

approved 80–17.) Republicans were concerned that they would now need to cast more budget votes—unnecessarily in their view—heading into the 2018 election year and that Democrats would enjoy another opportunity to wring concessions through negotiations heading into the deadline. The White House justified the deal as providing the aid needed for hurricane relief, making room on the legislative calendar for fall passage of tax reform, and improving the chances of increasing military spending in the final budget.<sup>188</sup>

The president might also have learned that relying on Republicans alone had not been a successful strategy. Little had been accomplished in Congress, his poll numbers had slid to record lows for a first-year president, and his statements about Charlottesville and actions on DACA had unleashed a storm of criticism. Perhaps bipartisanship would help recast his image and produce some “wins” for the man who prided himself on being a “winner.” We cannot know at the time of this writing President Trump’s calculus, but he extended his flirtation with the Democrats by inviting “Chuck and Nancy” (Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer [D-NY] and House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi [D-CA]) to a White House dinner on September 12. The group of eleven did not include “Mitch and Paul,” the Republican leaders.<sup>189</sup> Already nervous Republicans learned the next morning that the Democrats thought they had come away with a deal that would preserve DACA without requiring them to support funding for the border wall.

The White House quickly denied that any deal had been completed. But Trump’s support for the December 15 deadline ensured that the nation could expect a continuation of this drama, and the Republican party leaders would bear the burden of trying to deliver success without the help of the president from their own party. Keeping the government open and paying its debts is essential to tackling the “larger, more complicated issues” that face the nation.<sup>190</sup> Those tasks should be easier under a unified government, but eight months of the Trump presidency threw that truism into question.

## V. Foreign Policy

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Presidents sometimes decide to emphasize foreign policy when the direction of domestic politics is not going their way. Arguably, Congress, the media, and public opinion are more supportive of an administration’s foreign initiatives than its domestic ones. Facing unrelenting investigations at home, the Trump administration highlighted several foreign initiatives during its first half year in office even though Trump’s campaign had been

centered more on isolationism than on international engagement. As the newly inaugurated president, Trump intoned on January 20, 2017, “We, assembled here today, are issuing a new decree to be heard in every city, in every foreign capital, and in every hall of power. . . . From this day forward, it’s going to be only America first. America first.”<sup>191</sup> With this pledge still echoing, Trump—unlike his predecessors across forty years—made no foreign trips during his first hundred days in office.

Even before President Trump formally took office, a series of phone calls with world leaders set off diplomatic alarm bells. Fervent praise for Pakistan’s prime minister made India nervous; a protocol-shattering call with Taiwan’s president threatened to upset the fragile compromise of the “one China” framework in place since the 1970s, when the United States broke diplomatic relations with Taiwan in order to establish them with the People’s Republic of China.<sup>192</sup> Other calls were simply combative, including angry exchanges with the prime minister of Australia and the president of Mexico.<sup>193</sup> The latter, frustrated with Trump’s repeated claim that Mexico would pay to build a wall on its northern border, canceled a scheduled trip to Washington to meet with the new president. Leaked transcripts of



BANDAR ALGALLOUJ/SAUDI ROYAL COUNCIL/HANDOUT

**Photo 13** In contrast to most of his predecessors, President Trump chose Saudi Arabia—rather than a prominent North American or European ally—for his first foreign trip as president. Here, Trump participates in an equally unusual photo op: placing his hands on an illuminated globe alongside Egyptian president Abdel Fattah El Sisi, Saudi king Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud, and First Lady Melania Trump. The picture, widely circulated on social media, was taken at the inauguration ceremony of the Global Center for Combating Extremist Ideology in Riyadh.

their conversation show Mexican president Enrique Peña stressing that “we find this completely unacceptable for Mexicans to pay for the wall you are thinking of building”; Trump responded, “I have to have Mexico pay for the wall—I have to. I have been talking about it for a two-year period.”<sup>194</sup> Critics charged that Trump tended to have friendlier interactions with less democratic leaders, as when Trump praised Philippine president Rodrigo Duterte, whose regime had overseen thousands of extrajudicial killings, “for doing an unbelievable job on the drug problem” and inviting him to visit the Oval Office “any time you want to come.”<sup>195</sup>

Trump told the *Wall Street Journal* in July that “despite what you may read, I have unbelievable relationships with all of the foreign leaders. They like me. I like them.”<sup>196</sup> And Trump’s supporters argued that any friction simply reflected a realistic re-set geared to American interests. “We’ve never seen before at this point in a presidency such sweeping reassurance of American interests, and the inauguration of a foreign-policy strategy designed to bring back the world from growing dangers and perpetual disasters brought on by years of failed leadership,” said press secretary Sean Spicer of the president’s record on foreign affairs after four months in office.<sup>197</sup> National security advisor H. R. McMaster and National Economic Council director Gary Cohn wrote in an op-ed piece widely considered the most coherent statement of the administration’s overarching international strategy that while “America First does not mean America alone,” cooperation would be forthcoming only “where our interests align.” After all, “the world is not a ‘global community.’ . . . Rather than deny this elemental nature of international affairs, we embrace it.”<sup>198</sup>

In trade matters, particularly, the administration sought to displace the long-term global framework promoted by the United States after World War II, rejecting it as insufficiently beneficial in the short term to American businesses and workers. Trump formally withdrew the United States from the negotiations aiming to complete a Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) trade pact on the third day of his term; he considered withdrawal from the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) as well, until deciding instead to renegotiate its terms in search of what he called, by tweet, “a fair deal for all.”<sup>199</sup> Germany, a close ally, and especially China, a growing international threat, came under criticism for their trade policies. Trump had thought China would hold back North Korea’s nuclear program in return for access to U.S. markets, but he grew increasingly disillusioned with this prospect over time, as a July tweet suggested: “Our foolish past leaders have allowed them to make hundreds of billions of dollars a year in trade, yet they do NOTHING for us with North Korea.” Reports suggested the administration was considering ways to punish the Chinese economy,<sup>200</sup> even as the president blustered about Germany and the European Union. On May 30, Trump tweeted, “We have a MASSIVE trade deficit with Germany, plus they pay FAR LESS than they should on NATO & military. Very bad for U.S. This will change.”<sup>201</sup>

An immediate change did come when Trump announced on June 1 that the United States would withdraw from the 195-nation Paris climate accord, negotiated in 2015 to slow the rate of global greenhouse gas emissions. While compliance with the nonbinding accord was voluntary, Trump argued it placed “draconian financial and economic burdens . . . on our country” that advantaged other nations: “we don’t want other leaders and other countries laughing at us anymore.” The president noted that “I was elected to represent the citizens of Pittsburgh, not Paris.”<sup>202</sup> (Others, arguing that isolating the United States from international and scientific consensus was foolhardy, were less sanguine. Indeed, the mayor of Pittsburgh quickly criticized Trump’s decision and joined the mayor of Paris in pledging commitment to a Global Covenant of Mayors for Climate and Energy.)<sup>203</sup>

The president’s first trip abroad played out in a way consistent with these broad themes. While all of his predecessors going back to Franklin Roosevelt had chosen a North American or European ally as the site for their symbolically important first trip (most went to either Canada or Mexico), Trump chose Saudi Arabia.<sup>204</sup> He went from there to Israel and to Vatican City, then to meet with NATO and G7 leaders in Belgium and Italy, respectively, in all covering five countries in nine days.

The media paid most attention to the beginning and end of the trip. Arriving in Riyadh on May 20, the president delivered a speech to a large group of Middle Eastern leaders that touched on longstanding themes of U.S. policy—the “United States is eager to form closer bonds of friendship, security, culture and commerce,” Trump promised, in order “to conquer extremism and vanquish the forces of terrorism.” But he shifted sharply from past administrations’ insistence on emphasizing human rights, telling his Saudi hosts that “we are not here to lecture—we are not here to tell other people how to live, what to do, who to be, or how to worship.”<sup>205</sup> After meeting with Egyptian president General Abdel Fattah el-Sisi, Trump said Sisi had “done a tremendous job under trying circumstances.” Trump garnered widespread attention for posing with Sisi and Saudi King Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud at the opening of a Global Center for Combating Extremist Ideology, all three men grasping a glowing globe-shaped orb. The symbolic alignment of the United States with these dictatorial regimes provoked criticism (and shortly after meeting with Trump, the Egyptian government again cracked down on internal dissent).<sup>206</sup>

In some ways, Trump’s first trip embraced bipartisan continuity in U.S. foreign policy—for instance, he quietly shelved a campaign promise to immediately move the U.S. Embassy in Israel from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem, a move consistent with the position of earlier administrations. But the end of the trip reaffirmed key breaks with past policies that had been taken for granted by Trump’s predecessors. Most notably, Trump had offered, at

most, restrained criticism of Russian interference in Ukraine, Syria, and even in elections across Europe and in the United States itself. European allies' concerns with this stance grew when the president personally cut language from a speech in Brussels meant to reaffirm America's commitment to the NATO alliance (and especially to Article 5, which provides its mutual defense mechanisms).

The truncated speech took even Trump's national security team by surprise and made allies fearful he had returned to his campaign stance that NATO was "obsolete," fears not alleviated by contentious private interactions between Trump and NATO leaders at the meetings.<sup>207</sup> Not until ten days later, back in the United States and following widespread criticism, did the president say that "absolutely, I'd be committed to Article 5," a sentiment more formally repeated in a subsequent speech in Poland in July.<sup>208</sup> But during the July trip, while at the G-20 economic summit in Germany, Trump held two private meetings with Russian president Vladimir Putin with minimal staff support (without even an American translator in one conversation), renewing fears about a pro-Russian slant to his foreign policy.<sup>209</sup> "Trump's desire for a warmer relationship with Putin is perhaps the one position on which he has never vacillated since assuming office," one observer wrote.<sup>210</sup> (It didn't help that the meetings coincided with the disclosure of a June 2016 meeting between leaders of the Trump campaign and Russian operatives promising Kremlin support for the campaign, as discussed previously.)

One result was to spur Congress—by overwhelming votes of 98–2 in the Senate and 419–3 in the House—to pass a bill imposing sweeping economic sanctions penalizing Russia (as well as North Korea and Iran) and limiting the power of the president to lift those sanctions without formal congressional approval.<sup>211</sup> Given the likelihood of his veto being overridden, Trump signed the bill on August 2, 2017, complaining in accompanying signing and press statements about legislative micromanagement and arguing that because he had "built a truly great company worth many billions of dollars. . . . I can make far better deals with foreign countries than Congress."<sup>212</sup> In response to the new law, Russia required that America reduce its workforce in Russia by more than 700 American diplomatic employees and seized two U.S. compounds, mirroring (though far more expansively) moves by the Obama administration in late 2016 designed to punish Russian interference in the presidential election.<sup>213</sup> Putin also announced a troop build-up along the eastern edge of NATO's border with Russia, while American officials dropped hints that U.S. arms might be sent to Ukraine. Clearly, any intended re-set of relations had foundered on the shoals of realpolitik.

If the Cold War seemed reanimated, the "hot" wars Trump inherited also continued. Trump had severely criticized the Iraq War during the 2016



**Photo 14** President Trump and Russian president Vladimir Putin hold a meeting on the sidelines of the July 2017 G-20 summit in Hamburg, Germany, drawing scrutiny in light of ongoing investigations of his campaign's alleged collusion with Russia.

campaign but had said little about Afghanistan, where Taliban forces stubbornly continued their attacks on government bases and civilian targets. In June, Defense Secretary James Mattis conceded in Senate committee testimony that “we are not winning in Afghanistan right now.”<sup>214</sup> He promised a new strategy was being developed. But this proved difficult to deliver. National Security Adviser H. R. McMaster proposed an increase of just under 4,000 troops. But other White House aides pushed back, arguing that adding new Marines without a new strategy was unlikely to change the trajectory of America’s long presence in Afghanistan. They argued instead for pulling out most U.S. forces.<sup>215</sup> The National Security Council meeting convened in July to discuss the matter came to no conclusion and was so contentious that participants described it as a “s—t show.”<sup>216</sup> The president himself was reluctant to commit to the war, saying that “I want to find out why we’ve been there for 17 years.” Trump suggested removing General John Nicholson from command of U.S. forces in Afghanistan, and many took the president’s frustration as a vote of no confidence in McMaster.<sup>217</sup> Others blamed the president’s short attention span and unwillingness to delve into the details of Afghanistan’s complicated and bloody history and of American involvement there. “I call the president the two-minute man,” said one Trump “confidant” to the *Washington Post*. He added that a full-page briefing memo was too long: “The president has patience for a half-page.”<sup>218</sup> In late August, Trump pushed back on this perception, claiming

in a televised address that he had “studied Afghanistan in great detail and from every conceivable angle.”<sup>219</sup> The result was a continued commitment to the American presence there, a modest increase in troop levels combined with reduced constraints on their use of force, and financial suasion against Pakistan’s frequently ill-disguised support of the Taliban. As such it effectively endorsed—substantively if not rhetorically—American tactics in the region since the second half of the George W. Bush administration.<sup>220</sup>

In the Middle East, the so-called Islamic State (IS) terrorist group remained an active threat even as U.S.-backed Iraqi government forces regained much of the physical territory once held by IS, most notably liberating the key city of Mosul in July. President Trump loosened and expanded rules of engagement for American drone and special forces operations against IS, authorized by the Obama administration. This gave on-the-ground commanders more freedom to act quickly after targets were identified but also increased the number of civilian casualties from drone strikes.

The administration expanded the use of air power in Syria as well, against IS directly and in support of anti-IS Syrian militias; this led to tension between the United States and Syrian forces, since those militias were seen by President Bashar al-Assad and his Iranian and Russian allies as enemies of his regime. In June, American pilots shot down a Syrian warplane, prompting worries of “a war within a war.”<sup>221</sup> The Trump administration had already escalated American involvement against the regime when in April it fired cruise missiles at a Syrian airbase in retaliation for a chemical weapons attack carried out by Assad’s government. In sharp contrast to Barack Obama’s decision in 2013 under similar circumstances, Trump did not request congressional authorization for the attack. Without authorization, Obama took no action—for which he was heavily criticized, given his previous declaration that the use of chemical weapons would be a “red line” triggering U.S. involvement. But the clear shift toward active hostilities in Syria in 2017 prompted many in Congress to revisit the Authorization for the Use of Military Force (AUMF) passed in 2001 and used by the Bush, Obama, and Trump administrations to justify not just the fight against al-Qaeda but that against IS, al-Shabab (in Somalia), and other terrorist entities as well. Expanding the AUMF to include the Syrian government seemed at least one step too far.<sup>222</sup> The House leadership reversed a surprise bipartisan vote in the House Appropriations Committee to add language requiring a new AUMF to the fiscal 2018 budget, and the Senate voted down an effort by Rand Paul (R-KY) to sunset the extant AUMF. But the question remained very much on the table, especially as the administration discussed the use of force in places ranging from Timbuktu to the Philippines.<sup>223</sup>

Trump remained hugely critical of the multi-nation agreement reached by the Obama administration with Iran to limit Iran’s nuclear ambitions (“I

think they're taking advantage of this country. They've taken advantage of a president, named Barack Obama, who didn't know what the hell he was doing," he charged in July<sup>224</sup>). But he nonetheless twice certified that Iran was in compliance with the agreement, though threatening in future not to do so—a decision that would again separate the United States from its European allies who were partners in the agreement and complicate the possibility of negotiations with North Korea, where the costs of an untamed nuclear program were on full display.<sup>225</sup> In the summer and fall of 2017, North Korean dictator Kim Jung Un oversaw a series of escalating weapons and ballistic tests that hinted its missiles might soon be able to reach the U.S. mainland. This, in turn, led to a marked escalation of rhetorical jousting between Kim and Trump. When Kim threatened to fire missiles at the U.S. territory of Guam (an important military base), Trump responded that such action would elicit “an event the likes of which nobody's seen before” and that “things will happen to them like they never thought possible.”<sup>226</sup> Despite threatening “fire and fury” against North Korea in an off-the-cuff statement that took some of Trump's top advisers by surprise, North Korea escalated its missile tests.<sup>227</sup> When President Trump spoke to the United Nations in September, he threatened to “totally destroy North Korea” and mockingly called Kim Jung Un “rocket man.”<sup>228</sup> (Soon after, he amended this to “Little Rocket Man.”)<sup>229</sup> In response, Kim Jung Un threatened to test a hydrogen bomb over the Pacific Ocean, denounced Trump as a “mentally deranged U.S. dotard,” and warned of the “highest level of hard-line countermeasure in history.”<sup>230</sup>

Before things escalated to that point, Trump had complained via tweet that “China could easily solve this [Korean] problem!”<sup>231</sup> But foreign policy problems proved to be no more amenable to being resolved by tweet than domestic issues. And rather than relying on the government's experts to guide foreign affairs decision making, the administration had downgraded the State Department's diplomatic capacity in multiple ways. Even as the Korean crisis reached frightening new rhetorical heights, Trump had still nominated no one to serve as assistant secretary for East Asian and Pacific affairs in the State Department or for Asian and Pacific security affairs at the Defense Department. Nor had the president chosen anyone to serve as U.S. ambassador to South Korea.<sup>232</sup> Likewise, even as advisers debated Afghan policy, the State Department had shut down the office of the Special Representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan, folding the office back into the department's regional bureau.<sup>233</sup>

More generally, the president gave responsibility for overseeing Israeli–Palestinian relations to White House aide Jared Kushner; undermined Secretary of State Rex Tillerson's efforts to negotiate a resolution to a dispute between Qatar and other Gulf States; refused to approve Tillerson's choices for deputy secretary and other top-level personnel; and proposed



a 30 percent cut in the department budget. Foreign Service members grew increasingly disillusioned as vacancies went unfilled and Tillerson seemed uninterested in drawing on the department's institutional memory and expertise.<sup>234</sup> Some suspected Tillerson would soon depart the administration altogether—a scenario immediately dubbed the “Rexit.”<sup>235</sup>

As the first year of the administration progressed, with a new National Security Strategy due in the fall of 2017, observers struggled to decipher an overall “Trump Doctrine” guiding the administration's policies. Cambridge University historian Stephen Wertheim argued that the president's July speech in Warsaw asking whether “the West has the will to survive” had defined such a doctrine, one that pledged the United States to the “defense of civilization itself.” This, he said, made Trump consistent with past presidencies and in fact “like a conventional foreign policy” mirroring an earlier (pre-George W. Bush) version of neoconservatism that worried more about global security than about exporting democracy. “A long line of presidents . . . backed third world autocrats as bastions of moderation and stability,” he argued; Trump merely “dispenses with lip-service to democracy or human rights.”<sup>236</sup>

By contrast, two senior fellows at the Council on Foreign Relations argued instead that “there is no Trump doctrine and there will never be one” because of what they deemed “tactical transactionalism.” They saw the president maintaining “a focus on short-term wins rather than longer-term strategic foresight; a ‘zero-sum’ worldview where all gains are relative and reciprocity is absent; and a rejection of values-based policymaking.”<sup>237</sup> A *Washington Post* analyst saw the Trump Doctrine as “situational,” reflecting “the messiness of the ongoing war for the soul of Trumpism that rages on inside the administration, pitting the nationalists against the globalists. Neither faction is likely to ever decisively win out over the other.”<sup>238</sup>

After six months in office, Trump's record was mixed. Some citizens expressed concern about the unorthodox ways he conducted himself as president as well as the goals he sought to achieve. For others, he was doing just as he had promised on the campaign trail—rattling cages at home and abroad. What does this contradictory record bode for the Trump presidency and our democratic system in the future? We turn to that question in our final section.

## VI. President Trump: A Natural Experiment

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Trump's record after his first eight months in office was no less controversial than his rule-breaking presidential campaign. There is ample evidence that the factionalism and disequilibrium foreshadowed in the first hundred days of the Trump administration escalated through the second hundred