

Say's reading materials for Group B

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Where Is Ivanka?

There is method behind Donald Trump's "go home" tweets

ELAINA PLOTT

Ivanka Trump wants it both ways.

Since joining her father's White House as a senior adviser in early 2017, the first daughter has reserved the right to toggle between a strict and loose construction of her portfolio. When flashy opportunities arise—such as the chance to play diplomat with Kim Jong Un—the edges of her purview, which she often defines as “women's economic empowerment,” become conveniently blurry. But when the issue du jour is particularly messy, she is quick to clarify its limits, thus absolving herself of accountability for problems that exist outside it. When *The View*'s Abby Huntsman, for example, asked Trump in February why she didn't speak up about family separations along the U.S.-Mexico border, she objected that she is “not president of all women's issues.”

This awkward dance underscores the true nature of Trump's silence on a flurry of new controversies surrounding her father: She is declining to speak out not because of the limits of her portfolio. She simply does not want to.

“It's an exclusive club,” said a former senior White House official, who spoke on the condition of anonymity in order to talk frankly. “People who

want to be in charge of everything, but when the going gets weird, just disappear.”

Trump has, indeed, largely disappeared from public view amid perhaps the worst humanitarian crisis plaguing the United States and amid questions about whether her father sees nonwhites as sufficiently American. Each day, it seems, brings with it new reports of the inhumane conditions within migrant camps along the border, where many detainees have little to no access to proper medical care, adequate nutrition, or basic hygiene. On Monday, multiple news outlets reported that a Border Patrol agent in El Paso, Texas, told a 3-year-old Honduran child that she had to pick which parent would stay with her in the United States, and which would be sent to Mexico, as the U.S. processed her family’s asylum claim. And back home in Washington, the White House is currently navigating the fallout from the president’s racist tweets about four Democratic congresswomen of color, whom he told to “go back and help fix the totally broken and crime infested places from which they came.”



PATRICK SEMANSKY / AP

Both the border crisis and President Donald Trump’s Twitter attack are the kinds of events that many Americans feared, however vaguely, would take place in a Trump presidency. They also represent the kind of moment

in which many people, reasonably or not, once assumed his elder daughter would intervene. As I wrote in April, the founding myth of Ivanka Trump is that she would prove a moderating force in her father's White House. This myth was born, in large part, out of a collective assumption about how her status as a wealthy, liberal Manhattanite would affect the administration's agenda. Surely, for example, Trump wouldn't allow her father to do severe damage to abortion access, because how could a New York businesswoman and socialite—married to a Democrat, no less—be anything but ardently pro-abortion-rights?

At the same time, Trump seemed to have little interest in dispelling this perception. In the first year of her father's administration, it was common to see anonymously sourced news reports detailing her distress following an especially unpopular decision by the president. Still other reports would explain her attempts to persuade her father to change course. Even if those attempts failed, a "source close to Ivanka" was usually there to inform the public that she had tried. (Trump's team did not respond to a request for comment on this story.)

Those signals began to ebb in frequency, however, following the president's decision to remove the United States from the Paris climate accord. Trump was public in her efforts to keep the U.S. in the pact, making her failure to change her father's mind equally public. It was then, as I reported in my April profile of Trump, that she came to see the value of using her narrowly tailored portfolio, full of largely uncontroversial issues, as a shield in moments of crisis. The thinking, according to her current and former colleagues: You wouldn't seek out comment from the presidential adviser Stephen Miller, who is closely associated with immigration policy, about, say, the White House's failure to repeal and replace Obamacare. Why, then, would you ask Trump, if the issue doesn't fall under her purview?

That posture could make Trump's utter silence today on the continuous separation of migrant families or her father's racist invective seem slightly more reasonable. But the problem is that, as time healed the wounds of her climate loss, she began adopting it only on an as-needed basis. It

became nearly impossible to predict when the boundaries of her platform were sacrosanct and when they weren't.

At no time was this dynamic more obvious than earlier this month, when it was revealed that Trump, along with her husband and fellow senior adviser, Jared Kushner, had joined President Trump in meeting with the North Korean dictator Kim Jong Un in the demilitarized zone, a conversation that included discussions about, among other topics, nuclear weapons. It is unclear, to put it mildly, how North Korea's nuclear program dovetails with her work on women's economic empowerment on the Ivory Coast, which her team insists is her biggest priority.

There was once a time when even if Trump was unable to succeed as a conscience-check on this White House, she wanted to seem like she was trying all the same. But as the events of recent weeks lay bare—her eagerness to participate in historic photo ops, her refusal to wade into things murkier—even that pretense has dissolved. “Maybe she’s coming more to grips with the fact that she’s tied forever to everything that happens in there, and it’s not even worth trying to distance herself from it all anymore,” posited a second former senior White House official, who also requested anonymity.

Multiple people close to Trump have told me that she speaks of her time in the White House as “sand in an hourglass,” a race to “make the most” of a “once-in-a-lifetime experience” before it slips away. (Indeed, she has a gorgeous hourglass in her White House office, perched near a window a few feet from her desk, to remind her of just that.) It may be difficult now, though, to grant Ivanka the benefit of the doubt, that when she speaks of making the most of her time, she means in service to the American people—and not simply herself.

ELAINA PLOTT is a staff writer at *The Atlantic*, where she covers the White House.