

National Security Forum  
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As Gen. McMaster, President Trump's National Security Adviser prepared to depart his position in the White House, he urged staff members to keep working on the policies codified in the National Security Strategy. He emphasized the need for a sustained military engagement in Syria. Gen. Votel, commander of the Central Command, echoed Gen. McMaster. He said that international forces had made progress in degrading the Islamic State, but the US needed an indefinite presence in Syria. Across town, President Trump said "I want to get out" of Syria. I want to bring our troops back home. At his National Security Council, President Trump reportedly declared "we'll be coming out of Syria like, very soon." Only the efforts of Defense Secretary Mattis and JCS Chairman Gen. Dunford convinced him to leave the troops there for a few more months.

At the National Security Forum, this turn of events has caused confusion.

Ty and Keith have described the classical interagency model of policy development. The Strategies and Reviews we have discussed are "umbrella" documents which harmonize the evolution of specific, subordinate policies. Once adopted, these national policy documents lead to programs and to procurements, some of which can be large. To change them is to designate new winners and losers both in government and in the commercial sector. Think of the size of the "military-Industrial complex" and the scope of programs affected after 9/11 during the strategic shift from fighting the advanced armies of the Soviet Union in Europe to fighting terrorists in the Middle East. Winners and losers, that is why accepted strategies and policies have momentum and why they continue until redirected.

To process what has been happening recently, we have to recognize that there has been a *paradigm shift* in policy making and that new influences are at work. Firstly, there is the influence of the internet and social media, more partisan radio and TV commentary and the declining influence of the newsroom. We have been surprised by the rise of spontaneous, self organized, and leaderless movements in public opinion. For, example, we have seen teacher walkouts in West Virginia, Oklahoma, Kentucky and Arizona that demanded — and are getting — better wages and funding for education in some very tax frugal states.. We have seen a #MeToo movement that has toppled powerful figures in business, the media, entertainment and politics. And, we have seen the election of Donald Trump, whose campaign structure was a loose network of self organizing activists which astonished every pollster in America.

The people involved in these opinion uprisings share some characteristics. They seem to have a distrust of government and of established authority. They have long held grievances that have been ignored by existing power structures, they are frustrated, and they mean to bring about change. We know that major shifts in public opinion eventually translate into political power.

Secondly, we have a change in Presidential Style. President Trump says he trusts his instincts. He distrusts international organizations like the World Trade Organization and the U.N. And, he is unimpressed by pushback from traditional pundits like journalists, the purveyors of “fake news.”

When the President focusses on an issue, the policy review tends to begin with a Tweet. He will often begin with a maximalist position — withdraw from NAFTA, tear up the Iran Nuclear Agreement, or threaten North Korea with destruction. His advisors and Cabinet members are often caught off guard. Recently, for example, Amb. Nikki Haley, announced to the U.N. that the Administration would place additional sanctions on Russia following the April chemical attack in Syria. She was immediately contradicted by President Trump, who rejected additional sanctions and whose Press Secretary announced that “the President has made clear that he’s going to be tough on Russia, but at the same time he’d still like to have a good relationship with them.” Implicitly, this episode suggests that John Bolton, the new National Security Advisor, was also out of the loop on this decision. As a former Ambassador to the U.N. himself, he would surely have warned Amb. Haley to cancel her statement.

Observers note that the President’s eventual position cannot be predicted from his opening Tweet. For NAFTA, for example, the pressure of mid-term Congressional elections appears to have set a timetable for negotiations and he seems ready to accept minor changes. He has recertified, for the moment, the Iranian Nuclear Agreement. Of one thing we can be sure, however, a Tweet from the President will bring the subject policy process to a halt until he gives new directions.

For our purposes today, let me address a few selected policy areas and try to categorize them in two ways: those that are established policies carried forward by momentum and which we think we understand; and, secondly, policies in play that may or may not be redirected.

### **Policies Carried By Momentum:**

The Iran Nuclear Agreement has been recertified by the President and has been backed by Europe, Russia and China as well as the US. No change so far, but a candidate for change because of the President’s comments.

The War on Terror continues, with U.S. forces operating in Afghanistan, Iraq and Africa. Some small force augmentations have been authorized.

Relations with Pakistan are in a turmoil after the Trump Administration suspended aid and security assistance early this year. Mr Trump began the year on Twitter by saying that Pakistan had engaged in “lies and deceit” over a 15 year period during which the US had provided \$33 Billion in aid. Late in the Obama Administration, however, the US

accused Pakistan of providing safe haven to the Taliban-affiliated Haqqani network and also withheld aid.

Russia: current policies are a continuation of the modified containment policy started under the Reagan Administration—avoid military confrontation while using economic leverage and sanctions to influence Russian behavior. But this could change suddenly. Despite the expulsion of diplomats and the sanctions over the Skripal Affair — the use of a nerve agent against a Russian defector and his daughter in Salisbury, England — President Trump appears to respect Vladimir Putin, and congratulated him on his reelection. The sanctions against Russia were initiated by the US Congress, although the President signed them. Mr. Trump has rejected additional sanctions following the April bombing of Syria and said that he believes that he can manage better relations with Russia. In April, Moscow inquired about a meeting between Mr. Trump and Mr. Putin. I would guess that the ongoing Mueller investigation into Russian influence during the last election is the major obstacle to such a meeting.

### **Policies in Play**

North Korea: Mr. Trump's threats have given way to personal diplomacy. Kim Jong un has said that he will discuss denuclearization if certain conditions, such as security guarantees for his regime, are met.

Syria: U.S. troop withdrawals are months away and the level of subsequent U.S. commitment to the area is uncertain. The withdrawal will assure that the Assad regime, with the backing of Iran and Russia will crush the remaining opposition, including Kurdish fighters backed by the U.S. This will likely open the Shiite corridor across Syria by which Iran can project its power toward Israel and Saudi Arabia.

China: Our traditional policy has been to draw China into international institutions and global governance. China, however, has observed international rules only when it was convenient. It has manipulated its currency to give it trade advantage, been a major Pirate of intellectual property and technology, and restricted entry to its markets. Foreign investors are forced into “joint ventures” with Chinese partners and must share technology. The Party is expanding its “oversight requirements” of joint ventures and is exerting greater control.

To revitalize and reorient the economy, China has inaugurated two major strategies:

One Road, One Belt is a multi-billion dollar infrastructure and investment program across South Asia, the Middle East and Africa that seeks to secure markets and to assure energy supplies.

Made in China 2025 sets goals to become the world leader in high tech industries such as robotics, electronics, information technology, aerospace and medical equipment.

Despite massive Chinese investments in these initiatives, large foreign investments are also needed. To become dominant in the high tech area over the next decade, China must steal an a lot of technology, already a threat for companies in the U.S. and Europe. President Trump's steel and aluminum tariffs may lead to a growing confrontation that is likely to focus on technology theft and unfair competition. Although Europe would prefer to work through international institutions, Mr. Trump's direct confrontation may prove more effective. The Chinese are vulnerable to investment and technology sanctions, such as limiting the purchase of technology companies in the West. They are sure to react strongly, however, economically, nationalistically and perhaps with military pressure to policies that erect barriers to Chinese expansion.

Members of the Forum are now free to disagree with any of the above analyses!