

Trump is right to seek an end to

The president's desire to disentangle the country from costly overseas conflicts



JON FINER

There is no shortage of policies and decisions made by President Donald Trump worth criticising, but since the earliest days of his presidential campaign, he has expressed at least one belief that deserves to be encouraged, not denigrated: the desire to disentangle the United States from costly overseas conflicts.

Trump's noninterventionist impulse has always fit uncomfortably with the team he assembled, particularly the latest, more hawkish iteration in his ever-shifting foreign policy cast. For a time, the president grudgingly deferred, allowing conflicts to escalate in virtually every theatre he inherited.

Recently, the president's preferences seemed to prevail, at least momentarily, as he tweeted his decision to withdraw 2,000 American troops from Syria and suggested he would do the same with as many as 7,000 from Afghanistan.

Since then, a bewildering public tug of war between the president and his national security team has left a trail of confusion. It remains unclear whether the

United States is withdrawing from Syria right away or gradually; whether it wait until the Islamic State is wholly defeated or it believes that is already the case; whether the United States will protect its Syrian Kurdish allies, somehow; and whether it remains committed to its goal of ending Iran's presence in Syria.

The absence of anything akin to a decision-making process in the administration is not surprising. The surprise is that among the most vocal critics of Trump's withdrawal announcement have been not just Republican hawks but also a chorus of voices on the left.

Progressive opponents of Trumpism should resist the urge to do so over the wrong transgressions. We may not know what the policy actually is until Trump implements it, but on Syria and Afghanistan, his initial instinct — to do less, with less — was correct. It is his execution, timing and inability to leverage his decisions for the best possible terms that were damaging.

In Syria, whatever one's view of the tragic and long-debated trajectory of the conflict or past policy decisions, the United States has few remaining, achievable interests at stake: preventing the Islamic State from regaining territorial control, protecting the predominantly Kurdish forces on whom Washington relied to do most of the counterterrorist



US soldiers outside the American base in Kabul.

fighting and supporting our allies in their efforts to defend against threats emanating from Syrian territory. The success of none of those goals will be determined by a relatively small, long-term military presence.

Trump misled the country by claiming that the Islamic State has been defeated. But the argument that American boots on the ground are needed to address its

remaining strongholds is a recipe for a perpetual presence, since the terrorist group represents a generational threat that can be countered and contained but not soon wholly vanquished.

In truth, many on the right who denounced Trump's announcement did so principally because they see Syria as a venue for confronting Iran. But that is chasing an illusory and dangerous goal: It

is hard to see how a few thousand American troops could counter tens of thousands of Iranian and Iranian-backed forces, aligned both with Moscow and President Bashar Assad's regime that has largely won the civil war.

A chorus of criticism inevitably greeted Trump's recent statement that Iranian forces "can do what they want" in Syria. Yet read as a statement of fact rather

than the extension of a green light, he stumbled upon a self-evident truth: Notwithstanding Israel's successful efforts to limit Iran's importation of advanced weaponry into Syria, Tehran's position in the country is essentially secure.

Trump is correct that the better course is to extricate ourselves from Syria, but his fatal error has been in its implementation

Workers on corporate boards? Germany



SUSAN R HOLMBERG

Elizabeth Warren's plan to give workers a voice on corporate boards isn't radical. 'Co-determination' has a long history, and America should embrace it

In the late 1970s, the United Automobile Workers union had a brazen idea. During negotiations for a new contract, members asked Chrysler to give workers representation on its board, a practice called "co-determination" that had been germinating all over Europe.

The proposal was far outside the bounds of management-labor relations in America at the time, and Chrysler was initially immovable. But the union had helped secure a federal loan for the company, which shielded it from bankruptcy, and management eventually relented. In 1980, Chrysler's chief executive, Lee Iacocca, nominated the UAW leader Douglas Fraser to the board as a reward.

But the presence of a single labor representative on a 17-member board did not translate into meaningful results for workers. At one point, Fraser did vote against a plush executive pay package, but he was the only nay. He stepped down in 1984,

and Chrysler eliminated the union seat altogether in 1991. Only a handful of other companies tried worker representation, the unions didn't fight for it, and the American experiment in co-determination was over before it began.

In today's Gilded Age — when chief executives are making well over 300 times what the typical worker brings home in pay — the idea is getting new life. Sen. Elizabeth Warren of Massachusetts, who recently announced her bid for president, introduced a bill last year to give workers the right to vote for two-fifths of all corporate board seats, with a companion bill in the House by Representatives introduced by Ben Ray Lujan of New Mexico. A similar bill by Sen. Tammy Baldwin of Wisconsin would entitle workers to elect one-third of the seats.

These proposals are part of a fundamental rethinking of whom corporations should serve, but they are not new. American companies were once run with the interests of people other than just shareholders — workers, customers, the public — in mind. (In 1965, corporate managers earned only 20 times what the typical worker did.)

There is already a thriving

example of how co-determination can work. Germany has the strongest system of co-determination in Europe, and it is a defining feature of its economy, the biggest in Europe. German laws dictate that workers at large companies elect up to half the members of supervisory boards, which make high-level strategic decisions, including how to invest profits and whom to hire for senior management positions. Workers also elect representatives to works councils, the "shop-floor" organisations that deal with day-to-day issues such as overtime pay, major layoffs and monitoring and evaluation.

Is co-determination good for business? The results from Germany are mixed. Some research shows that co-determination has a positive effect, especially through work councils, and some shows no effect. Co-determination doesn't guarantee corporate growth and profits, but it certainly doesn't undermine them.

German workers have fared well under co-determination. Along with strong trade unions, co-determination helped German workers minimise job losses from a financial crisis in the 1990s. Workers traded raises for job security, but that investment



has paid off. Workers' wages in Germany have begun to rise recently after decades of stagnation.

This history means that generations of Germans have grown

up believing that having workers involved in decision making is the right way to do business. While co-determination has plenty of critics inside Germany, it is accepted by almost every