

‘America First’ Does Not Mean ‘America Only’

During the presidential campaign, when Donald Trump spoke of putting “America first,” I never thought he meant “America only.” It appears, however, that others understood him quite differently, and they are not happy with his overseas actions. As summed up by Ann Coulter, “We want the ‘president of America’ back—not ‘the president of the world.’”

Of course, Coulter, along with other Trump loyalists like Paul Joseph Watson, Laura Ingraham and Mike Cernovich, were not upset because the president bombed another country. They were upset because he bombed Syria after saying for years that we should stay out of there.

They felt betrayed and double-crossed.

They also felt that any American intervention in Syria was unwise, especially if it led to an attempt to remove Assad.

But we did not only bomb Syria. We sent warships to North Korea, warning the demented dictator of that country to behave, or else.

For Coulter, this means that Trump has already become a pawn of the Washington establishment. As she wrote, “Looking for some upside to this fiasco, desperate Trump supporters bleated that bombing Assad had sent a message to North Korea. Yes, the message is: The Washington establishment is determined to manipulate the president into launching counterproductive military strikes. Our enemies—both foreign and domestic—would be delighted to see our broken country further weaken itself with pointless wars.”

What, then, are we to make of this? Has Trump caved in to the establishment already? Has he abandoned his pledge to put

“America first”?

As to the larger question of President Trump and the Washington establishment, time will tell. The same can be said regarding which direction the president will go. Will it be the way of Jared Kushner if or will it be the way of Steve Bannon [to oversimplify things dramatically]? Only time will [tell].

But when it comes to Trump’s bombing of Syria and standing up to N. Korea, I see no contradiction between these actions and him being the president of “America first.”

To begin with, there is nothing exceptional with the elected leader of a country saying that they intend to put the interests of their country first. But of course!

Would the Israelis be shocked if Prime Minister Netanyahu said, “We must put Israel first!”? How about the Canadians if Prime Minister Trudeau said, “It’s Canada first!”? What about the Russians if President Putin said, “It’s time to put Russia first!”?

Obviously, it’s the role of the leader of a country to put that country first, just as it’s the role of the head of the household to pay his or her family’s bills before helping a neighbor (or stranger) with their bills. Even the New Testament, with all its calls for altruism, addresses this. In the words of Paul, “but if any do not care for their own, and especially for those of their own house, they have denied the faith and are worse than unbelievers” (1 Tim. 5:8).

So, to repeat, I find nothing exceptional about the “America first” mentality, especially the way Trump articulated it in his inaugural speech:

From this moment on, it’s going to be America first.

Every decision on trade, on taxes, on immigration, on foreign

affairs, will be made to benefit American workers and American families.

We must protect our borders from the ravages of other countries making our products, stealing our companies and destroying our jobs. Protection will lead to great prosperity and strength.

Can anyone really call this “xenophobic”?

He also said, “We will follow two simple rules: Buy American and Hire American.” In keeping with that pledge, he signed a bill to that effect yesterday. As CNN reported, “President Donald Trump signed an executive order Tuesday directing federal agencies to implement the ‘Buy American, Hire American’ rhetoric of his campaign.” In the president’s words, “It’s America first, you better believe it. It’s time. It’s time, right?”

But during his inaugural speech, Trump also said this:

We will seek friendship and goodwill with the nations of the world—but we do so with the understanding that it is the right of all nations to put their own interests first.

We do not seek to impose our way of life on anyone, but rather to let it shine as an example for everyone to follow.

We will reinforce old alliances and form new ones—and unite the civilized world against radical Islamic terrorism, which we will eradicate completely from the face of the earth.

What happens, then, when one of our allies faces potential danger from a reckless regime, as South Korea could be facing from the north? Do we abandon them because we put “America first”? And when North Korea threatens us directly, do we simply laugh it off because we put “America first”? Of course not.

And when it appears that another ruthless dictator crosses a bright red line, do we sit back and do nothing—following the example of President Obama—or do we send a message, loud and clear?

It would be one thing to provoke North Korea into a nuclear conflict, just as it would be one thing to put American troops on the ground in order to oust Assad. And it would be one thing if we fashioned ourselves to be the world's moral judge, jury and police force, acting unilaterally whenever we felt it was right.

But it's another thing to send a message (that's what our warships are doing and that's what our bombing did), reminding the tyrants of this world that they cannot act with impunity.

The reality is that the world needs a strong America, and for us to be strong, we must put our own interests first. In doing so, we will be able to help the rest of the world. {eo}