

How “America First” Became the Presidency of the Pentagon

The Pentagon’s new National Defense Strategy is the perverse embodiment of the Trump administration’s “America First” policy, putting American military and corporate empire above all else, even if it leads the country into financial ruin and a dangerous global war.

By [Whitney Webb](#)

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*During the 2016 presidential campaign, **Donald Trump** won over many American voters by his promise to put “America First.” Though this catchphrase was thought - at the time - to imply a populist message of putting the American people first, Trump has largely failed to deliver on his promises to roll back the corporate welfare state and instead invest in everyday Americans - as evidenced by his tax reform bill, the only legislative “victory” of his young presidency.*

However, Trump wasn’t lying when he campaigned on putting “America First;” he was just referring to America in a different context that has nothing to do with populism or improving the economic situation for the average U.S. citizen. As his actions as president have shown, “America First” - in practice - has meant preserving American hegemony abroad at all costs, resulting in a scorched-earth policy that seeks to keep American corporations and military empire on top.

Over the course of Trump’s first year, what was promised to be a presidency of the people quickly became a presidency of the Pentagon. After putting several military men in top positions, Trump, after fewer than three months in office, [gave the Pentagon](#) unprecedented war-making powers. He did this by “pre-delegating authority” once reserved for the executive branch, thereby giving the Pentagon “a freer hand” in launching missions - ranging from [drone strikes](#) to [Navy SEAL ops](#).

What followed has been a massive increase in lethal drone strikes and explosive growth in secret military operations in nations with which the U.S. is not at war and where no legal authority for its military involvement exists, other than the notorious 2001 Authorization for Use of Military Force (AUMF). In addition, America’s “forever wars” and its occupation of Syria have both continued and expanded.

In a telling display, Trump had not [even been informed](#) of the use of the U.S.’ largest non-nuclear bomb until after it was detonated in Afghanistan last year. Trump, in speaking about the incident soon after, was able to recall the details of the cake he was eating at the time of the strike, but not the country that had been bombed.

Only weeks later, it emerged that Iraq War architect and former Deputy Secretary of Defense under George W. Bush, **Paul Wolfowitz** [was guiding](#) two of the three most

powerful military figures in the Trump administration – **James Mattis** and **H.R. McMaster** – via private email correspondence. Wolfowitz [later signaled](#) that he knew Mattis was calling the shots on U.S. foreign policy when he said:

“I think in many ways it matters much more what Secretary Mattis and Secretary Tillerson think it [Trump’s statement] means than what the president had in mind when he said it.”

Over time, “Trump’s generals” have shown themselves to be [firmly in control](#). They vet “everything” that comes across the president’s desk — a protocol [Politico reported](#) as a system “designed to ensure that the president won’t see any external policy documents, internal policy memos, agency reports and even news articles that haven’t been vetted.” They are also said to keep “[a tight leash](#)” on who meets with the president, with all meetings subject to their approval.

While staunch Trump supporters may argue that the generals’ rise to power is a sign that Trump is being muzzled by “the deep state,” [reports](#) have indicated that Trump was more than happy to give the Pentagon so much freedom, as he wished “to operate more like the CEO he was in the private sector in such matters and delegate even more power to Mattis” and the Pentagon. Furthermore, Trump’s warmongering rhetoric against certain nations has been all his own, including [his tweeting](#) that taunted North Korea with promises of nuclear war.

North Korean Leader Kim Jong Un just stated that the “Nuclear Button is on his desk at all times.” Will someone from his depleted and food starved regime please inform him that I too have a Nuclear Button, but it is a much bigger & more powerful one than his, and my Button works!

— Donald J. Trump (@realDonaldTrump) [January 3, 2018](#)

Most recently, Trump’s fondness for the militaristic tint of his presidency made headlines when he allegedly ordered a large military parade be staged in Washington, leading veterans groups and other activists [to criticize](#) Trump’s “authoritarian tendencies.”

With their control established, the Pentagon’s version of “America First” has taken hold. Last month, [the Pentagon announced](#) its new National Defense Strategy, thereby replacing the previous strategy published in 2008. The new strategy of the Pentagon sidelines the War on Terror in favor of targeting “inter-state strategic competition” — with special focus given to the dominant threats to American hegemony, Russia and China. As Mattis noted, it will seek to counter any “threat” to American influence by any means necessary, including the use of military force. Though some will note that this has long been the motivation behind much of U.S. military action in recent years, it is now out in the open and officially enshrined as the force guiding the Pentagon’s decisions.

This new strategy is the perverse embodiment of the Trump administration’s “America First” policy, putting American military and corporate empire above all else, even if it leads the country into financial ruin and a dangerous global war.

“Boeing First!”

Trump’s embrace of the Pentagon’s idea of “America First” has been demonstrated by his treatment of American corporations, particularly weapons manufacturers. For instance, Boeing – a company in dire straits prior to the Trump presidency – is now [the top recipient](#) of defense contracts, beating out Lockheed Martin and Raytheon by hundreds of millions of dollars.

Some have speculated that this surge in business is related to the fact that Boeing’s CEO [has had numerous meetings](#) with Trump at Mar-a-Lago and has even claimed to have “the president’s ear” on key issues. Boeing also [received](#) \$1.1 billion as a result of the Trump tax cut legislation. The money Boeing has received from government contracts and the tax break totals to about \$2.78 billion. Interestingly, that is roughly [the same amount](#) by which Boeing’s operating cash flow increased over the last year. Unsurprisingly, Boeing’s earnings forecast for this fiscal year [have soared](#) over the past year, along with its stock price.

However, Boeing’s [record profits](#) will do little to help everyday Americans, as the company produces most of its products through [a supply chain](#) spread all over the world with very little actually produced in the United States. Over the last five years, Boeing [has invested](#) heavily in automation and has cut around 34,000 jobs. Even though it is now set to have its [first annual sales gain](#) in three years, Boeing [has stated](#) it will not be adding to its workforce.

Despite this, Trump has made no attempts to “strong arm” Boeing into opening U.S. factories or offering more jobs by bringing them back from overseas. He seems to be content to have Boeing and its ilk instead receive lucrative government contracts and generous tax breaks.

“America First,” in practice, has shown itself to have little to do with the average American and everything to do with continuing the dominance of corporate America and its military empire. This policy is nothing new under Trump. It is exactly, if a bit more nakedly, what U.S. presidents have done for the vast majority of the nation’s history — the people be damned.

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[The Globalization of War: America’s “Long War” against Humanity](#)

Michel Chossudovsky

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