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## End Times Militarism



Image by Specna Arms.

In 2016, in response to a critical yet incoherent ad by the Super-PAC *Priorities USA*, Donald Trump's campaign manager Kellyanne Conway pushed back against what she described as a misleading portrait of Trump's stance on war and national security as reported by Nick Gass. The 30-second ad entitled "I Love War." used Trump's own words to question his fitness to serve as commander-in-chief, and highlighted statements about his admiration for military power and nuclear weapons. Trump's handlers appeared on *Good Morning America* to deflect and accuse the Clinton campaign of taking Trump's comments out of context to draw attention away from Clintonian hawkishness. The ad, to be clear, was not a criticism of U.S.

power, but just reaffirming the belief that Trump would mishandle our God given right to police the world.

In 2017 alone, Trump approved nearly twice as many arms deals as Barack Obama did in his final year in office. In, “Actually, Donald Trump Loves War” Akbar Shahid Ahmad exposed the stark contrast between Trump’s diplomatic rhetoric and his actual policies. Although Trump often claimed to oppose “endless wars” and criticize the military industrial complex, his presidency was and is, marked by increased military spending, expanded arms sales, and deeper ties with defense contractors like Boeing and Lockheed Martin. Trump used these deals to boost the economy and promote his image, particularly in swing states while overlooking concerns about human rights or congressional oversight. For example, he pushed through weapons sales to Saudi Arabia despite the kingdom’s role in Yemen and the killing of journalist Jamal Khashoggi.

After 100 plus days of the Trump Administration’s second term in office, *CounterPunch* reflects on Trump’s foreign policy actions and rhetoric thus far. Trump’s approach to international relations generates comparisons to the policies of past U.S. presidents who relied heavily on military power and interventionism both foreign and domestic — leaders such as William McKinley, Andrew Jackson, and Theodore Roosevelt. Extending much more broadly, the prolific American historian Eric Foner once commented on *Democracy Now!* about how Trump was a composite figure featuring the international hypermasculinity of Silvio Berlusconi, the confederate populism of George Wallace, and the anti-institutional business libertarianism of Ross Perot.

Each of these figures ultimately defended state violence and military force to further American interests on a domestic and global stage, a legacy that Trump has at times selectively embraced. Despite presenting as a champion of prosperity, diplomacy and peace, Trump’s actions in office suggest a complex reality that combines his admiration for strongmen along with decisions that often favor the illegal use of force.

Trump foreign policy paradoxes are often found in statements made by officials like Secretary of State Marco Rubio, who just recently on *Face the Nation*, defended the administration’s policies despite the prominent inconsistencies and vast factual misrepresentations. Rubio is yet another person motivated by a desire to label Trump as “a builder, not a bomber,” although the Trump military record contradicts this dubious branding made by Rubio. As stated, Trump’s foreign policy legacy was already marked by significant military operations, increased spending, and frequent military interventions. These actions are driven in part by a belief in American exceptionalism and the use of force to

maintain dominance, as Trump has openly admired historical actors and their approaches to securing unchecked power.

In that same interview on May 18<sup>th</sup>, Rubio discussed the recent Russia-Ukraine peace talks in Turkey and the drafting of ceasefire proposals emphasizing how U.S. patience is limited. Rubio added that a direct Trump-Putin meeting could help break the diplomatic deadlock and confirmed that the Senate was moving forward with a “veto-proof” sanctions package against Russia with Putin’s own knowledge of it. Further, and like a well-disciplined commissar, Rubio rejected the findings that the Venezuelan gang Tren de Aragua was not a proxy for Nicolas Maduro. On the issue of South Africa, Rubio essentially defended the bizarre white genocide thesis and asserted the Trump administration’s prioritization of Afrikaner refugees, although he stopped short of confirming it as a literal genocide.

Regarding the nightmare of Gaza, Rubio reflexively offered the standard Biden-esque, “what about Hamas” slogan, but said another ceasefire remained possible. The Biden policy of perpetual war and genocide has reached a new critical phase under Trump, Operation Gideon’s Chariot, a ruthless takeover that calls for a relocation plan for any surviving Gazan. Concerning the topic of Iran, Rubio made clear that the U.S. will never allow Iran to obtain nuclear weaponry. It was here that he imprecisely labeled the president as a builder, not a bomber. Trump is in fact, as Fintan O’Toole argued in the *New York Review of Books*, a leader dedicated to “shredding the postwar order,” but this is an obvious far cry from diplomatic and strategic peacebuilding, peacemaking, and peacekeeping. Just ask a Palestinian, Syrian, Somali, Afghan or Yemeni, if Trump equals peace. Furthermore, the mere appointments of dedicated yet failed neocons like Rubio and Gabbard, show that team Trump’s takes and rhetorical flourishes on detente are unserious but their commitments to Bush style deep-statism are real.

Stephen Zunes, a leading critic of U.S. militarism, has argued that the portrayal of Trump as moderate, or less interventionist, is a dangerous myth. Although Trump attacked Hillary Clinton’s hawkish record in 2016, Zunes contends this was largely a rhetorical ploy from the right, to win over war weary voters, and not a reflection of any real peaceful restraint. In practice, Trump dramatically expanded military spending, loosened rules of engagement, and escalated bombing campaigns in Afghanistan, where he set forth a new high in recording over 7,000 bombings of the country, including the creation of the MoAB.

In Iraq and Yemen, where Trump ordered large scale air-strikes as well as Somalia and Syria, his actions led to large amounts of civilian casualties. He also embraced authoritarian regimes and became a top arms negotiator and supplier to flagrant human rights violators such as

Saudi Arabia, Israel and Morocco. Trump openly and brazenly fantasizes about military displays on his birthday with military parades that are costly. In his first term, he created the ominous United States Space Force, a special addition to the cabinet to reinforce his love for increased militarism.

Zunes explained how Trump gained traction by exploiting public disillusionment with endless wars, especially in perceived working-class and military communities, both devastated by past interventions. His “America First” rhetoric appealed to both conservative isolationists and disaffected liberals, helping suppress Clinton support in key purple states. Zunes stressed however, that Trump’s actual policies showed very little ability to be checked. It should be remembered, that he increased troop deployments in some areas, supported repressive regimes, and pushed the world to the brink of cataclysmic war with both Iran and North Korea. Trump’s brand of nationalism, Zunes cautioned, was not rooted in peace but in authoritarianism and force. Much like Jackson, McKinley and Roosevelt, Trump favors a style of racialized militarism that gets cloaked in diplomatic messaging and political ability. Like every other U.S. President however, Trump is, of course, only interested in expanding American dominance through bombings, arms deals, and complete disregard for global rights and international norms.

Abandoning the Washington Consensus and the liberal world order while waging war against institutions such as NATO and the European Union might differentiate one from other establishment politicians, but it doesn’t remove the fact that Trump targets places such as Greenland and Canada and instills and invokes fear in the Mideast, Africa, and Asia. Justice Malala recently explained how Trump’s ambush of Cyril Ramaphosa reveals how low the U.S. has fallen with policies that fail to build.

Simply put, Trump is a bomber and not a builder, (we have Yemen, Somalia and Syria to show for it) regardless of what Rubio recently described on television. The record of Trump’s presidency, as does the record of history, offers a more complex and nuanced story. It is true that Trump has often criticized imperial Democratic warmongering and has managed to dupe intellectuals and cultural managers on the left and the right. Politically, he has emphasized diplomacy and disparaged “endless wars,” but the Trump administration in actual practice, has authorized numerous military operations and air strikes across multiple countries. Recall that after the two major air strikes of Syria in 2017 and 2018, his administration facilitated the assassination of the Iranian commander General Soleimani.

This is not building. End times militarism escalates tensions with regional powers and provokes global condemnation. While these moves align with his supporters’ expectations of

strong leadership, they place the United States on a dangerous path of ongoing confrontation. Coupled with what Naomi Klein calls “end times fascism,” the Trump administration fosters an environment of permanent warfare through drone strikes, military alliances, and support for dictatorial regimes. This ushers in a renewed level of catastrophes for not just global governance but for civil society and for resisters. The contradictions between Trump’s America first bombast and the interventionist policies of his administration, underline the complicated nature of his chaotic love of U.S. Navy Super Hornets, the super-weapon, and cruel foreign policy measures of destruction.

Daniel Falcone is a historian specializing in the revolutions of 1848 and the political refugees who sought asylum in New York City. His academic work focuses on Giuseppe Garibaldi’s influence on New York’s local history and the politics of memory in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Aside from his research, he is a teacher and journalist whose work has appeared in additional publications such as *The Journal of Contemporary Iraq & the Arab World*, *The Nation*, *Jacobin*, and *Truthout*. His journalistic pieces, Q&As with public intellectuals, intersect history with modern-day geopolitical issues.

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