

President Trump's Presidency: Results and Perspectives

James Petras

Introduction

We need an objective evaluation of the President's foreign and domestic policies – the means, the goals, their results and consequences. The Trump performance requires we discuss the style and substance of foreign and domestic policies.

We will ignore the fly swatting by Trump critics who ply peripheral issues – the state investigation of the fading Russian conspiracy tales--- and focus on strategic issues that purport to transform global economic, political and social relations.

'Trump at Work': Foreign Policy

President Trump has a strategy and he works hard at realizing it.

High on Trump's agenda is, first and foremost, asserting US global supremacy by word and deed.

In pursuit of world power, he utilizes multiple weapons: he believes in the magic powers of weapons and words. He asserts that prior Presidents 'were weak and allowed others to exploit us'. Today, under Trump's leadership, he claims we are strong and flexing our power everywhere at all time.

How does the President reveal strength? Through multiple wars, severe sanctions, increased military spending and greater concentration of wealth, in strategic

locations. As a result, according to Trump, we intimidate rivals, competitors and adversaries.

Trump cites numerous examples. In Syria, we occupy regions, build new military bases, hire and arm more mercenaries and drop larger bombs on more Syrian cities. Trump boasts that he weakens Iran by ending the nuclear agreement, increasing sanctions precipitating an imminent collapse and regime change. Trump trumpets the success of the economic trade war against China and the downfall of Russia by encircling them with nuclear missiles, military bases and economic sanctions.

Trump hails new political successes and military allies in Latin America. Argentina, Brazil, Colombia, Chile and Ecuador are viewed as Trump's market successes and providing a vassal army to overthrow the governments of Venezuela, Cuba and Nicaragua.

Trump brags about his success in 'renegotiating' NAFTA, renaming it and claiming more favorable trade 'deals' with Mexico and Canada.

The European Union and each of its members have felt the wrath of Trump's threat of trade wars, and his demands for greater military contributions to NATO.

He has demanded the Germans buy US oil and gas instead of Russian; he threatens to sanction European corporations who dare to abide by agreements with Iran; Trump boasts of hundred-billion-dollar arms sale with Saudi Arabia, while affirming US supremacy in the Middle East and North Africa.

President Trump, according to his bluster and boisterous self-acclaim, has won every war, conquered all competitors and has laid the groundwork for an ‘American Century’.

How many of Trump’s foreign policy twitters correspond to the real world and how many are empty-handed ejaculations?

President Trump: Claims and Reality

Trump’s foreign policy strategy is mostly bluster than conquest, more boisterous than business, more bluff than success.

Let’s start with Russia. Trump’s sanctions and military encirclement have failed to weaken Russia. Berlin deepens trade ties with the Kremlin – buys more oil and gas, builds pipelines and affirms EU autonomy in dealing with Russia. Military encirclement involves third rate Baltic partners, and missile bases stationed in Poland. In contrast Russia has deepened multi-billion-dollar military and economic agreements with China, a world power.

Russia has responded to Trump’s ending of nuclear missile agreements by building superior weaponry. By any measure, Russia has defeated Trump’s sanctions and military threats.

Despite Trump’s bombast about ‘squeezing China’ with tariffs, China’s trade surplus with the US has increased, while the US trade deficit has risen.

The US has grown by 2.8%, China's by 6.5%. The US has failed to convince any of its Asian allies to join its trade war against China. On the contrary, US so-called trade war has encouraged Asia to replace US exporters. While Trump's economic advisers threaten Wall Street's largest bankers to stop making billion dollar deals with China, most have brushed Trump off. The bankers ignore Trump's 'trade war' because profits count more than gaseous rhetoric.

Saudi Arabia signs a \$110 billion-dollar military agreement with Trump and then buys only 10% . . . 'fake deals' to paraphrase the President.

Trump's claim that the Saudis are a great ally ,yet it boycotts Qatar, which houses the biggest US military base in the region. Israel, Trump's Middle East ally, ignores Trump's economic sanctions with Russia and trade war with China, two of its biggest high-tech trade partners.

The US wars are losing propositions. Afghan rebels control most of the country, surround the provincial capitals and force US generals to seek withdrawal. US allies in Syria have retreated. He relies on Kurdish separatists who have their own agenda, not Trump's.

In Latin America, Trump collects kudos from far-right regimes in Brazil and Argentina which hover on the verge of economic collapse, social crisis and political upheaval.

Domestic Success of Dubious Value

Trump trumpets his big tax cut for billionaires with overseas holdings. He claims it is a success story – creating jobs and producing growth. In fact, over three quarters of the returned profits have resulted in buy-backs increasing corporate dividends not investment in productive activity,

Trump's trade war with China has not added jobs – it has added cost for consumers through higher prices.

His pro-business policies have strengthened the leverage of corporations in securing multi-billion-dollar concessions from local and state governments. Jeff Bezos the multi-billion dollar owner of Amazon, received over \$10 billion dollars in tax exemptions, in addition to state financed concessions.

In effect Trump's large scale, long-term income transfers benefit the rich over the poor, increase inequalities and lowering public funds for education, health and welfare.

Trump's opposition to public health for all, international climate change agreements, national infrastructure investments and regulation of bank oversight, has increased the risk of natural disasters , financial crises and transport breakdowns.

Despite his retrograde domestic program, Trump retains electoral support and does not face an immediate political threat ---for one basic reason: The Democrats offer no alternatives.

The corporate Democrats who lead the Party, back all of his retrograde policies: they support Trump's increases in military spending; support tax reduction for the rich; oppose a national health program for all.

Moreover, during Democratic President Obama's two terms in office, trillions of dollars bailed out the biggest banks while 3 million households suffered foreclosures; minimum wages remained below the poverty level; inequalities widened, as did racial disparities.

Under President Obama 2 million immigrants were seized and expelled, establishing a precedent for Trump's anti-asylum policies.

In other words, Trump's policies are a continuation and exacerbation of the Obama regime.

Conclusion

Trump's domestic and foreign policy demagogically capitalized on the failures of the Democratic Party's corporate socio-economic programs and multiple wars.

As a result, Trump's exploited popular discontent and attracted big business support by promising lower taxes and the end of regulations. In practice Trump's aggressive foreign and domestic policies contributed and added to Washington's isolation and decline. None of Trump's original objectives have been achieved. The US has multiplied adversaries who have grown stronger and more unified. Washington has lost established markets without gaining new ones. His original electoral support has

declined without gaining new adherents. Trump's reliable 'allies' (Israel, Saudi Arabia, Germany, etc.) have undermined his aggressive trade policies to China and Russia. Anti-Iran sanctions have exempted the biggest buyers of Teheran's oil exports. If Trump has failed to secure his domestic and foreign policy objectives these failures have not led to any major loss of influence.

Europe is internally divided and unable to formulate any consequential alternatives. Latin America faces economic crises which precludes any joint military intervention despite 'paper agreements'.

But the biggest failure is Trump's policies to China. Each and everyone of Trump's major Asian allies has retained and increased trade agreements with Beijing. Trump's premature celebration of diplomatic victory over North Korea has evaporated. North Korea has returned to and extended ties with China and Russia.

Trump's strategic decisions have failed to secure his objectives. Not a single world-shaking change has taken place. Trump's generals may abandon Afghanistan but no thanks to the Democrats or Europeans.

Trump trade wars with China has failed to secure more jobs in America, but his Wall Street critics have negotiated bigger and more lucrative financial deals.

In a word, Trump's failures have not led to greater and better conditions for global markets, nor ended wars or improved living standards. Nevertheless many progressives are pleased by Trump's failures even though they are not beneficiaries.