

Trump a Peacemaker? Analyses of His Political Profile Vary Wildly

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Donald Trump, a peacemaker?

*That's precisely how **Robert C. O'Brien** (former US National Security Adviser) [describes](#) the former president's record – even if this means peace by force, or “peace through strength”, as Ronald Reagan phrased it and as Trump echoed it in his UNGA 2020 General Assembly speech. Analyses of Trump's political profile can indeed vary wildly, depending on whom you ask (see below). O'Brien in any case forecasts that, with regards to foreign policy, one can expect realism with a “Jacksonian flavor” in case the Republican wins the election.*

Andrew Byers (a nonresident Fellow at Texas A&M University's Albritton Center for Grand Strategy) and Randall L. Schweller (an Ohio State University Professor and Director of the Program for the Study of Realist Foreign Policy) have similar views on this.

[According to them](#), Donald Trump is, at heart, a “true realist”, that is, “someone who avoids idealistic and ideological views of global affairs in favor of power politics”.

For the experts, in Trump's first term, such “realist impulses were muted and sometimes stopped by hawkish national security staffers who did not share his vision”, however, “having learned that personnel is policy”, he “will not make this mistake again.”

Byers and Schweller thus forecast that Trump's potential new administration will be “perhaps the most restrained US foreign policy in modern history.”

The idea of securing peace through readiness to engage in war is best summarized in American political culture by the aphorism of which Theodore Roosevelt was so fond of saying: **“speak softly and carry a big stick; you will go far.”**

Trump seems to lack the softness part – this becomes abundantly clear if one takes the [story of his exchange with Taliban leadership](#) seriously, for instance (clearly a mistake, considering how other Powers today pragmatically engage with the Taliban). Even Roosevelt’s “big stick” diplomacy was not pure bullying: it was supposed, in theory, at least, to allow adversaries to “save face” in defeat.

O’Brien and the other experts quoted do have a point with regards to Trump’s record of “peacemaking”. There is at least a grain of truth to that and one must admit it. There is however, as is often the case, another side to almost all the examples these analysts list in making their point.

O’Brien goes as far as to claim that “Trump was determined to avoid new wars and endless counterinsurgency operations, and his presidency was the first since that of [Jimmy Carter](#) in which the United States did not enter a new war or expand an existing conflict.” This assertion depends on one’s definition of “war”, of course. The claim is even contradictory, as O’Brien next says “Trump also ended one war with a rare US victory, wiping out the Islamic State (also known as ISIS)”. Besides, on the defeat of the ISIS terrorist group, O’Brien, while hailing the Republican candidate, fails to mention the [key role](#) played by [Russia](#) and [Iran](#) (not to mention [Hezbollah](#)).

Other analysts, such as Hal Brands (a Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies scholar), also ardently [believe](#) in Trump’s “isolationism” – but see it as potentially apocalyptic. For Brands, a new Trump presidency could “fracture Europe”, bringing back the European “darker, more anarchic, more illiberal patterns of its past.”

Image: Donald Trump and Iranian General Qassem Soleimani (Source: OneWorld)



I [wrote](#) in March about how Trump’s supposed “isolationism” must be taken with a grain of salt. One may recall that it was no other than Trump who [assassinated Iranian General Soleimani](#), for one thing. Trump has also famously [said](#) that Tel Aviv must “finish the problem”. The former president may not be the insane warmonger he’s made out to be by a largely Democrat US media and some analysts. He does prefer to resort to economic warfare (rather than opting for military intervention all the time). However he is obviously no “[anti-imperialist](#)” hero as the fantasies of some of the more naïve analysts would have it.

Trump did “facilitate the [Abraham Accords](#)” to bring “peace” to “Israel and three of its neighbors in the Middle East plus Sudan” (as O’Brien writes)

However, the very same agreements, albeit attracting new allies, have caused a major increase in tensions all across Africa, the Middle East and beyond. The Israel-UEA peace deal

in 2020, for instance, prompted [protests in South Africa](#) right away – by 2022, the African nation was [declaring Israel an “apartheid state”](#). The Persian Gulf – Horn of Africa nexus has always been a strategic place for Israel, this being a region where military and commercial interests overlap. These normalization deals were in fact also part of the rise of Israeli military presence in Africa and abroad – this was made all the more clearly with the 2021 [Israel’s joint naval drill with the UAE and Bahrain](#). Besides that, already in 2021 I [wrote](#) (as did countless others) on how the Israeli-Palestine conflict further polarized the Middle East and inflamed public opinion against the Abraham Accords.

The same normalization agreements, together with the issue of [Western Sahara](#), escalated Algerian-Moroccan tensions tremendously, to the point of [disrupting European energy interests](#). In December 2020, Trump recognized Morocco’s claims to the disputed region (in a kind of “quid pro quo” after Morocco normalized its relations with the Jewish state). In doing so, the former US President fueled pre-existing contradictions between the Maghreb region and the African Union, and within the Maghreb region itself – with regards to the Western Sahara “forgotten war”, he threw gasoline on the fire. One must admit that increasing tensions globally is a rather strange way of making peace.

Trump gave the Abraham Accords a central place in its foreign policy, and Biden has inherited this. The hard fact is that the roots of today’s crisis in the Middle East lie largely at these agreements. With the escalation of conflict in the Middle East, the center of gravity for global tensions might have partially shifted away from Eastern Europe. The current Houthi crisis in the Red Sea, for one thing, is largely a collateral effect of the Washington-backed catastrophic Israeli campaign in the Levant. It turns out Trump is, by all indications, more of an unconditional backer of Israel than his opponent Biden is. And this could be bad news to the world.

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