



## **A “Devil’s Advocate” Approach to the US Presidential Election**

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**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:** Polls and other social barometers are consistently forecasting that Joe Biden will win the US presidential election on November 3, but it’s too early to be sure. Relatively little attention is being paid to Trump’s track record in foreign affairs, though it might turn out to be a meaningful factor in the election. By taking that element into consideration, it is possible to make a “Devil’s Advocate” case for a Trump victory. The president’s multiple nominations for the 2021 Nobel Peace Prize could have an impact as well.

Most scholars and media experts are forecasting that Joe Biden will be elected the 46<sup>th</sup> president of the United States on November 3. This conclusion is based on regular polling as well as other social barometers. President Trump is thus widely believed to be in the final stages of his tenure at the White House.

Trump’s failure to effectively combat the COVID-19 pandemic, coupled with his policy of underplaying the severity of the illness even after he contracted it himself, is considered by many to be the last straw. Trump, who has criticized the Democrats for politicizing the pandemic, tested positive at a time of extraordinarily low public trust in both the media and the federal government.

The fiasco of Trump’s COVID-19 diagnosis and swift reemergence from the hospital after only a brief stay is the most recent of a number of missteps by Trump in the domestic sphere. These include the deep crisis over social and racial gaps in American society, the rise of strong BLM sentiment, and the involvement of anarchists in violent riots that wreaked destruction on multiple cities in the US.

Less attention is being paid to Trump's investment in foreign affairs, though it may well prove to be a meaningful factor in the election. This is especially true in view of the fact that US foreign policy is now viewed as a function of the president's personality rather than a well-crafted policy.

Donald Trump's approach to foreign policy is certainly unusual, and is frequently characterized as chaotic. Confusing though it often is, the "Trump Doctrine" could provide the foundation for a "Devil's Advocate" analysis in which he is the victor on November 3.

Trump's unprecedented approach to international affairs has been on prominent display throughout his term in office, as demonstrated in his administration's approach to China and North Korea as well as to US allies in Europe, Asia, and North America.

Trump started his presidency by having a conversation by phone with the Taiwanese president, an event that caught Beijing completely by surprise. China considers Taiwan part of its sovereign territory, to be reunited by force if necessary. Trump went on to launch a large-scale trade war against China that roiled the global economy as the world's two largest economies imposed tens of billions of dollars' worth of sanctions on one another. Trump then escalated tensions by accusing Beijing of having caused the COVID-19 pandemic.

Trump's China policy had its merits, in that it put Beijing on notice—backed by Congress as well as public opinion polls—that the US-China relationship needed fundamental restructuring. Trump also firmly indicated that the US would not tolerate Chinese aggression in the Asia-Pacific hemisphere, particularly threats to Taiwan's sovereignty and to free maritime shipping in the South China Sea.

The president also took a unique approach to North Korea. His hostile early messaging toward Kim Jong-un seemed to be escalating in the direction of nuclear war. He then reversed course entirely and began speaking of Kim as an admirable counterpart, an inexplicable about-face. Though Trump appears to have lost interest in insisting upon Pyongyang's denuclearization, he can take credit for restraining the Korean dictator at least with regard to the test firing of ICBMs.

On the other hand, Trump's tough policy on Iran, his spectacular withdrawal from the JCPOA, and the snapback of sanctions reflected a consistent standpoint. Washington under Trump managed to coordinate its approach to Iran with Israel and the Gulf States, including Saudi Arabia. The anti-Iran regional front continues to grow through the efforts of the Trump

administration. The president thus deserves the lion's share of the credit for countering Iran's maximalist Middle Eastern ambitions.

Just two weeks prior to Trump's COVID-19 diagnosis, Israel signed dramatic peace and normalization agreements with the UAE and Bahrain. These groundbreaking agreements were formally signed at the White House on September 15, 2020, as were the "Abraham Accords," which will serve as an umbrella for expanding such relations toward additional Gulf states.

As significant as all of that was, there is still more. US diplomacy under Trump succeeded in brokering a historic normalization agreement between Serbia and Kosovo, putting an end to 21 years of conflict. Trump's team also succeeded in encouraging Belgrade and Pristina to establish relationships with Israel.

Considering the number and scope of these achievements, it can be argued that they will have an impact on the election.

The presidential race is nearing the finish line. While a Biden victory is considered by many to be a foregone conclusion, he is 77 years old and on occasion appears to display confusion, fatigue, and cognitive issues. Of course, Trump is 74 and just tested positive for COVID-19. Despite his quick return to the White House, his recovery is still in question. The game is not over for either side.

A possible external influencing factor could be Trump's recent nominations for the 2021 Nobel Peace Prize. The latest nomination came from Australian law professors on the basis of the "Trump Doctrine" of foreign policy. Law professor David Flynt called the doctrine "extraordinary", citing Trump's approach to Middle East peace with the Abraham Accords and the normalization of relations between the UAE and Israel.

White House press secretary Kayleigh McEnany said about those accomplishments, "This is a big deal and it's well-deserved. You cannot deny what has happened on President Trump's watch."

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