



BRIEFING PAPER

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Donald Trump on foreign and defence policy

By Ben Smith
Louisa Brook-Holland
Rob Page



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Summary

It is difficult to predict the effect of the Trump victory on US foreign policy. As candidate for the Republican ticket and for the Presidency, Donald Trump has said conflicting things, and his position has varied depending on what audience he addressed, getting more moderate as he clinched the nomination and then secured his victory.

Nevertheless it seems reasonable to expect radical change in US foreign relations: Trump has said for some time that he admires Putin's leadership qualities and has advocated a reassessment of US/Russian relations.

The nuclear deal with Iran will face a hostile Presidency and Congress and could be derailed, although the fact that it is backed by a UN Security Council Resolution makes it more complicated for the US simply to repeal it.

Trump called an end to policies of regime change and state-building. Autocratic regimes in Sunni majority countries will welcome a more critical approach to Iran, but have not welcomed Trump's anti-Muslim campaign rhetoric and may be even more doubtful of the US security umbrella than they were under the Obama Administration.

Trump has made some contradictory remarks about defence: he has said that he will spend what it takes to restore clear dominance for US armed forces yet at other times has blamed other countries' reliance on the US for defence as "bankrupting" the country.

He has described NATO as "obsolete" and has called into question whether the US would automatically respond to the invasion of NATO members – the basis of the alliance. Reducing US commitment to NATO and, implicitly, ending the US role of world policeman would be one of the biggest changes to US foreign policy since the Second World War.

While Trump has promised to modernise the US nuclear arsenal he has spoken against nuclear proliferation. But sometimes seemed to suggest that Japan should get a nuclear arsenal to defend against the North Korea threat.

1. Russia

1.1 What he said

Ukraine

In 2014, Trump described Putin's moves in Ukraine as "so smart."¹ In the same interview, Trump appeared to deny Russian intervention in Ukraine, then excuse it:

He's not going into Ukraine, OK? Just so you understand. He's not going to go into Ukraine, all right? You can mark it down, you can put it down, you can take it anywhere you want.

Interviewer: "Well he's already there isn't he?" Trump went on:

OK, well he's there in a certain way, but I'm not there yet. [...] The people of Crimea, from what I've heard, would rather be there than where they are.

I don't like what's happening with Ukraine. But that's really a problem that affects Europe a lot more than it affects us. And they should be leading some of this charge.

[...] I wouldn't care. If [Ukraine] goes in [to NATO], great. If it doesn't go in, great.²

Trump accused Germany of "sitting back," taking oil and gas from Russia while the US was "leading" on Ukraine.

Vladimir Putin

In April 2014 Trump praised Putin:

We just left Moscow. He could not have been nicer. He was so nice and so everything. But you have to give him credit that what he's doing for that country in terms of their world prestige is very strong.³

"He could not have been nicer"

In Scotland, in July 2015 he said:

I think I would just get along very well with Vladimir Putin. I just think so. People say what do you mean? I just think we would. Obama and him, he hates Obama. Obama hates him.⁴

In September 2016 Trump said:

(Putin) has very strong control over a country. Now, it's a very different system and I don't happen to like that system. But certainly in that system he's been a leader far more than our president has been a leader.⁵

¹ ['Trump Called Russia's Invasion Of Ukraine "So Smart" In 2014'](#), *Buzzfeed, News*, 2 August 2016

² [Interview with NBC](#), 16 August 2016

³ ['Donald Trump on how to revive the US economy'](#), *Fox News*, 12 April 2014

⁴ ['Donald Trump: I'd get on 'very well' with Putin if I were president'](#), *Daily Telegraph*, 31 July 2015

⁵ ['Trump: Putin has been a leader "far more" than Obama'](#), *CNBC*, 7 September 2016

Cooperation on terrorism

I also believe that we could find common ground with Russia in the fight against ISIS. They too have much at stake in the outcome in Syria, and have had their own battles with Islamic terrorism.⁶

He said that relations would improve from a position of US strength:

Russia, for instance, has also seen the horror of Islamic terrorism. I believe an easing of tensions, and improved relations with Russia from a position of strength only is possible, absolutely possible.⁷

1.2 Analysis

It is now widely accepted that Russian intelligence services were involved in the hacking of Democratic Party and Clinton campaign emails,⁸ aiming to help the Trump campaign.

Most analysts think the Kremlin welcomed the Trump victory, on the hope that it may mean that US/Russia relations may improve and, particularly, that US support for sanctions over Russia's intervention in Ukraine will be tempered.

Britain's decision to leave the EU has deprived the pro-sanctions side on the EU Council of a powerful advocate. Together, Brexit and Trump could make sanctions relaxation more likely.

Analysts argue that the Kremlin welcomes division between the US and Europe on defence, too after Trump's comments about the obsolescence of NATO.⁹

Arguments with the West might continue to be politically useful to the Kremlin, but the first indications were that Russia's reaction would be to moderate the demonisation of the US and embrace Trump. A Kremlin spokesman said after the victory:

It is phenomenal how close they are to one another when it comes to their conceptual approach to foreign policy. And that is probably a good basis for our moderate optimism that they will at least be able to start a dialogue to start to clear out the Augean stables in our bilateral relations.¹⁰

"phenomenal how close"

Nevertheless, there will be plenty of opportunities for disagreement between Russia and the US. Even if cooperation on fighting terrorism could be fruitful, agreeing on which groups are terrorists will be as difficult as ever.

And although Trump has praised Putin's personal and leadership qualities, a majority of the US public disagrees: only 24% thought he

⁶ [Donald J. Trump's Detailed Plan to Defeat ISIS](#), Speech Youngstown Ohio, 15 August 2016

⁷ [Trump foreign policy speech](#), Center for the National Interest, 27 April 2016

⁸ Jonathan Eyal, ['Russia and Donald Trump'](#), Royal United Services Institute, 10 November 2016

⁹ ['Donald Trump is dismissing NATO as 'obsolete' — and he might be playing right into Russia's hand'](#), *Business Insider*, 24 March 2016

¹⁰ ['Trump's foreign policy approach almost same as that of Putin: Kremlin'](#), *Reuters*, 10 November 2016

has qualities it would be good for a US president to share, according to a poll taken in September 2016.¹¹

1.3 Related Commons Briefing Papers:

[*NATO's military response to Russia: November 2016 update*](#)

[*Russian foreign and security policy*](#), July 2016

[*NATO Summit Warsaw 2016: a primer*](#), July 2016

¹¹ [‘AP-GfK poll shows voter distaste for Putin-style leadership’](#), *Associated Press*, 25 September 2016

2. Middle East

2.1 What he said

Muslims

In November 2015, responding to reporters' questions about registering US-resident Muslims on a database, Trump said: "I would certainly implement that. Absolutely. There should be a lot of systems, beyond databases. We should have a lot of systems."¹²

When asked whether Muslims would be legally obliged to sign into the database, Trump responded, "They have to be — they have to be."

In a statement on his website, Trump called for a "total and complete shutdown of Muslims entering the United States until our country's representatives can figure out what is going on."¹³

ISIS

In a speech in November 2015, Donald Trump said that he would bomb ISIS and the oil-producing infrastructure that helps fund it:

I'd blow up the pipes, I'd blow up the refineries, I'd blow up every single inch—there would be nothing left [...] And I'd bring it on, and I'd take the oil.¹⁴

"I'd take the oil"

On his campaign website, his policy positions sounded more measured:

- Work with our Arab allies and friends in the Middle East in the fight against ISIS.
- Pursue aggressive joint and coalition military operations to crush and destroy ISIS, international cooperation to cut off their funding, expand intelligence sharing, and cyberwarfare to disrupt and disable their propaganda and recruiting.
- Defeat the ideology of radical Islamic terrorism just as we won the Cold War.
- End the current strategy of nation-building and regime change.¹⁵

In a speech in August 2016 Trump called for an international conference on defeating ISIS:

As President, I will call for an international conference focused on this goal. We will work side-by-side with our friends in the Middle East, including our greatest ally, Israel. We will partner with King Abdullah of Jordan, and President Sisi of Egypt, and all others who recognize this ideology of death that must be extinguished.

[...] The fight will not be limited to ISIS. We will decimate Al Qaeda, and we will seek to starve funding for Iran-backed Hamas

¹² ['Donald Trump's Plan for a Muslim Database Draws Comparison to Nazi Germany'](#), *NBC News*, 20 November 2015

¹³ [Donald J Trump Statement on preventing Muslim immigration](#), 7 December 2015

¹⁴ ['Trump in his own words: highlights of a 95-minute rant'](#), *Des Moines Register*, 13 November 2015

¹⁵ [Trump for President 2016, foreign policy](#)

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and Hezbollah. We can use existing UN Security Council resolutions to apply new sanctions.¹⁶

Iran

[President Obama] has treated Iran with tender love and care and made it a great power. Iran has, indeed, become a great, great power in just a very short period of time, because of what we've done. All of the expense and all at the expense of Israel, our allies in the region and very importantly, the United States itself.¹⁷

Trump criticised the nuclear deal as a “disaster” and “the worst deal ever negotiated.”

During the last five years, Iran has perpetuated terror attacks in 25 different countries on five continents. They've got terror cells everywhere, including in the Western Hemisphere, very close to home. Iran is the biggest sponsor of terrorism around the world. And we will work to dismantle that reach.¹⁸

“They've got terror cells everywhere”

The “25 different countries” figure came from the Israeli Government, according to [Politifact](#), a fact-checking site.

Trump made aggressive comments about the Iranian navy in 2016:

With Iran, when they circle our beautiful destroyers with their little boats and they make gestures at our people that they shouldn't be allowed to make, they will be shot out of the water.¹⁹

Egypt

Trump described Abdel Fateh al-Sisi, Egyptian President, as “a fantastic guy.” “You know when you have good chemistry with people. There was a good feeling between us.”²⁰

Gulf States

“Can you imagine, we're defending Saudi Arabia? And with all of the money they have... they're not paying?”²¹

Israeli-Palestinian conflict

Trump's campaign was characterised by unambiguous support for Israel. Delivering a major foreign policy speech in April 2016, Trump said:

Israel, our great friend and the one true democracy in the Middle East, has been snubbed and criticized by an Administration that lacks moral clarity. Just a few days ago, Vice President Biden again criticized Israel – a force for justice and peace – for acting as an impediment to peace in the region.

President Obama has not been a friend to Israel. He has treated Iran with tender love and care and made it a great power in the

¹⁶ [Donald J. Trump's Detailed Plan to Defeat ISIS](#), (Speech, Youngstown Ohio, 15 August 2016)

¹⁷ [Trump foreign policy speech](#), Center for the National Interest, 27 April 2016

¹⁸ [Trump speech to American Israel Public Affairs Committee](#), 21 March 2016

¹⁹ ['Trump on Iran ship behavior: 'They will be shot out of the water''](#), *CNN*, 10 September 2016

²⁰ ['Trump praises Egypt's al-Sisi: 'He's a fantastic guy''](#), *Politico*, 22 September 2016

²¹ ['The first Trump-Clinton presidential debate transcript, annotated'](#), *Washington Post*, 26 September 2016

Middle East – all at the expense of Israel, our other allies in the region and, critically, the United States.²²

2.2 Analysis

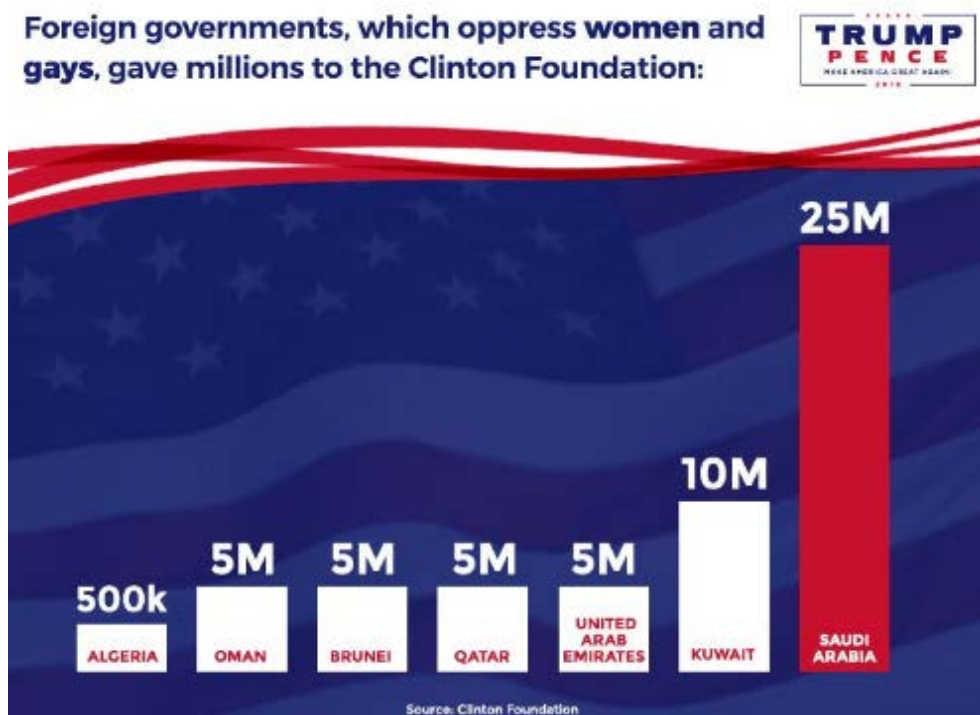
Assembling a coalition against ISIS

Seeking to boost “joint and coalition” military action against ISIS may not sit easily with campaign criticisms of some Muslim nations:

Instead of condemning the oppression of women and gays in many Muslim nations, and the systematic violations of human rights, or the financing of global terrorism, President Obama tried to draw an equivalency between our human rights record and theirs.²³

“oppression of women and gays”

On his website Donald Trump posts a chart showing some Gulf State donations to the Clinton Foundation:



Cooperation with Muslim states in the region may be undermined by Trump’s comments about preventing Muslims from entering the US and registering those already there.

On the other hand, some autocratic governments will welcome Trump’s election, despite his hostile comments about Muslims. His calls for stability, his rejection of regime change and his perceived readiness to do deals with other autocrats may all be appealing.

His criticisms of the deal with Iran will go down very well with Sunni governments. Iran is the biggest concern for Sunni Arab governments across the region and any effective US move to curtail Iran’s rising influence could more than make up for slights to Muslims.

²² [Donald J. Trump foreign policy speech](#), 27 April 2016

²³ [Donald J. Trump’s Detailed Plan to Defeat ISIS](#), (Speech).

***Jihadi* recruitment?**

ISIS and other transnational violent *jihadi* groups may welcome Trump's election victory. Al-Shabaab, the Somalia-based al-Qaeda affiliate has released a recruitment video citing Donald Trump's policies.²⁴ In March 2016 ISIS released a video featuring Trump after the attacks in Brussels.²⁵

To an extent his discourse fits theirs. The idea of a Christian or Western 'crusade' against Islam is the background to such groups' calls to all Muslims to fight to defend the *Umma*, or world Muslim community.

As well as difficulties in working with regional coalition partners, bombing ISIS if it involved attacks that failed to avoid civilian targets and increased civilian casualties, could also boost the ranks of ISIS, as well as possibly facing legal challenges.

Russia and the Middle East

Western sources indicate that Russia has directed most of its energies towards supporting the Syrian government rather than targeting the recognised terrorist organisation of ISIS and the former al-Qaeda affiliate Jabhat Fatah al-Sham. Any new cooperation with Russia could quickly be undermined by disagreements.

The priority given to regional stability in the Middle East and the declarations against regime change might mean the US aligning more closely with Russia on the survival of the present Syrian government. That could undermine cooperation with the Jordanians, the Saudis, the Emiratis and the Turks.

Egypt, however, has already started to shift its position towards Russia's on the Syria conflict and does not call for the removal of Bashar al-Assad. Criticism from Washington of Sisi's crackdown on political dissent was already modest. Trump is likely to be even more accommodating. Sisi was reportedly the first Arab leader to congratulate Trump on his victory.

Iran

The Trump victory spells danger for the Iranian nuclear deal; his rhetoric during the campaign was particularly sharp, although this may have been partly about undermining one of the Obama Administration's claimed successes. With Republican Congressmen also hostile, there may be further attempts to legislate to amend the deal.

Iranian President Rouhani quickly moved to bolster the accord, with a statement on Iranian television in which he argued that the US alone could not undo it:

Iran's understanding in the nuclear deal was that the accord was not concluded with one country or government but was approved

²⁴ ['Al Qaeda-Linked Group Cites Donald Trump in Terrorist Recruiting Video'](#), *Wall Street Journal*, 1 January 2016

²⁵ ['ISIS uses Trump in video touting Brussels attacks'](#), *The Hill*, 24 March 2016

by a resolution of the UN Security Council. There is no possibility that it can be changed by a single government.²⁶

Trump himself has referred to similar complications, and this may signal that a Trump Administration would not try to terminate the deal.

Iranian conservatives, never fully supportive of the nuclear deal and very hostile to Hassan Rouhani, may quietly welcome the new president.

Israel/Palestine

Analysing what Trump's victory might mean for the Israeli-Palestinian issue Borzou Daraghi, Middle East correspondent at BuzzFeed, states:

A senior Israeli official in the prime minister's office said there was no expectation that a Trump White House would try to push a peace deal between Israel and the Palestinians. "Through channels close to Trump, Netanyahu has understood that this White House will be friendly towards Israeli policy. There will not be the same condemnation towards the [West Bank] settlements that we saw under Obama, and before him Bush," said the official, who added that Sheldon Adelson, the American casino mogul and billionaire backer of Trump, had directly communicated with Netanyahu to assure him over what a Trump White House would look like. "We are being told this will be a very friendly White House to Israel."

But other Israelis sensed a new era. On Wednesday morning, Naftali Bennett, the minister of education, said in a press release: "Trump's victory is an opportunity for Israel to immediately retract the notion of a Palestinian state in the centre of the country, which would hurt our security and just cause.

"This is the position of the president-elect, as written in his platform, and it should be our policy, plain and simple. The era of a Palestinian state is over."²⁷

Palestinian state
"now over"

2.3 Related Commons Briefing Papers:

[Iraq and Syria update October 2016](#)

[The Occupied Palestinian Territories: recent development](#), August 2016

²⁶ ['After Trump Victory, Fears Grow Of Iran Nuclear Deal Unravelling'](#), Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, 9 November 2016

²⁷ B Daraghi, ["No One Knows What Trump Will Mean For The Middle East - Not Even Trump"](#), *BuzzFeed*, 9 November 2016

3. Latin America

Mexico

Trump's position on Mexico was among the most notable features of his campaign. He famously pledged to build an "impenetrable, physical, tall, powerful, beautiful, southern border wall" along the entire length of the US-Mexico border²⁸ – though he has admitted, since his election, that parts of this wall might in fact be simple fencing.²⁹ He also claimed in September 2016 that Mexico would pay for the wall "100%".³⁰

Trump has also pledged to deport illegal Mexican migrants, often backed up with inflammatory rhetoric. Speaking at the launch of his presidential campaign in June 2015, Trump said:

When Mexico sends its people, they're not sending their best. They're not sending you. They're not sending you. They're sending people that have lots of problems, and they're bringing those problems with us. They're bringing drugs. They're bringing crime. They're rapists. And some, I assume, are good people.³¹

"They're bringing drugs"

After his election, Trump said his administration would deport or jail between two and three million illegal migrants:

What we are going to do is get the people that are criminal and have criminal records, gang members, drug dealers, where a lot of these people, probably two million, it could even be three million, we are getting them out of our country or we are going to incarcerate.³²

Analysing these comments, the BBC has argued:

Although he says this group comprises violent criminals, drug-dealers and gang members, to hit such a high mark would involve either casting a very wide net that covers even the smallest infractions or also deporting legal alien residents of the US with criminal convictions.

To pull this off, an expanded "deportation force" would almost certainly be necessary, but Mr Trump's advisers have spent the past few days downplaying the prospect of such an organisation.³³

The *Guardian* has published a series of short interviews with Mexicans reacting to Trump's victory. Many of the interviewees express shock and dismay. The following is an example:

I feel shocked, saddened, dismayed and deeply disappointed. As bad as that sounds, the worst part is feeling powerless. We don't have a say in an event that can have catastrophic consequences to our economy. In the US we are seen as collateral damage. Even

²⁸ ["How realistic is Donald Trump's Mexico wall?", BBC News, 1 September 2016](#)

²⁹ ["Trump election: Up to three million migrants 'to be targeted'", BBC News, 14 November 2016](#)

³⁰ ["Donald Trump: Mexico will pay for wall, '100%'", BBC News Online, 1 September 2016](#)

³¹ ["Full text: Donald Trump announces a presidential bid", Washington Post, 16 June 2015](#)

³² ["Trump election: Up to three million migrants 'to be targeted'", BBC News, 14 November 2016](#)

³³ Ibid.

those opposing Trump seem indifferent to the economic and human pain this situation can inflict on us.³⁴

Cuba

Trump has sent mixed messages on Cuba. Early on in the campaign he said he was “fine” with Obama’s re-establishment in 2014 of US-Cuba relations, although he said that the US “should have made a better deal.”³⁵

By the end of the campaign, Trump told supporters in Miami he would keep the trade embargo in place and close the recently re-opened US Embassy in Havana.

The Cuban-American vote, traditionally Republican and anti-rapprochement, was reportedly an element in Trump’s support in in the crucial state of Florida, which he won by a narrow margin.

3.1 Related Commons Briefing Papers

[*Cuba and the United States - how close can they get?*](#) August 2015

³⁴ ["Mexicans on Trump's election: 'The power he has over us is terrifying' "](#), *Guardian*, 13 November 2016

³⁵ Council on Foreign Relations, [Trump on the issues](#)

4. Brexit

Following the UK's vote to leave the European Union earlier this year, Trump described the result as a "great victory" against the "global elite." Shortly before the US election, at a speech in Raleigh, North Carolina, he declared his own desire to achieve something similar:

Look, we are going to deliver justice the way justice used to be in this country.

At the ballot box on November 8th we are going to do something so special. It will be so special.

It will be an amazing day, it will be called 'Brexit plus plus plus'. You know what I mean?³⁶

"Brexit plus plus plus"

Following his victory, the Washington Post attempted to analyse what the result might mean for Europe:

In Europe, Trump's victory is likely to reinforce the trend toward politicians expressing similar right-wing, nationalist views. The avatar of this neo-nationalism was the surprise victory of Brexit supporters in June's referendum in Britain, and there are comparable movements in France, Germany, Italy and Spain. President Trump will have to decide whether to embrace such movements, which could destabilize the European Union.³⁷

4.1 Related Commons Briefing Papers

[Defence and security after Brexit: a reading list](#), October 2016

³⁶ ["Donald Trump says his election victory would be 'Brexit plus plus plus' in final push for votes"](#), *Independent*, 8 November 2016

³⁷ D Ignatius, ["What President Trump's foreign policy will look like"](#), *Washington Post*, 9 November 2016

5. US Armed Forces

Trump wants to reverse the cuts to the defence budget enforced by sequestration. He bemoans the cuts to the Army, Navy and Air Force and pledges to “spend what we need to rebuild our military,” arguing “it is the cheapest, single investment we can make,” vowing “our military dominance must be unquestioned, and I mean unquestioned, by anybody and everybody.”³⁸

“Unquestioned”
military dominance

These comments may sit uneasily with others to the effect that the US is spending so much on defending others it is “bankrupting” the country (see below).

³⁸ [Speech at the Centre for National Interest](#), 27 April 2016; [“Trump calls for military spending increase”](#), CNN, 8 September 2016

6. Trump on NATO

NATO is “obsolete” and the US may not automatically come to the aid of a NATO ally. At a stroke Trump has struck at the very heart of the Alliance, questioning the very essence of the nearly 70-year-old Alliance.

NATO is
“obsolete”

NATO’s central tenet, encapsulated in Article 5 of its founding treaty, is that an attack on one is an attack on all. This has formed the core of European security since the end of the Second World War.

However comments made by Trump during his election campaign suggest America’s support to its European allies may no longer be unconditional.

When asked if members of NATO can count on the US to come to their military aid if they were attacked by Russia, Trump replied “have they fulfilled their obligations to us? If they fulfil their obligations to us, then yes.”³⁹

So what are these obligations that he believes European allies owe to the US? Trump admits he views defence and foreign policy through an economic prism. He has said “many NATO members that aren’t paying their bills... they have an obligation to make payments” and “NATO is unfair, economically, to us, to the United States.”⁴⁰

One could interpret this to mean he is simply reflecting a long-held view by some Americans, and acknowledged by some Europeans, that European members of the Alliance have ‘freeloaded’ on the back of US military might since WW2. Then Secretary of Defense Robert Gates warned NATO in 2011 of “the growing difficulty for the U.S. to sustain current support for NATO if the American taxpayer continues to carry most of the burden in the Alliance.”⁴¹

NATO has responded, to a degree, to that criticism. When the UK hosted the NATO summit in 2014 it pressed allies to resurrect a dormant pledge to spend 2% of GDP on defence.⁴² British defence ministers pressed the point home, arguing “if we are to enjoy the insurance policy, we must pay the premium.”⁴³

An alternative interpretation centres on Trump’s comments on defence alliances worldwide, particularly South Korea and Japan. This is explored in greater detail below but broadly suggests Trump may be seeking financial reimbursement from nations which benefit from the US military might.

³⁹ [“Transcript: Donald Trump on NATO, Turkey’s Coup Attempt and the World”](#), The New York Times, 21 July 2016

⁴⁰ [“Transcript: Donald Trump on NATO, Turkey’s Coup Attempt and the World”](#), The New York Times, 21 July 2016

⁴¹ [Transcript of speech](#), Department of Defense, 10 June 2011

⁴² Albeit with a goal for those not yet spending 2% to do so within a decade. And apart from the US only the UK, Greece, Poland and Estonia are estimated to spend that amount in 2016, according to [Defence expenditures of NATO countries \(2009-2016\)](#), NATO, 4 July 2016

⁴³ Andrew Murrison, then Defence Minister, HC Deb 14 July 2014 c565

Trump's views on NATO will hopefully be clearer by the time he attends the next NATO summit, to be held at NATO headquarters in Brussels in 2017.

So what does NATO think of a Trump Presidency?

NATO's Secretary-General pointedly said in remarks immediately after Trump's victory that "a strong NATO is good for America" and that US commitment to NATO has been 'rock solid' for almost 70 years. Jens Stoltenberg then listed the importance of NATO to the US – referring to the fact that the only invocation of Article 5 was after the 9/11 attacks on the United States, NATO's role in Afghanistan and, in a nod to Trump's explicit concerns about the threat from terror, explicitly outlined NATO's role in fighting international terrorism.⁴⁴ He added that a stable Europe is important to the US:

The US commitment to NATO and the US commitment to the collective defence of Europe has been rock solid for almost 70 years and I'm absolutely confident that, that will still be the case and that the US will be committed to the defence of Europe and to the NATO obligations and our security guarantees. And I'm confident because a strong NATO is important for Europe, but it's also of great importance for the United States. Two World Wars have taught us that stability in Europe is also important for the United States... I really believe that that the strength of NATO is so important for United States and Europe, so we will continue to respond together to a more challenging security environment.⁴⁵

Moscow will use any thaw to its advantage

Others have voiced fears that Putin may seek to use and deepen any cracks among NATO allies. William Hague, former foreign secretary, warns "unless Washington shows strength and resolution, Moscow will use any thaw in relations to its own advantage" pointing out that it is far easier to restate America's steadfast support for her allies from the beginning than to have to go and defend them at a later."⁴⁶

Why does this matter to the UK?

NATO is the 'bedrock' of the UK's national defence and lies at 'the heart' of the UK's defence policy. This has been the policy of successive Governments, encapsulated most recently in the 2015 National Security Strategy and Strategic Defence and Security Review. Leaving the EU means the UK will focus harder on NATO, according to the defence secretary.⁴⁷

NATO decisions are taken on the basis of consensus. This means nations are able to prevent agreement if they feel a policy is not in their interests. The US has by far the largest and most deployable military force of all NATO allies – the operation in Libya in 2011 exposed the limits of European allies to act

⁴⁴ "[NATO Secretary-General congratulations US President-elect Donald Trump](#)", NATO, 9 November 2016; "[joint press point with NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg and the Chairman of the Presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bakir Izetbegović](#)", NATO, 9 November 2016

⁴⁵ "[joint press point with with NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg and the President of the Republic of Finland, Sauli Niinistö](#)", NATO, 9 November 2016

⁴⁶ "Be clear-eyed about Putin and reassure Europe: my six-point memo to Trump", Daily Telegraph, 10 November 2016

⁴⁷ "[UK will play a bigger role in NATO to compensate for Brexit, defence secretary Michael Fallon has said](#)", City AM, 8 July 2016. A detailed examination of the implications of Brexit for US-UK relations, though not of a Trump Presidency, can be found in Tim Oliver and Michael John Williams "Brexit and the future of the US-EU and US-UK relations", International Affairs, vol 92, no. 3, May 2016

militarily without key US capabilities. NATO's Secretary-General has stressed the importance of US leadership to NATO.

6.1 Related Commons Briefing Papers:

[*NATO's military response to Russia: November 2016 update*](#)

[*NATO Summit Warsaw 2016: a primer*](#), July 2016

[*Defence Expenditure - NATO 2% Target*](#), October 2015

7. Nuclear weapons

Trump identifies nuclear proliferation as the single biggest problem in the world. Using nuclear weapons would be “an absolute last step” and has appeared to endorse a ‘no first use’ policy, saying “I would very much not want to be the first one to use them.”⁴⁸ He has also not ruled out using them.⁴⁹

Trump has spoken at length against nuclear proliferation. But at the same time has also appeared to suggest he would not be opposed to a nuclear-armed Japan to offset North Korea’s nuclear capabilities.⁵⁰ Reading some of Trump’s comments suggest a lack of clarity on this - in a long exchange with Anderson Cooper on CNN he seemed to suggest it was inevitable that more countries, like Japan or Saudi Arabia, would have nuclear weapons, but at the same time he repeatedly stated his opposition nuclear proliferation.⁵¹

Trump has also criticised the state of America’s nuclear weapons arsenal, saying it has been allowed to atrophy and is desperately in need of modernisation and renewal. He points to Russia’s current modernisation programme for its nuclear forces. However the US already has a plan to modernise its nuclear fleet, albeit a plan which some question whether is justifiable financially.⁵² Steven Pifer suggests this shows Trump has a limited understanding of Russian and US nuclear forces.⁵³

Proliferation?

7.1 Related Commons Briefing Papers:

- [Nuclear Weapons – country comparisons](#), June 2016
- [Nuclear weapons: Disarmament and non-proliferation regimes](#), June 2016

⁴⁸ “[Transcript: Donald Trump Expounds on His Foreign Policy Views](#)”, The New York Times, 26 March 2016. Under the 2010 Nuclear Posture Review the US retains the right to first use of nuclear weapons, although it has pledged not to use or threaten the use of nuclear weapons against non-nuclear weapon states that are party to the NPT and in compliance with their nuclear non-proliferation obligations. Further background to US nuclear declaratory policy can be found in Library Briefing Paper [Nuclear Weapons – country comparisons](#), CBP-7566, 29 June 2016

⁴⁹ “[Here’s what Donald Trump has said about nuclear weapons](#)”, Time, 3 August 2016. Sam Kleiner provides a historical examination of US Presidential policy on non-proliferation in “[With his finger on the trigger](#)”, the Atlantic, 3 June 2016

⁵⁰ “[Transcript: Donald Trump Expounds on His Foreign Policy Views](#)”, The New York Times, 26 March 2016

⁵¹ “[Full Rush Transcript: Donald Trump, CNN Milwaukee Republican Presidential Town Hall](#)”, 29 March 2016

⁵² See Library Briefing Paper [Nuclear Weapons – country comparisons](#), CBP-7566, 29 June 2016; and Library Briefing Paper [Russian foreign and security policy](#), 5 July 2016, CBP7646

⁵³ Steven Pifer “The Donald shows again he doesn’t understand much about nukes” Brookings brief, 10 October 2016

8. US defence agreements with Japan and South Korea

The US maintains tens of thousands of military personnel in South Korea and Japan. Will Trump keep those forces there?

Trump has expressed continued dissatisfaction with maintaining a status quo established at a time when America was in a far stronger position militarily and economically. This is evident in comments like “we don’t have that the luxury of doing what we used to do” and “we spend a substantially greater amount than what the people are paying.”

He has also shown unhappiness with the perceived one-way street in terms of security guarantees. On Japan, for example, he says “if we’re attacked, they do not have to come to our defence, if they’re attacked, we have to come totally to their defence.”⁵⁴

His conclusion? To demand nations pay up or lose the US military guarantee.⁵⁵

Pay up

This view was articulated in a speech in April when he bemoaned the trillions spent on the US armed forces to provide a strong defence for Europe and Asia, arguing:

The countries we are defending must pay for the cost of this defence – and if not, the US must be prepared to let these countries defend themselves.⁵⁶

He has baldly stated that if the US “cannot be properly reimbursed for the tremendous cost of our military protecting other countries” then he would be willing to tell those countries “congratulations, you will be defending yourself.”⁵⁷ He explicitly said on Japan “they have to pay us or we have to let them protect themselves.”⁵⁸

He seemingly discounted the security gains America receives from its relations with South Korea and Japan in an interview with Anderson Cooper in March:

Trump: Anderson, when you see all of the money that our country is spending on military, we're not spending it for ourselves; we're protecting all of these nations all over the world. We can't afford to do it anymore.

Cooper: But isn't there benefit for the United States in having a secure Europe? Isn't there benefit for the United States in having a secure Asia?

⁵⁴ [“Transcript: Donald Trump Expounds on His Foreign Policy Views”](#), The New York Times, 26 March 2016

⁵⁵ Thomas Wright makes this point in “48 hours from a new world crisis”, Brookings, 7 November 2016

⁵⁶ [Speech at the Centre for National Interest](#), 27 April 2016

⁵⁷ [“Transcript: Donald Trump on NATO, Turkey’s Coup Attempt and the World”](#), The New York Times, 21 July 2016

⁵⁸ [“Full Rush Transcript: Donald Trump, CNN Milwaukee Republican Presidential Town Hall”](#) 29 March 2016

Trump: There's a benefit, but not big enough to bankrupt and destroy the United States, because that's what's happening. We can't afford it. It's very simple.⁵⁹

So would a Trump Presidency seek to renegotiate existing agreements with its Asian allies? Would he reverse President Obama's Asian pivot? Would he withdraw US forces? Or even, as former Reagan advisor Doug Bandow suggests, to completely drop the commitments deemed no longer necessary for US security.⁶⁰ Thomas Wright argues a core belief of Trump is his opposition to America's alliance relationships:

If elected, Trump will demand that allies pay an exponentially greater sum for US military support. He has repeatedly claimed that he would be willing to walk away from the alliances in order to extract the best bargain possible. But his past criticism of alliances also suggests he will be happy if US allies are unable to meet his demands, which would provide him with a pretext to withdraw US support.⁶¹

Of course Trump's comments could also be seen to be tough opening negotiating tactic: "you always have to be prepared to walk."⁶² However Wright argues that simply by suggesting he is considering dissolving America's long-standing defence alliances could have a major impact by damaging confidence in them.⁶³ *Reuters* reports post-election anxiety in Asia, suggesting Trump's views could bolster calls from conservatives in Tokyo for a more robust defence policy.⁶⁴

Reverse Asia pivot?

8.1 Related Commons Briefing Papers

[The US-Japan Security Treaty and the East China Sea](#), May 2014

⁵⁹ ["Full Rush Transcript: Donald Trump, CNN Milwaukee Republican Presidential Town Hall"](#), 29 March 2016

⁶⁰ ["Ripped off: what Donald Trump gets right about US alliances"](#), *Foreign Affairs*, 12 September 2016

⁶¹ ["The 2016 Presidential campaign and the crisis of US foreign policy"](#), Lowy Institute,

⁶² ["Transcript: Donald Trump on NATO, Turkey's Coup Attempt and the World"](#), *The New York Times*, 21 July 2016

⁶³ Thomas Wright makes this point in ["48 hours from a new world crisis"](#), *Brookings*, 7 November 2016

⁶⁴ ["Trump Presidency to create high anxiety among Asian allies"](#), *Reuters*, 9 November 2016

9. Trade and China

China featured regularly in Donald Trump's campaign rhetoric but his comments have largely been part of his economic policy, focused on trade and currency levels. This paper does not deal with trade policy.

Alongside the doubts about coming Trump administration's position on isolationism versus interventionism are questions about its position on the equivalent economic split: protectionism versus globalisation.

Specifically, the future of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) is in question, while negotiations on the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) and the Transpacific Partnership are frozen.

During the campaign Donald Trump said that he would declare China a 'currency manipulator' and bring back US jobs "stolen" by such countries.

"Stolen" jobs

There were comments from allies after the election to the effect that the Trump Administration would in fact try to avoid a trade war with China.

9.1 Related Commons Briefing papers

[*The Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership \(TTIP\)*](#), December 2015

10. Conclusion

It is difficult to come to firm conclusions about the foreign policy of the coming Trump Administration. Not only has he made some intemperate and sometimes contradictory comments on the campaign trail and shifted his tone and some positions to a more 'presidential' style having won the Republican nomination: foreign affairs team is so far not clear and will not include the familiar faces that would have staffed a Democratic State Department.

The most important divide in US foreign policy is perhaps between interventionists and isolationists. His calls for the destruction of ISIS means intervention but the "end to regime change" is more isolationist; the balance of Trump positions suggests that he leans away from a notion of *Pax Americana*.

Trump's comments on NATO, a bedrock of US and Western strategy since 1945, are particularly worrying for Eastern Europe, where some politicians worry that the deterrent influence of NATO has already been sharply undermined. For Western Europe, too, the Trump victory will bring about strategic re-assessments. One analyst said "Europeans need to understand that the responsibility of defending Western civilization will be theirs if Trump is elected."⁶⁵

Others have played down the rhetoric, saying that the realities of international relations mean that the Trump presidency will want to maintain good relations with European allies:

When he enters the Oval office on 20 January, Trump will find that the US still has vital interests in remaining deeply engaged abroad, that threats and challenges are no different than they were on Obama's watch, and that his pledge to "make America great again" must include an international, indeed a global, commitment. Better to face that world with allies than alone.⁶⁶

The checks and balances for which the US system is famous will have some effect on US foreign policy, although the President is freer to determine foreign than domestic policy. The Republicans have retained control of both Houses, but is it not yet clear to what extent a previously reluctant Republican Party will sign up to the Trump project after the victory.

It may, in any case, prove difficult to pursue a radically different foreign policy when the US is constrained by several factors – the reluctance of US citizens to get further involved in foreign conflicts, sluggish US economic growth and pressure on the federal budget (combined with promised tax cuts).

⁶⁵ ['President Trump and the future of the West'](#), *Politico*, 8 August 2016

⁶⁶ Robert Hunter, ['This victory need not trouble Nato – Trump will find he needs friends in Europe'](#), *Guardian*, 10 November 2016

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