

Us Policy In The Era Of Donald Trump “A Political-Economic Reading”

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Abstract

Indeed, after Donald Trump won the United States presidential elections and assumed the reins of power, he developed a US security strategy for 2017. Trump identified the most important issues that constitute a challenge and obstacle to the security of the United States, such as the Iranian nuclear file, North Korea’s nuclear program, the threat of terrorist groups, and Russian and Chinese ambitions to expand and impose influence. Trump defined and implemented a foreign policy to address these issues in a way that achieves the aims of US National Security. Trump's policy also addressed resolving the Palestinian issue and the Arab-Israeli conflict with what he called “Deal of the Century”. In this deal, Jerusalem has been recognized as a the capital of “Israel” and the headquarters of the US Embassy was transferred to the city of Jerusalem.

Key Words: Donald Trump, foreign policy, American politics, Iran, North Korea, the Palestinian issue.

Introduction

The US foreign policy entered a change after Trump assumed the presidency. He followed an approach to managing foreign issues that differs from the previous administration during the era of Barack Obama, especially in files that are among the strategic priorities of the United States related to its foreign policy and national security. Perhaps at the top of these files and priorities is the Iranian nuclear file, its ballistic missiles and its influence in the region, as well as North Korea’s nuclear program, also the Palestinian issue and the Arab-Israeli conflict. Trump has pursued an economic policy towards China aimed at improving the trade balance in favor of US, and weakening China's economic and trade role worldwide. He worked to inflict material and economic losses on China, deprive it of playing an effective role at the regional and international economic and trade levels, and weaken its ability to influence the international economy. Trump also opposed the nuclear agreement with Iran which was signed and concluded in 2015 under Obama's presidency where he imposed economic sanctions on the Iranian regime. Trump also met with the North Korean President to address Korea's nuclear program, and demanded that the Korean regime make concessions in its nuclear program to resolve this issue and return to normal relations. The Korean President did not accept, perhaps because of the nature of the unfair concessions against North Korea and the US President’s lack of seriousness in adhering to the agreement if it is completed. Trump's policy also addressed resolving the Palestinian issue and the Arab-Israeli conflict, by creating what he called the "deal of the century" as well as his decision to recognize Jerusalem as the capital of “Israel” and move the headquarters of the United States Embassy to the city of Jerusalem. Hence, the article has examined on the most prominent issues addressed by American politics during the era of President Donald Trump.

1. US foreign policy towards China

US-Chinese relations face many challenges, especially at the economic level, as the Trump administration has criticized China’s trade policy in terms of the international economy and the

investments it makes. Also, the initiatives put forward by China, especially the Belt and Road Initiative, where the United States criticized China's policies and imposed sanctions on it². The American strategy touched on the Chinese role, as it considered that China's investment construction and trade strategy supports China's geopolitical ambitions to build and militarize its progress in the South China Sea. It jeopardizes free trade, threatens the sovereignty of other countries, and undermines stability in the region. In addition, China uses incentives, economic sanctions, and military threats to convince other countries to respect its political and security programs³.

Furthermore, the American strategy criticized Chinese expansion in Africa, as it considered that some Chinese practices undermine long-term African development by corrupting elites, dominating extractive industries, and trapping countries in unsustainable and ambiguous debts and obligations. In accordance with Trump's policies, his administration made many charges against Chinese policies, which are considered among the main reasons for imposing sanctions on China from the United States' point of view, including: The Chinese government is forcing American enterprises to transport technology to their firms and then transfer their commercial secrets as a cost of doing business in China⁴. It also endeavors to gain technology from the US firms via intellectual property theft. Chinese security agencies have been coordinated the stealing of US technology, such as advanced military blueprints, and supporting unauthorized intrusions into and robbery of US companies' computer networks to access their trade secrets sensitive and business information⁵. China's industrial policy also attempts to seize the future industries via various ways such as public investment, export restrictions on sensitive raw materials, and China's unfair policies. It is using what Washington has called "market distorting forces," which contain subsidies and state-owned firms, to enhance excess capacity and overproduction of aluminum and steel. The United States has accused China of pursuing a debt trap strategy to procure control over global essential resources globally⁶.

Therefore, the Trump administration has taken several measures against individual Chinese companies, based on accusations that the Chinese telecommunications company "Huawei" will allow China, through its entry into "5G" networks, to obtain greater access to trade secrets and confidential government information⁷. The United States also officially accused the company of fraud, and pressured allies not to allow Huawei to operate on 5G networks within its borders. Hence, It has aimed the international society against Chinese economic and investment policies. It also tries to impose sanctions on China to shift the trade balance in favor of the US economy⁸.

US Census Bureau data revealed that the trade balance between the two countries leans in favor of China, as US imports from China during the first quarter of 2017 amounted to approximately \$106 billion. The value of American exports to China amounted to approximately \$26 billion, and the value of American imports from China amounted to about \$540 billion in 2017⁹. That is, the US imports goods worth \$1.5 billion daily from China, while American exports to China were more than \$120 billion and about goods worth \$330 million annually. American imports from China are concentrated in computers, electronics, and electrical equipment, as they were imported at about \$236 billion in 2017. Followed by the import of manufacturing equipment at a value of \$44 billion, plastic and leather

² Sánchez, Valentina Taborda. "Power balance towards china? Trump's foreign policy towards Asia Pacific." *Online Journal Mundo Asia Pacifico* 7, no. 13 (2018): pp 37-39.

³ Chow, Daniel CK, William McGuire, and Ian Shledon. "A Legal and Economic Critique of President Trump's China Trade Policies." *U. Pitt. L. Rev.* 79 (2017): p 205.

⁴ Sutter, Robert. "Congress and Trump Administration China policy: Overlapping priorities, uneasy adjustments and hardening toward Beijing." *Journal of Contemporary China* 28, no. 118 (2018): pp 519-521.

⁵ *Ibid*, p522.

⁶ *Ibid*, p529.

⁷ *Ibid*, 523.

⁸ Hu, Weixing. "Trump's China policy and its implications for the "cold peace" across the Taiwan Strait." *China Review* 18, no. 3 (2018): pp 61-88.

⁹ Ishido, Hikari, Yuki Tashiro, and Richard Liang. "US President Donald Trump's Twitter Analysis and His Trade Policy Agenda." *International Relations* 6, no. 9 (2017): pp 476-477.

products at a value of \$40 billion, machinery at a value of \$39 billion, and clothing at a value of \$30 billion, and manufactured minerals worth \$27 billion¹⁰.

In implementation of Trump's plans to exert economic pressure on China, his administration imposed sanctions on China, imposing duties on Chinese goods worth \$250 billion. Beijing also responded with tariffs on \$110 billion on US commodities and goods. The United States responded on 7/6/2017 by imposing 25% customs duties on \$34 billion in Chinese electronic imports and Chinese manufactured devices (cars, hard disks, and aircraft components). China responded in kind, imposing a tax on US goods worth \$34 billion (agricultural products, cars, and marine products). US President Donald Trump also announced that his country will impose, as of September 1, 2019, customs duties of 10% on Chinese goods worth \$300 billion¹¹.

It is clear, then, that Trump wants, through the sanctions he imposed on China and the opening of the trade war, to improve the trade balance in favor of US, and also to hinder China's trade role at the regional and international levels. Washington is also working to make China lose its trade and investment revenues, distort China's image before the world, and accuse it of promoting trade policies that trap countries in a debt trap and plunder the wealth and capabilities of these countries. Therefore, it turns out that this is what Trump wanted to achieve through his policies towards China.

2. US foreign policy towards North Korea

The relationship between the United States and North Korea is witnessing many tensions due to the policies pursued by North Korea, which from the United States' point of view violate international laws and norms and affect regional and international security and stability, especially with regard to the nuclear program and the development of ballistic weapons carried out by North Korea. The primary goal of the United States is to freeze and limit the nuclear program and stop the development of ballistic weapons by Korea¹². The American decision-maker considered North Korea a major threat to its national security and explained the mechanisms of Korean progress in the fields of nuclear and electronic weapons. The North Korean regime is accelerating its cyberspace, nuclear weapons, and ballistic missile programs. Washington considered that North Korea threatened the international order, with the aim of gaining global support to impose more sanctions on Korea¹³.

Under Trump's presidency, US foreign policy towards North Korea has been tightened, as his administration invited 100 senators to the White House and outlined its new policy towards North Korea, which is characterized by maximum pressure. Rex Tillerson (Secretary of State) and (James Mattis) Secretary of Defense, as well as (Dan Coats) Director of National Intelligence issued a joint statement. It was shown the House of Representatives on these policies¹⁴. This reflects that the United States places a high priority in its foreign policy on undermining North Korea's nuclear program. The main point of the statement was that Washington aims to pressure North Korea and guide it into negotiations through strong economic sanctions and diplomatic means, while keeping the military option as a hidden card¹⁵.

On July 28, 2017, Pyongyang launched a ballistic missile, and continued to conduct missile tests on August 8, 2017, containing couple flight tests which sent missiles directed against Japan. Also in the same year On September 3, it released a photo of what seemed to be a small nuclear weapon before its sixth nuclear experience. In reaction to North Korea's policies, Trump asserted in a speech before the United Nations General Assembly on September 19, 2017¹⁶, that if the United States or its allies

¹⁰ Ibid, p 484.

¹¹ Ibid, pp 495- 499.

¹² Husenicova, Lucia. "US Foreign Policy Towards North Korea." *International Studies: Interdisciplinary Political and Cultural Journal (IS)* 22, no. 1 (2018): pp 65.

¹³ Ibid, p 67.

¹⁴ Ibid, p 69.

¹⁵ Ibid, p 71.

¹⁶ Porter, Patrick. "Why America's grand strategy has not changed: Power, habit, and the US Foreign policy establishment." *International Security* 42, no. 4 (2018): pp 9-14.

were attacked, the United States would have no choice but to completely destroy North Korea. North Korean President Kim also announced on January 1, 2018, that his nuclear arsenal is capable of thwarting and combating any nuclear threats from the United States. Trump's response to the Korean threats was that it is better for North Korea not to direct any threats to US, because it would face fury and fire which the world has not seen before¹⁷.

The US President's threat comes after security reports circulated by the media, which spoke of North Korea's ability to install a nuclear warhead in ballistic missiles. Pyongyang had tested two ballistic missiles on two different occasions, followed by US imposing severe economic sanctions on North Korea, due to its violation of the UN Security Council resolution banning ballistic weapons imposed on it. In order to alleviate the accusations and threats between the two countries, US and North Korean president attempted in 2018 to discuss and negotiate the outstanding issues and resolve them. A meeting was held between US President Trump and North Korean Kim in Singapore on June 12, 2018 to research North Korean issue, as well as maintaining international peace on the Korean Peninsula, and the future of US-North Korean relations and interactions. After the summit, two presidents issued a joint statement, in which they committed to providing security and political guarantees to the DPRK. The North Korean president in turn has been affirmed his commitment to making the Korean Peninsula free of nuclear weapons¹⁸.

The Singapore Document can be seen as serving as a statement of the following fields: (1) Both sides commit to establishing bilateral relations based on cooperation. (2) Perpetual peace through which US and the DPRK agree to work toward building a lasting and stable regime. (3) North Korea is committed to working towards denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula. (4) The US and North Korean parties are going to labor to recover the remains of thousands of unidentified U.S. troops a period the Korean War¹⁹. The two parties also agreed to hold follow-up negotiations led on the American side by Secretary of State Mike Pompeo. Following the summit, Trump announced that the United States would suspend annual military exercises between the United States and South Korea, which Trump described as "war exercises" and "provocation"²⁰.

It can be concluded from the above that Trump tried to resolve and end the North Korean nuclear file through negotiations and diplomacy through official meetings with the Korean leader²¹. However, it becomes clear that these attempts failed due to the American rejection of the Korean proposals that entail ending this file gradually and in stages extending over years, in exchange for canceling the sanctions imposed on North Korea and restoring normal relations. This proposal was rejected by Trump because he wants the Korean nuclear disarmament completely and without making any concessions, which obstructs the process of ending the Korean nuclear file, leaves it suspended without a solution, and leads to aggravation of relations between the two countries.

3. US foreign policy towards Iran

In a speech in May 2018, Mike Pompeo (US Secretary of State) declared which US would be willing to retrieve diplomatic and economic relations in exchange for Iranian denuclearization. Also the release of all prisoners who hold citizenship of the US or allied country of US, and finishing to the expansionist Iranian influence in all countries of the region, predominately in Iraq, Syria, Yemen. Indeed, Trump's policy towards Iran revolves around thwarting Iran's attempts to develop ballistic missiles, preventing Iran from possessing nuclear capabilities, and changing the terms of the nuclear

¹⁷ Cha, Victor, and David Kang. *Nuclear North Korea: A debate on engagement strategies*. Columbia University Press, 2018. pp 45-76.

¹⁸ Pardo, Ramon Pacheco. *North Korea-US Relations: From Kim Jong Il to Kim Jong Un*. Routledge, (2018). pp 46-48.

¹⁹ *Ibid*, pp 49-51.

²⁰ Alexandrova, Iordanka. "The European Union's Policy Toward North Korea: Abandoning Engagement." *International Journal of Korean Unification Studies* 28, no. 1 (2018): p 39.

²¹ *Ibid*, p 41.

agreement that was signed in 2015²². In addition to Trump's tendency to prevent Iran from strategic expansion, regional positioning, and interference in regional politics. Thus, it is clear that the United States does not want Iran to rise as a regional and international power, because that constitutes a challenge and threat to the policies and plans of the US not only in the region but for the world. Hence, the Trump administration canceled the nuclear agreement with Iran, and exerted pressure on it through US sanctions on the Iranian economy in an attempt to force Iran to renegotiate the nuclear agreement²³.

Therefore, in Donald Trump issued an executive order imposing sanctions on the mining sector in Iran, according to which companies in the world will not be allowed to conduct any commercial dealings with Iran in this sector. The imposition of new US sanctions on the Iranian mining sector has led to many economic repercussions, including depriving Iran of export revenues estimated at \$5 billion²⁴. The Trump administration also canceled the exemptions granted to eight countries to continue purchasing Iranian oil in order to deprive Iran of vital oil revenues worth about \$50 billion annually. It will lead to an escalation in the severity of economic problems, such as the deterioration of the value of the currency, high inflation rates, and a widening of the general budget deficit²⁵.

This made Iran begin moving at the international level in order to communicate with the international powers concerned, whether by continuing to implement the nuclear agreement or in bilateral relations with them. Hence, 12-17 May 2019, Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif undertook an Asian tour that included Turkmenistan, India, Japan and China, after his visit to Russia. Iran is still counting on bilateral relations with some countries, such as China and India, to help it deal with the repercussions imposed by US sanctions. In other words, Iran is currently trying to enhance the chances of continuing commercial transactions, especially in the field of energy, with those countries²⁶.

But what made the situation worse were the bombings that occurred in the Emirati port of Fujairah, as well as the bombings that occurred in the Gulf of Oman, which led to aggravation of the security and political situation in this region. The Trump administration has designated the Iranian Revolutionary Guard as a "terrorist organization threatens the region as a whole", blaming it for several past acts of Iranian-backed and anti-American terrorism. Tensions and problems between US and Iran escalated significantly, especially after the September 14, 2019 attack on vital Saudi energy infrastructure, in which Iran was accused of involvement. It is clear, then, that the policies followed by Trump threaten regional and even international stability. These measures lead to the deterioration of trade and economic relations between Iran and other countries, due to the sanctions imposed by the United States, in addition to threatening international transit routes in the Strait of Hormuz and the Gulf, which causes obstruction of regional and international trade²⁷.

4. US foreign policy towards the Palestinian issue and the Arab-Israeli conflict

Previous American administrations moved towards resolving the Palestinian issue through a two-state solution and a political settlement through negotiations with the Palestinian and Israeli sides. But Trump decided to contradict this strategy, abandoned the idea of two states, and adopted policies towards the Palestinian issue and the Arab-Israeli conflict that might destroy and end the political settlement process. During the election campaign, the Palestinian issue appeared on the agenda of US President Trump in the form of terms bearing the American perspective on issue, most notably

²² Asghar, Mariam Javed. "US Foreign Policy towards Iran under Obama and Trump Administration." *IUB Journal of Social Sciences* 1, no. 2 (2018): pp 35-37.

²³ *Ibid*, pp 39-40

²⁴ Mossalanejad, Abbas. "US Comparative Policy toward Iran and the Middle East Security." *Geopolitics Quarterly* 14, no. 52 (2018): pp 1-20.

²⁵ Katzman, Kenneth, Kathleen J. McInnis, and Clayton Thomas. *US-Iran conflict and implications for US Policy*. Congressional Research Service, (2019). pp 46-50.

²⁶ *Ibid*, pp 53-55.

²⁷ *Ibid*, pp 58-60.

“ensuring Israel’s security” and ensuring its military superiority over all countries in the Middle East as well as “Israel is America’s democratic ally in the region”²⁸. Trump affirmed his commitment to Israel’s security and his great support for it economically and militarily. He stressed the need for the Palestinian Authority to recognize the State of Israel as a Jewish state. As for the two-state solution, in August 2015, Trump presented a strange proposal to solve the Palestinian issue, as he sent a message to the Palestinians to leave their lands to “Israel” in exchange for giving them the American island of Puerto Rico as compensation²⁹.

In his speech at the United Nations General Assembly in 2017, Trump ignored the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. Despite his media announcement when he came to power about the “the century agreement” to end the rooted Palestinian issue, for the first time he did not adopt the official position of the United States, which is to recognize the two-state solution, like his predecessors. Trump also gave a promise to the Israeli occupation to confess Jerusalem as the capital of Israel state. Then, on December 6, 2017, Trump’s decision came to confess Jerusalem as the capital of Israel state, as well as his promise to transfer the US embassy there³⁰.

In response to Trump’s policies, Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas broke off the political contacts with US and refuted to the international bodies. Trump also reduced aid to Gaza Strip and the West Bank, and closed the representative office of the Palestine Liberation Organization in Washington, DC. In 2018, US Banned financing and enhancing the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees. Washington also called on Jordan to dispossess Palestinians that living there of refugees status and then naturalize of them instead³¹.

Indeed, Trump’s confessing that Jerusalem as the unified and eternal capital of Israel state contradicts the US delegate decision to the United Nations in 1967 that acknowledged which Gaza Strip and the West Bank and are occupied areas. It also contradicts the United Nations resolution (181) that designed the all holy sites under international guardianship, as well as it also conflicts with Resolution 242, that deemed the previous territories are occupied lands³². Trump’s confession of Jerusalem as a the capital of Israel state, as well as the moving of the US embassy to Jerusalem constituted a prelude to what Trump is planning within the “deal of the century” that he announced but did not mention its details. Although the specifics of the century agreement that adopted by Trump were not revealed, there are some websites and sources that leaked some specifics about this deal, which includes the refugee issue, Jerusalem, and areas of Palestinian presence³³.

Donald Trump's policy towards the Palestinian issue and the Arab-Israeli conflict is an extension of the policies of previous American presidents, which are based on supporting Israel . However, Trump wants to play a larger and more important role than the roles played by previous US presidents through his decisions to move the American embassy to the city of Jerusalem, recognize Jerusalem as the capital of Israel..

Conclusion

The policy of the United States under Trump’s term has tended towards addressing global issues in a manner consistent with the interests of the United States. Trump has developed an American strategy that serves his foreign policy. The issues of Iran and North Korea’s possession of nuclear weapons have formed a focus of Trump’s policy. He prevented Iran from obtaining nuclear weapons, opposed the nuclear agreement that was concluded in 2015, and supported his strategy in cooperation with allies to strike Iran’s economic capabilities through an economic blockade. He tried to end North Korea's nuclear program through economic pressure and blockade, then resorted to diplomacy

²⁸ Mohamad, Husam. "US Policy and Israeli-Palestinian Relations." *Journal of South Asian and Middle Eastern Studies* 43, no. 1 (2018): pp 26-31.

²⁹ *Ibid*, pp 33-37.

³⁰ Anziska, S. E. "Arab-Israeli Wars and US Foreign Policy." Oxford University Press, 2018. p38.

³¹ Rantisi, Dina Dawud. "The Arab-Israeli conflict: foreign intervention in the Arab-Israeli conflict." (2018). pp56-68.

³² Shalbak, Ihab. "The deal of the century." *Arena Magazine* (Fitzroy, Vic) 161 (2019): pp 35-37.

³³ *Ibid*, pp 38-39.

through negotiations, but he was unable to achieve any gains or progress. Trump aimed to inflict economic losses on China, deprive it of playing an effective role at the economic and commercial levels, and weaken its ability to influence the international economy. Trump's policy dealt with resolving the Palestinian issue as well as the Arab-Israeli combat through the century deal which was in Israel's favor.

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