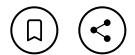


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Trump's foreign policy built on personal bigotry

BY SREERAM CHAULIA



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Demonstrators protesting against President Donald Trump's travel ban outside Philadelphia International Airport in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

Photo: Reuters

proposed tax on imports have realised the worst horrors of his critics.

These drastic measures prove that Mr Trump is not pragmatic but actually a radical conservative who intends to use state power to implement a foreign policy derived from religious bigotry, racist stereotyping, misguided economic protectionism and international confrontation.

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Disappointing observers who assumed that Mr Trump would become “presidential” after entering the White House, he is living up to heated election campaign rhetoric. By not abandoning pet peeves about the alleged dangers of migration, trade and generosity towards the rest of the world, he is showing his loyal voter base how ideologically faithful he remains to far-right thinking.

Typical of Mr Trump’s instinctive decision-making, there is less rational logic and more emotional bias in his visa ban order. His choice of Iran, Iraq, Libya, Somalia, Sudan, Syria and Yemen as targets does not make sense from a national security perspective.

Citizens of none of these countries have attempted or successfully staged any terrorist attacks on US soil in contemporary times.

On the other hand, Saudis, Egyptians, Pakistanis and Afghans have figured prominently in terrorist plots and strikes in the US over the past couple of decades. The immigration system in the US was anyway quite probing and harsh towards all Muslims entering the country in an unspoken practice of religious profiling.

To impose a total ban on seven nations with no ostensible threat to American homeland security is baffling and explained purely by Mr Trump’s desire to demonstrate his rightist Christian fundamentalist credentials (he has declared support only for Christian refugees from Muslim nations to come into the US). The divisive concept of a “clash of civilisations” had been slowly receding during the past eight years under former president Barack Obama. Mr Trump has nonchalantly resurrected it within days of assuming the presidency.

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Muslim world and hinder Mr Trump's goal of eliminating the Islamic State (IS) and other jihadist movements.

The perception that America is at war with Islam, rather than a virulent fundamentalist strain within that religion, used to be widespread during the presidency of George W Bush (2001-2008).

But even the neoconservatives of that Republican administration had not resorted to such draconian steps as a complete shutdown of Muslims' mobility into the US. Mr Trump is essentially reflecting populist prejudices of the alt-right movement, whose luminaries include the US President's Chief Strategist, Mr Stephen Bannon. The once-racist fringe that traces its origins to the Ku Klux Klan is now in power and roaring.

Branding Mexican migrants as criminals, rapists and "bad hombres", and resurrecting the much-touted wall to block their arrival into the US, is another dimension of the same core philosophy of restoring white supremacy. Mr Trump's undiplomatic contempt for his southern neighbouring nation — which led to his Mexican counterpart Enrique Pena Nieto's cancellation of a scheduled meeting — speaks volumes for how he will be conducting foreign policy as an extension of the paranoia in American far-right quarters about a Hispanic takeover of the southern US.

Objective economic analysis reveals that job losses in the manufacturing sector in the US have been caused primarily by automation and technological advancement in production processes rather than by free trade with neighbours or in-migration of low-skilled workers. Scapegoating Mexicans and other Latinos who enter the US to take up menial jobs that no white Americans are willing to perform themselves is another characteristic "Trumpism" devoid of factual or policy soundness.

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But it resonates among the Republican Party's grassroots because of political dread about Spanish-speaking people becoming too numerous in the context of a demographic transformation of the US, where it is predicted that whites of European ancestry would turn into a minority in the next couple of decades. Mr Trump's agenda is to reverse this trend, even if it comes at the cost of America's innate strengths that have stood the tests of time — that is, relative openness to migration and trade.

But protecting and extending the US' soft power is nowhere on Mr Trump's agenda. His draft executive order to cut American funding for the United Nations by up to 40 per cent and his pulling the plug on healthcare service providers around the world catering to women's reproductive rights display a callous attitude towards the provision of global public goods that have historically been underwritten by the liberal US.

The harm awaiting the already battered environment from Trump's pro-fossil fuel, climate change-denying dogmas is another major disservice.

The overall impact of Mr Trump's narrow economic nationalism and transactional zero-sum-game approach to the world is to impair global governance and its underlying bedrock principle of mutually beneficial international cooperation.

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A mean US portends a world disorder where collective aspirations are buried in an avalanche of self-interest and irrational fear. Shorn of its halo of exceptionalism, the US itself is being set up for a sharp decline.

As single party rule is currently in place (Republicans control both the US Congress and the White House), America's judicial system, civil society organisations, artists and intellectuals are the only checks on discriminatory tendencies and policies emanating from the Trump administration.

In combination with international condemnation, the institutions that comprise sane America can patiently resist and eventually roll back the insane.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

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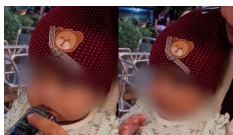
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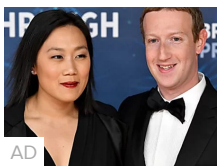


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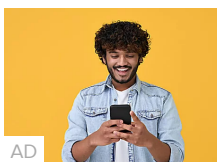
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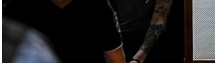
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