



## **US continuing sad record on international agreements, treaties**

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### **Abstract**

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US is increasingly abrogating and undermining international agreements and treaties, with Congress abusing international law and sanctions to score domestic political points against President Trump. The recent Congressional legislation to force the Pentagon to violate a nuclear-arms treaty with Russia, increasing sanctions to help dismantle the UN Iran nuclear deal, Russia sanctions that also target German and EU companies, regime change wars to illegally overthrow foreign governments, are collectively causing a transatlantic rift and eroding US credibility and leadership on the international stage.

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### **About the Author of this Issue**

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## Analysis

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These days it seems Washington is busy tearing up and abrogating international agreements and treaties. On July 21, [Foreign Policy](#)<sup>1</sup> reported that President Donald Trump had tasked his White House staff to seek ways to declare Iran to be in non-compliance with the 2015 United Nations nuclear agreement and provide a [US exit](#)<sup>2</sup> from the deal.

There is also talk of another [regime change](#)<sup>3</sup> operation, something Iran has already experienced, in 1953 when the US Central Intelligence Agency backed a [coup](#)<sup>4</sup> to overthrow the democratically elected Mohammad Mossadegh and replace him with a Western-friendly dictator.

Now, the US Congress is moving to force the Pentagon to [violate](#)<sup>5</sup> a nuclear-arms treaty with Russia in order to score another domestic political point against Trump.

The Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty, which US president Ronald Reagan negotiated with Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev in 1987, banned the development of medium-range missiles. However, key defense bills in both the US House of Representatives and the Senate would require the military to begin developing land-based missiles banned by the INF Treaty, likely provoking Russia into a dangerous nuclear arms race that the treaty was originally designed to avoid.

Legal experts criticize the legislation as congressional overreach, since the Senate can only ratify treaties, while the House has no role whatsoever, and the president alone can negotiate or abrogate treaties. Mallory Stewart, former deputy assistant secretary of state in the Bureau of Arms Control, Verification and Compliance, [warned](#) that the defense bill “exceeds the power of Congress” and “is ignoring a division of power that has been recognized since the beginning of our constitution”.

This congressional overreach, built on the recent bipartisan bill imposing new sanctions on Russia, is also overreaching to Europe and causing a trans-Atlantic rift. Already the European Union is protesting against the extraterritoriality of US sanctions in coercing other countries to obey US domestic law, and German Minister for Economics and Energy Brigitte Zypries has called for the EU to retaliate against “[illegal](#)”<sup>6</sup> moves against Russia that also [sanction](#)<sup>7</sup> German and other EU companies.

As David Goldman has observed in [Asia Times](#)<sup>8</sup>, Congress in abusing sanctions as a weapon to score cheap domestic political points against Trump only serves to undermine US leadership and credibility on the

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<sup>1</sup> Jana Winter, Robbie Gramer, Dan de Luce, “Trump Assigns White House Team to Target Iran Nuclear Deal, Sideline State Department”, *Foreign Policy*, July 21, 2017, <http://foreignpolicy.com/2017/07/21/trump-assigns-white-house-team-to-target-iran-nuclear-deal-sideline-state-department/>

<sup>2</sup> “Trump signals he might pull out of the Iran nuclear deal. What’s at stake?” *PBS Newshour*, July 26, 2017, <http://www.pbs.org/newshour/bb/trump-signals-might-pull-iran-nuclear-deal-whats-stake/>

<sup>3</sup> Alexander B. Downes and Lindsey A. O’Rourke, “The Trump administration wants regime change in Iran. But regime change usually doesn’t work.” *The Washington Post*, July 31, 2017, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2017/07/31/some-in-d-c-want-regime-change-in-iran-good-luck-with-that/?utm\\_term=.89457bb25ff6](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2017/07/31/some-in-d-c-want-regime-change-in-iran-good-luck-with-that/?utm_term=.89457bb25ff6)

<sup>4</sup> Bethany Allen-Ebrahimian, “64 years later, the CIA finally released details of the coup in Iran”, *Business Insider*, June 25, 2017, <http://www.businessinsider.com/cia-releases-details-of-iranian-coup-2017-6>

<sup>5</sup> Bryan Bender, “Congress readies Round 2 with Trump on Russia”, *Politico*, August 2, 2017, <http://www.politico.com/story/2017/08/02/trump-russia-congress-missiles-putin-241269>

<sup>6</sup> Josh Lowe, “Russia sanctions ‘illegal’ says Germany, urging Europe to retaliate against U.S.”, *Newsweek*, July 31, 2017, <http://www.newsweek.com/donald-trump-russia-sanctions-putin-644160>

<sup>7</sup> Andrew Rettman, “Trump signs Russia sanctions, targeting EU firms”, *EU Observer*, August 2, 2017, <https://euobserver.com/foreign/138672>

<sup>8</sup> David Goldman, “Trump’s ‘America First’ vs. McCain’s ‘America Last’”, *Asia Times*, July 30, 2017, <http://www.atimes.com/article/trumps-america-first-vs-mccains-america-last/>



international stage. Unfortunately, the inability of the Beltway establishment for self-reflection is leading Washington down a path of making “America last”.

### Double standard on ‘foreign meddling’

While the Washington elites often flout domestic and international law as they see fit, in turn they apply a double standard and moralize for others to comply. This prompted *The Economist* in 2014 to publish the article “[Why the sheriff should follow the law](#)”<sup>9</sup> admonishing the US for its hypocrisy.

Indeed, while Congress and President Trump’s detractors are indignant about Russia allegedly meddling in last year’s US election, they are also busy planning to overthrow governments in [Iran](#),<sup>10</sup> [North Korea](#)<sup>11</sup> and [Venezuela](#)<sup>12</sup>, while currently bombing Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria, Libya, Yemen, Sudan and Somalia. One ponders whether the Beltway pundits consider regime change via invasion and violent toppling of foreign governments a form of foreign meddling and a violation of state sovereignty enshrined in international law.

Perhaps not, and it seems the sheriff is above the law. Not only was the 2003 invasion of Iraq [illegal](#)<sup>13</sup> and helped give rise to the ISIS scourge of today, many consider current US support for Saudi Arabia’s near-[genocidal campaign](#)<sup>14</sup> on [Yemen](#)<sup>15</sup> complicity in [war crimes](#).<sup>16</sup> Moreover, that some Congress members found it necessary to pen legislation ([Stop Arming Terrorists Act](#))<sup>17</sup> to stop the US government from supporting [al-Qaeda-laced](#)<sup>18</sup> Syrian rebels (which some have dubbed “moderate [head-choppers](#)”),<sup>19</sup> is a national disgrace.

Speaking on [FORA.tv](#)<sup>20</sup> in 2007, General Wesley Clark – former NATO supreme Allied commander Europe and onetime presidential candidate – complained that Washington had suffered a foreign-policy “coup” by a group of militant regime-change enthusiasts and liberal interventionists who abuse US military power to invade countries and start wars.

<sup>9</sup> “Why the sheriff should follow the law”, *The Economist*, May 23, 2014,

<https://www.economist.com/blogs/democracyinamerica/2014/05/america-and-international-law>

<sup>10</sup> John R. Bolton, “Iran: Regime Change is within Reach”, Gatestone Institute, July 3, 2017,

<https://www.gatestoneinstitute.org/10620/iran-regime-change>

<sup>11</sup> Eli Watkins, “CIA chief signals desire for regime change in North Korea”, *CNN*, July 21, 2017,

<http://www.cnn.com/2017/07/20/politics/cia-mike-pompeo-north-korea/index.html>

<sup>12</sup> Mark Weisbrot, “US support for regime change in Venezuela is a mistake”, *The Guardian*, February 18, 2014,

<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2014/feb/18/venezuela-protests-us-support-regime-change-mistake>

<sup>13</sup> Ewen MacAskill, Julian Borger, “Iraq war was illegal and breached UN charter, says Annan”, *The Guardian*, September 15,

2004, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2004/sep/16/iraq.iraq>

<sup>14</sup> Dan Kovalik, “A problem from hell: The U.S.’s Genocide’s complicity in Yemen” *The Huffington Post*, September 4, 2015,

[http://www.huffingtonpost.com/dan-kovalik/a-problem-from-hell-the-u\\_b\\_8090782.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/dan-kovalik/a-problem-from-hell-the-u_b_8090782.html); Ben Kentish, “Saudi-led coalition in

Yemen accused of ‘genocide’ after airstrike on funeral hall kills 140”, *The Independent*, October 9, 2016,

<http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/middle-east/yemen-air-strike-bomb-kills-140-saudi-arabia-usa-white-house-a7352386.html>

<sup>15</sup> Bethan McKernan, “Saudi Arabia is blocking fuel for UN humanitarian planes in Yemen, says officials”, *The Independent*,

August 3, 2017, <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/middle-east/saudi-arabia-yemen-block-un-aid-humanitarian-planes-civil-war-officials-a7874521.html>

<sup>16</sup> Julian Borger, “US military members could be prosecuted for war crimes in Yemen”, *The Guardian*, November 3, 2016,

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/nov/03/us-military-members-war-crimes-yemen>

<sup>17</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uKV1sTw8zOc>

<sup>18</sup> <https://twitter.com/TuckerCarlson/status/889646890714902528>

<sup>19</sup> Tyler Durden, “Trump saw a disturbing video, then he shut down the CIA’s covert Syria program”, *Zero Hedge*, August 1,

2017, <http://www.zerohedge.com/news/2017-07-31/trump-saw-disturbing-video-then-he-shut-down-cias-covert-syria-program>

<sup>20</sup> “Wes Clark—America’s Foreign Policy “coup”, *Fora TV*, November 5, 2007,

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TY2DKzastu8>;



When first informed of an original 1991 plan to topple seven countries in five to 10 years (Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, Libya, Somalia, Sudan and Iran), General Clark recalled his disbelief and questioned, “you mean the purpose of the military is to start wars and change governments, it’s not sort of to deter conflicts ... we’re gonna invade countries?” He went on to condemn this group of US foreign-policy hijackers who “wanted us to destabilize the Middle East, turn it upside down, make it under our control”, and declared that it was time for a national dialogue and debate by the American public on the dangerous trajectory of US foreign policy.

### Reset in America

This may be wise counsel. After decades of “democracy by bombing” and “regime-change operations”, the endless 16-year war in Afghanistan may be a good example of current US policy failures, and here perhaps a picture is worth a thousand words.

Before US/Saudi meddling in Afghanistan via the Mujahideen (who later became al-Qaeda) in the 1980s, [Afghan women](#)<sup>21</sup> enjoyed a great degree of [freedom](#),<sup>22</sup> attended universities, and studied to be teachers and doctors. Indeed, a 2001 US State Department report from the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor explained how women were given the vote in the 1920s, granted equality in the Afghan constitution in the 1960s, and by the early 1990s formed 70% of schoolteachers, 50% of government workers and, in Kabul, 40% of doctors.

After the US sponsored the Islamist insurgency to destabilize the government and force the Soviets out, and the subsequent Taliban takeover in the early 1990s, this is the face of US democracy and its “promotion” of human and women’s rights in the Greater Middle East.

<sup>21</sup> Ted Thornhill, “When women lived FREE in Afghanistan: Pictures show how they were once able to study, wear skirts and mix freely with men - before civil war, invasion and the Taliban enslaved them”, *Daily Mail*, January 22, 2014, <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2543902/Photos-just-free-women-Afghanistan-Taliban-rule.html>; Matt Johnson, “Once upon a time in Afghanistan”, *Foreign Policy*, May 28, 2010, <http://foreignpolicy.com/slideshow/once-upon-a-time-in-afghanistan/>

<sup>22</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LPzCqCpC20M>



Not only are the people worse off, but US security is also worse off because of terrorists filling the vacuum of failed states created by US destruction of target countries, whether Afghanistan, Libya, Iraq or Syria.

Perhaps it is time for a reset. Not with Russia, but within America itself, and to have a national dialogue regarding illegal and endless wars that continue to bypass the will of the people.

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**Remarks:** Opinions expressed in this contribution are those of the author. This article was first published in *Asia Times* on August 7, 2017.