

Trump is God's gift that keeps on giving – but to whom?



Trump's running of US imperialism is replete with own goals, causing almost as much pain to his own side as to that of his opponents.

“Trump is God's gift that keeps on giving,’ said Vladimir Frolov, a Russian columnist and foreign affairs analyst.” In citing Mr Frolov in a tone of despair, Neil MacFarquhar of the New York Times added: “Trump implements Russia's negative agenda by default, undermining the US-led world order, US alliances, US credibility as a partner and an ally. All of this on his own.” ([Glee in Russia over Trump's foreign policy largess](#), 21 December 2018) Steven Erlanger and Jane Perlez in the same issue of the New York Times went into more detail on US President [Donald Trump's](#) wrecking-ball activities: They express the view that President Trump is “acting with utter disregard for traditional American allies in his sudden decisions to pull troops out of Syria and Afghanistan”. They quote an exasperated EU official saying: “Until now, you could talk about hedging, and all allies were doing it fairly prudently. But now everyone will have to work on the assumption that the alliance system is no longer there. The organisations are there, the treaties are there, the troops and equipment are still there, but the high priest of that church is gone.’ ... “These alliances cost the American taxpayer real money, of course, but the payments were not altruistic – they prevented the United States from having to engage in yet another global conflict, another world war. And they created increasingly wealthy markets for American products, both industrial and agricultural. “In turn, many allies fought alongside the United States in its wars – in Korea, Vietnam, Iraq and Afghanistan. And when al-Qaeda attacked the United States on 11 September 2001, Nato exercised [Article 5](#) of its treaty: If one Nato country is attacked, all Nato countries will be considered under attack and will join in defence ... “Britain, with troops alongside American forces in Afghanistan, must also recalibrate, said Ivor Roberts, a former ambassador. “‘All around for America's allies, it's a matter of great dismay,’ he said. In Syria, ‘Trump has given comfort to people I wouldn't think the United States would want to give comfort to: the Russians, Iranians and Isis [he conveniently ‘forgets’ that Isis is a US asset].” ([America's allies fear that traditional ties no longer matter under Trump](#)) Imperialist propaganda always depicts [Russia](#), [Iran](#), [Syria](#), [China](#), etc, as the embodiment of evil, whose only interest is to destroy

whatever is good about the American way of life. From this totally unsubstantiated premise, it follows that anybody who undermines [US imperialism's](#) ability to attack and subdue such countries is acting against the interests of America and its ‘democratic values’ (!) with a view to forcing on America the same supposedly sorry undemocratic system under which they are supposed to be labouring. If, however, one rejects the absurd premise that any of these countries has even the slightest design on changing US or European, or anybody else's, internal political arrangements, then it becomes clear that the only thing that might be endangered by Trump are the teeth and claws through which US imperialism seeks to dominate the world in the interests of maximising the profits of its home multinationals and multibillionaires. If what Trump is doing, very much in spite of himself, is weakening the imperialist war machine, as these quotations suggest, what's not to like?

Trump's middle-eastern calculations

It is of course true that since Trump became president US imperialism's war effort has been ramped up with more bombing raids in various middle-eastern targets, both by US imperialism itself and its surrogate, Israel, and by much larger numbers of US troops on the ground in the region. This was all contrary to Trump's extremely popular campaign promises to extricate the US from overseas wars. However, he had surrounded himself with army generals as advisers, who were telling him that with just one more push US imperialism could emerge successful from its middle-eastern and Afghan adventures. “Mr Trump's noninterventionist impulse has always fit uncomfortably with the team he assembled, particularly the latest, more hawkish iteration in his ever-shifting foreign policy cast. For a time, the president grudgingly deferred, allowing conflicts to escalate in virtually every theatre he inherited.” ([Trump is right to seek an end to America's wars by Jon Finan and Robert Malley](#), New York Times, 8 January 2019) But now that the generals have fallen out of Trump's favour, with General Jim ‘Mad Dog’ Mattis being the latest to be shown the door, all the imperialist hyenas are shaking in their

shoes in case Trump actually does start implementing a withdrawal agenda, for they all fear that without teeth imperialism is going to lose its bite. “The breaking point was Syria, where Mr Trump decided over his defence secretary’s [Mattis’s] objections to pull out all American troops, and Afghanistan, where the president seems determined to reduce the American presence by half in the next few months. By the time Mr Trump made clear he would delay those actions no longer, Mr Mattis was isolated. “He was not alone: most of the advisers Mr Trump once called ‘my generals’ also believed in the worldview that Mr Trump has long rejected. And now, headed into his third year in office and more convinced than ever that his initial gut instincts about retreating from a complex world of civil wars and abstract threats was right, Mr Trump has rid himself of the aides who feared the president was undercutting America’s long-term national interests. “Now the president appears determined to assemble a new team of advisers who will not tell him what he cannot do, but rather embrace his vision of a powerful America that will amass a military that will enforce national sovereignty and bolster American deal-making – but not spend time nurturing the alliance relationships that Mr Mattis, in a [remarkable resignation letter](#), makes clear are at the core of American power.” ([With the generals gone, Trump’s ‘America First’ could fully emerge](#) by David E Sanger, New York Times, 21 December 2018) It is obvious that in seeking to pull out of [Syria](#) and possibly Afghanistan as well, Trump is by no means showing pacifist tendencies. He has every intention of staying on in [Iraq](#) to extract its oil to pay for the war that US imperialism launched there. It’s just that he wants to see a return on his imperialist investment that he does not see in Syria or Afghanistan. As explained by [Jon Finer and Robert Malley](#), both former advisers to the Obama administration, in the article quoted above: “In Syria, whatever one’s view of the tragic and long-debated trajectory of the conflict or past policy decisions, the United States has few remaining, achievable interests at stake: preventing the Islamic State [aka Daesh or Isis] from regaining territorial control, protecting the predominantly Kurdish forces on whom Washington relied to do most of the counterterrorist fighting and supporting our allies in their efforts to defend against threats emanating from Syrian territory. The success of none of those goals will be determined by a relatively small, long-term military presence ... “In truth, many on the right who denounced Mr Trump’s announcement did so principally because they see Syria as a venue for confronting Iran. But that is chasing an illusory and dangerous goal: It is hard to

see how a few thousand American troops could counter tens of thousands of Iranian and Iranian-backed forces, aligned both with Moscow and President Bashar al-Assad’s regime that has largely won the civil war ... “In Afghanistan too, Mr Trump’s bottom line was correct. After more than 17 years of combat and a virtual stalemate, at best, for more than a decade, there is little rationale for continuing to expend American blood and treasure on a conflict trending badly, with unclear objectives.” Of course, that notorious architect of the Iraq war John Bolton remains in the Trump entourage as national security advisor, and he just revels in war, any war, and is therefore most reluctant to pull out of Syria and Afghanistan. Under his urgings, what Trump had announced as an ‘immediate’ withdrawal is now likely to take several months – but there is at least some sign that military materiel is being gradually withdrawn. Quite a bit of distress at Trump’s announcement has been expressed by Britain, as voiced by an editorial in The Times of 21 December: “The decision to pull American troops out of Syria is a serious error of judgment. President Trump’s announcement on Wednesday via Twitter appeared to take the state department and Department of Defence by surprise and showed an alarming failure of communication in the chain of military command. That the president made the decision without informing Britain and France, two of his closest allies who both have troops in Syria working closely with American forces, shows a shocking disregard for friends of the United States ... “There must now be a question over the continued presence of British forces in Syria who have also been assisting the Kurds. The British government has said that it intends to keep soldiers there. Yet it is hard to see to what purpose. Withdrawal would be a humiliation, but certainly not the greatest or necessarily the last to be suffered by one of America’s allies.” ([The Times view on the US withdrawing troops from Syria: Trump is undermining allies](#)) Actually there is no particular question over the British troops remaining should US imperialism actually get round to withdrawing (see it before believing it!) They only went in in the first place because little European imperialisms wanted to curry favour with their big bad brother, US imperialism. If US imperialism leaves, it would make absolutely no sense for Britain and France to remain – quite apart from which they would be absolutely powerless, having no function other than to provide target practice to forces hostile to them.

The weak knees of the European imperialists

The likes of General Mattis were fearful that Trump's unilateral declaration of withdrawal would damage US imperialism's relationship with allies such as the UK and France, undermining bellicose coordination in pursuit of imperialist interests. A few weeks later, however, Trump was able to demonstrate how futile were Mattis's fears as he took it upon himself to declare the Venezuelan government illegitimate and to 'recognise' as president of Venezuela some upstart who has never contrived to win an election. All the minor imperialist powers, including Britain and France, which had been so 'let down' over Syria, rushed in pursuit of Trump's non-too-savoury posterior to express their full support for his totally preposterous action. All these imperialist flunkys fear loss of access to the US market so much that they dare not put a foot out of line. Trump was quite right to treat them with the contempt they deserve. It appears that the Kurdish YPG (the armed wing of the Kurdish nationalist Democratic Union party, PYD), about to be abandoned by its US imperialist benefactors and quartermasters, has been forced to try to mend fences with the Syrian government, since without the US presence to protect its fighters, they face armed intervention by Turkey, their bitterest foe. Turkey has indignantly spurned the demand put to it by John Bolton that it should promise not to attack the YPG.

Trump's wall and the US government shutdown

Meanwhile Trump has been playing to the anti-immigrant sentiment so successfully fostered among the US working class by the mendacious bourgeois media by demanding \$5bn funding for the building of a 2,000 mile wall along the border with Mexico, ostensibly to keep out Latin American immigrants he equates with being criminals, drug smugglers and even jihadis with suggestions being flung around that prayer mats have been found among the caravans seeking to enter the country. Couldn't possibly be fake news, could it? The cant about drug smugglers is the sheerest hypocrisy, seeing that commercial American popular culture, like the British, is awash with the normalisation of drug taking, which nobody denounces, let alone tries to prevent! His Democratic Party opponents, and even some Republicans, are determined not to allow the funding, which they rightly consider to be a waste of money – partly because the US economy needs immigrants, partly because most immigrants do not enter the US via its southern border, and partly to make the Democratic Party look better in the light

of the presidential election due next year. In the cause of insisting on funding for the wall, which is apparently hugely important to his electoral base, Trump has blocked the passage of the bill required to provide ongoing funding for the federal government, meaning that it is unable to meet its wages bill and thus shutting down the US federal government for the third time in 2018. It remained closed until this issue of Proletarian was just going to press on 27 January, when Trump finally caved in, temporarily, after 35 days. What appears to have finally forced him to back down is that commercial flights were being grounded as a result of air traffic controllers refusing to continue to work without pay. Astonishingly, Trump announced the end of the shutdown as a great victory for his negotiating tactics! During the shutdown no fewer than 800,000 federal employees were either working without pay (including, apparently, its intelligence agents) or were sent home altogether, while the various public services they provide were suspended. This was actually causing real harm to the US economy: "The administration now calculates that the shutdown reduces quarterly economic growth by 0.13 percentage points for every week that it lasts – the cumulative effect of lost work from contractors and furloughed federal employees who are not getting paid and who are investing and spending less as a result. That means that the economy has already lost nearly half a percentage point of growth from the four-week shutdown ... "While federal workers are likely to receive back pay once the furlough ends, most government contractors will not, and the longer spending is depressed, the higher the risk that the businesses they run or patronize will fail." ([Economic damage starts to pile up, threatening an end to growth by Jim Tankersley](#), New York Times, 15 January 2019) And further: "The government shutdown has produced a serious economic threat that's hiding in plain sight: the US economy is flying blind. The people who collect, analyse and release all the basic data tracking the path of the economy and its principal aspects are on furlough. This means that thousands of companies and financial institutions, and millions of investors, have to rely on guesswork instead of data, and each week the problem grows worse. "In normal times – which here means anytime but now – the Census Bureau surveys thousands of American businesses every week and through each quarter on every aspect of their operations. The results of these surveys, taken together, describe the path of every industry, and the Bureau of Economic Analysis (BEA) pulls all of those data together to calculate GDP. "The official list of these Census surveys ...

now carries the following notice: 'Due to a lapse in federal funding portions of this website are not being updated.' Without any public attention, the shutdown has put all of those surveys on hold. "The Department of Commerce issues most of these data on the economy's recent performance, and it [reports](#) that the shutdown so far has prevented the analysis and release of the November data on imports and exports, construction spending, residential home sales, retail inventories, wholesale trade, and manufacturers' orders, shipments and inventories. Over the next several days, the department also will cancel its scheduled releases on manufacturing sales in November, retail sales in December, and residential construction in December. "This confounding ignorance about the economy's current performance matters a great deal. For example, what's happening with trade affects the decisions by thousands of companies about how to manage their certain spending, investments and inventories. With no public data on recent imports and exports, those decisions have to rely more on guesswork – and more companies than usual will simply guess wrong. "The data on imports and exports also influence exchange rates, so the shutdown will inject more speculation into Federal Reserve policy, along with decisions by millions of investors. In the data-free world of this shutdown, Donald Trump can no longer know if his tariffs are working. "Everyone who collects and analyses the monthly data on residential housing construction, new and existing home sales, and business investments in new offices and factories also is on extended forced leave. As a result, the thousands of companies that produce the goods and services used to build and outfit new structures and to furnish existing homes and buildings also have to rely more on intuition than facts. Inevitably, the intuitions of many of those companies will prove wrong, inflicting unexpected costs on their workers and their shareholders. "The shutdown also will complicate any efforts by Trump to make good on his pledge to 'bring back manufacturing'. Consider a widget producer in Ohio thinking about expanding production or opening a new factory. But Trump's commerce department has suspended the analysis and release of any recent monthly data on widget industry orders, sales, and inventories, or foreign demand for US widgets and US demand for foreign widgets. "Unless the company is willing to risk a shareholders' lawsuit if an expansion undertaken during the shutdown goes badly, its only reasonable option is to delay new investments to increase its production." ([The real threat the government shutdown poses for the American economy](#) by Robert Shapiro, Brookings, 16

January 2019) Understandably "An NPR-PBS NewHour-Marist poll found that 57 percent of Americans would rather the president compromised on his wall demands in order to keep the government open. However, only 29 percent of Republicans agree that the president should compromise – compared with 71 percent of Democrats – a sign of the partisan battle lines." ([Trump threatens government shutdown over Mexico border wall](#) by Courtney Weaver and Demetri Sevastopulo, Financial Times, 11 December 2018) Since it's the Republicans who will be nominating their presidential candidate for 2020, Trump will no doubt continue to play to his constituency. Now that the shutdown has ended, at least until mid-February when Trump is threatening to restore it if he doesn't get the money for his wall, the total cost is estimated to have been \$3bn – over half the cost of the ridiculous wall.

Trade war with China – another double-edged sword

All this is of course detracting attention from Trump's disastrous [trade war](#) with China. US imperialism has created the 'rust belt' in the United States by investing abroad – especially by investing the capital gathered from profits reaped years ago from American workers when they still had industrial jobs. The imperialist concerns then minted it by selling the goods they had made cheaply in China back to America at a massive mark-up. And the imperialist US governments try to bamboozle the workers by telling them that America faces unfair competition from China! The trade war that the US has unleashed on China, leading to the latter imposing retaliatory tariffs on US goods, has caused great economic harm to both countries. While US stock market prices fell drastically last year, and Apple, for example, has been forced to post a profit warning after a \$9bn drop in predicted sales, with the rating agency Fitch predicting that US debt will be downgraded this year, China has also suffered great economic setbacks. On 14 December the New York Times reported: "China's consumers and [businesses](#) are losing confidence. Car sales have plunged. The housing market is stumbling. Some factories are letting workers off for the big Lunar New Year holiday two months early. "China's economy has slowed sharply in recent months, presenting perhaps the biggest challenge to its top leader, Xi Jinping, in his six years of rule. At home, he faces difficult choices that could rekindle growth but add to the country's long-term problems, like its heavy debt. On the world stage, he has been forced to make

concessions to the United States as President Trump's trade war intensifies ... "On 8 December, Chinese officials reported surprisingly weak growth in monthly retail sales and industrial production weighing on global markets and helping to drag down the S&P 500-stock index by 1.9 percent. Many economists say the slowdown is the worst since the global financial crisis a decade ago, when Beijing was forced to plough trillions of dollars into its economy to keep growth from derailing." ([China's economy slows sharply in challenge for Xi Jinping](#) by Keith Bradsher and Ailin Tang) In addition: "Euler Hermes, the trade credit insurer, predicted that insolvencies in China would grow by a fifth in 2019. That increase comes on top of a 60 percent jump last year in the country, where gross domestic product growth has fallen to its lowest rate in a decade." ([Chinese business failures set to outstrip other big economies](#) by Oliver Ralph and James Kynge, Financial Times, 9 January 2019) In spite of its problems, the money markets are rating China as marginally more creditworthy than the US, as yields on 10-year debt are lower for China than the US, according to the Keiser Report on RT. And even the New York Times has to admit: "Thanks to the government's tight hold on important industries and the financial sector, it has more levers to pull in case of a downturn than practically any other country." ([Op cit](#)) Nevertheless, US imperialism appears confident that it is in a position to drive a hard bargain on China to end the trade war, forcing it to take more imports, especially of GM-produced agricultural products, from the US and hobbling its attempts to turn its economy into a technological powerhouse to rival the US. Central to US efforts to undermine China's technological advance are its assault on leading Chinese telecoms company, Huawei. Much publicity has been given to [the arrest in Canada](#) at US imperialist behest of the chief financial officer of Huawei and the demand for her extradition to the US on charges of evading US sanctions on Iran in 2013. It is clear, however, that what motivated this arrest was the fact that Huawei is well ahead of its US rivals in development of 5G mobile phone technology and infrastructure, which is causing the US government, on behalf of US telecoms multinationals, to work to destroy the Chinese business. It seems that 5G is not just an upgrade on 4G: "A leaked memo, apparently written by a senior national security council official, revealed as far back as the start of this year exactly how worried the US is about Huawei." According to this memo: "5G is 'by no means simply a "faster 4G"', describing it instead as 'a change more like the invention of the Gutenberg Press'. It will bring

higher speeds, lower lag times between network and device, and a much larger capacity to transfer data. Together, these features are expected to underpin self-driving cars, AI [artificial intelligence] and machine-to-machine communications that will transform the way everything from homes to hospitals to factories operate." Moreover, "Beijing started planning for 5G early, establishing a working group of mobile operators, equipment makers and handset manufacturers as early as 2013. As it set up its 4G network, it had an eye on expanding it for 5G, which requires many more base stations. China had almost 2m cell sites in early 2018, which is ten times that of the US, according to Deloitte, the consultancy. "There are 5.3 sites for every 10 sq miles in China, compared to 0.4 in the US. 'No country has devoted more effort to preparing the ground,' said a report from the Eurasia Group consultancy last month, which suggested that China will have first-mover advantage in 5G." ([US fears it will lose the 'commanding heights' of new technology](#) by Nic Fildes and Louise Lucas, Financial Times, 13 December 2018) Huawei has gone all out to be the first and the best in the field. The superiority of the system that Huawei are poised to be able to implement before anybody else obviously threatens to steal a considerable competitive march on its rivals, which US imperialism is determined to prevent by means mostly foul. It is spreading panic about Huawei equipment being compromised by programs that will enable the Chinese government to control Huawei-based networks both for the purpose of espionage and of sabotage. President Xi Jinping of China and Donald Trump have expressed optimism as to the outcome of negotiations currently taking place to end the trade war. China has certainly indicated a willingness to make some concessions to US demands. These demands, however, will be unjust and are bound to cause China hardship. On the other hand, the US's unreasonable imperialist behaviour runs the risk of strengthening the hand of all those powerful elements in China who oppose 'reform and opening up' and want to see a return to full socialist economic planning – and to put in place a robust technological base that is not reliant on imperialist markets or imperialist technology. All in all, whether it be reducing troop numbers in Syria and Afghanistan, ramping up the trade war with China or shutting down the government at home, Donald Trump's approach to the running of US imperialism is replete with own goals, causing almost as much pain to his own side as to that of his opponents. His advent to the White House is a stark reminder that the entire imperialist system is in the throes of the deepest-ever

crisis of overproduction – a crisis that has impoverished and angered the masses and divided and weakened their overlords, rendering them *increasingly unable to rule in the old way*. What is lacking is a powerful organisation of workers that is able to mobilise the presently disorganised and demoralised working masses to fight back against the decrepit and dying rule of the financial oligarchs. When the workers can show in practice that they are *unwilling any longer to be ruled in the old way*, they will be able to take advantage of the weakness of their rulers and make the socialist revolution that is the only way out of capitalism's downward spiral into crisis, poverty and war.

2 February 2019