

WIN WITHOUT WAR



Progressive Foreign Policy Debrief

Intel for Advocacy

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SL: The Real State of the Union

The Real State of the Union

If you, [like many others](#), chose not to watch this Monday's [State of the Union address](#), you didn't miss much, except further evidence of our crumbling democracy. As expected, President Trump's speech was long on bluster and short on facts. While the domestic sphere took up most of the speech, what little reference there was to foreign policy was filled with misinformation, lies of omission, and Trumpian pageantry.

Let's cut through the nonsense: here's the *real* state of the union's foreign policy.

The Brink of War with Iran

Trump's reckless foreign policy [brought us](#) to the brink of a catastrophic and unnecessary war with Iran — TWICE. To Trump, this was a victory. In the State of the Union, Trump bragged about the unlawful assassination of Major General Qasem Soleimani, appropriated the [struggles](#) of Iranian protestors whose lives he has only made harder, and praised the deadly force of U.S. sanctions. "Because of our powerful sanctions, the Iranian economy is doing very, very poorly," Trump boasted. [He's right](#): and in the process, the Iranian people are suffering needlessly, and the Iranian government's hardliners are empowered.

The Middle East Peace Sham

Last week, Trump finally released his long-awaited Israeli-Palestinian "peace plan," which is better named the steal of the century — a proposal that he extolled as "groundbreaking" during the State of the Union. In reality, the deal is no deal at all. It is an offensively [one-sided](#) proposal that seeks to strong arm the Palestinians into little more than their own [Bantustans](#). Naturally, the Palestinians, the [Arab League](#), and the international community have largely rejected the offer. Given Jared Kushner's [rhetoric](#), that may have been the point: those with no interest in the wellbeing of Palestinians can once again accuse them of refusing to negotiate, and disingenuously blame them for their own oppression. Meanwhile, in the Occupied Territories, protests have already begun, and at least three Palestinians have been [killed](#).

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Xenophobe-in-Chief

It would not be a Trump speech without racist feamongering about migrants and asylum-seekers. The State of the Union was no exception. While xenophobia in the Executive Office is nothing new, it remains a shock to see it on such open display. From the [outsourcing](#) of border violence to Central America and the ongoing separation of families at the border, to the recent [expansion of the Muslim Ban](#), and much [more](#), Trump's cruel anti-immigrant policies are intended for nothing short of advancing white supremacy. As our friend Maha Hilal of the Justice for Muslims Collective [put it](#): "This serves a very intentional purpose of comforting white Americans who fear becoming a minority in the U.S., and whose fears are easily stoked in the language of Islamophobia, racism, xenophobia and anti-blackness."

NAFTA 2.0

Trump gloated that (with the help of [many Democrats](#)) he was able to keep his biggest campaign promise: renegotiating NAFTA. But while NAFTA was indeed disastrous, and the new NAFTA 2.0 (formally the U.S., Mexico, Canada Agreement or USMCA) includes some minor improvements on labor standards, a few tweaks of a broken system are hardly laudable. NAFTA 2.0 keeps in place most of the pernicious, corporate-dominated [Investor-State Dispute Settlement](#) system and does [nothing](#) to improve environmental protections in the face of the climate crisis. We don't need to tweak trade agreements to be better "for America," we need a [new model of trade](#) that benefits workers and the environment, around the world.

Refreezing Relations with Cuba

Trump touted as a victory his reversal of "the failing policies of the previous administration on Cuba." But the Obama-era thaw in bilateral relations that Trump is referring to — easing travel restrictions, reopening embassies, reengaging diplomatically, and removing Cuba from the list of state sponsors of terror — were far from failures. They were critical steps toward normalizing relations with a nation that the U.S. has, for decades, isolated and [oppressed](#) — a strategy which only furthered authoritarianism.

A Round of Applause for...

In one of the night's more brazen displays of Trumpian political theater, the president invited as his special guest the leader of last year's failed Venezuelan [coup attempt](#), Juan Guaidó. Guaidó, whom Trump referred to as the rightful President of Venezuela, received a mostly-bipartisan standing ovation, including from Speaker Nancy Pelosi. While Nicolas Maduro has failed the Venezuelan people, and rules under a dubious mandate, the U.S. has no business lionizing a politician with no credible claim to having been democratically elected as president of Venezuela. Such actions normalize U.S. interventionism, help to justify [violent sanctions](#) and the dehumanization and deportation of Venezuelan immigrants, and evoke [decades of illegitimate military interference](#) in the affairs of sovereign Latin American countries.

Bombing Our Way to Peace in Afghanistan?

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Trump's sentiment that "it is also not our function to serve other nations as law enforcement agencies" may be right, but his claim of significant progress toward peace in Afghanistan is simply not true. Last year, the U.S. [dropped](#) a record number of bombs on the country, eight times as many as in 2015, and Trump unilaterally blew up negotiations between the U.S and the Taliban to make it all about him. There is no way to bomb our way to peace — certainly not while [killing](#) civilians with impunity.

Pentagon Over People

Trump also bragged about his administration's exorbitant spending spree at the Pentagon. Contrary to Trump's claims, further inflating the Pentagon's [overstuffed coffers](#) does nothing to make the U.S., or anyone, safer. Trump's profligate military spending, including the wasteful new Space Force, only serves defense contractors' bottom lines and the expansion of a failed model of security in which the United States polices the entire world. At the same time, it draws hundreds of billions of dollars away from critical human needs: housing, healthcare, education, and combating climate change.

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"The United States has become the No. 1 producer of oil and natural gas anywhere in the world, by far." On this point, Trump may be factually correct. But increased fossil fuel production is nothing to celebrate. The climate crisis, which Trump did not mention once in the over an hour-long speech, is here, and it's an existential threat to the world as we know it. It's time to keep fossil fuels in the ground and end the United States' role in helping drive this crisis.

The State of the Union

Suffice it to say, the state of the union is poor (and we've only recounted Trump's disastrous foreign policy). We remain mired in seemingly interminable, fruitless conflicts around the world. We continue to interfere unjustifiably in the sovereign affairs of foreign countries for the president's personal or political benefit. We consistently choose xenophobia over internationalist cooperation and global justice. We eschew diplomatic solutions, endlessly retreading the same failed path of militarism. And we have so far utterly failed to confront the greatest global crisis of our time: the climate emergency.

But the state of the union is also one of resistance. From the [mass mobilization](#) to prevent all-out war with Iran, to widespread [demands](#) to rein in the Pentagon budget, to a growing understanding of the [connections](#) between militarism and climate change, each of Trump's disastrous foreign policies have been met with people-powered struggle. Movements for a more just, equitable, and sustainable foreign policy are on the rise. Someday soon — despite the disinformation campaigns we have to endure in the meantime — we will win.

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BURIED LEDES

Another day, another **report showing that the U.S. is deporting people into violence, persecution, and [death](#)**.

As the government continues to spend billions on endless war and [shiny new \(dysfunctional\) toys](#), **1.5 million children in the U.S. are [homeless](#), the highest number in a decade.**

In a classic white savior move, **humanitarian organizations are [ignoring](#) Rohingya refugees' expertise and needs, including access to education**, in Bangladesh refugee camps.

Stop tokenizing Women of Color and start valuing their unique voices in foreign and domestic policymaking to create a truly [representative](#) democracy.

The Pentagon emits more CO₂ than 140 nations combined. **Stopping a war with Iran is vital to [protecting](#) the environment from further abuse.**

BFFs 4 ever? Not so much. Increasingly Ukrainians [feel](#) the U.S. is an unreliable and unpredictable ally, raising questions about the future of the bilateral relationship.

The U.S. may not be the best at exporting democracy, but we have [exported](#) one thing: illegal and inhumane treatment of prisoners. **The Iraqi government is using Guantanamo-esque tactics while sentencing and imprisoning supposed ISIS operatives.**

In [Afghanistan](#), **climate change pushes temperatures higher every year, fueling food and water scarcity, driving mass displacement**, and underscoring the urgent need for a [Global Green New Deal](#).

And finally, **Punxsutawney Phil did NOT [see](#) his shadow** and has announced the early arrival of Spring! (RIP to Charlotte the groundhog who [may or may not](#) have been murdered by Bill de Blasio six years ago).