

Trump Presidency: America First or America Alone?



President-elect Donald Trump

By Philip Stephens

“We have no eternal allies, and we have no perpetual enemies. Our interests are eternal and perpetual, and those interests it is our duty to follow.” So Henry Temple, the third Viscount Palmerston, described British foreign policy in 1848, at the height of its imperial pomp. “England is a power sufficiently strong, sufficiently powerful to steer her own course.”

It is more than fanciful to imagine US president-elect Donald Trump taking his cue from the 19th century British statesman. Palmerston’s style does not quite fit the social media age. But those struggling to make sense of the blizzard of tweets that describe Mr Trump’s worldview will not miss the shared insouciance. Forget historic entanglements, alliances and enmities: after Mr Trump’s inauguration next week, the world’s most powerful nation will make its own rules. America First looks a

lot like America Alone.

That, anyway, is the plan. The present open global economic system was designed by the US, but Mr Trump intends to make his own rules, starting with the repudiation of the Trans-Pacific Partnership, renegotiation of the North American Free Trade Agreement with Mexico and Canada, and the imposition of hefty duties on Chinese imports. Forget, too, nostalgia for the old geopolitical order - all that stuff about shared values and democracy. This president-elect is happy to side with Russian President Vladimir Putin against both the departing President Barack Obama and the Republican foreign policy establishment.

Mr Trump has likewise used his Twitter account to question four decades of US engagement with Beijing by challenging the One China policy towards Taiwan. Do not expect consistency. In one breath he promises US disengagement from the violent chaos of the Middle East and,

Trump’s ‘Make America Great Again’ prospectus is a jumble of instincts, prejudices and impulses

in the next, the creation of “safe zones” in Syria - a policy he has previously said would lead to a third world war.

Those looking for a grand design will be disappointed. Mr Trump prefers deal making to strategic thinking. His Make America Great Again prospectus is a jumble of instincts, prejudices and impulses. Among the ingredients: economic nationalism, antipathy to “globalism”, hostility towards immigrants, a relentless focus on Islamist extremism and a transactional, zero-sum view of great power relations. Add to this mix a palpable disdain for the NATO alliance and equivocation about security guarantees for East Asian allies such as Japan and South Korea.

For all that, the tension between disavowal of international leadership and the promised restoration of US power and prestige - bellicose isolationism, you might call it - has caught the national mood. The legacy of the wars of choice in Iraq and Afghanistan has drained popular support for foreign adventurism. The Pew Research Center recorded in June that nearly six out of 10 Americans want the US “to deal with its own problems and let other countries deal with their own problems the best they can.” Yet the same opinion poll shows a majority still wanting the US to retain its global primacy.

The visceral fear harboured by America’s allies is that Mr

Trump’s presidency draws a line under the US-led international liberal order. Beyond raising the protectionist flag, he has promised to renounce America’s climate obligations. He could strike a deal with Mr Putin over the heads of Europe and disavow the international nuclear agreement with Iran. Europeans are appalled at his proposals to build a wall against Mexican immigrants and shut the US border to Muslims, but the strategic concern is the isolationist swagger - the implicit rejection of the US role in the international system that has underpinned the West. The history that haunts them is that of the 1930s, when a self-absorbed America stood by as Europe fell to fascism and war.

Of course, allies are already making their accommodations with the new regime. Japan’s prime minister Shinzo Abe was first to grab an audience with the president-elect. Mr Abe welcomes the tougher line against

Trump Presidency: America First or America Alone? (continued)



A couple kisses in front of graffiti depicting Russian President Vladimir Putin (left) and Donald Trump, on the walls of a bar in the old town in Vilnius, Lithuania

Beijing - and also frets about a weaker commitment to Japan's security. Theresa May's British government, in the throes of detaching itself from its own continent, is still more neuralgic than is usual about clinging on to something resembling a "special relationship". Such ties are no substitute for the systemic and institutional co-operation that marked out the post-1945 settlement. Without US leadership the very concept of "the West" begins to lose its meaning.

Mathew Burrows, a former counsellor at the National Intelligence Council and now a director at the Washington-based think-tank the Atlantic Council, puts it succinctly: "Pax Americana no longer pays. Instead, Mr Trump believes that the US is self-reliant enough to slough off the rules-based order even if others are hurt by the loss of US leadership."

As Mr Burrows points out, America's allies have already concluded that Mr Trump is neither predictable nor reliable. China's determination to translate its economic power into geopolitical clout is unlikely to be dented by the president-elect's provocative tweets. Mr Putin doubtless thinks that he will get the better of the inexperienced Mr Trump.

"We have to see how much of it is put into practice," one senior European diplomat says of the new president's pronouncements, "but it is fairly clear that Trump is closing the door on US global leadership." Another senior European policymak-

America's allies have concluded Trump is neither predictable nor reliable, while Putin doubtless thinks that he will get the better of the inexperienced president

er remarks: "We will all strike our bilateral deals with the new administration, but it's foolish to pretend there will be a transatlantic meeting of minds." Mr Trump scorns multilateralism. In Europe it is a religion.

At this point, an optimist (though there are precious few of them around these days) would note that America's interest in the world has waxed and waned from the time of the founding fathers. The pendulum has swung between isolationism and exceptionalism and from unilateralism to multilateral engagement. Mr Trump wants Europe to sort out its own problems. George Washington made a similar point in his farewell address when the first US president observed that Europe's "frequent controversies" were "foreign to our concerns."

A quarter of a century later President James Monroe abandoned isolationism in favour of staking out the new republic's claim to suzerainty over the entire western hemisphere. By the turn of the 20th century, Theodore Roosevelt was launching America's own imperial adventures. And after the Second World War, Washington learned

the lesson of the 1930s by designing a new, US-led global order.

More recently, President George W Bush started out by repudiating the Kyoto climate change agreement and the 1971 Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty with Russia. After the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, he scorned rules-based multilateralism in favour of dividing the world between those "with us or against us" in the fight against Islamist terrorism. If others wanted to sign up to a coalition of the willing, then fine, but the US would not be constrained by institutions such as NATO. As Mr Bush declared in Palmerstonian tones in his State of the Union address on the eve of the 2003 invasion of Iraq: "The course of this nation does not depend on the decisions of others."

As things turned out, America's unipolar moment was gone almost as quickly as it arrived. The neoconservative dream of democratising the Middle East was lost to the bloody chaos of Iraq and discontent at home at the huge cost in blood and treasure. Mr Bush spent much of his second term seeking to rebuild

the bridges with allies that he had blown up during the first. NATO was invited into Afghanistan, while Germany and France were forgiven for their opposition to the Iraq invasion.

What was true for Mr Bush, the optimist narrative runs, will be more so for Mr Trump. The global power balance has tilted towards a rising, more assertive China and a belligerent Russia. There are some geopolitical facts the new president cannot deny.

Beguiling though the idea may seem to a dealmaker, detaching America's national interests from its international commitments and alliances is impossible. Economic interdependence cannot be wished away and, as Mr Bush discovered in Iraq, military might has its own limits. Nor does retrenchment offer a viable alternative to engagement. Wherever it looks, the US has national interests to be promoted and protected, whether economic and commercial or geopolitical and military.

Mr Obama's response has been a middle way, marrying realism to internationalism and recasting the US role as that of a convening power. Sometimes it has worked - witness the Iran nuclear deal and the Paris climate change agreement. Defending his inaction in Syria, the president told *The Atlantic* magazine: "We've got to be hard-headed at the same time as we are big-hearted [...] there are going to be times where the best we can do is to shine a spotlight on something that's terrible." His critics would charge that Mr Obama allowed

credible caution to drift into debilitating paralysis.

In any event, supporters of the pendulum theory have a point. It is quite possible to imagine a Trump presidency that starts out with a unilateralist swagger being conditioned over time by the realities of great power rivalry and economic interdependence.

The new president will discover soon enough that the US needs help in the fight against ISIS and that American businesses would be among the biggest losers from a drift back into global protectionism. It is equally likely that the president-elect's infatuation with Mr Putin will last no longer than similar attempts by both Mr Bush and Mr Obama to reset relations with Moscow.

The mistake, though, would be to think that the past can be recovered - that after a few tumultuous and dangerous years of isolationism the Pax Americana can simply be reinstated "as was". The world has changed. American power is contested - and not only by China. There has been a corresponding shift in the nation's domestic politics. The open global trading system once meant the expansion of US power: new markets for Ford, IBM and the rest.

Now it is more often seen as the enemy of American jobs. Great power rivalries have sharpened. Globalisation, invented in the US in the pursuit of American interests, now bestows its benefits on China and other geopolitical challengers.

At the end of next week Mr Trump will become the leader of the world's most powerful nation. By most calculations, the US military will be unmatched for decades to come. But primacy is not the same as hegemony. The new president will find that most of his goals are out of reach of an America acting alone. Deals are no substitute for allies, and angry tweets will not restore US power and prestige. Palmerston was right that nothing in geopolitics is forever. But even in all its pomp, the British empire needed friends in the pursuit of its interests.

On the evidence thus far Mr Trump has neither the mindset nor temperament to recognise such constraints. The immediate dangers - of a miscalculation that leads to confrontation with China in the western Pacific, a "deal" that encourages Mr Putin's revanchism in eastern Europe, or a clash with Iran - are clear enough. The long-term threat is that Mr Trump's presidency sees a Pax Americana that has sustained relative peace and stability for the past 70 years dissolve into a return to the Hobbesian world of great power conflict.



Residential and commercial buildings stand in Hanoi



Vendors sell fruit at stalls on a street in Hanoi

Vietnam recalibrates as Trump and Duterte upset strategy

By Chris Blake and John Boudreau

VIETNAM is moving to firm up key relationships after the rise of unpredictable politicians in the U.S. and the Philippines upset its trade and security strategy.

A trio of high-profile diplomatic exchanges over the next week highlight a careful balancing act as Donald Trump prepares to take office. Communist Party chief Nguyen Phu Trong began a four-day visit on Thursday to China - Vietnam's biggest trading partner - that includes a meeting with President Xi Jinping. Outgoing U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry arrives in Hanoi on Friday for talks. And this week Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe makes his first trip to Vietnam since 2013.

During their meeting on Thursday, Xi said the two countries were as "comrades and brothers," telling Trong that China viewed relations with Vietnam from a long-term perspective, and hoped that the two countries would properly manage and control disputes, according to the official Xinhua News Agency. Xi also proposed expanding military and security cooperation, and coordinating on global issues.

Vietnam in recent months has watched as key parts of its economic and foreign policy were thrown into question. Trump

vowed to kill the Trans-Pacific Partnership - a trade deal in which Vietnam was seen as one of the biggest winners - while new Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte shifted toward China, eschewing a more coordinated approach with Vietnam over territorial disputes in the South China Sea.

■ Vietnam in recent months has watched as key parts of its economic and foreign policy were thrown into question

Vietnam's leaders are concerned about political changes in Europe, the U.S. and the Philippines, said Tran Viet Thai, deputy director general of the Diplomatic Academy of Vietnam in Hanoi, where the country's diplomats are trained.

"It's a fast-changing world, an unpredictable world," Thai said. "We have to react very carefully."

Ton Nu Thi Ninh, a former ambassador of Vietnam to the EU and Belgium between 2000 and 2003, and former vice chair of the Vietnam National Assembly's Foreign Af-

fairs Committee, said the focus would now be on the new administration in the U.S. and said she didn't think Vietnam would move closer to China economically if TPP was unsuccessful. "Vietnam already is a member of several free-trade agreements," Ninh said. "Vietnam is a member of the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership, in which China is a member. Vietnam has also boosted trade relations with Russia and Europe."

WAR, SUSPICION

Relations between China and Vietnam, shaped by decades of war and suspicion, have been strained in recent years by Beijing's moves to reclaim thousands of acres of land and increase its military presence in the South China. Ties hit a low in 2014, when China sparked an international incident by placing an oil rig within Vietnam's exclusive economic zone.

Tensions dissipated somewhat after Prime Minister Nguyen Xuan Phuc's six-day trip to China in September, his first since taking office in April. Chinese state media heralded it as "a new era of stronger bilateral ties." Vietnam state media used similar language to preview Trong's trip this week, saying it showed the country wanted to to deepen its ties with China and create a peaceful and stable environment.

"China and Vietnam do have sources of tension on the nation-

nal interests level that cannot be easily reconciled, such as maritime conflict and trade tension," said Zhang Mingliang, a professor at the Southeast Asia Research Institute under Jinan University in Guangzhou. "However, at this moment of geopolitical uncertainty, it'd serve the interests of both to aim for a steady, working bilateral framework under which business can be done."

“It's a fast changing world, an unpredictable world. We have to react very carefully.”

TRAN VIET THAI
DIPLOMATIC ACADEMY OF VIETNAM

Duterte's embrace of China has particularly stung Vietnam. He has softened the Philippines's position on the South China Sea, sought to negotiate disputes bilaterally instead of as a group and downplayed a July international court ruling that rebuffed China's claims to more than 80 percent of the waters.

"The Vietnamese feel that Manila's decision not to push for

Chinese compliance with the July arbitral award short-circuited any effort to bring international pressure to bear on Beijing," said Gregory Poling, a Southeast Asia specialist at the Center for Strategic and International Studies in Washington. "They are not alone - Singapore, Japan, Australia, the U.S. and others feel the same."

'BIGGER ROLE'

Duterte's move to distance the Philippines from the U.S., its longtime ally, contrasts with Vietnam's improved relations with Washington under the Obama administration's so-called Asia pivot. The two countries have started joint naval drills and two U.S. warships paid a visit to Cam Ranh Bay in October for the first time in decades.

The Obama administration was also the key driver of the TPP trade deal, which would represent nearly 40 percent of global economic output worth USD30 trillion if it came into force. Japan's Abe has been a key advocate of the agreement, and has sought to convince Trump of its merits.

Abe will look to strengthen ties on his trip to Vietnam, including cooperation in the South China Sea such as improving coast guard capacity in the region.

"We expect a bigger role from Japan in security and defense," said Thai of Vietnam's diplomatic academy. "The game is changing."

As for Trump, he said, Vietnam's leaders are at a loss.

"The way he does politics will be quite different - whether or not it will be good or bad we don't know," Thai said. "However, we do not think the U.S. national interests in Asia will change." **Bloomberg**



Two male pectoral sandpipers in a competitive, territorial display flight



A male pectoral sandpiper, right, courting a female on the tundra in Alaska.

Long-distance birdie call: Sex-crazed pipers travel for tail

By Seth Borenstein
in Washington

You fly more than 100 miles for love. You get rejected. You fly another 100 miles. Another rejection. And another.

That's the high-flying but futile sex life of the male pectoral sandpiper looking for love in northernmost Alaska, according to a new study.

Some males are more persistent

than others. Researchers tracked one desperate small shorebird that logged more than 13,045 kilometers in two dozen different hook-up attempts over a frenetic four weeks.

"They're definitely trying hard to flirt and court," said biologist Bart Kempenaers of the Max Planck Institute for Ornithology in Germany. "They are not particularly successful most of them. Failed Don Juans mostly."

Sandpipers migrate from South America to breeding grounds in the Arctic tundra in the summer. The males tend to be sex crazy during this time because females are only fertile for a few weeks. They flit all over the place, trying hard to seal the deal with loud throaty hoots as many times as possible. The problem for them is that the females only mate once or twice a season.

"Copulations are incredibly

rare," Kempenaers said. "The males need to try and try and keep at it."

Researchers tracked the activity of 100 male birds during a breeding season. It is "the most extreme example" of promiscuity in animals seen yet, said Kempenaers, who led the study published last week in the journal *Nature*.

The males mostly forgo sleep as they embark on non-stop flight

ts in search of a mate, getting by on snatches of shut-eye lasting several seconds at a time, Kempenaers said.

The average bird flies about 178 kilometers between mating attempts. In a breeding season, the males log on average about 3,060 kilometers, a bit farther than flying from Los Angeles to Chicago.

Copulations are incredibly rare. The males need to try and try and keep at it.

BART KEMPENEAERS

Sandpipers can fly 40 hours non-stop around 37 mph (60 kph), but these long trips often end up in rejections. Those that successfully mate don't have a role in raising the offspring, Kempenaers said.

George Divoky, a biologist at the scientific group Friends of Cooper Island that monitors the changing Alaskan Arctic, said in general Arctic shorebirds are shrinking in population.

He called the study on this species of bird impressive, adding that it "will make me think differently about every pectoral sandpiper I see during the summer." AP

ASK THE VET

by Dr Ruan Du Toit Bester



CAT FIRST AID KIT: 10 THINGS YOU NEED IN YOUR HOUSE

A cat first aid kit is a must for any pet owner, as there might be emergencies when you need to take action before getting to the vet. Get a box with a secure lid and put it near the emergency kit of your household, so as to be able to locate it when needed.

1 - SURGICAL GLOVES

The surgical gloves come in handy to prevent you from getting infected and protect your cat also. Make sure to use them when handling your cat in emergency situations or even when collecting urine/ feces samples.

2 - HYDROGEN PEROXIDE

Hydrogen peroxide is an efficient cleaning solution for wounds. Hydrogen peroxide is more recommended than alcohol, as alcohol can cause burns. You may also keep an antiseptic cleaner - i.e. Beta-dine or Hibitane.

3 - GAUZE AND SURGICAL TAPES

Get sterile gauze pads and rolled gauze to be able to cover wounds. Use surgical tape to tie up bandages. After cleaning the wounds, it's best to cover these to prevent your cat from licking and biting the wound and stop impurities from the cat's

saliva or environment from getting inside the wound.

4 - TOWELS

Towels are used in emergency situations to wrap the cat, to wrap ice when cool compresses are needed or to wipe the cat after administering different drops. It's always good to have an extra towel.

5 - TWEEZERS

Tweezers are used to extract different splinters or fragments that might get in your pet's paws. The tweezers should be sharp pointed, so as to enable you to be precise. Keep the tweezers clean; use hydroxide peroxide before using the tweezers to prevent infecting the pet.

6 - SMALL SCISSORS

The scissors may be used to cut the cat's hair in case of burns, but may come in handy when cutting the bandages or the tape. Wet the scissors in hydroxide peroxide before using, to sterilize them.

7 - THERMOMETER

If you want to determine if your cat has fever use the thermometer; this may be a rectal thermometer or an ear thermome-



ter. The ear thermometer is easier to use and your cat should be more cooperative.

8 - OINTMENTS

An ointment containing steroids such as hydrocortisone is used to treat different stings, bites and allergic reactions.

9 - EYE AND EAR DROPPER

Your pet might need eye or ear drops; you may keep some small syringes instead.

10 - VET'S ADDRESS AND PHONE NUMBER

When in a rush, you might have difficulties remembering the vet's address or

phone number, we give out fridge magnets with our emergency details on. Make sure to keep the vaccination history and possible medical records.

Always check that your supplies are not expired. Replace these on a regular basis.

Hope this info helps
Till next week
Dr Ruan

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