

Opinion | Trump's Politics Are Not America First. They're Me First.

Thomas L. Friedman

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I have never trafficked in the conspiracy theories about Donald Trump and Russia. I never thought that he was a Russian asset or that Vladimir Putin had some financial leverage on him or sex tapes to blackmail him with. I have always believed it was much worse: that Trump, in his heart and soul, simply does not share the values of every other American president since World War II when it comes to what America's role in the world should be and must be.

I have always believed that Trump has an utterly warped value set that is not grounded in any of our founding documents, but simply favors any leader who is strong, no matter what he does with that strength; any leader who is rich and can thus enrich Trump, no matter what the leader does with that money or how he got it; and any leader who will flatter him, no matter how obviously phony that flattery is.

As long as Putin the dictator checked all those boxes more than the democratic leader of Ukraine, Trump treated him as a friend — American interests and values be damned. Putin never even had to break a sweat to make Trump his chump.

For all those reasons Trump is the most un-American president in our history. It was obvious from the day Trump trashed Senator John McCain, an authentic American war hero and patriot, for having been shot down in combat and taken prisoner. What kind of American would denounce McCain, who was held captive for over five years in a North Vietnamese prison camp after spurning early release, knowing it would be used as propaganda? No American that I know.

Trump's worst un-American impulses and intellectual laziness were contained in his first term in the White House by a group of serious advisers. This time around, there is no one to contain them. He has surrounded himself with sycophants. So, Trump is now basically running our country the way he ran his companies — as a one-man show free to make terrible deals.

That management style led to [six bankruptcy filings](#) by his companies. Unfortunately, today we're all his shareholders, and I fear he is going to bankrupt us as a nation — morally for sure, if not one day financially and politically.

Trump's behavior has become so reckless, so self-absorbed, so obviously contrary to American interests — as even Republicans have long defined them, let alone Democrats — that the question must be asked: Is America now being ruled by a mad king?

What American president would ever write the text that [Trump wrote](#) to Norway's prime minister, Jonas Gahr Store, on Sunday, claiming that one reason he is pushing to acquire Greenland is that he was not awarded the Nobel Peace Prize? He wrote, "Considering your Country decided not to give me the Nobel Peace Prize for having stopped 8 Wars PLUS, I no longer feel an obligation to think purely of Peace, although it will always be predominant, but can now think about what is good and proper for the United States of America."

Read those words over slowly. They don't scream "America first." They scream "Me first." They scream "I, Donald Trump, am ready to seize Greenland, at the price of breaking up the nearly 77-year-old NATO alliance, because the Nobel Committee did not give ME its peace prize last year" — ignoring the fact that the Norwegian government doesn't control the awarding of the prize.

It would be one thing for Trump to say he is ready to break up NATO over a matter of geopolitical principle affecting the security of the American people. I can't imagine what that would be, but I could at least imagine the possibility. What is unimaginable to me is an American president so obsessed with winning a Nobel Peace Prize to feed his ego and one-up his predecessor — as well as equal Barack Obama, who won the peace prize in 2009 — that he would be ready to wreck the whole NATO alliance and trading system with Europe because he did not get it.

I am trying to imagine a scene where Trump dictated that note to an aide, without shame, and that person sent it to the Norwegians — presumably without anyone in the White House hierarchy stopping it, without anyone saying: "Mr. President, are you crazy? You can't put your personal ambition for a Nobel Prize ahead of the whole of the Atlantic alliance."

But Trump can do that, because he obviously assigns little or no value to the blood and treasure and energy that generations of American soldiers, diplomats and presidents before him sacrificed in order to build that durable partnership with our European partners.

Let me put it in terms Trump should understand: If America were a company, you would say that a generation of American workers, executives and investors built the most successful, profitable and impactful corporation in the history of the world — the Atlantic/NATO alliance forged out of the ashes of World War II. With a relatively tiny investment in postwar Europe, known as the Marshall Plan, we created a healthy trading partner that helped make both America and Europe richer than ever; we helped to transform Europe from a continent known for nationalist, ethnic and religious wars into the biggest center of free markets, free people and the rule of law in the world — giving ourselves a powerful democratic wingman to help stabilize the world and contain Russia for the last three-quarters of a century.

It's true that Europe faces daunting challenges, from uncontrolled migration to overregulation to the rise of far-right parties. And yes, it often responds with indecision. And yes, there are legitimate security concerns in the Arctic. But generations of American statesmen and presidents understood the overriding importance of the U.S.-European compact and would never even contemplate sacrificing it over who has sovereignty in Greenland.

It is so obvious that only a pathological narcissist who insists on having his name on everything — from someone else's Kennedy Center to someone else's Nobel Peace Prize — would risk all of the above to seize Greenland, especially when you consider that we already have the right to operate bases in Greenland and station forward troops and missiles there. We also have the right to invest in extracting its minerals.

If indeed America were a company, the board of directors would have responded to behavior like Trump's by announcing an "intervention" with the C.E.O.

Unfortunately, America's board of directors, the Republican-led U.S. Congress, has been completely self-neutered. And so now, we the people, we the shareholders, are about to get stuck with the bill.

Meanwhile, America Inc.'s competitors simply cannot believe their luck. Since the end of World War II both Russia and China have understood the one big thing that Trump does not: America's competitive advantage. While Russia and China had only vassals that they could order and pressure to join them in any geopolitical or geoeconomic competition with the United States, America had a secret weapon hiding in plain sight: allies who shared our values and were ready to do difficult things, like send their soldiers to fight and die, *in our wars* in Iraq and Afghanistan. One of them was Denmark, which has sovereignty over Greenland.

Russia and China dreamed that one day something would happen where America would lose its allies and NATO would be fractured. Without economic allies, America could never be as influential in trade negotiations with China, and without America's military might, NATO would be hard pressed to prevent Russia from retaking parts of Central and Eastern Europe that it lost control over after the fall of the Berlin Wall.

And then one day their dreams came true. The American people elected a man who, no matter what he tells us, is taking us to a future not of "America first," but of "America alone" and "Me first."

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