

American Foreign Policy under Donald Trump

One thing is certain – the old rules of the last 70 years no longer apply to American Foreign Policy under Donald Trump. So said Mayer Wakefield of the ‘Stop the War Coalition’ who spoke to the Faringdon Peace Group in February. It is very difficult to predict the future when Trump is both isolationist and interventionist, pro and anti nuclear, pro and anti NATO depending on his audience. Mayer identified five key areas where he believes Trump will agitate and intervene: China, ISIS, Iran, Israel and Russia.

China is ringed with American military bases and there is already tension in the South China Sea. We should be very worried about Trump’s aggressive attitude towards China, both economic and military. Trump is clear in his desire to intensify attacks on ISIS in Iraq and Syria. US Navy Seals are also operating in Yemen. It is unclear whether Obama’s nuclear deal with Iran will continue under Trump but relations are unlikely to improve. He will undoubtedly strengthen ties with Israel, the US’s main ally in the Middle East, particularly as his son has a property portfolio in the illegal settlements. His proposal to move the US Embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem would be highly provocative and inflammatory for the whole region. Putin and Trump share certain personal characteristics and a love of authoritarian nationalism. Mayer believes their relationship will remain ambiguous and secretive. While sceptical about NATO, Trump seems to have committed to it since May’s visit and has retained the 5000 troops sent to Latvia just before he took office.

Trump’s domestic policies are also having an effect around the world: People are protesting against the degrading of civil rights, loss of land and environmental rights after the controversial oil pipeline to Canada was signed off. With a climate change denier in charge of the environment, international agreements and targets are in danger and protest could tip over into violence. In particular Trump’s Islamophobia has already shown itself in his travel ban against 7 Muslim countries – this can only strengthen enemies abroad. Saudi Arabia and Egypt with whom he has business links are notably exempt. He appears to be testing the establishment in how much he can get away with.

During his campaign he pledged to redevelop a new range of nuclear weapons ‘until the world sees sense’, yet also promised to halve their number. The arms industry, crucial to the American economy, will undoubtedly influence his foreign policy, feeding on the inconsistency and fear that Trump is fomenting.

The call for ‘America First’ goes back to before the First World War and has always dominated the so-called ‘special relationship’ with the UK. At its heart this is a military alliance which sees the UK reinforcing American influence and imperialism around the world. As Trump is so deeply unpopular and unpredictable, Mayer believes the anti-war movement has a unique opportunity to make its voice heard and call for an end to the ‘special relationship’ and interventionist policies abroad. But post Brexit, can the UK afford to lose such a friend?

Throughout Mayer’s talk and discussion afterwards it was clear that Trump must be judged on his actions rather than his campaign trail rhetoric, but quite what those actions might be is very uncertain. We all shared Mayer’s fear that the world will become a much more volatile and dangerous place with Trump in the White House.