

JOSEF JOFFE

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Jim BITTERMANN

Josef, you said, *plus ça change, plus ça reste le même*, so in a way you two are on opposite sides of the equation here. You basically are saying that things are basically the same as under the Obama administration, or maybe you want to flesh that out a bit.

Josef JOFFE

It is important to notice continuities. I don't want to compare Obama to Trump in terms of breach of etiquette and nastiness, but in foreign policy there is more similarity between them than meets the eye. I have three points.

One: Trump keeps pushing allies to raise defence spending and the threat is: pay-up or we pull out. That is the line Obama took in his interview with *The Atlantic*, when he said 'Free riders aggravate me'. That is Trump-speak. Both told the Europeans: We protect you, but you do not do enough for yourselves, rich as you are. It was Obama who drew down troops in Europe to a rock bottom of some 30 000, which was part of the retrenchment under the 44th president.

Two: Both Obama and Trump shifted into a general withdrawal mode, as in Afghanistan and Iraq, while Obama refused to engage in Syria. Trump keeps reducing the U.S. presence in Syria. Both have been unsteady, with "surges" following upon reductions.

Three: Both stressed the domestic over the strategic. An oft-repeated line by Obama reads: "It is time for a little nation-building at home," meaning less for assertion abroad and more for investment at home. Likewise Trump who has pledged a billion dollars for infrastructure. The messages are the same. Let us spend our wealth on ourselves, not on these wayward and sometimes disloyal allies.

Jim BITTERMANN

You are saying that is not the content...

Josef JOFFE

One more thing. Let us try to look ahead. We are now in the middle of an 11-year cycle: 8 years of Obama, three of Trump, which might be characterized as "retrenchment," if not "retraction." Assume a Democrat, especially a left-wing candidate, will win the Presidency in 2020. My worry is that we will get more of the same, that is, continuity: less for abroad and more for at home, including abstentionism and protectionism. "Come home, America" was George McGovern's famous line in 1972. Such isolationist reflexes are not a new thing under the sun. They come in cycles of exuberance and exhaustion. The current swing is older than three years of Trumprican foreign policy, which is older than the three years of Trump.

Jim BITTERMANN

The content has not changed, but the presentation has changed under Trump.

Josef JOFFE

Of course, the presentation and tone. I do not want to talk about Trump's abrasive and contemptuous style, as I am running out of adjectives to describe it. He is uncouth, brutal and nasty. He treats allies worse than adversaries. Shall



we go on? The critical thing, as far as America's role in the world is concerned, is that Trump bestrides the world as "Demolition Man," who is chopping away at the International Liberal Order the United States devised and maintained since 1945. The premise of policy since Harry S. Truman was a non-zero game: We can both win. Trump plays a zero-sum game. He is turning an old non-zero-sum game, meaning all of us can win, into a zero-sum game: I win if you lose, and he has applied America's superior power to change the rules of the old game.