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The Trump Presidency: The First Week

EDITORIAL, 31 January 2017

#466 | Johan Galtung

Attacking the Affordable Care Act; the “global gag rule” against abortion; the federal regulation and hiring freeze; canceling the TPP; restarting the Keystone XL and Dakota Access Pipeline; limiting entry with the Mexican Wall; the 90-day travel ban on seven countries; more undocumented people prioritized for deportation; no federal funding for cities refusing to cooperate; communications blackout from federal agencies; Guantánamo torture continued – What does it add up to?

A very strong white state centered on a president with absolute power and control over life (birth) and death (care) of the citizens. Not regulating police racism. So far, no order on the military.

Fascism? Too early to say; but in that direction. (1) It opens for questions about the inner workings of Donald J. Trump. Who is he?

A Johns Hopkins psychologist sees Trump suffering from “**malignant narcissism**“. A Norwegian historian, Øystein Morten, in a detailed analysis of Norwegian king crusader Sigurd Jorsalafare (1103-1130) – clearly crazy – has a Norwegian psychiatrist diagnose him as suffering from “bipolar depression”, manic-depressive. Is Trump only manic?

This column early on saw Trump as suffering from “**autism**”, **living in his own bubble**, speaking his babble with no sense of reciprocity, the reaction of the other side. The column stands by that.

However, this column drew a line between his words and deeds; denouncing his rhetoric as grossly insulting and prejudicial, **but pinning some hope on his deeds. Wrong, and sorry about that.** After one week, Trump clearly means every word he says, and enacts them from Day 1; even what he once retracted in a *New York Times* interview.

Combine the two points just made: autism and immediate enactment. He acts, and from his bubble does not sense how others will react, and increasingly proact. **He assumes that others will accept his orders, obey, and that is it.** It is not. His orders may even backfire.

As many point out, terrorism in the USA after 9/11 is almost nil. But his actions may change that. **Some Mexicans may hit back, not only against the wall but the border itself, drawn by USA grabbing 53% of Mexican territory in 1846-48, then soaking Mexico in debt and violence importing drugs and exporting arms, even unaware of the harm they do.**

Take the seven countries targeted by Trump for collective punishment: Iraq, Iran, Libya, Syria, Sudan, Somalia, Yemen; the old seven with state central banks targeted by Bush, with Yemen substituted for Lebanon. All mainly Muslim. Imagine them reacting by cooperating, learning from China to raise the bottom up, starting building a West Asian community with links across the Red Sea, and “Saudi” Arabia soon

joining?

If their governments do not do that, imagine the Islamic State doing exactly that?
What a gift to the Islamic State/Caliphate!

As a minimum, the 7 might reciprocate and block US citizens' entry for the same period. How would that affect US military operations? Would it force Trump to use force? In fact, are his demands on other countries so extreme, not only in words but in deeds, that there are no more words and deeds left short of force? Does his extremism limit his range of options, making war as probable as under Hillary Clinton?

And yet what he has done so far, firing and backfiring, is little relative to what other US presidents have done of harm.

Take FDR spending much of his presidencies on beating Japan, scheming to provoke Japan into war, defeat and permanent occupation to eliminate Japan as a threat to US economy and polity. That policy is still being enacted, now as "collective self-defense."

Take JFK getting USA into the Vietnam War in 1961.

Take Eisenhower eliminating Lumumba, maybe Hammarskjöld.

They caused devastation of Japan, of Vietnam and set back Africa on its way to freedom, autonomy, independence. Trump is retracting, contracting, away from others, but not expanding into them. So far.

The reaction inside the USA has been from judges challenging the legality of the orders and launching court suits. The market has been ambiguous but generally down with heavy protests from Silicon Valley. Trump claims the orders are working. What else will happen?

It is difficult to imagine that there will not be a CIA response, being challenged and provoked by Trump, not only for accusing Russia of intervening to his advantage.

There are probably at this moment countless meetings in Washington on how to get rid of Trump. Yet, he has command over not only his Executive, Congress and the Supreme Court, but also over the overwhelming number of states in the union.

US presidents have been assassinated before Trump when the forces against are sufficiently strong. Could somebody from the Travel ban 7 be hired to do the job, making it look as a foreign conspiracy?

Another and more hopeful scenario would be nonviolent resistance. Difficult for border officials. But inside the USA people to be deported may be hidden, protected by their own kind and by others – with care though, Trump also has some good points.

More constructive would be alternative foreign policies by cities, at present not by the federation, nor by most of the states. Reaching out to the seven and above all to

Mexico for dialogue; searching for better relations than at present and under Trump. Preparing the ground for something new, under the Democratic Party or not. **Not a third party, impossible in the USA it seems, but as general approach.** The relation between New York and Baghdad, Tehran, Damascus, Tripoli, Khartoum, Mogadisciu and Sana'a as an example. Still some space!

There is no greatness in what Trump does, he makes USA smaller.

Trying rebirth instead of rust, canceling stupid deals like TPP: OK.

But retracting into a self-glorifying strong state is not greatness, it is isolation.

Greatness is not in what you are but in how you relate.

And Trump relates very badly.

 (1) http://motherboard.vice.com/en_uk/read/us-power-will-decline-under-trump-says-futurist-who-predicted-soviet-collapse

US Power Will Decline Under Trump, Says Futurist Who Predicted Soviet Collapse

Written by [Nafeez Ahmed](#)
 6 December 2016

Johan Galtung, a Nobel Peace Prize-nominated sociologist who predicted the collapse of the Soviet Union, warned that US global power will collapse under the Donald Trump administration.

The Norwegian professor at the University of Hawaii and Transcend Peace University is recognized as the 'founding father' of peace and conflict studies as a scientific discipline. He has made numerous accurate predictions of major world events, most notably the collapse of the Soviet Empire.

Back in 2000, Galtung first set out his prediction that the "US empire" would collapse within 25 years.

Galtung has also accurately predicted the 1978 Iranian revolution; the Tiananmen Square uprising of 1989 in China; the economic crises of 1987, 2008 and 2011; and even the 9/11 attacks -- among other events, according to the late Dietrich Fischer, academic director of the European University Center for Peace Studies.

Back in 2000, Galtung first set out his prediction that the "US empire" would collapse within 25 years. After the election of President Bush, though, he revised that forecast five years forward because, he argued, Bush's policies of extreme militarism would be an accelerant.

After the election of Trump, I thought it might be prudent to check in with Galtung to see how he was feeling about the status of his US forecast. Galtung told Motherboard that Trump would probably continue this trajectory of accelerated decline -- and may even make it happen quicker. Of course, with typical scientific caution, **he said he would prefer to see what Trump's actual policies are before voicing a clear verdict.**

The model

Galtung has doctoral degrees in both sociology and mathematics, and some decades ago developed a theory of “synchronizing and mutually reinforcing contradictions”, which he used to make his forecasts. **The model was based on comparing the rise and fall of 10 historical empires.**

In 1980, Galtung used his theoretical model to map the interaction of various social contradictions inside the Soviet empire, leading him to predict its demise within 10 years.

“Very few believed him at the time”, writes Dietrich Fischer in the main biography and anthology of Galtung’s works, *Pioneer for Peace*, “but it occurred on November 9, 1989, two months before his time limit, 1990.”

For the USSR, Galtung’s model identified five key structural contradictions in Soviet society which, he said, would inevitably lead to its fragmentation -- unless the USSR underwent a complete transformation.

The model works like this: the more those contradictions deepen, the greater the likelihood they will result in a social crisis that could upend the existing order.

In the case of the USSR, the main structural contradictions were as follows:

- the working class was increasingly repressed and unable to self-organise through trade unions (ironic given the country’s Communist pretensions);
- the wealthier ‘bourgeoisie’ or elite had money to spend, but nothing to buy from domestic production, leading to economic stagnation;
- Russian intellectuals wanted more freedom of expression;
- minorities wanted more autonomy;
- and peasants wanted more freedom of movement

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Eventually, **as the highly centralised structures of the Soviet empire were unable to accommodate these intensifying pressures, the top-down structures would have to collapse.**

Galtung later began to apply his model to the United States. **In 1996**, he wrote a [scientific paper](#) published by George Mason University’s Institute for Conflict Analysis & Resolution warning that **“the USA will soon go the same way as [previous] imperial constructions... decline and fall.”**

Fascism?

But the [main book](#) setting out Galtung’s fascinating forecast for the US is his **2009** book, *The Fall of the American Empire -- and then What?*

The book sets out a whopping 15 “synchronizing and mutually reinforcing contradictions” afflicting the US, **which he says will lead to US global power ending by 2020 -- within just four years. Galtung warned that during this phase of decline, the US was likely to go through a phase of reactionary “fascism”.**

He argued that American fascism would come from a capacity for tremendous global violence; a vision of American exceptionalism as the “fittest nation”; a belief in a coming final war between good and evil; a cult of the strong state leading the fight of good against evil; and a cult of the “strong leader”.

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All of which, Galtung said, surfaced during the Bush era, and which now appear to have come to fruition through Trump. Such fascism, he told Motherboard, is a symptom of the decline -- lashing out in disbelief at the loss of power.

Among the 15 structural contradictions his model identifies as driving the decline, are:

- economic contradictions such as ‘overproduction relative to demand’, unemployment and the increasing costs of climate change;
- military contradictions including rising tensions between the US, NATO, and its military allies, along with the increasing economic unsustainability of war;
- political contradictions including the conflicting roles of the US, UN and EU;
- cultural contradictions including tensions between US Judeo-Christianity, Islam, and other minorities;
- and social contradictions encompassing the increasing gulf between the so-called ‘American Dream’, the belief that everyone can prosper in America through hard work, and the reality of American life (the fact that more and more people can’t).

Galtung’s book explores how the structural inability to resolve such contradictions will lead to the unravelling of US political power, both globally, and potentially even domestically.

Global collapse

Trump has made clear that he thinks US troops are still needed in Iraq and Afghanistan, and even proposed sending more troops to Iraq. He also [said](#) that we should have ‘grabbed’ the country’s oil. But he has also heavily [\(and incoherently\) criticized](#) US military policies.

Domestically, Trump has promised to deport 11 million illegal migrants, build a wall between the US and Mexico, compel all American Muslims to sign up to a government register, and ban all Muslim immigration to the US.

On the one hand, Trump might well offer an opportunity to avoid potential conflicts with great power rivals like Russia and China -- on the other, he may still, stupidly, fight more unilateral wars and worsen domestic contradictions relating to minorities.

For Galtung, Trump’s incoherent policy proposals are evidence of the deeper structural decline of US power: “He [Trump] blunts contradictions with Russia, possibly with China, and seems to do also with North Korea. But he sharpens contradictions inside the USA”, such as in relation to minority rights.

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Motherboard asked Galtung whether he thinks Trump would speed up his forecast of “collapse”, or slow it down.

Even if we give Trump the benefit of the doubt, he said, and assume that he “prefers solving underlying conflicts, particularly with Russia, to war -- in other words for the US not be imperial -- then yes, that still speeds up the decline from above, and from the center... **Of course, what he does as a President remains to be seen.**”

But what exactly is collapsing?

“An empire is more than violence around the world,” said Galtung. **“It is a cross-border structure with a center, the imperial country, and a periphery, the client countries. The point about imperialism is to make the elites in the periphery do the jobs for the center.”**

The center country may be a dictatorship or a democracy. **So for Galtung, the collapse of the US empire comes “when the periphery elites no longer want to fight US wars, no longer want to exploit for the center.”**

For Galtung, a key sign of collapse would be Trump’s attitude to NATO. The President-elect has said he would be happy to see NATO break-up if US allies aren’t willing to pay their dues. Trump’s ‘go it alone’ approach would, Galtung said, accelerate and undermine US global empire at the same time.

“The collapse has two faces,” said Galtung. “Other countries refuse to be ‘good allies: and the USA has to do the killing themselves, by bombing from high altitudes, drones steered by computer from an office, Special Forces killing all over the place. Both are happening today, except for Northern Europe, which supports these wars, for now. That will probably not continue beyond 2020, so I stand by that deadline.”

US break-up?

But this global collapse, also has potential domestic implications. **Galtung warned that the decline of American power on the world stage would probably have a domestic impact that would undermine the internal cohesion of the United States:**

“As a trans-border structure the collapse I am thinking of is global, not domestic. But it may have domestic repercussion, like white supremacists or even minorities like Hawaiians, Inuits, indigenous Americans, and black Americans doing the same, maybe arguing for the United States as community, confederation rather than a ‘union’.”

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Galtung is not pessimistic about his forecasts, though. Having always seen the collapse of the “US empire” as inevitable -- much like the collapse of the Soviet empire -- he argues that there is real opportunity for a revitalization of the “American republic.”

The American republic is characterised by its dynamism, its support for the ideals of freedom and liberty, its productivity and creativity, and its cosmopolitanism toward the ‘other.’

Might Trump help revitalize the American republic?

Galtung's answer is, perhaps, revealing: "If he manages to apologize deeply to all the groups he has insulted. And turn foreign policy from US interventions -- soon 250 after Jefferson in Libya 1801 -- and not use wars (killing more than 20 million in 37 countries after 1945): A major revitalization! Certainly making 'America Great Again'. We'll see."

That's a big if.