

The Dangerous Noose: Trump, Rogue Regimes and Annihilation

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*We must not sleepwalk our way into nuclear war.” – UN **Secretary General António Guterres**, Sep 19, 2017*

*Having gone soft on the United Nations in his initial remarks, US **President Donald Trump** returned to stupendous form with the language of annihilation in his address to the 72nd session of the General Assembly. Jaws dropped; heads were covered by hands; arms were resolutely folded. It was exactly the sort of “hate speech,” snorted Iran’s foreign minister, **Javad Zarif**, that belonged to the medieval age, “unworthy of reply.”[1]*

In one fundamental sense, Trump’s spiky language resembled that of a previous US president, one whose simplicity remained innocent to the deep greyness of international politics. **George W. Bush**, whose childish rendering of the world into friends and those of the “axis of evil”, would have found little to disagree with.

“Authority and authoritarian powers seek to collapse the values, the systems, and alliances that prevented conflict and titled the world toward freedom since World War II.”[2]

Trump’s tone of menace proved particularly apocalyptic, painting a truly hideous world for member states. “International criminal networks traffic rugs, weapons, people; force dislocation and mass migration; threaten our borders; and new forms of aggression exploit technology to menace our citizens.”

Nothing is ever to scale in such Trumpian performances. North Korea’s “depraved regime” had killed millions by means of starvation, with millions more tortured, and killed (presumably by other means), and oppressed. Pyongyang was responsible for the looming spectre of mass death, its “reckless pursuit of nuclear weapons and missiles” threatening the globe “with unthinkable loss of human life.”

The next stage of the Korean gamble shows the public front of delusion and self-denial. Trump retains the cobwebbed view a growing number of US strategists disagree with: that denuclearisation at the moment is pure fantasy. Take it off the table, as the **Kim Jong-un** regime will never have a bar of it.

Not so Trump:

“No nation on earth has an interest in seeing this band of criminals arm itself

with nuclear weapons and missiles.”

Indeed, Trump felt that “Rocket Man is on a suicide mission for himself and his regime.” The noble, restrained United States, with its “great strength and patience” would, if forced to defend itself or its allies, “totally destroy North Korea.” Such suitable restraint.

Iran also reserved a special spot in the Trump show of rancour.

“It is time for the entire world to join us in demanding that Iran’s government end its pursuit of death and destruction.”

Iran, supporter of terror, enemy of peaceful Israel, an impoverished rogue state which should never have received international blessing in “one of the worst and most one-sided transactions the United States has ever entered into.”

Without any glimmer of contradiction, Trump noted a visit to that great standard bearer of peace and moderation, Saudi Arabia, where he was “honoured to address the leaders of more than 50 Arab and Muslim nations.” The theme? Combating terrorism and Islamist extremism. No better place, perhaps, than Riyadh to address these niggling points.

Then came another regime to target with an expansive tongue lashing:

“The socialist dictatorship of **Nicolas Maduro** has inflicted terrible pain and suffering on the good people of [Venezuela].”

Across the country were instances of starvation, democratic corrosion, an “unacceptable” situation that demanded intervention, military, if necessary.

Trump’s address ticked the boxes of a very distinct nomenclature, the sort alien to the diplomatic corps and dogmatists of the liberal market credo. Swedish foreign minister **Margo Wallström** found his performance barely believable.

“It was the wrong speech, at the wrong time, to the wrong audience.”

In other respects, Trump foisted upon his UN audience a brand thinning with each speech and press release: the America First label, the art of the necessary deal centred on a responsibility for citizens.

“For too long, the American people were told that mammoth multinational trade deals, unaccountable international tribunals, and powerful global bureaucracies were the best way to promote their success.”

Trump preferred the necessary deal, America First as a warming vision of cosy affluence, a form of nostalgia in action, an effort to restore those vanished jobs running into the millions and confront those who “gamed the system and broke the rules.” In so doing, the middle class received a historical caning, forgotten in a bout of mass amnesia. Never again, he intoned, would they be forgotten.

It was a speech insistent on the supremacy of sovereignty while also praising the UN as a forum where disputes and challenges could be resolved.

“If we are to embrace the opportunities of the future and overcome the present dangers together, there can be no substitute for strong, sovereign, and independent nations”.

This is Trump pure and simple, unable to reconcile the dictates of stomping sovereign will with the notion of calm collective action, thereby undermining both.

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Notes

[1] <https://twitter.com/JZarif/status/910205888677470208>

[2] <https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2017/09/19/remarks-president-trump-72nd-session-unit-ed-nations-general-assembly>

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