

# Good Bye to All That: Donald Trump and the End of the U.S. Global Empire

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*What's startling is how quickly **Donald Trump**, aided and abetted by a mixture of billionaires, sycophants, and far right ideologues is undermining the basic pillars of a U.S. imperium that emerged in 1945 with the unconditional surrender of Germany and Japan ending the Second World War. Amidst the follies of Trump unleashed upon the world, it's worth examining what has been and what is emerging.*

## **Then: 1945 to 2016**

With unparalleled power and global influence the United States waged a Cold War against the Soviets and global communism; organized a global system of military alliances; constructed a global network of military bases to encircle, contain, and threaten it's rivals; engaged in endless arms races and spent trillions in building and maintaining dominant conventional and nuclear military forces; established a global financial order with the American dollar as global reserve currency and U.S. bonds on ultimate protector of value in hard times allowing the U.S. to run deficits and print money with impunity; waged a series of wars and proxy wars contesting for U.S. dominance and the control of oil and other strategic materials in the global South; as dominant economic, military, scientific, and cultural power, exercised an astounding global mixture of hard and soft power throughout the world ranging from engineering coups to providing disaster and crisis aid and home for refugees; offered food and development aid and plethora of military hardware; controlled international development groups like the World Bank; and managed the world in accord with the Washington Consensus based on free trade, structural adjustments imposed upon the poor nations of the global South using privatization, commodity exports to pay for mountains of development debt.

This was an empire that managed to emerge substantially unchanged and even more globally dominant after the collapse of the Soviet Union. It's ideologues, like Francis Fukuyama, proclaiming an "end to history" as a liberal capitalist free-trading American empire encompassed the world. This was the only real choice moving forward, a matter of theme and variation.

The empire was shaken by 911 and the disastrous Iraq Invasion but it persisted and managed to bail out the bankers and speculators following the 2007-2008 global financial collapse. Terror replaced communism as the Enemy. Business and empire as usual would have persisted given the universally anticipated succession to power of **Hilary Clinton**.

## **Now**

The consternation on the faces of the other leaders of the G-7 staring down at the petulant

Donald Trump sitting with arms crossed tells it all just before Trump departed for his summit meeting with a dynastic and murderous Korean dictator. On the way, Trump refused to sign the carefully wrought G-7 statement while having his Economic Adviser and his Trade Representative attack Canadian **Prime Minister Justin Trudeau**.

For many this is close to the last straw following a stream of perplexing actions including Trump's reticence to support NATO and his withdrawal from the global Paris Climate Accords where the U.S. now stands alone as ecological catastrophe gathers and the Trump administration wants to burn more coal.

What is significant is more than the latest outrage. We need to examine the consequences combining what is done in the normal course of business; what is not done; and what happens in emergencies.

### **No Coherent Plan**

There is, of course, no coherent design or understanding at work much beyond the reported White House staffer's explanation for trashing the G-7. "This is America bitch."

Trump hardly reads. He is an instinctive actor compulsively seeking self-aggrandizement of a fragile ego; endless personal and familial enrichment; revenge against those who have opposed or slighted him; expressing his lusts for young beautiful women including his daughter and his deeply racist and anti-immigrant sentiments. He rode to power on racism and nativism and will attempt to stay in power using racism and nativism. He's all in.

This is not a recipe for sustaining a global U.S. empire. He clearly does not care. His instincts were to remove U.S. forces from Afghanistan and Syria and was talked out of it by the generals and White House handlers.

Trump's world view is also incoherent. Trump makes common cause with Saudi Crown Prince and autocrat to be, **Mohammed bin Salman** and supports the genocidal Saudi War in Yemen and acts as if a Middle East War against Iran, dear to the heart of **National Security Advisor John Bolton**, would be an acceptable thing. While a negotiated settlement in Yemen can open the door toward more peaceful relations with Iran, the likelihood of pursuing such a path is poor. The odds currently appear to favor more the eruption of a Saudi-U.S.-Israel vs. Iran-Hezbollah Middle Eastern War than a durable regional peace plan.

U.S. leadership that was globally central is suddenly become peripheral. Trade is now a weapon to be used as readily against the great liberal capitalist democratic members of the G-7 as against recalcitrant dictatorships. U.S. military alliances matter little. Trump's decision to end U.S.-South Korea military exercises was a strong signal to Seoul and Tokyo as well as to Pyongyang and Beijing and Moscow that the fearsome assertiveness of U.S. military might is taking a big step back.

The danger, of course, is that the end of U.S. military presence if not done the context of regional peace settlements, will instead embolden well armed dictators and lead countries like South Korea and Japan to pursue their own nuclear weapons programs.

The U.S. empire has prospered and thrived by rewarding its friends, punishing and, if necessary, destroying its enemies. That required some unspoken sense of limits and imperial judgement. But not for Trump. Power is to be used to serve his short term needs.

“Trade wars are easy to win,” said Trump.

And this is certainly true rhetorically and perhaps politically in the short term.

Bashing Canada for high protective tariffs shielding Canadian farmers from cheap U. S. Wisconsin dairy imports is likely to be helpful in 2018 mid-term elections in some Wisconsin Congressional districts. The U.S. has a net trade surplus with Canada, if that matters. Of course long term consequences of a trade war with G-7 and with China will seriously hurt the global economy and red state Trump Districts most of all through targeted retaliatory tariffs. Will Trump just talk tough and do little on trade? Who knows?

**Xi Jinping** treats Trump like a powerful but corrupt provincial governor providing pomp and circumstance and funneling cash to Ivanka through trademarks and patents on her products, providing a \$500 million dollar loan to a Trump branded Indonesia resort project. Trump is a man with whom Xi Jinping can do business. So can the litany of many other authoritarians worldwide both obscure and notorious.

His fondness for **Vladimir Putin** and multiple murky financial ties are headline news; **Kim Jong-un** is now a buddy soon to be invited to the White House. The murderous Duterte of the Philippines a pal. He has not met an authoritarian who has treated him royally he does not like.

### **Bankruptcy Man**

Trump in the past has remarked that his experience in multiple and profitable bankruptcies, where the sucker investors end up holding the bag while he flushes bad debt, can be duplicated by U.S. default, for example, by not increasing U.S. debt limit. While this is more political trope to appeal to his base and to gain political advantage, there is a grave risk of a global credit driven financial crisis to come in the few years. A global credit crisis can unfold quickly in the face of an economic dip given the potential trillions of defaulting corporate junk bonds, emerging market bonds, and non-recourse loans where there is no choice but to wipe out many trillions of bad debt by default through government mandated deleveraging and financial restructuring. There is simply too much corporate debt, consumer credit card debt, mortgage debt, sovereign debt, pension and health care liabilities on a global scale affecting everyone from the OECD nations to China and the global South. Worst case can be global depression while government acts to save the richest and impoverish most everyone else. What will the Donald Trump do as President if he has to step into the breach facing global financial chaos?

### **Conclusion**

The retreat from U.S. leadership on trade, economics, military security, climate change and ecological protection by Donald Trump is leading in the short term to a world that will emerge as more chaotic, more violent, more polluted, with dictators more emboldened and the poor more desperate.

The healing response to Trump's excess is not a return to U.S. empire as usual, but to use this opportunity to establish principles, policies and programs needed to start to build a global ecological civilization based on ecological and social justice and peace. Now is the time to articulate what such a just, peaceful and sustainable system would be, and how we get from here to there.

Beyond U.S.global militarism, for example, what is the shape of global security arrangements. Mature democracies do not fight wars with one another. How can global democracies develop sufficient security guarantee against tyrants like Kim, and, at the same time, pursue paths toward peace and justice.

Above all, the essential need for a global transition to efficient renewable energy and sustainable practices in manufacturing, forestry , agriculture and aquaculture within a context of peace and social justice can establish the basis for a peaceful global convergence on sustainable norms like 3 tons of carbon dioxide emissions per person per year and an end to poverty. Many tens of trillions must be unvested in building a sustainable and just future that will save us, and not continue on squandering our future on war spending and pollution and ecological destruction as usual.

We should not waste the opportunity the opportunity provided by theTrump disruption to develop and start to implement plans and programs for an ecological and peaceful future.

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**Roy Morrison's Latest Book is Sustainability Sutra (2017). He is working on building solar on working farms [www.dual-cropping.com](http://www.dual-cropping.com).**

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