

Although decisions about war and peace are a long way from environmental rollbacks, it's striking how much the Administration's process for going to war is like its domestic policy process, including its environmental policy. This comparison reveals the Trump Administration's deep-seated vision of how government ought to work. The common features are monopolizing policy decisions within the White House, ignoring allies, sidelining Congress, downgrading deliberation and expertise, and minimizing transparency and public participation.

The simplest way to make this point is to tease out these various similarities one by one.

*Presidential primacy.* Foreign affairs and national security are primary areas of presidential authority, so it's not surprising that the President took the lead on the war. What's unusual is the extent to which everyone else was locked out of the process, as discussed below. In terms of domestic regulation on matters like the environment, Trump's 200+ executive orders are a vivid representation of his desire to control all significant policy decisions (and even some insignificant ones, like shower-head pressure and paper straws).

*Ignoring allies.* There's no reason to think that allies other than Israel were consulted about the decision to go to war. Similarly, the decision to withdraw from the U.N. Framework Convention on Climate Change was made regardless of the obvious opposition of our allies, all of whom adhere to the Convention.

*Sidelining Congress.* Normally, top members of Congress are consulted about major military initiatives, but at best they received last-minute notice after the decision to go to war was made. Similarly, the Executive Branch normally defers to Congress's decisions to create agencies and to fund certain activities, but this Administration demolished some agencies like AID and ignored congressional funding laws (including for environmental grants) that it didn't like.

*Downgrading deliberation and expertise.* There was apparently so little deliberation before beginning this war that members of the Administration, including the President, had not agreed on the justifications for war or its goals. On the domestic policy side, the effort to repeal the endangerment finding for greenhouse gases included a rush effort to assemble some supporting science from climate denialists that turned out to be full of holes, in the process committing a blatant violation of the federal law governing advisory opinions. No real scientists within the government were consulted, for obvious reasons.

*Minimizing Transparency and Public Participation.* In the past, Presidents of both parties have felt some need to persuade the public in advance of the need for major military actions. Prior to the start of this war, however, there was no indication that a crisis was looming, as negotiations with the Iranian government seemed to continue. Even after the fact, there has not been a major presidential address or even a press conference. In terms of domestic policy — environmental issues in particular — the Administration has also done its best to freeze the public out of the process and reduce transparency. Under its current NEPA regulations, the public often will not be informed of, let alone be allowed to comment on, proposed actions that affect the environment. In rulemaking, the Administration has done everything possible to eliminate the normal process of giving public notice and receiving comments before making regulatory changes. Notably, much though not all of this is based on claims of emergency and threats to national security.

Trump's approach to governance has some roots in previous practice, but it is not what Americans generally have been used to. It is a governance style that centralizes power within the Executive Branch at the expense of agency experts, Congress, and the public. Some might argue that this is more democratic since only the President is nationally elected. Others take a different view. There's no question, however, that the current governance system is in a very different mode of operation in all spheres, foreign and domestic.