

The World Hates Trump - and the US Needs to Know

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This article was published in January 2016, a year before the inauguration of Donald Trump as president of the United States.

Who the US elects is the world's business, and our people and Parliament have every right to take a stand, argues Salman Shaheen

Everyone knows what Donald Trump thinks about the world. How he wants to build a wall to keep out the Mexicans, who he views largely as drug traffickers and rapists. How he wants to ban all Muslims from entering the US.

Extreme wealth, power and the platform afforded him by the US presidential race have beamed what would otherwise have remained the rantings of a backyard bigot into homes across the globe. Not surprisingly, a lot of people don't much like what they hear. Moreover, they are terrified that they could be hearing the pronouncements of the soon-to-be most powerful person in the world.

Following Trump's call to ban Muslims from the US a British petition to ban Trump from our shores swiftly attracted over half a million signatures, becoming the most popular government petition in British history and earning itself a debate in Parliament.

Despite the overwhelming revulsion MPs from across the political spectrum displayed towards Trump's opinions, there was no vote. Of course, Britain was never actually going to approve a ban on a man with whom it may be forced into a special relationship next year. Nor should it. As a countryman of Trump's once said, sunlight is the best disinfectant.

Freedom of speech is vital. Trump is free to air his racist views and the world is free to call him to account for them.

Many Trump supporters expressed a range of emotions from bafflement to outright hostility when they heard another country's parliament was debating the idea of banning their chosen rabble-rouser. In supporting last week's debate on Russia Today, I was subjected to a number of outright racist comments from Trump's tag-alongs. One said with a name like Salman Shaheen I couldn't really be British — perhaps I too should release my birth certificate to silence the tin-hat birthers.

Trump himself called the campaign to ban him an "absurd waste of time." Others said Britain has no right to comment on US internal affairs, that for MPs to pass judgement on what should be the preserve of the US democratic system was "neocolonialist paternalism."

The debate was not a waste of time. And it is absolutely right that British politicians and

people — and indeed people from all over the world — should voice their opinions on Trump. The US is the most powerful nation in the world. Who leads it and what they say and do affects us all.

We might not have a vote in November, but we will be profoundly affected nonetheless. Equally, a US president — especially one who may be prone to insulting half its population even before he's dropped his first bomb — affects their country's global standing.

Global opinion of the US fell sharply even among allies as George W Bush lit fires all over the Middle East. In 2000, 78 per cent of Germans held a favourable view of the US according to the Department of State. By Bush's final year in office in 2008, this had fallen to just 33 per cent. The picture is similar in France, falling from 62 per cent to 42 per cent, and even in Britain it fell from 83 per cent to 53 per cent.

Turkey saw an even more marked decline, down from 52 per cent to 12 per cent, and at the starts of the Iraq war in 2003, only 1 per cent of Jordanians had a positive view of the US. Generally, global opinion of the US improved markedly once Barack Obama took office. It is, therefore, vital that in choosing their next president US voters consider his or her standing on the world stage.

And what is Trump's standing? Unsurprisingly he has been universally condemned south of the border in Mexico, which, like Britain, is another key US partner. The nation's newspapers rounded on him and its richest man, Carlos Slim, pulled the plug on a real estate project with Trump on the back of the Republican hopeful's unflattering appraisal of Slim's countrymen. In the aftermath, Trump pinatas experienced a surge in popularity.

North of the border, Canadians have been hanging their heads. "How could such a buffoon become the top candidate to lead the party of Lincoln and Eisenhower into the next election for US president?" wrote Marcus Gee of Canada's Globe and Mail in August, as Trump was surging in the polls.

L Muthoni Wanyeki, Amnesty International's regional director for East Africa, describes him as "arrogant, crass and uneducated," decrying his offensive views on immigrants and women and the support he enjoys from white supremacists.

In France he has been likened to former National Front leader Jean-Marie Le Pen. And French Prime Minister Manuel Valls accused him of stoking hatred after his comments about banning Muslims from the US.

Unsurprisingly, Trump's comments did little to endear him to Muslim nations. "Hate rhetoric" was how Egypt's official religious body described Trump's pronouncement. In Pakistan, another vital US ally, human rights lawyer Asma Jahangir accused him of bigotry and ignorance and said: "Although we are not as advanced as the US, we have never elected such people to power in Pakistan." Even Benjamin Netanyahu — who has vigorously continued apartheid policies in Israel — condemned Trump's remarks.

In a year's time Trump could be the man with his finger on the nuclear button. Trump could have to negotiate an end to the Syrian civil war and a de-escalation of tensions with Russia. Trump could have to oversee the detentes with Cuba and Iran. Trump could have to work towards a lasting and equitable peace between Israel and Palestine. Trump could have to steer the global economy through the turbulent waters of China's slowing growth. Can he be

trusted to do this? At the end of the day, only US voters will decide. But they ignore the world's opinion at their peril.

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