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Progressive Foreign Policy Debrief

Intel for Advocacy

SL: A blueprint for a more progressive foreign policy in the next Congress

[THE NEW CONGRESS CAN REIN IN TRUMP'S RECKLESS FOREIGN POLICY](#)

For the past two years, Congress has only emboldened the worst of Donald Trump's foreign policy decisions, standing idly by while he kicked the Iran deal aside, withdrew from the Paris Climate Accord, wasted billions of taxpayer dollars throwing more money at an already bloated Pentagon budget, and performing essentially no oversight, from misguided military adventures to the Trump campaign's potential collusion with Russia during the 2016 election campaign and his use of the military to militarize immigration.

But that may all be about to change. Tuesday's election results open up an opportunity for Congress to not only rein in Trump, but also to set and advance progressive priorities for years to come.

ENDING THE WAR IN YEMEN

The biggest and most immediate priority for the current Congress will be to end the U.S. role in the Saudi-UAE led war against Houthis in Yemen. The [foolishness](#) of this policy, and the [devastation](#) it has caused, are well known.

Fortunately, legislation in both the [House](#) and [Senate](#) will be voted on in the coming weeks to pull the plug on this conflict. And the Saudi government murdering journalist Jamal Khashoggi has only emboldened Congress to act. Sen. Chris Murphy [recently explained](#) how the two issues are connected.

"The Saudis have been telling us that they were not intentionally bombing civilian targets inside Yemen," he said. "Now, when they've spent two weeks lying through their teeth about what happened to Khashoggi, it has started to draw real questions from members as to whether the Saudis were telling us the truth about what is happening inside Yemen."

[Spoiler alert](#): **The Saudis are not telling us the truth.**

AFGHANISTAN, THE AUMF, AND BEYOND

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It's rarely a topic of conversation in most quarters these days but [we are still at war](#) in Afghanistan. And Iraq. And Syria. And Libya. And Niger. And Somalia. And ...

House Democrats, led by Reps. [Barbara Lee](#) and [Ro Khanna](#), are looking to change that. They'll be considering proposals to repeal the legal justification for the war in Afghanistan -- the 2001 AUMF -- a law the past three administrations have used to dubiously justify military action across the Middle East and beyond. House Democrats will also seek to "tie funding for the campaign to clearly outlined strategic goals and troop reductions," according to HuffPost. The push comes as a new report from the Brown University Cost of War Project, which found that nearly [half a million people](#) were directly killed in the post-9/11 wars in Iraq, Afghanistan, and Pakistan.

For more on this, see our Debrief from [September 14](#).

PENTAGON OVERSIGHT

Rep. Adam Smith, who will likely become the next House Armed Services Committee chair, has said that in that role, he wants to increase oversight of the ever expanding, and [increasingly hidden](#), military operations worldwide.

The current Congress has essentially let Trump allow the Pentagon to write it's own check, and Smith says those days are over. "The Trump White House, by and large, has let the Pentagon have a lot of free rein," Smith said. "I think that's inappropriate, and I think there is a real role for Congress to step in." Smith denounced Trump's \$716 billion Pentagon budget and said it should be [closer to \\$600 billion](#).

The Washington Democrat also said he'd be "actively engaged" in fighting for LGBTQ+ servicemembers' rights. He had previously called Trump's plan to boot transgender people from the military "[unwarranted and disgraceful](#)."

See our messaging on Trump's war budget [here](#).

NO WAR WITH IRAN

Progressives in Congress should now feel emboldened to push back against Trump's disastrous decision to violate the Iran nuclear deal and unilaterally reimpose sanctions. Congress should: 1) Speak out forcefully in support of the Iran deal and 2) **Introduce legislation that would not only prevent additional sanctions on Iran, but also put the**

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United States back in compliance with the agreement and support our European friends' efforts to save it.

While Congress has [already affirmed](#) that there is no existing authorization for the use of force against Iran, a [bipartisan](#) Senate [measure](#) led by Sen. Tom Udall would “prohibit the United States from expending funds which could lead to war with Iran without express approval from Congress.”

See [last week's Debrief](#) for more on how Trump's Iran policy has put us back on the path to war.

NO NEW NUKES

Since Trump took office, he has increased the likelihood of nuclear war by laying out a nuclear policy that expands criteria for nuclear weapons' use, calls for development of more “usable” weapons, and essentially abandons U.S. leadership to prevent the spread of nuclear weapons. Not only that, [more than half](#) of Americans are concerned Trump will launch an unprovoked nuclear strike.

Congress has a new opportunity to rein Trump in by revisiting previously introduced legislation that would [ban the development](#) of these so-called “usable” nukes, [limit](#) Trump's ability to introduce nuclear weapons in a conflict, and [establish](#) that “it is the policy of the United States to not use nuclear weapons first.”

Rep. Smith also [wants to limit funding](#) for Trump's (and Obama's before him) unnecessary plan to “modernize” our nuclear weapons program, which would [cost](#) upwards of \$1.7 trillion over the next 30 years.

And after Trump's misguided decision to withdraw from the Intermediate Range Nuclear Forces Treaty, Congress should [block funding](#) for the development of any missiles that were banned under the agreement

NORTH KOREA: PUTTING DIPLOMACY FIRST

It's now clear that diplomacy with North Korea to rein in its nuclear weapons program and bring peace to the Peninsula [has been largely driven by](#) South Korean President Moon Jae-in. In addition to the concern of Trump's own general incompetence derailing talks, it's also clear that there are elements within the Trump administration that are working at throwing wrenches in the process by refusing to embrace an action-for-action diplomatic approach.

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Congress must do everything in its power to promote diplomacy that puts peace and denuclearization on equal footing and to not stand in the way of progress with North Korea, which includes [curbing any desire](#) to encourage Trump to take a more hawkish approach.

On the war front, Congress has already said there is [no authorization for war with North Korea](#). Additionally, next year Congress can also revisit [Senate](#) and House bills to prevent Trump from launching a first strike attack on North Korea without Congressional approval.

REBALANCING U.S. FOREIGN POLICY

Donald Trump's foreign policy has tossed human rights aside, put smart diplomacy on the back burner, disregarded climate change, undermined respect for international law and norms, and stuck a finger in the eyes of our long-term democratic allies, all while cozying up to the world's worst authoritarians and dictators. Congress now has an opportunity to push back by:

- **Reasserting U.S. leadership in human rights promotion** around the world. It can start by blocking arms deals to Saudi Arabia and the Philippines, where authoritarian leader President Rodrigo Duterte's human rights record [has been abysmal](#).
- **Assure that the State Department is adequately resourced** and investigate whether former political officials were retaliated against or career service officials have been forced out.
- **Declare our intent to reenter the Paris Climate Accord** and pass legislation to combat climate change.
- **State unequivocally that the United States stands with our democratic allies** to confront the world's most pressing challenges and reaffirm American opposition to oligarchy and authoritarianism.

BURIED LEDES

Thanks to our friends at the Project on Government Oversight, we now have a [database](#) that **tracks the revolving door of Pentagon officials going to work for the defense industry**.

NBD: French President Emmanuel Macron is [proposing](#) the creation of a "true European army" to **defend the European Union from external threats like Vladimir Putin and ... the United States**.

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The Trump administration is [considering](#) labeling the Houthi rebel group in Yemen a terror group, **a move that would make an inclusive peace deal nearly impossible.**

Turkish officials have [concluded](#) that there are no remains of journalist Jamal Khashoggi's body because **he was "dissolved completely" by chemicals after he was murdered.**

There's a [push](#) to **rename the street outside the Saudi embassy in Washington "Jamal Khashoggi Way."**

Facebook is now [acknowledging](#) **its role in the genocide against the Rohingya in Myanmar.**

NBD 2.0: Counterterrorism experts [say](#) **Trump is inspiring a new era of right-wing extremism.**

Trump is [enabling](#) Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to **crack down on Palestinian opposition to the occupation of the West Bank.**

[The Nigerian Army](#), known for its human rights abuses, **cited Trump's own words to justify its fatal-shooting of rock-throwing protesters.**

Amid the chaos of this week, Trump quietly reimposed the harshest sanctions on Iran, **which are intended to be the final nail in the Iran deal's coffin.** Here's a [list](#) of organizational statements in response.

And finally, he just came out and said it. A [banned](#) undercover report by Al-Jazeera about the Israel lobby in the U.S. was leaked this week. In it, Jonathan Schanzer of the Foundation for Defense of Democracies is on tape [admitting](#) that right-wing pro-Israel types **use the anti-Semitism charge to smear people with whom they disagree.**