

Trump's "America First" National Security Strategy (NSS) Imperils the US and the World

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Last week, with great fanfare, Donald Trump rolled out his new [National Security Strategy](#) (NSS). Its guiding theme is "America First." An analysis of the 55-page document, however, reveals a program that renders the United States more unpopular and vulnerable to external threats.

Trump's plan takes Barack Obama's policy of "American exceptionalism" to a new level. In his speech accompanying the NSS's release, Trump stated,

"America has been among the greatest forces for peace and justice in the history of the world."

Yet Trump has not only continued but also escalated the Bush-Obama wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, dropped Tomahawk missiles on Syria, threatened North Korea and Iran, intensified airstrikes against Muslim countries, and fanned the flames of conflict in the Middle East.

Trump's NSS stresses military might but makes scant reference to diplomacy. His administration is [building 10 new aircraft carriers](#) worth \$13 billion each as a counterweight to China, and expanding the US nuclear weapons program to the tune of \$1 trillion over the next 30 years.

Nuclear weapons are "the foundation of our strategy to preserve peace and stability by deterring aggression against the United States, our allies, and our partners," according to the NSS. But Trump has [dangerously escalated tensions with North Korea](#), providing that country with increasing incentives to develop nuclear weapons that reach around the world.

And by refusing to recertify Iran's compliance with the nuclear agreement, in spite of the UN International Atomic Energy Agency's finding to the contrary, Trump is further imperiling peace.

The NSS's brief mention of working with international organizations is belied by the Trump administration's abiding contempt for the United Nations. The UN Charter was created in 1945 by the countries of the world to collectively restore and maintain international peace and security.

As with Trump's domestic program, the NSS makes no pretense of concern for human rights in other countries. This is evidenced in practice by [Trump's unwavering support for Israel's](#) brutal occupation of Palestinian lands, including, most recently, his declaration that Jerusalem is the capital of Israel. The NSS accurately states,

“for generations the conflict between Israel and the Palestinians has been understood as the prime irritant preventing peace and prosperity in the region.”

But the NSS minimizes Israel’s central responsibility for the conflict, stating,

“the threats from radical jihadist terrorist organizations and the threat from Iran are creating the realization that Israel is not the cause of the region’s problems.”

In defiance of nearly all other nations, Trump’s Jerusalem declaration endangers world peace. Indeed, last week, the UN Security Council voted 14-1, with a US veto, to condemn Trump’s characterization of Jerusalem as the capital of Israel. And in a rarely used procedure called Uniting for Peace (UFP), the UN General Assembly overwhelmingly followed suit. UFP allows the General Assembly to take measures to restore international peace and security when the Security Council is unable or unwilling to act. By utilizing UFP, which requires a two-thirds vote, this resolution has greater force than other General Assembly decisions. The International Court of Justice upheld the legality of UFP in its 1962 advisory opinion.

Richard Falk, former UN Special Rapporteur for Palestinian Human Rights, [told Truthout](#) that,

“What is already evident on the basis of [Trump’s Jerusalem] decision itself is the severe damage done to the global and regional leadership reputation of the United States.”

While setting forth the goal of being an “energy-dominant nation,” the NSS gives short shrift to “the importance of environmental stewardship.” [Obama’s 2015 NSS](#), on the other hand, correctly stated that climate change was an “urgent and growing threat to our national security.” Yet Trump’s NSS does not recognize the threat of climate change. And in spite of increasingly extreme and unseasonal weather events such as recent hurricanes and wildfires, Trump has alarmingly and irresponsibly [pulled out of the Paris climate accord](#).

The four pillars of the NSS, according to Trump, are protecting the US homeland, promoting US prosperity, achieving peace through strength and advancing US influence in the world.

Pillar I: Protect the Homeland

The NSS singles out unauthorized immigration as a threat to the homeland, but also implicitly attacks authorized immigration as well. It states that residency and citizenship decisions “should be based on individuals’ merits and their ability to positively contribute to US society, rather than chance or extended family connections.” This policy leads to the separation of families and makes us no safer.

Pillar I stresses securing our borders “through the construction of a border wall,” embodying Trump’s campaign mantra. There is no evidence that an expensive border wall will secure US borders or make us safer.

“The United States rejects bigotry and oppression,” according to Pillar I. Yet Trump has instituted three iterations of a [Muslim ban](#), which would exclude from the United States immigrants from six Muslim-majority countries, as well as North Korea and Venezuela.

The Trump administration has also drastically cut back on accepting refugees from Syria, whose people are suffering from a prolonged, tragic civil war.

Pillar I pledges the US government will “help communities recover and rebuild” after natural and other disasters. Yet Trump has failed to meaningfully respond to the devastation wrought by the recent hurricane in Puerto Rico, which is part of the United States.

Pillar II: Promote American Prosperity

One subsection of Pillar II, called “Reduce the Debt Through Fiscal Responsibility,” cites “modernizing our tax system” as a way to “make the existing debt more serviceable.” Ironically, at Trump’s urging, the GOP-controlled Congress passed a radical tax overhaul that will reportedly add \$1.5 trillion ([or more](#)) to the debt in the next 10 years. This is the height of irresponsibility.

Moreover, the United Nations has just conducted an investigation of extreme poverty in the United States, with disturbing results. It concluded that the prevalence of poverty and inequality “are shockingly at odds with the [US’s] immense wealth and its founding commitment to human rights.” The report documented a rise in poverty that disproportionately affects women and people of color as well as many white Americans. Homelessness, police surveillance, criminalization of poverty and unsafe sanitary practices were also flagged as problems.

Yet documentation of poverty in the United States is conspicuously absent from Trump’s NSS. In fact, Pillar II cites “unnecessary regulations” as problematic. [Deregulation](#) serves the interest of the wealthy. Since he took office, Trump has [eliminated](#) hundreds of regulations that protect health, safety and workers.

Pillar III: Preserve Peace Through Strength

This pillar identifies China, Russia, Iran, North Korea and jihadist terrorist groups as “actively competing against the United States and our allies and partners.” It stresses diplomacy “short of military involvement” as “indispensable.” Yet Trump castigated Secretary of State Rex Tillerson for pursuing diplomacy with North Korea while escalating the war of words and pushing punishing sanctions against that emerging nuclear power. Although Pillar III pays lip service to the “law of armed conflict,” Trump’s actions have [violated those rules](#).

Pillar IV: Advance American Influence

Pillar IV states, “Around the world, nations and individuals admire what America stands for. We treat people equally and value and uphold the rule of law.” But since taking office, Trump has celebrated white supremacists, pardoned racist Sheriff Joe Arpaio and ended the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program. He has also consistently [violated US and international law](#).

The United States sells weapons and provides military advisers to Saudi Arabia, which enables the Saudis’ illegal bombing and medical/food/fuel blockade of Yemen, the poorest Arab country. This has resulted in famine and an outbreak of cholera affecting millions of Yemenis, particularly children. California Democratic Representatives Ted Lieu and Ro Khanna both warned that such actions expose US officials to criminal liability for aiding and abetting Saudi war crimes in Yemen.

This pillar admits that the UN “can help contribute to solving many of the complex problems in the world.” It emphasizes that the “United States supports the peaceful resolution of disputes under international law.” Yet the administration reacted to the Security Council and General Assembly’s rejections of Trump’s Jerusalem-as-capital-of-Israel declaration by threatening countries that voted against it with loss of foreign aid. Moreover, Trump threatened to cut off funding to the UN itself, the most significant peacekeeping organization in the world.

Resist Trump’s Agenda

Increasing disillusionment with Trump’s policies and, most recently, his unpopular new tax bill, may lead to the loss of a Republican majority in one or both houses of Congress in the 2018 midterm elections. It is incumbent on us all to continue and escalate our resistance to the Trump regime. The future of the United States and indeed, the world, depends on it.

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