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Aides to Trump: America Needs to Police the World to Protect Corporate Interests

By Eric Levitz
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In most respects, it is unfortunate that the American president’s understanding of geopolitics is barely more sophisticated than that of the average Fox News viewer. The fact that White House advisers must expend time and energy policing the commander-in-chief’s media diet — to prevent a single cable news segment from reshaping his understanding of Middle East policy — is less than ideal; as is the fact that decisions of global import often seem to hinge on how the president responds to this or that visual aide.

Still, having a low-information voter in the Oval Office isn’t without its advantages: After all, in the innocence of their ignorance, laymen often ask vital questions that experts are far too smart to ever ponder.

Donald Trump’s ignorance of the realities of geopolitics — as defined by America’s foreign-policy Establishment — allowed him to ask some “stupid” questions, during the debate over America’s Afghanistan policy back in July. The “pros” in the Trump administration all knew that America must commit more troops to the project of winning a 16-year war (that most analysts consider unwinnable) in a country that is of little strategic value to the United States. The layman asked “why?”

Apparently, the ensuing discussion led the president to pose even broader, more profound versions of this same question. Eventually, Trump’s advisers were forced to justify the very existence of a globe-spanning, American military (a.k.a. American imperialism). This led our secretaries of Defense and State to explain that America must maintain worldwide military

dominance — even at a prodigious cost in blood and treasure — so as to protect the interests of multinational corporations with ties to the U.S. state. Or so this new report from the Associated Press suggests:

Trump’s national security team had become alarmed by the president’s frequent questioning about the value of a robust American presence around the world. When briefed on the diplomatic, military and intelligence posts, the new president would often cast doubt on the need for all the resources. Defense Secretary Jim Mattis and Secretary of State Rex Tillerson organized the July 20 session to lay out the case for maintaining far-flung outposts — and to present it, using charts and maps, in a way the businessman-turned-politician would appreciate.

The session was, in effect, American Power 101 and the student was the man working the levers...The officials said the purpose was to answer one of Trump’s most persistent questions of his national security aides: Why does the U.S. government need “so many people” abroad? As such, it was a comprehensive look at military bases, embassies and consulates, CIA stations and other intelligence posts, presented by experts sitting around a large conference table and in chairs lining the walls.

To be successful, Mattis and Tillerson decided they should use talking points and commentary with which they believed Trump would be most familiar: **the role that the military, intelligence officers and diplomats play in making the world safe for American businesses, like The Trump Organization, to operate and expand abroad. American troops provide stability, diplomats push rule of law and anti-corruption measures and the intelligence community provides context and analysis that drive the first two, the briefers explained, according to the officials. [my emphasis]**

So: American taxpayers must fund a global, quasi-empire to advance the financial interests of U.S. corporations — which, by the way, deserve a massive tax break on the trillions in earnings that they’ve been hoarding overseas.

If the president were an actual everyman, this explanation might have triggered more questions — or violated deep-seated intuitions about fairness. But Donald Trump isn’t a regular joe. He’s a “greedy, greedy, greedy” real-estate mogul who unquestioningly accepts the inherent righteousness of the (nihilistic) pursuit of plenty. And so, the president (apparently) found what is, essentially, Noam Chomsky’s case *against* American imperialism to be a persuasive case *for* it.

Five days after Tillerson and Mattis had shown the president their maps and charts, the New York *Times* reported that Trump had found a reason to prolong America’s 16-year war against the Taliban: “Afghanistan’s vast mineral wealth.”

When President Trump addresses the United Nations this week, he will do so as a believer in the American-led world order. Now, his advisers just have to hope that he’ll do the “adult” thing, and tactfully misrepresent the *reasons* for that belief.