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Progressive Foreign Policy Debrief

Intel for Advocacy

THE ACTUAL STATE OF THE UNION

When Donald Trump delivers his State of the Union speech next week, the audience looking back at him in the House chamber will look quite different from the one he spoke to last year.

Indeed, the 116th Congress is the most diverse in U.S. history, with most newly elected members having little interest in running cover for a president mired in scandal and swaddled with corruption, or assisting him in enacting his radical right-wing agenda.

On foreign policy, we can safely assume that during the speech Trump will, for example, baselessly fear-monger about Iran and lie about the nuclear deal, hype a non-existent security crisis at the southern border, or perhaps even try to lay the groundwork for a U.S. military intervention in Venezuela (and we can be sure he won't say anything about the murder of Jamal Khashoggi). And if Trump's recent [spat](#) with his own senior intelligence advisers is any indication, whatever national security issue he chooses to address will have little relation to any kind of observable reality.

Thankfully, those in the audience sitting across from him are the antidote to Trump's untethered and disastrous policies that have only made us less safe. And in just 4 short weeks, they've already begun to make their mark on U.S. foreign policy:

ENDING THE WAR IN YEMEN

Sens. Mike Lee, Chris Murphy, and Bernie Sanders, along with Reps. Ro Khanna and Mark Pocan [announced this week](#) during a joint press conference their intention to introduce companion Senate and House war powers resolutions ending the U.S. participation in the Saudi-UAE war in Yemen.

Trump seemingly remains committed to contributing to one of the largest humanitarian crises in the world. But while, in an unprecedented move, the Senate passed an identical measure in December calling for a withdrawal of U.S. forces, former House Speaker Paul Ryan blocked any consideration of similar legislation. Now, the 116th Congress will soon likely speak with one unified voice saying that enough is enough.

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"Today we are coming together to address one of the great humanitarian crises facing the planet," Sanders [said](#) at a press conference. "The United States should not be supporting a catastrophic war led by a despotic Saudi regime with a dangerous and irresponsible military policy."

Khanna noted the historic nature of the upcoming votes: "This will be the first time in the history of this country since 1973 that we will successfully pass a war powers resolution through the Senate and through the House," he said.

REINING IN/ENDING ENDLESS WAR

Syria

Of course the only time some feel the need to stand up to Trump, it's to try to prevent him from taking a step towards ending our endless wars.

Case in point, Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell [brought up a measure](#) opposing Trump's plan to withdraw U.S. troops from Syria and Afghanistan.

Of course, the issue with Trump's plan isn't his desire to withdraw U.S. troops, it's the haphazard way in which he's doing it. Sen. Bernie Sanders [neatly encapsulated](#) the heart of the matter:

President Trump's abrupt announcement last month that he would withdraw U.S. troops from Syria and Afghanistan was typical of his reckless approach—an approach that left our international partners blindsided and questioning U.S. leadership. Congress must play a role, consistent with its Constitutional authority over war, in developing a troop withdrawal plan that is coordinated with our allies, that continues to provide humanitarian aid and that supports political settlements in these countries.

The bill also included a provision criminalizing economic and political boycotts of Israel and West Bank settlements, which the ACLU explains [violates](#) the First Amendment. But it ultimately [passed](#), with 19 Democrats -- and all presumed presidential contenders -- voting against it.

Meanwhile, more than 30 House progressives, led by Reps. Barbara Lee and Ted Lieu, [sent a letter](#) to Trump asking him what his strategy is to bring peace and security to the Syrian people amid his abrupt decision to withdraw U.S. troops (despite the fact that they did not support the unauthorized deployment in the first place) and that they're particularly concerned with Trump devising a plan to alleviate the humanitarian crisis there.

In the coming months, Congress will similarly have to tackle our nation's longest war in history in Afghanistan and address the more than 17 year old legislation the President claims gives him the

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very authority for these endless wars. It's safe to say that these debates will look very different than the silence we've heard through the last several Congresses.

IRAN & THE NUCLEAR DEAL

It's no secret (albeit [a largely unnoticed one](#)) that Trump — particularly at the behest of John Bolton and Mike Pompeo — has put the United States on a [path to war](#) with Iran and is perhaps actively seeking one out.

As Trump continues to lie about the Iran nuclear deal, his intelligence chiefs — Director of National Intelligence Dan Coats and CIA Director Gina Haspel — this week publicly broke with the president, [saying](#) Iran is complying with the agreement, and there's no evidence that Iran is building a nuclear weapon (earlier this month, Bolton said Iran is “committed” to building a bomb).

Our European friends are doing what they can to keep the deal alive having just this week [rolled out a financial mechanism](#) designed to facilitate legal trade with Iran and avoid U.S. sanctions. Even the International Atomic Energy Agency [is stepping into the fray](#), warning against pressures (from certain hawkish U.S. “think tanks”) on inspecting Iranian nuclear facilities. Progressives in Congress are stepping up too.

Late last year, Elizabeth Warren [stated unequivocally](#) that the United States should re-enter the nuclear deal “because it makes the United States safer and the world safer.” Meanwhile, bipartisan bills in both the House and Senate were introduced last year to prevent Trump and his war cabinet from taking us to a disastrous war with Iran last year – legislation expected to be reintroduced in the coming weeks.

NUCLEAR WEAPONS

Sen. Ed Markey and Rep. Ted Lieu [announced this week](#) that they will reintroduce a bill that would prevent Trump or any president from having sole authority to launch a first nuclear strike. Similar legislation was also [introduced](#) by House Armed Services Committee Chairman Adam Smith and Senator Elizabeth Warren.

“Trump’s brand is to be unpredictable and rash, which is exactly what you don’t want the person who possesses the nuclear football to be,” Lieu said in a [press release](#). “We introduced this bill under the Obama administration but Trump’s presidency has highlighted just how scary it is that any president has the authority to launch a nuke without congressional consultation.”

Win Without War Advocacy Director Erica Fein said the bill might be comfort to those concerned about a trigger-happy Trump.

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“According to a new poll, nearly half of all Americans report they have no confidence 'at all' in Donald Trump; yet, because of our deeply flawed and dangerous system, if the president decides to launch a nuclear weapon, no one can stop him,” Fein [said](#). “It is high time for Congress to add a check on this or any future president’s ability to start a nuclear war.”

REPEALING THE MUSLIM BAN

Reps. Judy Chu and Zoe Lofgren and Sens. Chris Murphy and Dianne Feinstein this week [introduced companion bills](#) in the House and Senate respectively that would declare Trump’s Muslim Ban unconstitutional and prohibit the use of any funds to implement the ban. Notably, freshmen Reps. Rashida Tlaib and Ilhan Omar — the two first Muslim female members of Congress — [are original co-sponsors](#) of the House version.

The Washington Post [published a video](#) this week documenting the horrors Americans and their foreign born spouses have had to endure because of Trump’s policy.

CLIMATE CHANGE

While Donald Trump and much of the GOP have been busy denying climate science, the offices of Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez and Sen. Ed Markey [said this week](#) that they plan to unveil legislation to take the first steps on a “Green New Deal.” The details reportedly include setting a goal of reaching 100 percent renewable electricity in 10 years and “a federal jobs guarantee for people working in the low-carbon transition, and universal healthcare.” Next week [over 80 events](#) are planned nationwide to demand leaders support support a Green New Deal.

BORDER MILITARIZATION

More than a dozen House Democrats led by Rep. Jan Schakowsky [sent a letter](#) recently to House Armed Services Committee chair Rep. Adam Smith asking him not to fund Trump’s troop build-up at the southern border and assure that he “cannot utilize a fake ‘national emergency’ to co-opt the military into the construction of the President’s wall.”

Additionally, in an example of the sorely missing oversight during the past Congress, the first House Armed Services Committee hearing was on the President’s dangerous and likely illegal deployment of active duty armed forces to the border. Much more oversight on this and other issues will be very much welcome.

OTHER PROGRESSIVE PRIORITIES

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- Progressives like [Sen. Chris Murphy](#) and [Rep. Ro Khanna](#) have been outspoken in their opposition to Trump's handling of the situation in Venezuela, arguing that **democracy promotion shouldn't be coercive or come at the barrel of an American gun.**
- Progressives are also [publicly committing themselves](#) to **reining in wasteful Pentagon spending.**
- Rep. Nita Lowey is [expected to reintroduce a measure](#) in the coming weeks that will **repeal the global gag rule, Trump's policy of restricting American aid to groups that offer abortion services,** including even counseling clients about abortion or advocating for abortion rights.
- Rep. Tlaib is pressing on with her plan to **show her congressional colleagues the other side of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict** with organized trips to the occupied territories. Of course, Tlaib has been [catching heat for it](#), even from fellow Democrats, but it appears she has a good handle on [taming her opponents](#).

No doubt there will be other news by the President in his State of the Union, and rest assured we'll be back in your inboxes with additional commentary and analysis. If you know of someone who you think would enjoy the Progressive Foreign Policy Debrief, please feel free to forward this to them and have them sign up by clicking [here](#)!

BURIED LEDES

A Reuters investigation [published this week](#) revealed for the first time how **former U.S. cyber spies went to work for the UAE to gather intelligence on and hack the private communications of human rights activists,** journalists, and political rivals, including the targeting of American citizens.

Speaking of the UAE, authorities there recently [announced](#) the winners of an initiative to foster gender equality in the workplace. **All the winners were men.**

LOADING CASH ONTO THE TITANIC: A group of conservative Democrats are [pouring money](#) into a new pro-Israel group meant **to counter the growing trend on the left of increasing support for Palestinian rights.** (Reporting on this, the New York Times [was caught](#) bothsides-ing the military occupation.)

A new membership [survey](#) from Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America found that **less than half said the war in Iraq was worth fighting.** Sixty-two percent said the same about the war in Afghanistan.

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Human rights advocates launched a widely publicized campaign **asking pop star Mariah Carey to cancel a recent concert in Saudi Arabia**. She ultimately [ignored the request](#) but it appears that the Saudi monarchy's attempts to hide its human rights violations with high profile events like these [is starting to backfire](#).

And finally, [there's nothing like an](#) awkward rave to celebrate the delivery of the famously hopelessly broken and budget boondoggle F-35.