

Making Russia Great Again **Divided We (Must) Stand**

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United States President Donald Trump has been in office for just over a month and he has already dominated the world agenda. However, this domination is basically regarding the news waves with his statements and how he has upended decades of US foreign policy, as well as his efforts to dismantle the bureaucracy to fit his thinking. Allies are bewildered, foes are delighted, and no one can predict anything.

Should we be worried? What we have witnessed so far is only statements without any real follow-up. His first remarks were on Greenland, Panama, and Canada. The only changes we have seen so far are Denmark beefing up security in Greenland and Panama moving away from China. His outlandish idea of pushing out Palestinians from Gaza has no chance of happening unless Trump is ready for more bloodshed. Trump is unwilling to use US troops and as long as Hamas is still there who will force them out? Neither Jordan, nor Egypt is willing, let alone has the means to do so. Israel would not want to continue its destruction of Gaza as Netanyahu is more concerned about how to handle Iran.

The only effect of Trump's statements is with regard to the future of Ukraine. Russian President Putin prolonged the war as he waited for the results of the US elections. Had Kamala Harris won the Presidency, US support to Ukraine would have continued, and Putin would have been thinking twice on whether to continue his aggression. Putin's patience paid off.

President Trump has made a total about face on how Washington sees this conflict. Despite well-established facts Trump claims that it was Ukraine that started the war. Secretary of State Marco Rubio along with National Security Advisor Mike Waltz and Special Envoy Ambassador Steve Witkoff, met his Russian counterpart Sergei Lavrov in Saudi Arabia. All three were novices compared to the dean of Foreign Ministers, which showed almost immediately as the US representatives parroted Russian narratives. It was incredible witnessing how the US voted against a United Nations resolution that referred to Russia as the aggressor. It is as if Trump is actually Making Russia Great Again.

One benefit of all this is a final wake up call for the European Union. The EU failed to grasp the changes of US interests for a long time. What Trump is doing is taking it to the extreme but is following a certain logic that has been simmering for years. After the Second World War Washington created a rules based international system along with a number of multilateral institutions, notably the United Nations and others, as it fits its interests. As the leader of the West during the bipolar era the United States was able to use these rules to its benefit. Even when the Soviets prevented certain action the US was able to find a number of allies whether in Viet Nam or in the Middle East.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War the US continued to abide by these rules as long as it was in its interest. However, there were many instances in which several of these international organizations, which had many more members than when they started out, began to act against US interests. Take the World Trade Organization or the Human Rights Council which took decisions against Washington. The United States either withdrew from or prevented these institutions from taking decisions or stopped paying its dues. Whether it was Republican or Democratic administrations, they all had issues with the rules based order and even hesitated for a long time paying contribution to the United Nations. The shelf time of this order was coming to a slow end. We witnessed how hard power made a comeback in the last decade as international organizations failed to deliver diplomatic solutions. As the UN failed to deliver other groups such as the G7, G20 or BRICS were established with limited results. Azerbaijan waited for 30 years for the Minsk process to resolve its dispute over Karabagh with Armenia. In the end Baku used its military to handle the matter. Conflicts spiked, notably in Africa as we have recently seen in Sudan or between Rwanda and Congo. Is anyone stopping them?

As China gained strength the US saw its interest pivot towards the Pacific. However, as a global power it had commitments in Europe and elsewhere. The Russia – Ukraine war as well as the conflict between Israel and the proxies of Iran prevented Washington from concentrating to China. Therefore, a speedy resolution of both these conflicts was in the interest of the US. President Biden, old school that he was, tried using alliances to meet these challenges. Trump does not see Russia as a threat and doesn't care for the Palestinians. He is pragmatic and doesn't waste time on building alliances and wants quick results.

We are only at the beginning of Trump 2.0 and much will depend on the follow up of his statements. There is no need to panic, yet. Nevertheless, the West is divided between those who prefer to abide by international rules and those who don't care about them. Those who do not care are also acting with impunity in their domestic affairs. The EU and especially now the US do not make any remarks regarding human rights issues. So what we are seeing is worldwide fragmentation in which might becomes right. The EU itself is

divided increasingly as far right parties are gaining ground in several members. Whether the EU can hold its own will be the decisive factor for its future. Under these dire circumstances, enlargement of the EU is off the table.

The future of NATO is also becoming debatable. It is not that Trump will withdraw from NATO, but would it activate Article 5 if a member were attacked by Russia? This unpredictability is the major concern. Of course China is assessing carefully every move as it contemplates what to do with Taiwan.

If the US continues to go it alone, along with Russia and China, it falls on Europe to coalesce around a leader who could stand up to these new challenges. The West, divided as it may be, must make a stand. Where our country chooses to position itself will be a determining factor for its future.