Trump, the US Military and the American Empire

John Newsinger

In August 2015, in the midst of campaigning for the Republican nomination, Donald Trump boasted to Jake Tapper on CNN that he was 'the most militaristic person you will ever meet'. Now this was somewhat problematic, coming from someone who had faked bone spurs in his heels to avoid serving in Vietnam. When he came to setting-up his administration, however, he certainly showed a clear liking for having generals around him. He appointed General James Mattis as his Secretary of Defence, General John Kelly as his head of Homeland Security and later his chief of staff, and first General Michael Flynn and then (after Flynn was fired for lying to Vice President Pence) General H. R. McMaster as his National Security Adviser. Mattis, Kelly and McMaster were to all eventually fall out with Trump, and were fired or resigned in the course of 2018. Until recently they have by and large maintained their silence regarding their experiences as members of the Trump administration.

In the aftermath of the police murder of George Floyd and of Trump's threatening to use troops against Black Lives Matter protesters, Mattis has spoken out. The violent clearing of peaceful protesters from Lafayette Square in Washington DC, so Trump could pose with a Bible, seems to have finally provoked Mattis into publicly condemning the President. He released a wide ranging statement[fn], in which he called

Trump's actions at St. John's Church 'a bizarre photo-op for the elected commander-in-chief, with military leadership standing alongside'.

Not only was this a clear 'abuse of executive authority', Trump was not trying to unite the country, indeed he 'does not even pretend to try', he was trying 'to divide us. We are witnessing the consequences of three years of this deliberate effort. We are witnessing the consequences of three years without mature leadership'. Trump was, according to Mattis, out to undermine the US Constitution, making a 'mockery' of it, and Mattis actually compared him with the Nazis. He proclaimed himself to be both 'angry and appalled'. We will, he went on, have to 'unite without him'.[1] Other retired Generals and Admirals have rushed to endorse Mattis's stance. A cynic might well think that their primary concern is the very serious threat that a second Trump term poses to the survival of NATO and the United States' other alliances, rather than any concern with social justice. Either way, it provides a useful context in which to assess a number of recent books that have attempted to examine Trump's relations with the US military and intelligence agencies. First there is Peter Bergen's *Trump and His Generals*.

From 'Mad Dog' Mattis to 'Little Baby Kitten'

From the very beginning, the people appointed to senior positions by Trump seem to have completely underestimated how committed he actually was to his America First stance – and to have overestimated their ability to keep him under control. Generals Mattis, Kelly and McMaster along with Secretary of State Rex Tillerson and Director of the National Economic Council Gary Cohn, were all committed to a reassertion of US global power: to the strengthening of the US position as world hegemon both militarily and economically. As far as they were concerned, the Obama administration had been too defensive, had presided over a period of international retreat. It had, in effect, accepted the decline of US power as inevitable – something to be managed rather than reversed. For all his bluster and crudity, they welcomed Trump's aggression as a promise of the reassertion of American power and influence – if only he would listen to those who knew what they were about. And who better than the three Generals and the former heads of Exxon Mobil and Goldman Sachs, the so-called 'adults in the room', to guide America back to global domination.

They faced two problems: first of all, Trump did not share their world view; and second, he was astonishingly ignorant, incredibly stupid and convinced of his own genius. Trump's perspective was that of a real estate

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1 <https://edition.cnn.com/2020/06/03/politics/mattis-protests-statement/index.html>

developer, a (failed) casino owner, a hotel and golf course owner and TV celebrity. And much of his income over many years came from money laundering courtesy of the Russian mafia. His affinity for Vladimir Putin certainly seems to derive at least in part from this last factor. He was certainly not one of the US super rich. Short term advantage with maximum publicity was everything in Trump's world. This was all aggravated by his profound ignorance, which, combined with an unassailable belief in his own genius and a very short attention span, made him impossible to educate into what they regarded as the realities of international relations. It has to be said that none of these so-called 'adults in the room' were deterred from serving under Trump by his lying and bullying, nor by his his racism and misogyny. They completely overlooked his well-known reputation for dishonesty and fraud. They were blind to his rallying of the Tea Party, the Christian Right and the US Far Right which brought along neo-Nazi, white supremacist, KKK and alt-right outfits. They thought he could be managed, educated and used to restore US global hegemony.

There were many Republican conservatives and reactionaries, including the majority of veterans of and experts in the national security business, the so-called 'Never Trumpers', who absolutely refused to countenance someone as unstable as Trump becoming President. In March 2016, led by Eliot Cohen, they had published an open letter with 122 signatories pointing out that Trump was 'fundamentally dishonest' and that he was 'wildly inconsistent and unmoored', that he could swing 'from isolationism to military adventurism within the space of one sentence'. As Bergen points out: 'No other serious contender for the presidency had ever received such a public thrashing from his own party elders'. (p. 24) To no avail.

To be fair to Trump, he seems to have similarly misread the Generals. Mattis had the well-known nickname of 'Mad Dog' which Trump seems to have initially believed indicated that he was some sort of military version of himself. The nickname derived from the General's many 'Mattisisms' such as 'Be polite, be professional, but have a plan to kill everyone you meet' and 'If you fuck with me, I'll kill you all.'[2] One can see the attraction that he had for Trump, who at this point described him as his 'George Patton'. (p. 51) There was much more to Mattis than this, however. He was a well-read, well-educated workaholic, given to quoting Marcus

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[2] For more 'Mattisisms' such as 'Always carry a knife with you. Just in case there's cheesecake, or you need to stab someone in the throat' and 'It's fun to shoot some people' see the Snodgrass volume pp. 18 and 19.

Aurelius and had forty-three years military experience. He had been involved at the highest level in running America's Empire, from the Battles of Fallujah to commanding US Central Command (CENTCOM) that covered some twenty countries including both Iraq and Afghanistan. While his credentials as a servant of US Imperialism are impeccable, to give him his due, when he was first contacted by Vice President Pence about becoming Secretary of Defence, he was volunteering in a food bank and said they would have to call him back because he was busy. Nothing could be less Trumpian.

The decisive episode where they tried to get Trump in line was a briefing at the Pentagon on 20 July 2017. Mattis, Tillerson and Cohn all gave carefully prepared presentations celebrating 'the post-war, liberal, international rules-based order' and how much the United States had got out of it. (p. 9) This meeting was, Bergen writes, 'one of the most important moments of Trump's presidency', because here for the first time, he made clear to 'pretty much his entire cabinet that an isolationist, protectionist America First policy really was the Trump doctrine'. (p. 15) It was in the aftermath of this spectacular episode, with Trump berating everyone including the Generals, that Tillerson famously and accurately described him as 'a fucking moron'. (p. 14)

Nevertheless, Mattis still seems to have believed that Trump could be managed by 'the adults' and that much could be accomplished that would strengthen the position of US Imperialism. Mattis, for example, had disagreed with President Obama's policy of attrition with regard to the defeat of ISIS and instead favoured a much more unrestrained military assault. These disagreements had led to his replacement at CENTCOM in December 2012. Much more to Matis's liking, Trump relaxed any restraint on US military action. As Bergen insists, however, 'there were more similarities than differences between the two presidents' approaches' (p. 124) and neither Obama nor Trump wanted more troops on the ground. The war against ISIS would be fought by proxies, in particular by the Kurds, with the support of US special forces and air power. But under Trump the military were given much more of a free hand, allowed to bomb what they liked – although it is worth noticing that they still exercised much more restraint than Trump wanted. The other great success as far as Mattis was concerned was the massive increase in US military spending under Trump, up from some $600 billion under Obama to $750 billion under Trump. This strengthened America's overwhelming military dominance, vastly outspending the country's rivals, indeed spending more than the next ten highest military spenders combined, many of whom were US allies! For Mattis, this was necessary to meet the

challenges posed by Russia and China; for Trump, as far as one can discern any actual reasoning, it was to enable the US to do without any freeloading allies.

There were still many disagreements between Mattis and Trump. Mattis opposed from the very beginning the Saudi instigated blockade of Qatar, something that Trump went along with until the Qataris bailed out Jared Kushner's real estate business, taking out 'a ninety-nine year lease' for Kushner's 'troubled office building' at 666 Fifth Avenue albatross'.[3] As far as Mattis was concerned, the Qataris hosted a vital US base, while the Saudis had closed down all US bases on their soil after the First Iraq War. He was appalled by Trump's hostility to South Korea, trying in vain to convince him that the US bases in that country were vital for American interests in the region and not some sort of rip-off. And even though Mattis regarded Iran as a threat to the US position in the Middle East, nevertheless he still thought that the nuclear deal with Iran had been an American success, containing Iranian ambitions. In October 2017, he told the Senate Armed Services Committee that he supported the deal. Containing Iran cleared the deck for finally ending the war in Afghanistan and for meeting the Russian challenge. Mattis believed that it was Russia's intention 'to break up the NATO alliance' and that this was a major threat to US interests. (p. 231) This had to be countered, something made all the more difficult by the fact that the President was in the Russian camp on this, closer to Putin than to his own Secretary of State and Secretary of Defence.

With the eventual removal of McMaster and Tillerson, Mattis found himself increasingly isolated: at the same time, Trump found his obstructionism increasingly unacceptable. As Bergen points out, Trump went from being 'besotted by military brass' to being 'at war' with them only eighteen months later. (p. 237) Trump himself was by this time derisively referring to 'Mad Dog' Mattis as 'Moderate Dog', while others on his staff were calling the General 'Little Baby Kitten' Mattis – although not, one feels sure, to his face. What finally provided the occasion for Mattis's resignation was Trump's off-the-cuff decision, without any consultation with either the US military or the country's allies, to pull US forces out of Syria, effectively abandoning America's Kurdish allies. When his attempt to persuade Trump to reverse his whim failed, Mattis resigned on 20 December 2018. He was soon followed by General Kelly whose position as chief of staff was somewhat compromised by the fact that he 'was no longer on speaking terms with the president'. (p. 253)

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[3] Footnote to text on p. 193.

One last point that Bergen has to make is particularly important: Trump's dependence on Fox News. It is worth quoting him at some length. He writes:

> 'It was almost as if the greenroom at Fox News had taken over the West Wing. Three of Trump's most influential advisers – Sean Hannity, Tucker Carlson and Lou Dobbs – were anchors on Fox [. . .] Trump's national security adviser, John Bolton; deputy national security adviser, K T McFarland; communications directors, Bill Shine and Mercedes Schlapp; deputy to the chief strategist, Sebastian Gorka; and State Department spokespersons, Heather Nauert and Morgan Ortagus were all former Fox News executives, anchors, or talking heads.
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> There was simply no precedent in American history for this large-scale integration of a media institution and a presidential administration. It was often hard to discern if it was Fox News that was driving the national security agenda of the White House, or if it was the White House that was driving the agenda of Fox News.' (p 299)

Rupert Murdoch has a lot to answer for.

'Rock, Paper, Scissors'

Guy Snodgrass, the author of *Holding the Line*, was Mattis's chief speechwriter and director of communications. He witnessed Mattis's developing relationship with Trump from the inside. The 20 July 2017 Pentagon meeting figures prominently in his account. Mattis and Tillerson were increasingly perturbed by Trump's determination to abandon

> ' . . . America's long-standing commitment to the world order it had helped to create in the aftermath of World War II. Trump was also threatening to dismantle the nuclear deal with Iran, withdraw from NATO, pull US forces back from South Korea, Germany, and Japan, give Russia a pass on its electoral interference in the 2016 election, and, in his spare time start a war with North Korea. Mattis was fielding phone call after phone call from nervous allies . . . .' (p. 69)

The meeting was carefully planned, with Mattis speaking first, hoping to convince Trump that the United States overseas commitments were a good investment from which the country profited. He got to the third slide before a scowling Trump began interrupting, making clear that he had no time for any of this. Mattis was followed by Tillerson and then Cohn with the President becoming more and more disinterested, all the time interjecting to make forcefully clear his uninformed disagreement with all

their main points. After the three presentations, Trump responded by demanding that the Generals put on a military parade for him: 'I want vehicles and tanks', in Washington DC, like Bastille Day in France! He was all over the place, denouncing the *Washington Post* for ten minutes, offering 'simplistic and ad hoc' solutions to every problem, 'shooting from the hip on issues of global importance'. Syria? 'Claim victory and get out.' Mexico? 'Mexico is not our friend.' Whereas Mattis approached global issues as 'a game of chess', Trump 'was fixated on "Rock, Paper, Scissors."' At the end of the session, Mattis had 'a distant, defeated look on his face'. (pp. 77- 79)

Snodgrass is adamant that Trump is not stupid, but then goes on to undermine this when he points out that one of the lessons they learned from this meeting was that in future they would 'only use slides with pictures . . . no words'. (p. 81) At their next attempt at briefing Trump regarding his administration's new National Defence Strategy on 18 January 2018, they decided against any 'complicated, data-congested slides', opting instead for 'just pictures' chosen to capture Trump's attention, accompanied by Mattis's voiceover. (p. 164) The result was another disaster with the President offering up such gems of strategic insight as 'Seriously, who gives a shit about Afghanistan?' (p. 168) And at the end of the session, he once again announced his longing for a great military parade. How did Mattis deal with this? He just ignored everything Trump had to say and proceeded with his 'defense strategy that would drive America's $700 billion-plus in military investments for the next three to four years'. Unknown to Trump, this had been run past former State Department counsellor Eliot Cohen, one of the leading 'Never Trumpers'. (p. 175) This defence strategy was Mattis's 'top priority'. This was why he tolerated Trump; indeed, according to Snodgrass, actually 'ingratiating' himself with the President when necessary. (pp. 180, 185) The Bipartisan Budget Act of 2018 passed through Congress on 9 February 2018 and was signed into law by Trump the same day. It is worth emphasising that this massive increase in military spending was passed with the support of the Democrats. As we have already seen though, while Mattis and the Generals saw this as a way of strengthening the United States and its system of alliances, Trump seems to have seen it as demonstrating that alliances were not necessary, were just a costly entanglement.

Things went seriously downhill after this as far as Mattis was concerned. With the removal of first McMaster (who had never got on with Mathis) and then of Tillerson – both men treated with open contempt by Trump – Mattis found himself increasingly isolated. By June 2018 he was 'almost completely shut out' (p. 226) and Trump was announcing policies

without any consultation with the Defence Department. The first they heard about the establishment of the Space Force, for example, was when they saw the announcement on the television news. Snodgrass himself was 'dumbfounded'. This was something that Mattis had always opposed as wholly unnecessary and now it was just sprung on him. (p. 235-239) 'Increasingly, Snodgrass witnessed Mattis having to make "public statements in *support* of policies that I [Snodgrass] knew he personally loathed'. (Emphasis in the original.) The deployment of US troops to the border with Mexico was one such policy. As far as Mattis was concerned, it had nothing to do with security but was just 'a political stunt'. More and more, he was having to bend 'his personal and professional beliefs to support the president'. (p. 303) Mattis decided that he had had enough.

The last straw was Trump's announcement on Twitter that all US forces were being withdrawn from Syria and his refusal to reconsider this when Mattis met with him. As far as Mattis was concerned it was a shameful betrayal of both the Kurds and of America's allies, and would greatly encourage the country's enemies throughout the world. He resigned, although Trump, of course, claimed at the time and still claims to have fired him. It is worth quoting one of Mattis's post-resignation responses to Trump abusing him as the world's most overrated general: 'I earned my spurs on the battlefield . . . and Donald Trump earned his spurs in a letter from a doctor . . . I think that the only person in the military that Mr Trump doesn't think is overrated is . . . Colonel Sanders'.[4]

'Trapped in a rerun of the classic British comedy *Fawlty Towers'*

Michael Hayden, the author of *The Assault on Intelligence*, was an Air Force General, who went on to become Director of National Intelligence (1999-2005) and then Director of the CIA (2006-2009). Even more than the previous two volumes under review, Hayden brings to the fore that so repugnant is the character of Donald Trump, and so dangerous are his reactionary racist politics, that even dedicated agents of the American Empire, men who faithfully served it through the worst of the invasions and occupations of Afghanistan and Iraq, seem positively reasonable in comparison. This is obviously a mistaken conclusion and it is best to regard them as different sides of the same coin, as the agents of different factions of the same ruling class. A reading of Hayden's earlier volume, *Playing to the Edge: American Intelligence in the Age of Terror,* certainly

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4 David Frum, *Trumpocalypse: Restoring American Democracy* (New York: HarperCollins, 2020) p. 92.

brings this point home. But what does he have to say about Trump and his administration?

Hayden starts off with the remarkable assertion that in Western liberal democracies, 'the craft of intelligence . . . pursues . . . Enlightenment values', that intelligence professionals are 'truth tellers'. One has to remember he is writing about the CIA here. Presumably sceptics will be put to shame when Voltaire's lost treatise *Waterboarding and the Pursuit of Truth* is rediscovered. Meanwhile this supposed dedication to Enlightenment values is now under attack from Trump and his supporters, people who have no concern whatsoever with the 'truth' and who are putting American Democracy – or rather America's Empire – at risk.

Hayden is certainly critical of President Obama, whom (Hayden says) believed that the US 'had overreached, that [it] had become too involved'' However, while some 'necessary recalibration' was called for, Hayden thought there were times when 'Obama's scaling back seemed more a cover for indecision and retreat'. (pp. 30-31) Obama, as far as Hayden is concerned, was not interventionist enough with regard to Syria and too weak in his response to the Russian seizure of the Crimea. Trump, however, was something else. In his campaign for the Presidency, Trump 'normalized lying to an unprecedented degree' and in some ways even more worrying he 'often didn't know what he was talking about, and he may not have known he didn't know'. (p. 45) Hayden provides one interesting observation of how even at this stage of the proceedings Trump successfully changed the terms of the debate. Hayden was on a book tour in the spring of 2016, pushing his *Playing to the Edge.* He expected that he was going to have to spend a lot of his time defending 'Bush-era tactics that included electronic surveillance, metadata collection, renditions, detentions, interrogations, and targeted killings', trying to convince his audience that after 9/11 'we *had* to play to the legal and ethical edge'. Instead, he found himself having to insist 'that there *were* edges, that there were things we should *not* do, that there were lines beyond which we should *not* go'. (p. 55) At this time Trump was publicly advocating the use of torture as a punishment and calling for the reprisal killing of terrorists' families. Interestingly, while Hayden defends the use of waterboarding in the aftermath of 9/11, insisting it was only used 'reluctantly', he sees no need for its reintroduction today. (p. 57).

Of particular concern for Hayden is Trump's relationship with his 'Russian soulmate'. He leans towards the 'Manchurian Candidate' interpretation of the Trump Presidency, labelling Trump as Putin's 'useful

idiot, some naïf, manipulated by Moscow, secretly held in contempt, but whose blind support is happily accepted and exploited'. (pp. 73-74) He sometimes 'sounded a lot like an Internet troll on a botnet controlled from Saint Petersburg'. (p. 182) Certainly, it does seem that Trump really admires Putin, actually deferring to him, and it seems more than likely that the Russians will have 'kompromat' on him, but there is more to it than that. As long ago as 1987, in his ghost-written *The Art of the Deal*, Trump revealed his interest in doing deals in and with Russia; and that same year in an interview he told a journalist that he thought the United States should 'partner with Russia on nuclear weapons with the aim of threatening other countries into compliance. His dream targets included Pakistan and France'. He was just the man to pull off such a deal.[5]

Russian interference on Trump's behalf in the 2016 election is absolutely undeniable, although it is no more than the United States has done in country after country throughout the world since 1945. Indeed the US has also engineered the overthrow of elected governments when the result still did not go the way it had wanted. Hayden has no doubts whatsoever regarding Russian interference. One interesting aside in this regard is James Clapper's take on the interference in his memoirs. A former general, he was the director of National Intelligence from 2010 until 2017. He describes Obama attempting to secure bipartisan condemnation of Russian interference in the run-up to the 2016 election and notes with some incredulity that the Republican leadership were not interested, that 'they had decided by then that they didn't care who their nominee was, how he got elected, or what effects having a foreign power influence our election would have on the nation, as long as they won'. As for the Russians, in the end they were convinced that Trump had no chance of winning and, according to Clapper, had ready 'a multifaceted campaign to discredit Clinton's win, with the Twitter hashtag #Democracy RIP'.[6]

What of Trump's relationship with the 'intelligence community'? Briefing him was 'simple, visual, and chaotic' with Trump interrupting after 'a few sentences' to raise all sorts of questions often on wholly unrelated issues. Indeed it 'was not unheard of for the president to tweet during sessions'. (p. 100) The best description of the administration at

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[5] Sarah Kendzior, *Hiding in Plain Sight: The Invention of Donald Trump and the Erosion of America*, (New York: Flatiron Books, 2020) p. 68. This book is without doubt the best journalistic exploration of Trump and his corrupt world so far.

[6] James R Clapper, *Facts and Fears: Hard Truths from a Life in Intelligence*, (New York: Viking, 2018) pp. 350, 356

work was suggested to him by a friend who compared it to an 'upside-down duck':

> 'Rather than a visible calm above the surface while paddling like hell beneath it, the administration is visibly frenetic (often stimulated by the president's tweets), but there has been less evidence of much going on beneath the surface in terms of developing an overarching, coherent strategy.' (p. 182)

Even Trump's vaunted victory over ISIS was merely 'Obama plus', with the President having no interest whatsoever in what Mattis called the 'stabilization phase', and it was this that was to provide the occasion for Mattis's resignation. Working in intelligence under Trump must, Hayden finally concludes, have on some days felt like being 'trapped in a rerun of the classic British comedy *Fawlty Towers*'. (p. 243)

'Terrorism was politically useful'

This brings us to Peter Neumann's academic study, *Bluster: Donald Trump's War on Terror.* He sums the Trump doctrine up 'as "killing terrorists" and "keeping Muslims out of the country"', so that the 'War on Terror' has certainly become 'more militaristic' under this President. More important, however, 'has been the systematic conflation of terrorism, immigration, and Islam' which is 'little to do with countering terrorism' and more to do with his 'aggressively nationalist idea of America'. (p. 8) Neumann acknowledges Trump's ignorance, inconsistency and impulsiveness, but still insists that his core beliefs have to be taken seriously. But on the one hand we have a President whose 'belligerence and hostility towards foreign commitments are long-established' and at the same time has a strong belief in 'military aggression'. How to reconcile this contradiction? As Neumann argues, Trump is against sending in the troops but rather is in favour of 'bombing the shit out of them'. Aggression overseas but without any foreign commitment or as he put it on one occasion, 'You don't need a strategy to kill people'. (pp. 18-19)

Initially, Trump was constrained by 'the adults in the room' in respect to the 'War on Terror'. Mattis who 'repeatedly refused to carry out Presidential orders that he considered reckless or irresponsible' was crucial here. Trump wanted to immediately pull US troops out of Iraq and Afghanistan, but the Generals effectively stopped him. For at least the first two years of his Presidency, 'Trump's doctrine, his political programme, and – indeed – Trump himself could, at times, seem irrelevant'. (p. 54) It was not just the obstructionism of the 'adults', but

also Trump's own ignorance and stupidity that contributed to this. A classic instance was provided when the President publicly introduced his administration's 55 page National Security Strategy document in December 2017. As Neumann points out: 'he praised Russian President Vladimir Putin, and talked at length about his election victory, tax cuts and success in cutting regulations [. . .] mimicking fascist language by talking about himself as the leader of a "great awakening" – a "rebirth of patriotism, prosperity, and pride". There was little in his speech that reflected the document's content.' And afterwards his staff 'refused to say whether he had even read it'. (p. 12) We can safely assume he had not.

He was an improvement on Obama as far as relaxing restrictions on military operations was concerned but while Mattis welcomed this, he was not prepared to kill people with the abandon that Trump favoured. As Neumann puts it, the military still held to many of Obama's restraints:

> . . . they preserved most of the standards and procedures for avoiding civilian casualties; and they rejected the targeting of terrorists' families, the introduction of torture, and the expansion of the prison camp at Guantanamo [. . .] the national security establishment was more cautious and significantly less hawkish than the President they served.' (p. 79)

Trump's ideas were, as far as Mattis was concerned, 'not just unnecessary, but ignorant and potentially harmful'. (p. 88) Operations were certainly stepped up, at the discretion of local commanders. In Afghanistan, the number of air strikes doubled between 2016 and 2017 and the amount of ordnance used in each strike increased as well. Similarly in Iraq, where US bombing of Raqqa killed, according to some accounts, some 1,500 civilians (the Pentagon admitted to 77). But none of this slaughter was enough for Trump. As for Trump's claim to have defeated ISIS, Neumann insists, this was the result of Obama's strategy but carried through with 'the new "rules of engagement"'. (p. 95) And then Trump's announcement that he was pulling all US forces out of Syria successfully 'jeopardised many of the gains that had been made since 2014'. (p. 108) Overnight, Trump 'alienated allies, strengthened America's adversaries, and emboldened the (nearly defeated) Islamic State'. (p. 95) Trump's declaration was 'the first piece of good news in nearly four years' for ISIS. The Kurds, betrayed by their US ally, turned to Assad. (p. 111)

At the core of the Trump doctrine is his nationalist agenda and while this obviously has serious implications and consequences for the American Empire, the President's primary concern does seem to be domestic. Building his MAGA movement and securing re-election has been

his priority and as Neuman argues, 'much of Trump's War on Terror had little to do with countering terrorism'. Rather, 'terrorism was politically useful, because it validated the narrative of external threat through which he mobilised his "base"'. (p. 158) Whereas for the George W Bush administration, the 'War on Terror' was an ideological weapon for use on the Imperial front, for Trump it was primarily for use on the Home Front. At the time of writing, the coronavirus pandemic does seem to have led to a change of strategy on Trump's part with China replacing terrorism as the main threat, although hostility towards immigration and immigrants remains a central concern.

This brings us to Neumann's impressive chapter on 'Homeland' which explores Trump's relationship with the Far Right. One can only endorse Neuman's assertion that 'Trump's attitude towards right-wing extremism is one of the most disturbing aspects of his War on Terror'. Whereas previous administrations had condemned 'all forms of extremism, Trump has actively promoted far right narratives . . . . In doing so, he has empowered the extreme right . . . . More so than any other modern President, he has deepened divisions, furthered polarisation, and created the political environment in which domestic terrorism has been able to thrive'. (pp. 136-137) Trump has deliberately created an environment in which the Far Right, a heavily armed Far Right, can thrive and in the year since *Bluster* was published the situation has arguably got considerably worse and much more dangerous. In the event of his defeat in the 2020 Presidential election, there is a real danger/likelihood that Trump will claim fraud and that the Far Right will take to the streets in an attempt to keep him in office.

Trump and the American Empire

While it is impossible to ignore the peculiar character of the 45th President, nevertheless the political divisions in the United States are not just down to him. There is a real division within the US capitalist class between those whose profits are realised domestically and those whose profits are realised globally. Trump's nationalist agenda is not just a personal idiosyncrasy that has enabled him to exploit middle class outrage at the economic costs neo-liberalism has imposed on them. (A side effect of which has been the successful mobilisation of racism and anti-immigrant prejudice.) In fact, his MAGA movement is not a real grass roots movement, but rather what is known as an Astroturf movement – looking like grassroots but entirely artificial; financed and controlled by the section of the US capitalist class that favours an end to overseas

alliances and overseas bases, supports protectionism and has sympathy with strong authoritarian regimes.

During his first term, Trump has successfully driven out of his administration the supporters of globalism, those who favoured free trade and who saw US power as best served by the system of alliances put in place since 1945. For the US military and intelligence establishments, overwhelmingly committed to the exercise of global power, the prospect of a Trump second term is a disaster waiting to happen. It is not just his lying and his ignorance, his inconsistency and impulsiveness, his open sympathy for Putin and Russia, his narcissism and irrationality, his family's venality and corruption, his racism and encouragement of the Far Right. Though these are bad enough, Trump has become a growing danger to the global security of the American Empire. Only recently Trump has announced that the US is going to withdraw a third of the troops it has stationed in Germany, presaging the effective US withdrawal from NATO if he gets a second term. He still regularly demands that Germany, South Korea and Japan pay retrospectively for the cost of US troops and bases in those countries. From Germany, he has demanded a back-payment of some £300 billion. It is the threat his administration poses to the fundamental interests of American Imperialism that has led to Mattis and others publicly speaking out against him. And there is also a growing realisation that Trump will try to win the forthcoming election fraudulently; and if that fails will attempt to remain in office by claiming that his defeat was down to fraud. The Democratic Party candidate Joe Biden has actually made known that in the event of Trump refusing to leave office, he is absolutely confident that the military 'will escort him from the White House with great dispatch'.[7] This is unprecedented, but it certainly reflects the times we are living through.

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[7] David Charter, 'Joe Biden: Army will have to drag Trump out if he loses', *The Times* 13 June 2020