

Trump's Spectacular Achievements

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After a series of mainly self-inflicted wounds Donald Trump left Washington to do what many embattled presidents did before him – seek at least temporary refuge in foreign policy. He did not find it there.

It is true that after a few days abroad Trump's approval rating [according to Gallup] climbed back above 40 percent but it's not likely to stay there. James Comey's public hearing before the Senate Intelligence Committee and the work of the newly appointed special counsel investigating possible links of the Trump campaign to Russia are likely bring it down any time soon. Not least because – as *Politico* informs – the president 'and some aides including Steve Bannon are becoming increasingly convinced that they are victims of a conspiracy against Trump's presidency. [...] And they've become more rattled by the idea that they don't know where the scandals are headed and who may be ensnared next.'

This mood is manifest on President Trump's Twitter account. Unusually restrained during his foreign trip, Trump took to his favourite medium immediately after returning home. In a series of tweets he tried to discredit media informants and – as usual – the media themselves. Given Trump's uncontrollable temper and the fact that media attention has now focused on his son-in-law, Jared Kushner, in the forthcoming weeks we should expect more shocking revelations coming not only from numerous investigations, but the president himself.

It is now clear that neither Trump, nor his aides can adequately manage the biggest political crisis he has faced so far. In the span of no more than a fortnight since James Comey's dismissal – the word 'impeachment' has again made its way to American public debate. There's no doubt that even if the president is guilty of obstructing justice it may take months to actually launch the procedure and even longer to actually remove him from office. Yet from the day of Robert Mueller's appointment as a special counsel for the foreseeable future, Trump's presidency will be haunted by the spectre of the ongoing investigation. This relentless pressure will inevitably expose the existing conflicts within the administration and create new ones.

Caught in dire straits, Trump and his team need a success not only to divert the attention of the American public, but also to boost the morale of the president's inner circle and, probably, the man himself. Unfortunately for the president, as *Politico's* Josh Dawsey wrote 'while the trip may boost Trump's spirits, it remains unclear whether the highly choreographed diplomatic excursion can do the same for a presidency facing investigations at home'.

First of all, Trump has found himself in a trap. He was forced to tone down his rhetoric while abroad, which may not go down easily with his electoral base. For example, how can a president famous for anti-Muslim rants explain to his most ardent supporters that he just signed a 110 billion contract to sell arms to Saudi Arabia? The feeling of discontent was clearly expressed by Trump's informal advisor and alleged mastermind behind his campaign, Roger Stone.

In a tweet published on 20 May Stone said: 'Instead of meeting with the Saudis [Trump] should be demanding they pay for the attack on America on 9/11 which they financed.' The opinion expressed by Stone is by no means representative but after this trip many of Trump's core supporters may be asking themselves a question – where does their president stand on relations with Muslim countries?

Secondly, Trump desperately needs a success here and now, while foreign policy, especially in a region so complicated as the Middle East, hardly ever provides opportunity to score easy points. This was obvious during the president's visit to Israel where he met both Israeli prime minister

Benjamin Netanyahu and the president of the Palestinian National Authority, Mahmoud Abbas. Trump, who famously said that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict 'maybe not as difficult [to resolve] as people have thought over the years', again failed to live up to his words and left the 'Holy Land' achieving nothing.

Thirdly, let's not forget the president has recently revealed to Sergey Lavrov classified intelligence obtained by Israel, which caused outrage in Tel-Aviv and will have consequences not limited to American-Israeli relationship. As Paul R. Millar – a former CIA officer with 28 years of experience at the Agency – wrote, 'the damage is not limited to the one foreign service that originated the information that Trump divulged. Every other foreign intelligence, security, and national police force with which the United States has an information-sharing liaison relationship is taking notice. [...] There will be greater reluctance, as a result of what happened in the Oval Office, among many of these other foreign services to share information with the United States.' Millar's prediction came true sooner than he probably expected. After the Manchester bombing, British intelligence agencies temporarily stopped sharing information with their counterparts in Washington, when sensitive photographs of the bombing scene were leaked to the American press.

This constant stream of leaks coming from the White House has further compromised the American standing on the global stage. It is a clear sign of lack of respect among the staff towards the new Commander in Chief. Before the trip Reuters published a story on how the president's aides desperately try to get his attention by limiting memos to one-page documents, or even by including the president's name in as many paragraphs as they can because 'he keeps reading if he's mentioned.' Such anecdotes – funny as they are – only reinforce the view that Mr Trump is desperately unfit for office.

Fourthly, Trump has failed to improve his relationship with European partners. Although he some time ago declared NATO was 'no longer obsolete' and called the European Union 'wonderful', during this trip he managed to strain the transatlantic partnership once again. Angela Merkel's statement that Europeans can no longer fully depend on their American and British partners, issued after Trump's departure, may be just a campaign trick. But if it's not – and this is what I believe – it signifies a tectonic shift in the German vision of Europe.

It is therefore in some sense true that Trump achieved more in the beginning of his presidency than other politicians over many years. It's less clear, however, if these are the achievements he was hoping for. Only four months after he took the office major American media outlets including *New York Times* and *Washington Post* seriously discuss the possibility of removing the president from the White House due to his ignorance. Others report that Mr Trump has become a 'laughingstock' on the world stage.

This is not to say that over the course of four months the United States have ceased to be the most powerful country on earth. It's not even to say that Trump's administration is doomed to fail at every turn. Yet there's absolutely no reason to hope that diplomacy may be a way to stabilise Trump's presidency and win back the respect this office deserves.