplomatic and military processes, as well as his overarching vision, which often collided with the details of policy formation. Primary among them was the president's inexperience in policy, which hampered his choice of personnel.

Personnel is policy in this business, and every time the president wanted something, the perma-bureaucracy scrambled it. Consider how many times Trump wanted to get out of Syria, Iraq, and Afghanistan, as well as all those times he was hesitant to start a war with Iran and Venezuela. At every step, he was thwarted in his attempts to channel and reshape an American grand strategy, although he did manage not to start a new war in the last four years.

Ruger has been a consistent voice about pulling troops out from endless wars and other assorted policing missions. As a realist, Ruger is opposed to imperial overstretch. I met him in DC last year at the national conservatism conference, and he was vocal then about his opposition to the continued war in Afghanistan. He has also repeatedly written about it, most recently in May, saying that "President Trump has correctly concluded that a full and speedy withdrawal of our troops is imperative. Our national interest isn't served by continuing to wage a futile battle but by exiting it."

While the United States has supported a peace deal with the Taliban, Ruger remained unconvinced that a deal is necessary for the United States to get out. Ultimately, to him, it is about serving American interests by leaving a bloody quagmire.

If Ruger's nomination news is true, and it seems to be, then that points to two things. First, Trump is serious about ending stupid wars. For all his rhetorical flaws, he understands that America needs to stop wasting trillions in policing the globe and ensuring a sexual revolution in the Middle East and Asia, guarded by American blood and treasure.

In fact, one can causally link the repeated uncorroborated leaks against Trump to an effort to stop him from ending wars. Of all the presidents in the last quarter-century, he faced the most resistance from entrenched DC interests, but he still seems to be serious about keeping his campaign promise of ending wars.

Second, it highlights that Trump has understood or at least grasped that he has been frequently thwarted by some of his team. Historically, politics has always been about a candidate selling his vision to the masses. If that vision gets rewarded and he gets elected, he then proceeds to choose personnel who can implement that particular vision.

Lately, however, in both the United Kingdom and the United States, that has been in reverse. In both countries, a steady perma-bureaucracy and their allies in media and academia have ensured a muscular globalist liberal-internationalism despite who wins the nation's top election. The resistance to Trump and Brexit are both the logical conclusion of this Praetorian politics.

Ruger and Macgregor's elevation would change that dynamic to a more traditional form of politics. The two are also aligned with broader American public opinion, which opposes foreign overstretch, utopian wars, and allied free-riding. Both will naturally face resistance during their confirmation process, but the nominations are themselves a welcome change toward reversing a sclerotic post-Cold War foreign policy.