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Trump's 100 days: foreign policy and security implications – introduction

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'I think the 100 days is, you know, it's an artificial barrier. It's not very meaningful', Trump (2017) declared in an April 2017 interview. Yet candidate Trump (2016) had also issued a '100 day action plan to Make America Great Again'. The first '100 days' of an administration has been a barometer for a president's credibility in the White House since President Franklin Roosevelt (Keith 2017). It is an effort to systematise events and behaviours. However, Trump's 100 days poses a challenge. The President appears to defy systematisation: he rejects his own 100-day measurement, albeit as a way of avoiding criticism and downplaying expectation (Berenson 2017); he is unwilling to operate within predefined structures and look beyond the short-term; and his presidency lacks doctrine. As one of our contributors argues, in the haste to fit the Trump Presidency within existing frameworks, analysts risk identifying some deeper rationale or coherent motivation that simply does not exist. A recurrent theme of this Intervention issue is one of unpredictability and unexpected U-turns.

Yet unpredictable need not mean unintelligible. This special Interventions issue offers multiple approaches to understand the President's early security and foreign policy decisions. Our contributors consider Trump's actions in light of domestic and foreign policy audiences, relations with other states and broader implications for international politics. We identify theoretical frameworks that help make sense of Trump's decisions, including realism, constructivism, image and performance, discourse analysis and critical theory. For Davis and Holland and Fermor, Trump's foreign policy is understood as an exercise in perception management as part of a discursive war of position with his detractors. The administration engages with multiple discourses (Hassan). Eroukhanoff uses gender theory to illuminate the president's bordering practices and the Mother Of All Bombs attack in Afghanistan. Our contributors consider the administration's realist 'America First' commitments, its ambiguous relationship with the chemical weapons 'taboo' (Bentley). In terms of empirical analysis, this Intervention explores American relations with the Middle East (Hassan), Russia (Davis), the chemical weapons taboo (Bentley), a discourse analysis of foreign policy (Holland and Fermor) and a feminist analysis of Trump's 100 days (Eroukhanoff).

Perhaps the origins of Trump's unpredictable decisions can be traced to Trump's own business playbook: hide your game and do not let your adversary know your cards. This

is certainly how Trump sold himself in the electoral campaign. Or perhaps it simply originates from Trump's 'extreme' personality (McAdams 2016) or lack of political expertise (Rymel 2017). In any case, there is some reason to think that, in terms of his approach to security issues and foreign policy, unpredictability is predictable. Our contributors demonstrate that Trump does not resist all systematisation. Even in the face of his unpredictability, the President still engages with pre-existing norms, systems of meaning and institutional constraints. This Intervention issue provides impetus to create alternative models to understand the unpredictable presidency of Donald Trump, and what this means for the future of US foreign policy.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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