

# WIN WITHOUT WAR



## Progressive Foreign Policy Debrief

*Intel for Advocacy*

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SL: The last Progressive Foreign Policy Debrief of the Trump Era

### **The Takeaway:**

- In 2016, Trump rallied support from a war-weary nation by railing against the trigger-happy foreign policy establishment. From that point on, Trump has repeatedly been referred to as “anti-war.” Nothing could be further from the truth.
- Trump’s foreign policy has been defined by reckless hostility, attacks on diplomacy, and disregard for human life. His legacy is one of human suffering and violent conflict.
- With a new administration, it’s time for a new approach. Biden should learn from the popularity of Trump’s anti-war rhetoric, but break from his failed pro-war policies.

## **Four Years On, There Is No Doubt: Trump Was Never “Anti-War”**

The next time I write to you, Donald Trump will no longer be the president of the United States. With moving boxes already [arriving](#) at the White House, and four *long* years behind us, now is a good time to look back and assess the Trump era’s foreign policy legacy. In particular, did Trump’s presidency live up to his oft-repeated “anti-war” label? The short answer: No. It did not.

### **The “Anti-War” Candidate**

During the 2016 presidential election, Donald Trump managed to brand himself as an insurgent outsider despite by all accounts being a paragon of elite power and wealth. While the rebrand had many components, one key piece was the repeated insistence that he was [“anti-war.”](#) Regularly claiming, [without evidence](#), that he had opposed the invasion of Iraq, Trump rightfully attacked the bipartisan foreign policy establishment for its disastrous commitment to a war-first foreign policy. For a war-weary nation desperate for change, these attacks were evidence enough that Trump would be different. The “anti-war” label stuck, and it would be repeated over and over during the course of his presidency — even long after its inaccuracy became clear.

### **The “Pro-War” President**

Donald Trump was never “anti-war.” True, he didn’t launch a new all-out ground invasion on the scale of Iraq. But he escalated conflict in every theatre of war inherited, repeatedly brought us to

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the brink of new wars, eschewed diplomacy for hostility at the cost of countless lives, increased the likelihood of nuclear war, and brought our endless wars home:

- **Escalating Inherited Wars** — Despite repeated [PR stunts](#), Trump *did not* “bring the troops home” or “end endless wars.” In fact, Trump consistently added fuel to the conflagration, [increasing](#) troop levels or shuffling them around to different countries, [deepening](#) reliance on private contractors, and dramatically [scaling up](#) aerial warfare. He did nothing to rein in the expansive blank check for war — the 2001 AUMF— rather, expanding conflicts under both that authorization and the [2002 “Iraq War” AUMF](#). Not only did Trump not end the wars, he worsened them, [stoking](#) additional conflict, undermining the prospects of peace, and massively [increasing](#) the rate of civilian deaths.
- **All in on Yemen** — U.S. support for the Saudi- and UAE-led intervention in the war in Yemen is one of the most egregious examples of destructive militarist foreign policymaking in years. Not only did Trump do nothing to end U.S. complicity himself, he repeatedly used his veto power to *override* bipartisan majorities in Congress that tried to [stop](#) U.S. military involvement and [block](#) the flow of arms to the conflict.
- **“Maximum Pressure”** — Trump’s foreign policy was characterized above all by an aversion to diplomacy and a knee-jerk reliance on hostility. Attacking diplomatic relations and torpedoing successful multilateral agreements like the Iran deal, Trump instead tried to strongarm other countries into doing his bidding through threatening rhetoric, military brinkmanship, and suffocating [sanctions](#). The result? *Maximum failure*. Whether Iran, North Korea, or Venezuela, not a single one of Trump’s targets for hybrid warfare is any closer to doing what he wanted now than when he started. In the meantime, thousands have [suffered](#) the consequences.
- **Brought to the Brink** — On multiple occasions, this hostile posture almost ignited *another* all-out war. It was hardly a year ago that Trump’s illegal assassination of Iranian General Qasem Soleimani brought our countries to the brink of catastrophe. Ultimately, it was the pressure of [mobilization](#) by millions of people across the United States, Iran, and beyond, combined with restraint from the Iranian government, that averted that disaster. Trump deserves no praise for the fact that a crisis of his own creation didn’t spiral further out of control.
- **Nuclear War** — Donald Trump [shredded](#) the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty with Russia, withdrew from the Open Skies treaty that ensured transparency between the U.S., much of Europe, and Russia, and failed to extend the critical New START Treaty with Russia. He took an [inconsistent](#), self-serving, and often antagonistic approach to negotiations with North Korea that nearly [took us](#) to nuclear war. Oh yea, and he wanted to [nuke hurricanes](#). In short: the world is closer to nuclear war than it was before Trump took office.
- **The War at Home** — Communities of color have suffered under the thumb of police violence and [“security” surveillance](#) since well before Trump. But Trump took these wars even further, escalating [Islamophobia](#), [terrorizing](#) migrants and asylum-seekers at the Southern border, violently [repressing](#) racial justice protesters, and so much more.

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These are only the beginning. From increasing the overblown Pentagon budget, to accelerating the march to Cold War with China, to selling weapons to dictators, the list of reasons Trump is undeserving of the “anti-war” title is endless. Let us be clear: Trump’s legacy is one of violence, suffering, and conflict.

## **Chauvinism ≠ Peace**

Trump’s undeserved label is attributable to a basic but insidious mistake. For decades, U.S. foreign policy has been motivated largely by the belief in a U.S.-underwritten world order: The United States would be the supreme global power. It would use its power to create a rules-based system of liberal capitalist global governance, though it itself would only sometimes be constrained by those rules. It would then promote and protect this order by the barrel of a gun.

To commentators steeped in this ideology, the fact that Trump would attack international institutions like NATO or the World Trade Organization was evidence that he was rejecting the whole project, turning America inward toward “restraint” and “isolationism.” In reality, while Trump denied the first half, eschewing internationalist cooperation or rulemaking — *he maintained the latter*, continuing to use violent force abroad on a whim when he thought (wrongly) that it would be to the national benefit. In short, he was a national chauvinist, completely fine with military adventurism, but opposed to even a whiff of multilateralism.

## **What’s the alternative?**

If the pre-Trump status quo means international engagement and endless war, and the Trump doctrine is nationalism and endless war, what’s the alternative? Simply put: progressive internationalism. We must return to the task of multilateral cooperation and rulemaking — but this time, it must be in pursuit of an order that benefits all equally, which no single country sits above, or promotes by violent force. Rather than an order designed to maximize profits, this must be an order rooted in shared rules, in justice, in equity, and in the rule of law. *That* is the essence of [progressive foreign policy](#).

Trump was never anti-war. Not when he was a candidate, and not [after four years in office](#). But there’s a reason his attacks on the pro-war establishment took hold. The people are tired of the status quo. They want change. With a new administration, and a new Congress, now is our chance to give it to them.

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## **In Honor of Dr. King**

Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. was not the sanitized, universally-beloved messenger of unity that he has been whitewashed into. He was a tireless, unabashed freedom fighter, as maligned by the White mainstream in his time as movements like Black Lives Matter are today. On this Dr.

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Martin Luther King Jr. weekend, we honor his true legacy by remembering that *the fight for racial justice is a foreign policy issue too.*

- [“Dr. King Was Anti-War. We Need His Lessons Now More Than Ever,”](#) Annika London
- [“The Racist Underpinnings of the American Way of War”](#) Walden Bello
- [“The US Government Kills Black People with Impunity Both at Home and Abroad,”](#) Robtel Neajai Pailey and Amy Niang
- [“Why Is Mainstream International Relations Blind to Racism?”](#) Gurminder Bhambra et al.
- [“The Legacy of American Racism at Home and Abroad,”](#) Travis Adkins, Judd Devermont

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## **BURIED LEDES**

Trump’s efforts to cause as much damage as possible on his way out the door continued this week when **he and Pompeo designated the [Houthis](#) a terrorist organization**, undermining the prospects of peace and obstructing the desperately-needed flow of humanitarian aid...

That same day, they **erroneously [designated](#) Cuba a state sponsor of terrorism**, further eroding diplomatic relations and inciting further suffering in a country that has been suffocated by U.S. hands for decades.

Pompeo’s **politically-motivated scorched earth tack** is getting noticed at [home](#) and [abroad](#)

What if I said that the Biden administration had the power to snap its fingers and save thousands of lives around the world at virtually zero cost? It’s hardly an exaggeration. All they have to do is **support an [issuance](#) of 2 trillion Special Drawing Rights by the IMF.**

**“We’re [approaching](#) critical climate tipping points.”** Your weekly reminder that we need radical climate action NOW!

**One of Biden’s first acts in office should be to [end](#) the insidious Global Gag Rule** that uses U.S. influence to block abortion access in the Global South. But that isn’t enough — Biden must go beyond rolling back Trump’s policy and build a new foreign policy rooted in feminism.

In [last week’s Debrief](#), we said **it was wrong to compare the riot at the U.S. Capitol with a “banana republic.”** [Here’s why.](#)

Rep. Barbara Lee (D-CA) is perhaps most famous for being the only person in all of Congress to vote against the 2001 AUMF, rightly predicting it would become a blank check for endless war. It was a courageous move. But **her fight for peace and justice [didn’t end there.](#)**

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Those responsible for last week's attacks should be held accountable. But **let's not use this as a pretext to expand the "war on terror."**

And finally, if you're tired of being stuck at home, **try visiting the most famous museum in the Netherlands... virtually.**