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## THEMENSCHWERPUNKT

Interactions among Populism, Peace, and Security in  
Contemporary America\*

Louis Kriesberg

**Abstract:** Each word, populism, peace, and security, has multiple meanings, which are sometimes contradictory. For example, populism may be leftist, referring to advancing the interests and concerns of the common people and in opposition to domination or control by elites. Or populism may be rightist, referring to advancing the interests of a dominant ethnicity or ideology and often including authoritarian rule. Peace may refer to either harmonious, positive relations or to the simple absence of violence or repression with one-sided domination. Security also has varying references, including national security, personal feelings of security, human security, or one-sided security based on the other side's insecurity. This article examines major aspects of the complex relations among the diverse meanings of the three concepts, giving particular attention to populism. The article analyzes the current American domestic situation, focusing on U.S. President Donald Trump and his administration's actions. It examines the consequences of those actions and of various kinds of populism for the United States' peace and security. It also analyzes Americans' resistance to Trumpist actions and to rightist populism, focusing on how progressive citizen engagement could better advance Americans' peace and security.

**Keywords:** authoritarian, leftist, peace, politics, populism, progressive, rightist, security, Trump, resistance

**Stichworte:** autoritär, linksgerichtet, Frieden, Politik, Populismus, rechtsgerichtet, Sicherheit, Trump, Widerstand

## 1. Introduction

The words populism, peace, and security convey broad ideas, and each has multiple elements, some of which are contradictory. Populism may take left-wing forms, that is, advancing the interests and concerns of the common

people in opposition to elite domination and control. Or it may take right-wing forms, that is, advancing the interests of the dominant ethnicity or ideology and even adopting authoritarian rule to do so, as recently in Hungary.<sup>1</sup> Peace can refer to harmonious, positive relations or to the absence of direct violence or of severe repression with one-sided domination.

\* Many thanks to Jerry Miner, Paula Freedman, Volker Franke, and Karen Guttieri for their comments on an earlier draft of this article.

1 Ivan Krastev, "Eastern Europe's Illiberal Revolution: The Long Road to Democratic Decline," *Foreign Affairs* 97 (3) (2018).

Security can refer to national security, personal feelings of security, human security, or to one side's security at the expense of another side's insecurity.

This article, considers major aspects of the complex relations among the varying meanings of the three concepts identified in the title, with special attention to populism. First, it discusses the current American, domestic situation, focusing on President Donald J. Trump and his administration's actions, considering their sources and their relationship to various kinds of populism. Second, the consequences for American peace and security of the Trump administration's actions and of various kinds of populism are examined. Finally, it discusses the resistance to Trumpist actions and right-wing populism, focusing on how a popular social engagement of a progressive type could better further American peace and security.

## 2. Populism and President Trump's Administration

The word populism has many meanings, some of which contradict each other.<sup>2</sup> It may refer to a social movement or a political party, to a set of ideas about social-economic life, or to moral judgements. The left-wing and right-wing distinction of various qualities of populist thought and action will be emphasized. That will help clarify the confusion relating to references to Trump as a populist, while he pursues policies that serve special interests.

In the sense that populism is a movement for and by the common people in contention with oppressive elites, Trump often does use populist rhetoric. For example, in his inaugural address he said, "The forgotten men and women of our country will be forgotten no longer."<sup>3</sup> He voices the anger of workers who have lost their jobs and if employed, have had stagnant wages for decades. Moreover, he speaks in a common, vulgar fashion and disparages experts. This goes so far as to deny scientific evidence, to assert falsehoods, and to distort what critics actually say and do. Trump also gives voice to his anti-immigrant prejudices and nativist sentiments. Those statements and his attacks on foreign governments that he claims are taking advantage of America, as well as his recourse to authoritarian conduct, also fit with right-wing populism.

Trump, as a political leader, however, does not pursue a clear left or right populist vision. He pursues goals relating to his prejudices, to mistaken views of reality, to personal profits, and to interests of groups from whom he seeks support. Thus, Trump supports the right-wing Republican Party policies that harm workers' rights and reduce their security and well-being. For example, he seeks to weaken unions, imposing impediments to organizing, and ending government regulations to protect

workers from dangerous working conditions. He supports conservative Republican goals of cutting government taxes, regulations to protect the environment, and services such as health care and social security benefits. In his campaign, he promised Christian Evangelicals he would appoint Supreme Court judges who would overturn *Roe v. Wade*, which legalized abortion in the United States.

A basic element of much populist thinking is to celebrate the common people and to be wary or even antagonistic to the bosses and the very rich. In this regard, Trump often sounds like a left-wing populist. He does sometimes disparage the "establishment," by which he means political figures who oppose him. But it certainly is clear that his friends and the people he admires are very rich. They are the winners. Furthermore, his policies are advantageous to the very rich. His tax bill grants large tax cuts to rich investors and small cuts to other tax payers. His administration has rapidly cut regulations against corporate financial misconduct, as well as protections against environmental damages and injurious working conditions.

An important element in right-wing populism is the promotion of nativism, favoring privileges for native-born people of the "right" race, ethnicity, or religion. This is sometimes called nationalism, as distinguished from patriotism, when it takes an exclusivist ideological form.<sup>4</sup> In this matter, Trump's rhetoric and policies are often aligned together. He disparages and raises fears about immigrants, Mexicans, and Muslims and he promotes policies to prevent them from entering the United States and also to expel them. For example, just before the 2018 mid-term elections, he ordered thousands of soldiers to the southern border to stop the "invasion" of the country by a caravan of asylum seekers from Central America.

Another aspect of some right-wing populism is an affiliation with authoritarianism. One entry to that path is an extreme emphasis on a communal identity, based on ethnicity or religion, which is exalted and is combined with the denigration of other ethnicities or religions. This can be carried to extreme views that the others are inferior or even subhuman. To sustain actions based on such views within a shared territory is likely to produce authoritarian rule by and for the dominant ethnicity or religion – the Trump administration's efforts to ban entry into the country on religious grounds is illustrative. The search for undocumented immigrants and their deportation by the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement's (ICE) weakens laws protecting the rights of persons living in the United States.

Another entry to authoritarian rule derives from demagogic promises of economic prosperity. This can begin with excessive exploitation of commodities such as oil or land and high levels of apparent corruption by a new elite, including persons serving in the administration. Tariffs imposed by Presidential orders are another element of power aggrandizement, justified by serving the people's jobs and earnings. Trump's charges against

<sup>2</sup> Cas Mudde and Cristobal Rovira Kaltwasser, *Populism: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford University Press, 2017).

<sup>3</sup> *ibid.*, Also see: Graham. David A., "'America First': Donald Trump's Populist Inaugural Address" *The Atlantic*, <https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2017/01/trump-inaugural-speech-analysis/513956/> 2017. And see Uri Friedman, "What Is a Populist? And Is Donald Trump One," *ibid.*, February 27 2017, and Michael Lind, "Donald Trump, the Perfect Populist," *Politico* (2016) <https://www.politico.com/magazine/story/2016/03/donald-trump-the-perfect-populist-213697>.

<sup>4</sup> Comaroff, John L.. "Humanity, Ethnicity, Nationality: Conceptual and Comparative Perspectives on the U.S.S.R.". *Theory and Society* 20 (1991): 661-87. See also: Robert A. Levine and Donald T. Campbell, *Ethnocentrism: Theories of Conflict, Ethnic Attitudes, and Group Behavior* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1972).

journalists employed in the news media (other than Fox) as “enemies of the people” contribute to his authoritarian rule. Finally, the lack of transparency in his finances is a kind of flaunting of his personal power.

In Trump’s presidential election campaign and in the policies undertaken by his administration, there are words and deeds that match up with one or another aspect of populism. There are also words and deeds that match up with many traditional Republican Party dogmas. For all of the novelty of President Trump and his conduct, there has long been some pockets of support for the various policies he pursues and particularly policies of the right-wing Republicans.

The Republican Party has been moving to the right, with increasingly narrow and extreme conservative views for several decades. Under the leadership of President Lyndon B. Johnson, the Democratic Party had passed legislation to expand and protect the civil rights of African Americans, even if it meant the Democratic Party would lose its dominance in the Jim Crow South.<sup>5</sup> That happened, and later President Richard Nixon then seized the opportunity to pursue a Southern strategy to attract white voters nationwide.

The nomination, election, and policies of President Ronald Reagan established the control of the Republican Party by its more conservative members. This was marked by the rhetoric and policies based on the belief that the government was not the solution, it was the problem. Tax cuts were attractive as a way to shrink the government and further enrich the wealthy.

Many very rich corporate leaders cloaked this strategy by endowing conservative think tanks to elaborate and publicize the doctrine that government services and regulations are hindrances to liberty and economic progress. Welfare programs are dismissed as ineffective and subject to widespread cheating by poor people. The poor needed to be punished as an incentive to get a job, while the rich were incentivized by getting more money.

The Tea Party emergence in 2009 added a populist flavor to the extreme conservative movement. Tea Party supporters and activists tended to be older, white, male, comfortable middle class in income, and more likely to be evangelical Protestants than other religions.<sup>6</sup> The Affordable Care Act, or Obamacare, was vehemently opposed at Congressional town hall meetings. This position was given high priority by David and Charles Koch and other right-wing wealthy political action funders.<sup>7</sup> Expansion of government welfare

benefits was highly objectionable to the Koch brothers and many Republicans. Trump made this one of his most important targets for ferocious attacks.

Trump has determinedly opposed to two other matters, abortion and gun control. Each has activists who give the matter high priority in deciding for whom to vote. So Trump, despite his personal indiscretions, gained support from Christian evangelicals due to his hostility to abortion and Planned Parenthood. Trump also displays great opposition to any new controls to contain gun sales, thereby winning enthusiastic support from leaders of the National Rifle Association (NRA).

There is one other matter that seems to provide direction to Trump’s choice of actions. He seems to try to undo everything that President Obama had done as President. His antagonism to Obama was clear before Obama’s election. Trump insisted, despite evidence to the contrary, that Obama was not a native-born U.S. citizen. President Obama delivered a roast of Trump at the 2011 White House Correspondents Dinner, as Trump’s face appeared to be livid. It is hard not to believe that Trump pursues retribution by undoing Obama’s achievements.

Overall, it should be clear that President Trump does not adhere to any coherent populist approach. His positions are a shifting collection of actions based on personal prejudices, opportunities to win crowd adoration, calculations about winning support from powerful political and business interests, and judgments about vulnerable opponents who can be readily bullied. Steve Bannon, Chief Strategist in the first seven months of Trump’s presidency, provided a veneer of encompassing theory. The theory, however, is not a detailed comprehensive one, being significantly an attitude that celebrates disruption and a weakening of the state.<sup>8</sup>

Trump’s language and the reasoning he uses to justify the actions are extreme and often not grounded on sound evidence. He generally derides and casually, but fiercely, attacks those who do not agree with his policy assertions. Furthermore, at times, the actions that are taken are not consistent with the purported purposes he claims to be advancing. This personal style is deeply rooted in who he is, and subverts a coherent populist or any coherent ideological approach. He calls for actions that gain him cheers at rallies, even when they contradict each other and are based on false information.

Nevertheless, Trump has had considerable success in imposing his style and package of often contradictory claims and policies upon much of the Republican Party. This is associated with extreme attacks against the Democratic Party. All this contributes to making adherence to one or the other political parties to be matters of identity, which require loyalty to one side and hostility against the other. This kind of identity politics certainly hampers mutual understanding and political cooperation. Demonization of the other side tends to intensify destructive conflict, with mutual damages rather than possible mutual gains.

8 Christopher Caldwell, “What Does Steve Bannon Want?,” *The New York Times* (2017). <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/02/25/opinion/what-does-steve-bannon-want.html>.

5 Jim Crow law, in U.S. history, refers to any of the laws that enforced racial segregation in the South between the end of Reconstruction in 1877 and the beginning of the civil rights movement in the 1950s; see e.g. <https://www.britannica.com/event/Jim-Crow-law>.

6 Theda Skocpol and Vanessa Williamson, *The Tea Party and the Remaking of Republican Conservatism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), p. 23.

7 Ibid. Charles and David Koch’s wealth was initially based in the petroleum industry, but has widely expanded. They focus their political activities on promoting libertarian ideas and policies, and contribute millions of dollars annually to think tanks, foundations, and nonprofit groups to promote laissez-faire economic policies, lower taxes, restrictions on labor unions, and the elimination or privatization of numerous government services and social welfare programs. They support groups that deny human contributions to global warming. They provide large sums of money on electoral campaigns and lobbying, at the state and federal levels.

### 3. Relations among Populism, Security and Peace in Contemporary America

#### 3.1. Security and Populism

The word security, broadly understood, refers to protection from possible harm. Security varies greatly, in who is threatened by whom or by what. For example, national security often refers to the nation-state which defends itself against a hostile external military force or against some of its own military forces. The threatened entity, moreover, can be a government, a head of government, a political party, or a population. The threat may be in the form of a great variety of coercive and non-coercive inducements, such as economic sanctions, ideological subversion, terror attacks, cyber disruptions, or shows of military force. Furthermore, the threat may come from another state, an external non-governmental organization, or domestic entities or even individuals committing violent attacks on fellow citizens of different gender, ethnicity, or religion.

Trump, with his simplistic win-lose notions about international trade, has resorted to raising security fears regarding foreign trade to justify imposing tariffs to get better trade terms. This had the added benefits of seeming to be tough and nationalistic, putting America first.

Besides such forms of national security, the people in a country may be threatened by great natural calamities, such as hurricanes, rising ocean levels, droughts, and earthquakes. Awareness of these threats is rapidly growing, as many of the threats are increasing in frequency and magnitude. Security may take the form of prevention, or resilience, and preparation for quick recovery. It may be provided in various degrees by efforts of national governments, local governments, business corporations, nongovernmental organizations, and families. Populist social movements to mitigate the threats of global warming might seem likely, but that is not evident in the United States at present.

Back in the 1960s and 1970s, however, major public action was mounted to counter environmental dangers, including air and water pollution, waste disposal, and radiation poisoning. Rachel Carson's book, *Silent Spring*, published in 1962, was highly influential in spurring public engagement.<sup>9</sup> Numerous non-governmental organizations arose to deal with pressing environmental concerns. Widespread public support for action became evident in the Earth Day demonstrations of 1970. An amazing number of national bills were passed, with bi-partisan support, to deal with environmental problems. They include the Clean Air Act of 1970 and the Water Pollution Control Act Amendments of 1972, the 1970 National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), the Safe Drinking Water Act (1974), the Resource Conservation and Recovery Act (1976), and the Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation, and Liability Act, commonly known as the Superfund Act (1980). The development of procedures and systems to ensure the adherence to these acts were highly successful in clearing the country's air and water.

Despite the successes of these governmental and non-governmental actions, pushback emerged in the 1980s, when

the Republican Party intensified its traditional objection to what it called governmental overregulation. Leaders of corporations whose operations contributed to air and water pollution lobbied Congress and sought to win public support to oppose what was framed as an un-American governmental interference in individual freedom.<sup>10</sup> Extremist right-wing organizations gained some traction as part of a right-wing populist movement. Soon that became part of the dogma of extreme right-wing Republican Party leaders. Major Republican leaders, including President Trump, deny the scientific evidence that the earth is warming, and human activity is a, or even the, major factor causing it.

Human security is emerging as another important kind of security. It pertains to the security and well-being of people, of individuals and communities. The concept is supported by the United Nations General Assembly, which stresses "the right of people to live in freedom and dignity" and recognizes "that all individuals, in particular vulnerable people, are entitled to freedom from fear and freedom from want."<sup>11</sup> The threats to human security may arise from dictatorial rule and the exploitation of a country's people or of a marginalized minority of people. Even in countries with formal democratic governance, large segments of people may be impoverished and thereby lack human security.

Clearly, identifying security threats often is a contested matter. Political, religious, intellectual, or other leaders or would-be leaders compete in convincing the public about what threatens them. In recent years, political leaders have rallied people and gained power by crying out about the threats to their countries, which are attributable to the in-flow of immigrants. Such appeals can be seen as consistent with right-wing populism, if the immigrants are argued to be enablers of foreign terrorism. The nativism in right-wing populism therefore can contribute to framing immigrants as constituting threats to national security. A securitization of immigration can then justify extraordinary legal measures to intervene, respond, and return immigrants. If the immigrants are framed as competing workers, undermining jobs and good wages of the native-born, then immigrants may be viewed as threats to economic well-being among left-leaning populists.

Absence of fear from hunger, unsanitary conditions, inadequate medical care and other threats to popular well-being is sometimes linked to left-wing populism when charges are made against the establishment that neglects the needs of the common people. Sometimes this takes the form of political leaders promising overly simple solutions to overcoming the severe problems. If they win national leadership and control, they may use some revenues to disburse broad benefits, but drain or damage the source of the revenues and resort to more and more authoritarian rule to stay in power. Such problems with gaining power through demagoguery can afflict right-wing political leaders as well, and readily be associated with authoritarianism. This is the form of populism currently attracting attention in several states of Europe.

10 Naomi Klein, *This Changes Everything: Capitalism Vs. The Climate* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2014).

11 United Nations General Assembly Resolution adopted by the General Assembly, 60/1 2005 World Summit Outcome.

### 3.2. Peace and Populism

Left-wing populism has often been associated with peace movements, resisting engagement in wars. This was powerfully clear in the European opposition to the outbreak of World War I and in the American opposition to entry into that war.<sup>12</sup> World War II, framed as a war against Fascism, did not invite opposition from the left.<sup>13</sup> Opponents to American participation in that war were more often isolationists, had ties to Germany, had right-wing sympathies, or were pacifists.

Popular opposition generally rises as wars go on, and losses of life grow. Usually the common people suffer greater costs than the elites and their children. They may take to the streets in protest and youths eligible for military drafting seek to evade it. This occurred during the many years of U.S. engagement in the war in Vietnam. The war seemed increasingly to have no good reason to be waged and unwinnable at any feasible price. American political leaders began to differ about the worth of continuing and popular opposition grew. Yet, the opposition was not populist. The opponents in fact offended many common people who thought the opposition was un-American and a bunch of unkempt hippies.

Indeed, some people who might tend to be populists are prone to have nativist and chauvinist tendencies. Foreigners, therefore, are held in low regard and are sometimes readily seen as threats that must be forcefully resisted. This can be coupled with the belief in the need to be tough in foreign affairs. Trump's bellicosity in words and deeds appeals to these sentiments. These tendencies make favoring taking a long-term perspective in building mutually secure relations unlikely. All this indicates the ambiguity of the concept of populism.

## 4. Interactions among Resistance to Trump, Populism, Security, and Peace

### 4.1 Resistance to Trumpism

President Trump has supporters, who like him and like how he behaves and what he does. That approval, however, seems to be from a limited base of support, somewhere about forty percent of the electorate. Some of the people who voted for Trump did so despite their disapproval of him. Some of those voters voted for him as a way of voting against Hillary Clinton and/or the Democratic Party. Some of them prioritized having Supreme Court Judges appointed who would overturn or further restrict the *Roe v. Wade* decision.<sup>14</sup> Still others desired above all else ending Obamacare, getting large tax cuts, cutting way back on immigrants in or entering this country, or ending many government regulations.

12 Michael Kazin, *War against War: The American Fight for Peace, 1914-1918* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2017).

13 During the period of alliance between Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union, which ignited World War II, Communists in the United States argued against intervention. Once Germany invaded the USSR, Communists, of course, argued for U.S. intervention.

14 *Roe v. Wade*: "legal case in which the U.S. Supreme Court on January 22, 1973, ruled (7-2) that unduly restrictive state regulation of abortion is unconstitutional"; see e.g. <https://www.britannica.com/event/Roe-v-Wade>.

Once President Trump began making good on his promises, there easily could be majorities of people opposing each specific policy he tried to implement. As president, indeed, he has faced unprecedented resistance. Of course, this is partly because he makes little effort to work with people who disagree and forge a modified policy. Indeed, he seems to delight in choosing extreme forms of the policies, which are undertaken by persons he chooses to carry them out. Under these circumstances, there are many degrees of resistance.

Some resistance is undertaken by loyal members of the Trump administration. They like and are happy about many things the administration has done and is doing. However, they object to some of his decisions and they try to stop their implementation, finding they cannot dissuade him from pursuing what they regard as a wrong and dangerous policy.<sup>15</sup> Many other people in various government departments and agencies, regarding the new policies as gravely mistaken and offensive, have resigned from their positions. There are Republicans who have been elected to legislative and other offices who have chosen not to run for re-election because they were isolated and ineffective or would be defeated in a primary election.

Some of the resistance has been of an ad hoc nature; sometimes this has been a strong reaction to halt specific actions taken by the Trump administration. One of the first major efforts by the people to present another vision of America was the Women's March, with three times the number gathered for Trump's inauguration the day before. A second social movement arose to oppose and reverse a Trump administration action that began on Jan. 27, 2017. The movement was a response to the sudden and very confusing executive order closing the country's borders to immigration from seven predominantly Muslim countries.<sup>16</sup> Airports across the U.S. were crowded with many persons anticipating entry into the U.S., whose entry was blocked. Many Americans rushed to their nearby airports to protest the closure and assist the stranded would-be entrants. U.S. courts intervened, and the hastily-written ban on immigration was blocked. New executive orders were drafted and re-drafted until they were accepted by the U.S. courts.

Resistance also flowed from established non-governmental organizations that sought to counter patterns of conduct that the Trump administration's action would tend to enhance. They include the American Civil Liberties Union, Planned Parenthood, and the Southern Poverty Law Center. Contributions to these and similar NGOs rose greatly following Trump's election. They spurred legal actions protecting the rights of immigrants and people seeking asylum and actions to protect persons threatened by racist and anti-Semitic organizations. In addition, many social movement organizations, which had already been waging struggles to improve particular concerns relating to the environment, African-Americans, women, or other matters, became more active; they include #me too and Black Lives Matter. Workers, whose union rights, benefits, working conditions, and wages had been cut back began to push back with protest marches and strikes, notably by teachers.

15 <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/09/05/opinion/trump-white-house-anonymous-resistance.html>

16 <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/01/27/us/politics/trump-syrian-refugees.html>

City and state governments are additional major bases for resistance to Trump administration policies. This is evident concerning environmental and immigration issues. In many cities, local police provide “sanctuary” in the sense that they will not assist federal officials to the detriment of their own normal police work. In some states and cities, global warming is taken seriously and efforts to reduce carbon and other polluting emissions continue. Some cities facing rising waters are initiating policies to mitigate the damages of ever more and increasingly ferocious storms.

A national organization resisting Trumpism, Indivisible, quickly emerged with Trump’s election.<sup>17</sup> Modeled after the Tea party, it is organized in every congressional district, and works at the local and wider levels to oppose policies and actions urged and undertaken by the Trump Administration. This includes the legislative matters relating to taxes, budgets, social security, and Medicare. Local members lobby their representatives, by phone and by direct action protests. Decisions are made in general meetings and weekly emails are sent to all members suggesting specific actions to be taken most days of the week. In addition, workshops and trainings are offered, relating to community organizing and conducting nonviolent protest. This draws upon the methods developed in earlier periods of American militancy.<sup>18</sup>

Many of the actions and goals of the sources identified above go beyond resistance intending only to block the actions of the Trump Administration. Work goes into assessing the grievances many Americans felt that led them to support Trump and to promoting more effective policies that would actually respond to and remedy the reasons for the grievances. Some work also goes on to build a better social order that would speed the recovery from the damages to American democracy brought about by Trump and his extreme supporters.<sup>19</sup> This includes greater civic engagement at all levels, which would incorporate some facets of left-wing populism.

Recovering from the societal damages of Trumpism also includes significant changes in the Republican and Democratic Parties. Recovery of the Republican Party to serve the values and interests of a broader range of citizens and greater reliance on scientific, economic, and social realities may have to await major electoral defeat. The Democratic Party shows some signs of more creative and equitable ways of dealing with the country’s class problems. The mistakes of emphasizing meritocracy and failing to attend more to the needs of the working class in the new global world are being recognized.<sup>20</sup> These shifts in the orientation of the Democratic Party are matters of Party debate.

Ultimately, resistance to Trumpist policies and overcoming their damages will occur within American electoral processes. The midterm elections of 2018 did demonstrate considerable rejection of candidates who ran in national and state elections

as adherents of Trump and his policies. The Democratic Party won control of the House of Representatives and power in many states, which had been led by Republicans. But the Senate is firmly in Republican hands and Trump will try to exercise more authoritarian power.

## 4.2 Resistance and U.S. Security and Peace

Given the damages that Trump and his administration have done to American security and peace, the resistance might be expected to contribute greatly to American security. That is not the case for national security, where the presidency has great power. Trump has generally disrupted the international order, weakening international institutions and norms and U.S. ties with traditional allies. He has stressed reliance on military strength and increased military expenditures, while cutting down on diplomatic capacities and foreign aid. He engages in foreign affairs in a bullying manner. All this has made for more uncertainties and some highly intense antagonisms.

Trump’s escalation and then dramatic de-escalation of the U.S. conflict with North Korea and its president, Kim Jong-Un, should be recognized. Trump had threatened furious military action against North Korea unless it abandoned its nuclear weapons system. All U.S. military leaders warned that war was not feasible with an acceptable loss of life. The South Korean President, Moon Jae-in, who had long sought to establish peaceful relations between the Koreas, initiated cordial contacts with Kim, which enabled him to provide Trump with a way out of the intensifying crisis. Trump boldly accepted the proffered option. Kim and Trump met and agreed to the de-nuclearization of the Koreas and normalization of relations between North Korea and the U.S., including economic benefits for North Korea. Actualizing this transformation will take time and skill; at this writing, some progress seems to be happening.<sup>21</sup>

Domestic security has also suffered, but the resistance has had some mitigating effects. Thus, the security of immigrants has been reduced by government policies and of minority groups by emboldened racist attacks. The resistance in the form of solidarity with Muslims and members of threatened minorities is of some assistance. Legislative threats to various aspects of health and welfare security have been largely blocked thus far.

The contributions of the resistance to peace are certainly difficult to assess. By some accounts, some of the “grown-ups” in the president’s national security team constrained what would have been dangerously reckless actions. For example, some aides surreptitiously acted to prevent the U.S. withdrawal from a significant trade agreement with South Korea.<sup>22</sup> Certainly, the many elements of civil society try to maintain the international exchanges and interactions as much as possible. Resistance efforts have included pressure on legislators to restore a warmer handling of would-be visitors and immigrants.

17 John Cassidy, “The Trump Resistance: A Progress Report,” *The New Yorker* 2017, April 17. Also see: <https://www.indivisible.org/>.

18 Donald C. Reitzes and Dietrich C. Reitzes, *The Alinsky Legacy: Alive and Kicking* (Greenwich, CT: JAI Press, 1987).

19 E. J. Jr. Dionne, Norman J. Ornstein, and Thomas E. Mann, *One Nation after Trump* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2017).

20 Thomas Frank, *Listen, Liberal: Or What Ever Happened to the Party of the People* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2016).

21 Stephen Biegun, “East Asia and the Pacific: Remarks on Dprk at Stanford University,” in Shorenstein Asia-Pacific Research Center (Stanford University: the Nelson Report, 2019).

22 Bob Woodward, *Fear: Trump in the White House* (New York, NY: Simon & Schuster, 2018).

## 5. Conclusions

The contemporary U.S. system of governance is in grave disarray and there is widespread public dismay. The President aggrandizes power, he delights in insults and uncivil discourse, undesired information is dismissed as false news. The two major parties are highly polarized and that is not likely to be overcome by pleas to behave better. The resistance is likely to continue. The Republican Party and Trump are overreaching and further electoral pushback is likely.

Creative changes are needed and possible. The significance of common people in governance is increasing, but that needs to be enhanced by better information and skills. Much good work is being done by NGOs in various arenas, by public libraries, by public radio and television. Social media may be improved, by monitoring sources. Greater engagement across hierarchical levels is beginning to occur in some work settings. This could well be instituted with worker representation on corporate boards of directors, which has long been practiced effectively in Germany, under the name of co-determination.

Two major, underlying problems need correction in order to overcome the contemporary disorder in the USA. First, it is vital to reduce America's exceptionally high income and wealth inequality. Economic inequality had been moderate and steady in the 1940s-1960s, but began to rise in the late 1970s and is extremely high compared to other economically developed countries. Inequality is associated with poorer health and other social problems, among economically developed countries.<sup>23</sup> Interestingly, that relationship also holds true among the 50 states as well. The rise in inequality is not due to immutable forces; those forces can be influenced and their consequences mitigated by social policies. Tax policies and provisions for health care and safety net benefits matter. The decline in trade unions, speeded by legislation, helps account for lower wages.<sup>24</sup> Actions to reduce the very great income and wealth inequalities in the contemporary USA could help build a stronger sense of shared identity as well as better social relations.

The second fundamental problem is the Americans' lack of confidence in government. This was not always so. Much was accomplished by the government in the 1950s and 1960s, and the private economy flourished. However, the right-wing ideology to denigrate government capacities has been effectively promoted. Moreover, the great role of money in politics, and its use to protect and favor special interests undermines confidence in government. The present administration certainly provides many reasons to withhold confidence in it. The next administration, when it is voted into power, will probably do better in winning the people's confidence. Much is known about how to make good policies and execute them well. Much is known about how to wage conflicts constructively and to do good collaboration, with mutual benefits.<sup>25</sup> Any likely future administration will advance American peace and security.



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