

# 8 Foreign Policy Questions Trump Needs to Ask

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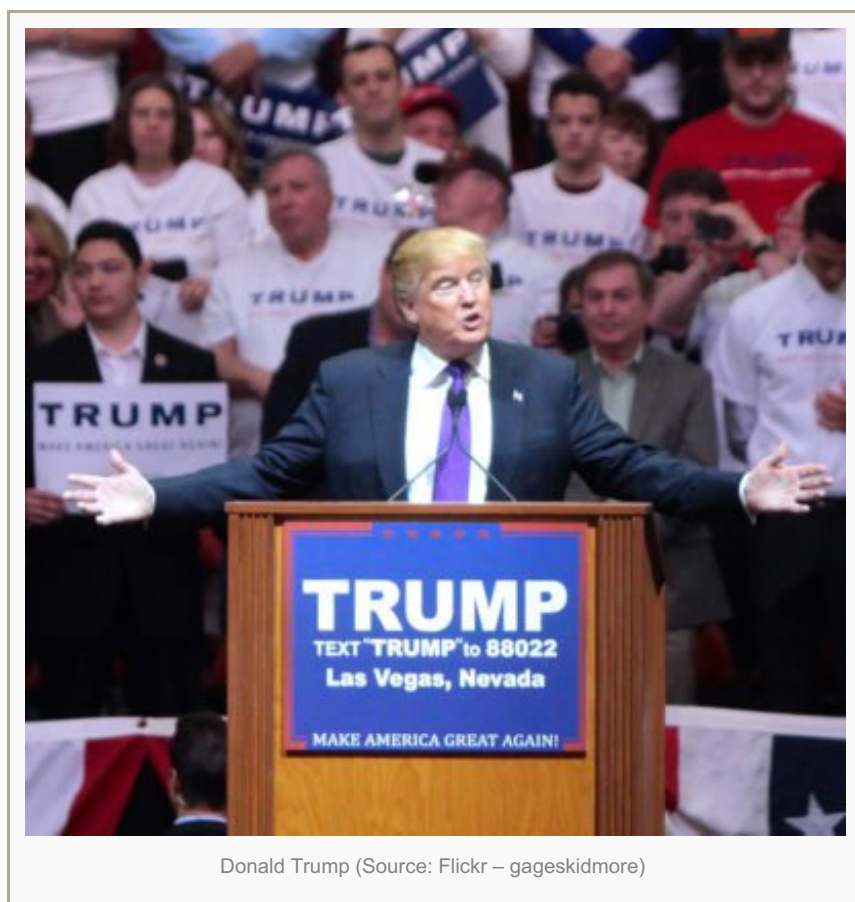
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## E-Notes

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Donald Trump (Source: Flickr – gageskidmore)

President-elect Donald Trump is in the midst of selecting his national security team. He not only needs to decide the “who,” but also the “how” of national security decision-making. It is unclear whether he will adopt Ronald Reagan’s model of entrusting empowered Cabinet secretaries to handle such matters; follow in Richard Nixon’s footsteps of retaining close control over foreign policy within the White House through the National Security Advisor; or emulate George H.W. Bush’s hybrid “gang” blending both White House staff and senior officials.

Beyond his staffing choices, the president-elect and his counselors must also be prepared to tackle a series of questions about U.S. foreign policy and defense strategy, both to inform his continuing selection of personnel to serve in his administration and to shape his conversations with foreign leaders who are anxious to take the temperature of the new Chief Executive. In addition, his answers will be critical if he wants to link his campaign promises with actual policies.

Trump ran on a platform which decried the apparent inability of the U.S. government to crush terrorism and the supposed ineptitude of U.S. officials who were outmaneuvered at the negotiating table by allies and adversaries alike. Alongside his critique, he intimated that with a “dealmaker” in the White House, things would change. But it is unclear how his team will translate campaign slogans into governing principles.

Over the last decade, we have begun to discover the limits of what both “hard” and “soft” power can achieve and the challenge of shifting from deterrence (preventing an adversary from doing something) to compellence (getting another country to do something for us). A Trump national security team will need to address eight key questions.

### **1) Why has the best-funded and most professional military in U.S. history been unable to translate tactical victories into strategic success in Afghanistan?**

Since al-Qa’ida attacked the United States in 2001, defense spending has steadily increased from about \$300 billion in 2002 to about \$600 billion in 2016. The growth provided both for the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, but also modernization. Navy P8s are replacing P3s; F35s are replacing F15s; and every military branch fields a fleet of remotely piloted vehicles. Secretaries of defense have transformed the strategic reserves to an operational reserve. Throughout the wars, training and professional military education were never compromised. With the most experienced force in modern history, the inability to “win” cannot be attributed to resources. Many of the retired military officers whom Trump is considering for administration jobs were at the forefront of defense strategy. To make sense of the last 15 years of war, the new president needs to commission a comprehensive study to know under what conditions military force works best; the changes needed to adapt the force for modern conflict; and ways to improve use of the military as a tool of power—and he must be prepared to confront the limits of what raw force can achieve in future defense strategy.

### **2) Why has counterterrorism through special operations raids and air strikes not defeated al-Qai’da let alone its offshoots like ISIL?**

One of the lasting impacts of the 9/11 attacks has been the transformation and maturation of U.S. counter terrorism capabilities. The Joint Special Operations Command proved its worth during the 2011 bin Laden raid. The U.S. remarkably penetrated Pakistan’s airspace, conducted the raid, and returned to a base in Afghanistan showcasing this capability. When combined with routine air strikes in the Middle East and Central Asia, there seems to be no target out of reach for special operations. In spite of this capability, the president-elect can pose the same question Secretary Rumsfeld posed a decade ago: are we killing terrorists faster than they are created? The persistence of al-Qa’ida and the development of offshoots like ISIL and al-Shabaab suggest an answer. A decade ago, the United States went through a constant list of al-Qaida “number threes” being killed (and just as easily replaced); a similar dynamic is apparent today with the Islamic State. This pattern suggests that the faith of so many in Washington that there is a low-cost, no-casualty, no-risk counter terrorism approach may be misplaced. Whether Trump will want to accept this reality—or insist all that is needed is to simply increase the amount of force that is applied—will help determine the future trajectory of U.S. counter terrorism policy.

### **3) How can the U.S. convince its European, Canadian, and Japanese defense partners to contribute more to collective defense?**

Unlike its Chinese and Russian rivals, the U.S. maintains an extensive list of allies and partners. By treaty, the U.S. pursues collective defense with 27 partners through NATO and five others through bilateral treaties in Asia. With few exceptions—like Estonia, the United Kingdom, or Poland—our treaty allies fail to meet the NATO

benchmark of spending two percent of GDP on defense. While they provide important basing and host nation support, the third and fourth richest countries of Germany and Japan do not meet the benchmark. As the president-elect looks to encourage allies to become contributors, he can look at surging diplomatic efforts to withdraw U.S. forces from Kosovo, Afghanistan, and the Middle East, so U.S. allies feel the security dilemma the same way the U.S. does. Indeed, just in the weeks since his election, concerns that a “green-eyeshade” approach to alliance accounting has spurred a number of U.S. partners to commit to real increases in their defense spending.

As allies and partners are put on notice that Trump may be prepared to make U.S. defense guarantees more conditional based on the extent to which allies take their defense responsibilities seriously, there could, in fact, be a hidden boon for American manufacturing. Encouraging partners to increase their defense outlays by purchasing U.S.-made weapons could provide a small stimulus. More importantly, increased sales of U.S. equipment promotes interoperability both between the U.S. and partners and among themselves, and including partners in U.S. command structures will give allies the tools to be partners. There are already dozens of countries represented at U.S. combatant commands.

#### **4) Why has the U.S. reverted to isolating Russia rather than improving upon multilateral negotiations that halted Iran’s nuclear program and removed 1300 tons of chemical weapons from Syria?**

A Trump administration will need to give a definitive answer as to whether the revival of Russian power and the Kremlin’s insistence that it play the leading role in the Eurasian region and be consulted on major problems of international significance is a direct threat to U.S. national interests and core values. Russia is important for U.S. presence in Afghanistan, essential for the U.S. space program, and has been a critical partner on countering nuclear proliferation. Can the U.S. accept a greater Russian role in the world under the Kremlin’s current management, or does the United States need to take steps to contain and reduce Russian power? Part of the answer to this question will come if the Trump administration sees Russian actions as annoyances rather than as threats and views the costs of alienating Russia as greater than the benefits of collective action with the Kremlin.

#### **5) How does the U.S. preserve cyberspace as a civilian space while protecting critical infrastructure, identifying terrorist activities, and protecting citizens from malicious activity?**

Cyber tools have expanded the range of actors in international security. Only governments can conduct missile strikes, but individuals and groups can conduct cyber strikes. Development costs are minuscule relative to conventional military power and have expanded the range of threats motivated by profits, espionage, and information operations. While we have not experienced cyber war, dozens of countries are developing cyber commands and are learning how to integrate cyber operations into traditional military operations. While cyberspace is a civilian space, future conflicts will place Americans in the battlespace. As NSA Director Admiral Mike Rogers has said, “It is only a matter of the ‘when,’ not the ‘if’—we’re going to see a nation-state, group or actor engage in destructive behavior against critical infrastructure in the United States.”

To improve cybersecurity, the U.S. government wants to and needs to work with industry. But neither side has understood how cybersecurity poses a different set of challenges for each. Government does not appreciate the business side of IT, and the IT industry does not appreciate the national security dimensions of their businesses. Disputes over encryption and surveillance have undermined trust. The president-elect will have to find ways to build bridges to industry to enable information sharing and rethink cybersecurity approaches that largely place the burden of security on the individual user who is exposed to risk by flawed software.

#### **6) How can the U.S. government improve the free trade agreements it has already signed (starting with the North American Free Trade Area and including the bilateral free trade agreements with countries like Colombia and South Korea) to increase American exports?**

This question will prove to be one of the most difficult challenges facing the new administration. These

agreements were painstakingly negotiated over years and rest on an entire set of compromise arrangements that cannot be unilaterally adjusted without collapsing the entire free trade relationship—and many of these are with key security partners. A Trump administration will need to give new resources and greater priority and prestige to the parts of the U.S. government, starting with the Department of Commerce, whose principal job is to get others to buy more from us. The president also has a panoply of executive powers at his disposal that may allow him to redefine standards and give legal cover to placing greater restrictions on the import of goods or services. As the chief purchasing officer of the U.S. government—one of the largest consumers in the world—he would also be able to set criteria that would redefine what constitutes “American-produced” goods to exclude a higher number of foreign-produced parts and components. All of these could be used as levers to encourage greater purchase of U.S. produced goods, similar to some of the voluntary agreements that Ronald Reagan reached with other G-7 leaders during the 1980s.

## **7) Does U.S. energy self-sufficiency enable the U.S. to rethink the Carter Doctrine and its Reagan Corollary that sees a vital national interest in exporting oil from the Middle East?**

If shale oil enables the United States to achieve energy self-sufficiency, a fundamental shift in U.S. foreign policy could occur. This shift would overturn the Carter Doctrine and the Reagan Corollary, which committed the United States to defend the countries of the Persian Gulf. While oil is a global commodity, a disproportionate share of U.S. military power is in the Middle East to ensure Gulf countries can export oil to China, India, and Japan. It is less likely that a Trump administration will let this state of affairs continue unless there is a clearer quid pro quo in place that benefits the United States.

## **8) How should the United States cope with a rising China?**

Trump will become the latest American Chief Executive to wrestle with avoiding the so-called “Thucydides trap,” whereby a rising power challenges a status quo power. Conflict with China is not inevitable, but there are clear tensions between the U.S. and China caused by extensive Chinese maritime claims and the U.S. desire to remain a Pacific power. During the campaign, Trump shifted between aggressive criticism of China’s approach to trade and calls for greater cooperation between the two countries. Perhaps, on taking office, Trump will reach out to see if it is possible to create a series of quid pro quo arrangements between China and the United States on matters of trade and geo-politics like the maritime disputes in the South and East China Seas and North Korea’s nuclear program. Trump will project an image of American power, strength, and resolve in the region—but at the same time does not want the United States to be the “sucker” that is either seduced by Chinese appeals to U.S. global leadership as a reason for the U.S. to absorb greater costs for dealing with problems like climate change, or is tricked by allies into making their problems with China America’s own. The lack of any detailed overview from Trump of a proposed China strategy makes the question of who will staff the key Asia portfolios in the U.S. national security apparatus all the more important in terms of the advice they will bring to the president.

As we look ahead to the next four years, one thing is clear: Trump does not appear to want to relinquish America’s leading position in the international order, but challenges the notion that the U.S. must always be the first responder and bill payer of choice. At the same time, his campaign seemed to indicate that he wants America to be more feared rather than loved (code, in his view, for exploitation) through judicious but effective uses of force that do not become drawn-out interventions or quagmires. As his cabinet forms and the national security staff is built, Eliot Cohen’s advice seems prescient: “he will begin to school himself on what it takes to wage wars—because he will surely find himself directing several of them.”

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