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Outlook for US Policy in Relations with China and Russia

Yuri MOROZOV

Abstract. Under President Donald Trump, the United States will continue to follow a policy of global hegemony under the slogan “America First,” primarily to its own advantage. This applies to both Russo-American and Sino-American relations. At the same time, 100 days into his presidency, Trump had yet to fully devise a strategy for the foreign policy of the United States, which has been largely reacting to events in the international arena. This article describes the first results of the Trump administration’s policy toward China and Russia, and the short-term outlook for US foreign policy strategy.

Keywords: *United States, Russia, China, national interests, policy, strategy, soft power, information war.*

US-China Relations in the Initial Period of Trump’s Presidency

In contrast to his campaign promises of tightening U.S. policy toward China, one of the main results of the first 100 days of Donald Trump’s presidency is the establishing of unexpectedly warm relations with Chinese leader Xi Jinping. This is partially explained by the choice of a moderate and constructive American foreign policy toward other countries after the harsh rhetoric of an election campaign being a characteristic feature of most US presidents. It was also due to the meeting between the two countries’ leaders at Mar-a-Lago (Palm Beach, Florida) in April 2017, which allowed them to discuss issues of mutual interest: bilateral trade, the nuclear problem of the Korean Peninsula, the situation in the South China Sea, and a number of other important matters.

Yuri V. Morozov, Ph.D. (Military Science), Professor, Leading Research Associate, Institute for Far Eastern Studies and Institute of the USA and Canada, Russian Academy of Sciences.
E-mail: morozovyury51@yandex.ru

The Trump administration's constructive policy toward Beijing is explained by one-fifth of everything the United States now buys abroad coming from China. For the foreseeable future, China will remain the United States' largest trading partner. The volume of their bilateral trade in 2016 was \$578 billion. Of this, the United States bought \$462.8 billion worth of goods from China, and sold \$115.8 billion worth of goods to China. The difference in China's favor was thus \$347 billion. Beijing, therefore, believes China has much to offer the United States under Trump's declared America First policy. For example, Chinese capital and industrial goods could play an extremely important role in the initiatives proposed by the 45th US president in the modernization of US infrastructure.

The economies of the United States and China are closely intertwined, and these ties cannot be broken without catastrophic consequences. Being the largest supplier of goods to the American market, China is also a major holder of US stocks and bonds. The softening of Trump's position toward China after his meeting with Xi Jinping is, therefore, entirely understandable. Trump refrained in particular from accusing Beijing of manipulating the exchange rate of the yuan. Judging from his statements, he also began to listen to China's viewpoint on the North Korean problem. In nudging China toward a more active role on the Korean Peninsula, Trump believes that, with Beijing's help, he will be able to curb North Korea's nuclear ambitions.

Meanwhile, the ensuing "warm friendship" between Donald Trump and Xi Jinping is cause for caution among a number of political scientists. For all the good feeling in relations now between Beijing and Washington, international affairs experts continue to speculate on the deeper motives of Trump's policy toward China.

A number of international analysts believe that Trump overestimates China's actual ability to apply pressure on Pyongyang. As Norwegian expert Stein Tønnesson believes, China's policy toward North Korea has not been terribly effective in recent years. In addition, he notes that a number of Chinese international experts criticize their own government for spoiling relations not only with the North but with South Korea as well.¹ Along with some White House advisors, he, therefore, doubts Beijing's ability to take effective steps to restrain North Korea.

At the same time, the governments of South Korea and Japan have begun to fear their own influence in the region will be reduced if Trump creates something like a grand US-PRC duo in his desire to get the most help from Beijing in solving the North Korean problem, particularly if the "friendly" US position gives China a free hand in such problems vital to the region as the international territorial disputes in the South China Sea. It is, therefore, worth recalling the G2 concept developed by the administration of Barack Obama, in accordance with which the United States recognized a certain dependence on China while simultaneously demonstrating a readiness to cooperate with it in global affairs. Bei-

jing, however, declined the dubious offer of sharing the burden of responsibility for the world's fate with Washington.

Looking at the development of US-China relations in the first 100 days of Trump's administration, international experts raise the question: Will its position toward China change if Beijing does not live up to all of the White House's expectations?

D. Trump is after all "so unpredictable in matters of foreign policy that no one knows what he'll say next week or next month"; "his mood is as variable as a weather vane." For example, during his election campaign, Trump repeatedly criticized the previous US administration for attacks in Syria, and promised not to interfere in the affairs of other countries if he were to become head of state.

Once he was in power, however, the United States launched a missile strike on the Syrian aerodrome at Shayrat, Homs province, on April 7, 2017, from which allegedly a chemical attack had been delieverd earlier. The strike was ordered by Trump personally.²

We may, therefore, conclude that at present, Trump is largely reacting to events in the international arena and has yet to devise the full-fledged strategy for US foreign policy that everyone is waiting for. "Trump is governing just as he promised he would: nontraditionally and unpredictably," notes *The Washington Post*. According to that newspaper's data, out of 60 promises made during his election campaign, Trump has so far kept five. We should remember one other thing where US foreign policy is concerned: it is formed mainly from the position of a superpower. Under Trump, the United States will continue to follow a policy of global hegemony in the future and pursue its own interests, even where China is involved.

Washington does not deny that there continue to be serious disagreements over, e.g., Taiwan, Tibet, North Korea, and human rights in today's "warmer" US-China relations. Therefore, despite the close connectivity of the world's two leading economic powers, the U.S.A. continues to guard jealously against giving China access to its cutting-edge technologies. This is apparent in particular from the imposing of restrictions on the export of high-tech products to China.³ If China does not live up to Trump's hopes where North Korea is concerned, the situation in Sino-American relations could change for the worse. One thing is clear: It is China that currently poses the greatest threat to the United States. Its economy is growing much faster than the U.S.A.'s, and the PRC armed forces are getting stronger every day.

If Beijing tries to resolve the territorial issues in the South China Sea or acquire Taiwan by force, the threat to neighboring countries and the United States will grow. It is obvious that US-Chinese relations in the future will develop according to the formula Coexistence-Rivalry-Controlled Confrontation.⁴

In trying to nullify the negative consequences of such confrontation for the United States, the previous administration actively used soft power in its relations with China by playing on Chinese vanity and using all available means to

bring Beijing over to its side. However, the conflict between Washington and Beijing over key issues did not facilitate a convergence of PRC and US positions on foreign policy.⁵

Obama counted in particular on gaining PRC support on the Ukraine issue. Xi Jinping, however, only confirmed the inflexibility of China's position on Ukraine, which consisted of "insisting on the need for a political solution to the crisis" and abstaining from a vote in the UN Security Council. China also blocked a draft resolution on the situation in Aleppo, Syria, at the December 5, 2016 session of the UN Security Council. Due to having such territorial problems of their own as Tibet, the Xinjiang-Uyghur Autonomous Region, and Taiwan, China is nevertheless unable to side openly with Russia, as it did over Syria and Ukraine.

With the support of the largest US rating agencies Standard & Poor's and Moody's, the media are continuing their information campaign against China. There is also talk of increasing US support for Taiwan. A retaliatory weapon is the US Federal Reserve System's more than \$1 trillion in treasury bonds. In the event of the United States declaring a trade war on China, they could be thrown off. In addition, China now has the Dagong Global Credit Rating Agency, which was not involved in the corruption scandals where the destructive role of Standard & Poor's and Moody's led to a huge financial loss for foreign investors.⁶

Russia-US Relations under the Donald Trump Presidency

Trump's foreign policy measures in the first 100 days of his presidency evoked a painful reaction from Moscow that replaced the euphoria among members of the RF State Duma after his election as the new US president. This good feeling came from his praise for Vladimir Putin in his campaign speeches, his promises of cooperation in the fight against Islamic extremists in the Near East, and his intention of "studying" the Crimean issue.

Trump's "good intentions" were more likely part of his campaign rhetoric, and hardly reflected the concept of US foreign policy that is still under development today. In the opinion of Alexander R. Vershbow, former Deputy Secretary General of NATO and now a leading expert in the Atlantic Council, intra-American factors are influencing the shape of US policy toward Russia. Several investigations concerning Moscow's possible involvement in hacker attacks against the United States and its ties to Trump's team are now under way in Washington. Under these conditions, any move by Trump to draw closer to Russia would hardly be viewed as positive in the United States. The problems associated with the Russian factor in American politics are slowing the process of devising an US strategy in relations with Moscow. There is thus still no hope of a major improvement in Russian-American relations in the foreseeable future.

Both Republicans and Democrats in the US Congress continue to view Russia with an attitude of aggressive caution. They hold impressive levers of legislative influence over the 45th US president. *Time* magazine lists a number of reasons why we should not expect a swift improvement of relations between the United States and Russia:⁷

- First of all, D. Trump's closest advisors in matters of defense and security are in no way pro-Russian. Secretary of Defense James N. Mattis calls Russia and Putin "the main geopolitical threat" to the United States. CIA Director Michael (Mike) R. Pompeo condemned "Russia's interference" in the 2016 US presidential elections. The President's National Security Advisor Lt. Gen. Herbert Raymond McMaster has referred to Russia as a "hostilely revisionist" power (i.e., one that seeks to revise the existing world order). Fiona Hill, whom Trump has appointed Special Assistant to the President and Senior Director for European and Russian Affairs on his National Security Council staff, writes that "the West must strengthen its defense, reduce its economic and political vulnerability, and develop crisis plans to counter Putin's new war of the 21st century."⁸ This too can hardly be called a pro-Russian position.
- Second, D. Trump intends to strengthen NATO. He is calling on the NATO countries to increase their contributions to the bloc's common treasury by 2% of their GDPs. (Today, only 5 of NATO's 28 member states meet this demand.) It is, however, obvious that Trump will hardly succeed in forcing all of the alliance's members to contribute the full amount they owe to NATO's treasury. Some simply do not want to, while others, like Germany, agree to pay nominal sums for defense but ask why they need so many weapons, and what they should do with them if there are no real military actions on European territory. Nevertheless, Russia will still be alarmed if the alliance cultivates its military might.
- Third, Moscow and Washington disagree over the production of oil. Trump will continue to push for an increase in oil production in the United States, as a result of which prices for it will fall on the world market. This is not at all to Russia's advantage, since almost one-half of its state budget comes from the sale of oil.
- Fourth, Russia has cooled considerably toward Trump, for the reasons listed above. In January 2017, Russia's leading media outlets mentioned Trump 202,000 times; Putin, 147,700. Since the inauguration, however, the Russian media have been disappointed by Trump. On the Federal television channels' Sunday News programs, mention of him suddenly dropped by 88%.

It should be added that Washington continues to worry about Russia, viewing it as a geopolitical rival, and as a nation that can unquestionably destroy the

United States. Its active dislike for unilateral US actions around the world continues to irritate Washington. The previous administration, therefore, used a number of ways and means to conduct an information war against Russia.⁹

Among these was violating agreements. After the disintegration of the Soviet Union, Moscow did not pay enough attention to developing humanitarian cooperation with the former Soviet republics, trusting in its agreements with the leaders of Western countries promising the *status quo* that emerged after the Cold War would not be upset, and the West would not expand NATO or intrude into its sphere of interests. It financed these ties according to the lingering principle of hoping the abovementioned governments were firmly bound to Russia, both economically and historically.¹⁰

Led by the United States, the West moved to violate its agreements, both overtly and covertly. With large-scale funding and the help of nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), it not only created fifth columns on the territories of the former Soviet bloc, but radically altered their public opinion and world view in accordance with their own interests. Because of this, a number of European countries were reoriented toward the United States and European Union: first, the countries of East Europe and the Baltic States; then, Georgia and Ukraine. Washington spent more than \$5 billion in aid to Kiev in shaping its pro-Western policy, and to carry out a Russophobic project to drive a wedge between Ukraine and Russia. When Moscow realized the true motives behind this process, it was already too late to demonstrate the appeal of collaborating with Russia.

Imposing stereotypes. A typical example of waging an information war was the use of special collocations that could be varied, depending on the aims of the United States. When Russia aided South Ossetia in 2008, defending its population and its own citizens against aggression, it found itself ostracized, and was cast in the US media as the side that initiated the conflict. Such spurious clichés as “the evil empire,” “Russia longs to resurrect the model of the Soviet Union,” and “Putin’s dictatorial regime” were constantly used in the English language media.

Selecting facts that are favorable to the United States when the audience is invited to draw their own conclusions, based on media materials. Facts that are not favorable to the United States are invariably minimized. For example, when there was a *coup d’état* in Ukraine, American political scientists selected only information discrediting President Victor Yanukovich and Ukraine’s forces of law and order while remaining silent on the criminal actions of the Maidan movement and attempts to physically crush the head of state.

Substituting concepts and key words by referring to their own irregular actions with terms that have a neutral or positive connotation. An outstanding example of this is the declaration of “sanctions” against Russia after it “annexed” Crimea. Only the UN Security Council has the right to impose sanctions after adopting the corresponding resolution. In this case, Washington inserted the

word “sanctions” into the world media as a way of legitimizing US actions in the global public consciousness.

Using psychologically traumatizing events and an information merry-go-round. The crash of the Malaysia Airlines Boeing 777 in Ukraine in July 2014 served as the pretext for creating a broad Western coalition against Russia that accused it of supporting the rebels (opolchentsy) who ostensibly shot down the plane. Aside from widespread statements by officials, the United States was unable to present any evidence of this. The version given by the General Staff of the Russian Armed Forces was thus not refuted.

The story propagated in the US media of the so-called Russian hackers is an example of an information merry-go-round, in which this theme was first developed at the appropriate levels and then offered in the form of a leak citing unnamed sources. It was later seized upon by the media and fed back to the government – which, having swallowed this fabrication, began to treat it as an information product that gradually acquired legitimization and a life of its own. This merry-go-round then moved to a second and even wider circle: the topic went beyond the confines of the United States and began to accrete as informational spume in other countries.¹¹

Distorting historical events. The destructive power of this way of acting is on all levels of society so great that it can cast doubt not only on the history of a nation, but on the very legitimacy of its existence. This is how the falsifiers of history are trying to belittle the role of Russia, the legal successor to the Soviet Union, in freeing humanity from fascism.¹² To accomplish this, they are fundamentally revising the results of the Second World War. The American historian Hanson Baldwin in particular considers its outcome to have been decided by 11 battles (“great campaigns”), including Operation Market Garden in the Netherlands, the Anglo-American landings in Normandy, and the Battle of Midway. Of the battles won by the Soviet Army, he mentions only Stalingrad. West European and American history textbooks have long contended that the victories of Anglo-American troops played the decisive role in defeating Nazi Germany and militarist Japan. Such events as the Battle of Kursk, where victory ensured strategic superiority on all fronts and opened the road to the liberation of Europe by Soviet troops, are interpreted in the West as “local battles,” and not as turning points in a world war.

Brainwashing in the field of history has affected not only Western society but Russian citizens as well. In the 1990s, different Western foundations contributed to a deluge of it. The American Open Society Foundation, headed by George Soros, offered its services in particular to the RF Ministry of Education and began to finance the publishing of history textbooks for junior and senior high schools. In these, the Second World War was described as the absolute triumph of the Anglo-Saxons, while more important events on the Soviet-German front were mentioned only in passing. The Open Society Foundation continues to offer its “educational aid” to the Baltic countries, Georgia, and Ukraine. The history

of the war was completely rewritten for Japan. As a result, most Japanese have begun to believe that the atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki was done by the Soviet Union.

Anti-Russian propaganda is widespread in the Internet, in movies, and on television and the radio. The targets of this practice are journalists, political and public figures, and the ordinary citizens of the countries belonging to Shanghai Cooperation Organization, the Collective Security Treaty Organization, and the Commonwealth of Independent States.¹³ One of the anti-Russian programs where recent international events are concerned is the project launched after the military actions in South Ossetia, where strategists from the Pentagon were surprised to discover that the “outdated and not fit for combat Russian army” was capable of quickly defeating a “mobile and highly effective army of the future” trained by American instructors according to NATO standards. The Strategic Communication Service, a sort of American agitprop for Europeans, was thus created at the 2009 NATO Summit in Strasbourg in order to quell discord among America’s allies. In the United States, the subdivision Information War Initiative was created at Washington’s Center for European Policy Analysis. Its main task is to block completely any information that Russia tries to disseminate in countries around the world. In 2014, the government of Lithuania announced the NATO Strategic Communications Center of Excellence in Riga, Latvia, had begun work on “analyzing and countering Russian propaganda.” At the same time, the British government announced the creation of Brigade 77, the personnel of which are charged with combating Russian propaganda in the Internet.

An operational strategic communications group to prevent the dissemination of Russian information through all channels, from open diplomacy to cyberspace, was formed in the European Union in 2016. The true motive for its creation was the November 23, 2016, resolution by the European Parliament *EU Strategic Communications as a Countermeasure to the Propaganda of Third Parties*. The author of this document, former Polish foreign minister Anna Fotyga, proposed equating Russian newspapers and television with the terrorist organizations Al-Qaeda and ISIS, which are “conducting active propaganda campaigns in order to compromise European values and interests.” Fotyga called on the Europarliament to fight the “propaganda of the Kremlin” by debunking it.¹⁴ The Western media’s efforts concentrated on reducing the influence of such Russian news outlets as *Russia Today* and *Sputnik*, which offer an alternative point of view on world events and dispel insinuations concerning Russia.

It is hardly realistic to expect the Trump administration to stop these actions in the foreseeable future. The reason for the indefinite continuation of the previous administration’s foreign policy is Trump’s focus on resolving domestic issues. He is gradually turning away from unneeded foreign expenditures, and from supporting countries of no direct benefit to the United States (Ukraine in particular). Meanwhile, the policy and strategy followed in the world arena by

the previous administration cannot be changed overnight. If US presidential candidate Donald Trump showed a certain sympathy for Russia during his electoral campaign, his policy toward it has hardened considerably. *The Wall Street Journal* notes that after his inauguration, Trump made it perfectly clear that relations with Russia would not be as smooth as the Kremlin thinks.¹⁵

International experts nevertheless believe it is still too early to draw any conclusions about Washington's long-term strategy in relations with Moscow. Considering the unpredictability and reactive nature of Trump's actions in the international arena, we can predict the vectors of future US foreign policy strategy only tentatively.

Possible Futures of US Foreign Policy Strategy

- **First**, there will be a further polarization of forces in the international arena under the 45th US president. Some will support the existing unilateral world order with the dominant role of the United States; others will work to strengthen the emerging multipolar world. Evidence of this is the development of the SCO, BRICS, and EAEU structures. Hostile actions against the leaders of these associations – Russia and China – will, therefore, continue. This is especially true for Russia, against which the information war will drag on, but not in the form it took under Barack Obama, where it frequently had a reciprocal effect.
- **Second**, the Trump administration has two approaches to dealing with other countries: applying economic or military pressure (the senselessness of this in relations with Russia was demonstrated under Obama), or reaching agreements on the basis of coinciding interests. It is obvious Trump prefers the second, more pragmatic approach, which is aimed at strengthening the United States' geoeconomic (and not geopolitical) positions in the world. There will be more negotiations on joint solutions to existing problems and developing a peaceful world community. This will be the foreign policy of the United States under Donald Trump.
- **Third**, the United States will continue its political and other actions in the international arena in order to maintain the myth of the priority of American values over all others.¹⁶ The United States and its allies will continue to use its foreign policy arsenal to organize color revolutions and *coups d'état* in countries not to its taste. They have already managed to throw Libya and Syria into chaos, bring about a color revolution in Georgia, and ignite a war in Ukraine. The danger of a unipolar world and the negative consequences of the inappropriate planting of "American values" is thus gradually being recognized in the international community. These consequences are already visible: zones of instability continue to exist in South-

east Asia and Africa; there is an unprecedented influx of refugees into Europe from countries where US diplomats and military personnel were engaged; terrorism has spread throughout Europe; and there is a crisis in European identity with nationalism on the rise. Finally, there is the growth of mutual distrust in Europe itself, and even a desire to reestablish control over national borders.¹⁷

- **Fourth**, where the use of other means from the US foreign policy arsenal is concerned, the Trump administration's approach in this area will influence a number of factors: the national interests of the United States, the actions of other countries in the international arena, differences in the views of Washington and other countries on security issues and the associated need to strengthen US deterrence as it modernizes its conventional and nuclear forces, the country's budget and economic situation, and the opinions of the US Senate (and of Congress as a whole) on the use of the American foreign policy arsenal. Meanwhile, the United States will continue to employ both soft power and a strategy of indirect actions to advance its interests in the world.
- **Fifth**, based on the above, the Pentagon will continue to use the United States' peacekeeping potential that allows it to bring peace to hot spots around the world on terms favorable to Washington. It was under the flag of peacekeeping (and, after September 11, of countering terrorism) that the United States established military bases in the Balkans and Afghanistan, and expanded its presence in Africa.

If armed conflicts break out again in the Transcaucasus or Central Asia, we cannot exclude the possibility that the Pentagon will not take advantage of the opportunity to send in peacekeeping forces under the UN flag. It is also obvious that the practice of resolving armed conflicts through the efforts of other international organizations in which the United States is first among equals (e.g., NATO) will continue. The inequality of US partners in their means of reacting to circumstances in a crisis zone, and in their political and economic resources, results in *de facto* subordination of these organizations' aims and tasks to the policy of Washington. The moment a conflict is ended through peacekeeping mechanisms, the old political structure of a country begins to crumble and a new scheme of mutual relations is imposed. Washington then has the chance of asserting its position in a new system of coordinates. American nongovernmental organizations brought in on the tails of peacekeeping missions then penetrate all pores of the local community, making it dependent on the United States. As a result, American business generally wins tenders on the postwar restoration of the country's economy and the development of its mineral wealth. This is what happened in the Balkans and in Africa, where US companies won a clear victory over their competitors.

- **Sixth**, most of the US sanctions against Russia will not be lifted in the foreseeable future. The anti-Russian sentiment in the US Congress, which levied the sanctions “until such time as Crimea is returned to Ukraine,” something Russia will never do, prevents this. In other matters of global and regional security, we can expect positive results in Russian-American relations, and in results from direct negotiations between presidents Trump and Putin. These will cover the issues of possible joint action against ISIS and Jabhat al-Nusra, reductions in the world’s nuclear arsenals, and solving other problems where the positions of the United States and the Russian Federation coincide within certain limits.
- **Seventh**, if there is a cooling of Sino-American relations and Trump declares a trade war against China, Russia will be faced with a number of problems: a rapid drop in production would mean China would no longer need large volumes of Russian energy sources; China would begin to market its goods everywhere, especially in Central Asia, weakening Russia’s presence there; and unemployment in China would result in a wave of migration into Russia, which would be forced to take measures to limit it. We would, therefore, expect that negotiations to deal with these matters would begin within the SCO and compromises would be reached with which they could be resolved. China and Russia cooperate closely and support each other in matters affecting their key interests. Moscow and Beijing are working hard to create a multipolar world order and favor strengthening the United Nations’ leading role in international affairs, calling on all parties to use peaceful means to settle the conflict in Syria, the nuclear issue on the Korean Peninsula, the situation in Afghanistan, and other world and regional problems.¹⁸
- **Eighth**, based on the dangerous consequences of the United States using its foreign policy arsenal, the SCO member states must, along with Russia and China, oppose those who promise happiness and prosperity through revolutions and other upheavals, for the sake of their own security. It would be advantageous to collaborate more actively in the joint battle against the so-called “three forces of evil” (terrorism, extremism, and separatism), in guaranteeing informational security, and in countering the Western strategy of indirect actions. It would also be expedient to make better use of the SCO buffer zone to mitigate Western efforts to cultivate hostility and distrust among the members of the organization and drive a wedge between them and its leaders – China and Russia. The citizens of the organization must choose: Either submit to Western propaganda or form their own opinions. The task of the member states’ governments is to prevent the West from depriving the SCO countries of their sovereignty and continue their collective efforts to establish a multipolar world based on joint solutions to global and regional problems.¹⁹ Cooperation

between the SCO countries in conjunction with the Eurasian Economic Union and the Silk Road Economic Belt could be an important factor in the integration of the Eurasian region.²⁰

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