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In the aftermath of the attacks on 9/11, the Bush Administration invaded Iraq and tortured prisoners of war and terrorism suspects, in flagrant violation of the U.N. Charter and the Geneva Conventions. As a result, the United States lost standing among many of its traditional allies around the world.

Behind the smoke and mirrors of Trump's tweets and publicity stunts, he has doubled down on everything that was already wrong with America's catastrophic militarist foreign policy.

President Barack Obama's global charm offensive brought friends and allies back to America's side, but his ten-fold increase in drone strikes to assassinate often innocent terrorism suspects, and his failure to reverse the ever-expanding violence and chaos of U.S. wars, overshadowed his efforts to restore America's international credibility, especially in the Global South.

Then came Donald Trump.

The 2016 election was a make-or-break moment in U.S. history. Would the United States build on the constructive elements in Obama's record, like the nuclear agreement with Iran and restored relations with Cuba? Or would it perpetuate catastrophic neocolonial wars justified as humanitarian interventions?

Trump campaigned on a platform of ending "endless wars," in contrast to his hawkish opponent, Hillary Clinton. A detailed study by Douglas L. Kriner of Cornell University and Francis X. Shen of the University of Minnesota Law School reached the stunning conclusion that support for Trump in counties with a high number of war casualties—especially in the battleground states of Michigan, Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin—played a critical role in the elections.

Yet Trump, far from delivering the peace he promised, doubled down on the worst of Obama's policies, particularly in regard to the nation's covert and proxy wars. In Libya, Syria, Somalia, Iraq, Afghanistan, and Yemen, U.S. allies still do most of the fighting while the U.S. military provides devastating air support, special operations "kill or capture" raids, training, and weapons for its proxies.

This strategy has resulted in massive casualties to combatants and civilians in those countries. But it reduced domestically sensitive U.S. war deaths in Iraq and Afghanistan to just thirty in 2015 and thirty-three in 2016, compared with 560 at the peak of Obama's escalation in Afghanistan in 2010 and 1,021 in 2007 at the peak of the Iraq War.

And while Trump has reduced U.S. troop strength in Afghanistan under a peace agreement with the Taliban, there are still about 8,600 U.S. troops there, slightly more than when he took office. Trump has promised another reduction to less than 5,000 U.S. troops by November, which would amount to the smallest deployment in Afghanistan since 2001. But this would still be less than a full withdrawal, leaving the door open for yet another cycle of reinforcement and re-escalation.

Trump's war on Afghanistan has relied heavily on bombing, with a record 7,423 bombs and missiles dropped in 2019. So far, the agreement with the Taliban has not ended the U.S. air campaign, nor the United States' support for the corrupt Afghan government. The fact that Trump can wave around a piece of paper during his re-election campaign does not mean that the war is over.

As part of his bid to win another four years as commander-in-chief, Trump has bragged about how he crushed ISIS in Iraq and Syria; but few Americans comprehend the level of U.S. brutality that this involved. The U.S. military used almost 40,000 bombs and missiles, and thousands more artillery shells and rockets, to bombard Mosul, Raqqa, and other ISIS-held areas in 2017.

In 2015, candidate Trump threatened to kill ISIS family members along with the fighters, saying, “When you get these terrorists, you have to take out their families.” The Iraqi forces that captured the last ISIS refuge in Mosul’s Old City in 2017 massacred everyone left alive: men, women, and children. According to Kurdish Iraqi intelligence reports, more than 40,000 civilians in Mosul were killed in the attack to retake the city.

Trump also brags about the weapons deals he has clinched with Saudi Arabia. Both Obama and Trump sold the repressive Saudi dictatorship so many U.S. weapons that, for three years, the Saudis' military spending exceeded every country in the world except the United States and China. The Saudi-led coalition, which included the United Arab Emirates, used these weapons to carry out a catastrophic war in Yemen that has caused the world’s worst humanitarian disaster.

Impervious to the suffering of the Yemeni people, Trump has vetoed five bipartisan bills seeking to rein in this endless massacre: two War Powers bills to end the U.S. role in the war and three bills to halt arms sales to Saudi Arabia and the UAE.

Meanwhile, Trump has continued to support Israel’s bombing of Gaza and planned annexation of its illegal settlements, with only limited autonomy for what is left of the Palestinian territories. Now Trump has further sacrificed Palestine’s future in order to cement a dangerous anti-Iran military alliance between Israel and the United Arab Emirates.

Besides not ending any of the wars that he promised to end, Trump has come dangerously close to starting even more catastrophic wars against North Korea , Iran , and Venezuela . His devastating campaigns of unilateral economic sanctions target thirty-nine countries , affecting a third of humanity. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo's accusation that Europe is "siding with the Ayatollahs" in Iran is an admission that Trump's policies of withdrawing from the Iran nuclear deal and imposing "maximum pressure" are isolating the United States as much as Iran.

But Trump's disdain for international cooperation goes far beyond the Iran deal. He has pulled the United States out of the Paris climate accord , the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty , the Open Skies agreement, and three U.N. agencies: WHO , UNESCO , and the Human Rights Council .

Despite Democratic hawks smearing him as a Russian puppet , Trump has led the United States back into a Cold War with Russia and China that most Americans thought we had left behind a generation ago. His National Security and Defense Strategy documents have unequivocally redefined Russia and China as enemies of the United States, courting major power confrontations and ensuring record military budgets for years to come.

This is a startling departure from Obama's 2015 National Security Strategy , which "welcome[d] the rise of a stable, peaceful, and prosperous China" and promised to "keep the door open to greater collaboration with Russia in areas of common interests."

Although Obama set a new post-World War II record for U.S. military spending, at $5.67 trillion over eight years (in 2020 dollars), Trump has used his Cold War with Russia and China to justify spending even more, including pushing ahead with Obama's $1.2 trillion plan to "modernize" U.S. nuclear weapons. Under the rising double danger of nuclear war and the climate crisis, *The Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* in January advanced the hands of its Doomsday Clock to just 100 seconds to midnight, closer to self-destruction than ever.

And while he once blasted NATO as "obsolete," Trump has switched to browbeating NATO countries to spend more money on their militaries. To retaliate against pushback from German Chancellor Angela Merkel, he has withdrawn thousands of troops from Germany and repositioned 5,500 troops in Poland to " enhance deterrence against Russia."

Trump has also ordered increasingly provocative U.S. naval patrols in the South China Sea and stationed 23,000 more U.S. troops in Japan, Guam, South Korea, and Australia. He also sent 14,000 more U.S. troops to the Middle East in 2019 and ramped up drone strikes in Somalia and West Africa.

Behind the smoke and mirrors of Trump's tweets and publicity stunts, he has doubled down on everything that was already wrong with America's catastrophic militarist foreign policy. As the November 3 election has drawn closer, Trump and Secretary Pompeo have stoked tensions at every flashpoint around the world, seeking to stir up the most jingoistic instincts in American voters.

Americans can disagree about whether Trump set out to escalate U.S. wars, sanctions, and brinkmanship, and to revive the old divisions of the Cold War, or whether he was duped into all this by the "Deep State" or the Military-Industrial Complex, or by Democratic opposition to his attempts to scale back troop deployments and reach out to adversaries such as North Korea's Kim Jong-un.

But the legacy of Donald Trump remains one of continued U.S. wars and aggression, backed by a bloated military budget. The only positive aspect of Trump's foreign policy legacy may be his unintended contribution to hastening the day when the sun finally sets on the U.S. empire.