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U.S.-Russia Relations: Strategic Rivalry, Political Manoeuvring, and the Shifting Global Order Under Trump's Return

Introduction: The U.S.-Russia relationship has long been defined by strategic rivalry and political tension, with both superpowers manoeuvring to maintain their global influence. As Donald Trump returns to the White House for a second term, questions arise about the future of American foreign policy towards Russia, especially considering ongoing conflicts in Ukraine and the Middle East. This article delves into the shifting dynamics between Washington and Moscow under Trump's leadership, exploring how his economic and military policies contrast with those of his predecessor, Joe Biden. It also examines how Putin's Russia must navigate this changing environment, where trust remains secondary to the pursuit of power and national interests, and where both countries continue to engage in a high-stakes game of political and strategic chess.

Navigating Shifting Alliances and Economic Pressures in the New World Order

As Donald Trump enters the White House, the question arises: will U.S. foreign policy towards Russia shift from one of competition to cooperation? During his first term, Trump suggested a desire to improve relations with Russia, emphasizing dialogue over confrontation. This was in stark contrast to the hardline stance often taken by the U.S. political establishment, especially under the administration of President Joe Biden.

From the perspective of Russian President Vladimir Putin, does the ongoing "war-mongering" rhetoric that has characterized U.S. policy under Biden remain

unchanged, or is there a potential shift with Trump's return? The current conflict in Ukraine and simmering tensions in the Middle East, among other geopolitical flashpoints, seem to persist, with some analysts arguing that these crises serve to maintain U.S. global influence and power. The continued instability could also be seen to leverage material benefits and preserve the American-led international order.

However, the geopolitical landscape has evolved dramatically. While the U.S. still holds significant power, the rise of China and Russia's assertive actions in global affairs suggest that the world is increasingly multipolar. The notion of America remaining the sole superpower appears increasingly untenable, with challenges to its dominance growing in both economic and strategic arenas. Despite this, Putin has often spoken optimistically about Trump, seeing him as a potential ally capable of altering the trajectory of global relations.

Trump's Approach to Ukraine and U.S. Support: A Shift in Strategy?

One of the major points of divergence between Trump and Biden lies in their handling of the Ukraine conflict. Under Biden, U.S. policy has strongly supported Ukraine, provided military aid, and emphasized the defines of democracy in the face of Russian aggression. Trump, however, is more likely to adopt a pragmatic, business-oriented approach, focusing on the strategic value of resources and positioning rather than ideological commitments.

If Trump were to assume office again, there is speculation that he might scale back military support to Ukraine, reducing the flow of arms and resources that has fuelled the ongoing conflict. Some analysts argue that Putin might be miscalculating Trump's position—believing his rhetoric could translate into a drastic shift in U.S. policy, when in fact, Trump could still prioritize U.S. interests in a way that keeps Russia embroiled in the conflict. Trump's past comments suggest a tendency to focus on pragmatic, results-oriented diplomacy, and in this context, he might view the war in Ukraine as a tool to exhaust Russian resources, rather than an ideological battleground.

The Future of U.S.-Russia Relations: Realpolitik or Perpetual Rivalry?

For Putin, the question remains: can he place trust in a Trump-led U.S. administration? If he does not recalibrate his strategy with respect to the White House, he risks getting caught in a long-standing stalemate, where geopolitical gamesmanship continues to undermine potential progress. Both Putin and the U.S. have historically viewed each other as rivals rather than partners. The Cold War legacy looms large, and while Trump's rhetoric may differ from that of Biden,

the fundamental dynamic of competition and mutual distrust is unlikely to change.

Trump's foreign policy, while marked by occasional isolationist tendencies, aims to fortify American power through strategic alliances and positioning, especially in relation to Russia and other global players. His approach could very well involve leveraging Russia's vulnerabilities, especially in Ukraine, without directly challenging Moscow militarily. Trump's tactics could create a new form of tension—one where Russia remains engaged in external conflicts while U.S. power remains intact, albeit through less overt means.

Ultimately, Putin's best course of action may be to prepare for a U.S. leadership that will never fully align with Russian interests. Trump, like Biden before him, is unlikely to forge an alliance with Russia, given the broader ideological and strategic divide. Whether or not the U.S. shifts its foreign policy under Trump, Putin must recognize that the dynamics of global power have evolved, and America's position, while strong, is no longer unassailable.

The Role of the "Deep State" in Shaping U.S. Foreign Policy: Trump's Approach to Europe and Ukraine

U.S. foreign policy is often shaped by powerful institutional forces, commonly referred to as the "deep state." These entities work behind the scenes, ensuring that American foreign interests are aligned with broader geopolitical goals, regardless of the individual in the White House. Despite this, the rhetoric and actions of the president can still significantly influence the trajectory of foreign policy.

Although it may seem counterintuitive, Trump's policies often create friction even with America's European allies, who are increasingly distancing themselves from his leadership. While it is evident that Europe is adjusting its strategy, particularly in the context of the war in Ukraine, Trump has continued to pursue an approach that encourages European states to oppose Russia—using the same fear-driven rhetoric that characterized the Biden administration. His stance, however, remains deeply transactional, with a clear demand for Europe to procure military hardware from the U.S. and maintain support for the ongoing conflict.

Trump's Strategy on Ukraine: A Tactical Approach Rooted in Business Negotiation

Trump's message on the Ukrainian war, as delivered in a recent press conference, is unmistakable. He argued that the war must continue and that the pressure on Russia should be escalated using advanced weaponry. Implicit in his statement

was the notion that Europe must continue to purchase heavy weapons from the U.S. and keep the conflict going until a negotiated settlement is achieved. This is not merely a military strategy but a clear economic directive, where Europe is expected to remain a market for U.S. arms manufacturers.

Putin's advisors should not underestimate this rhetoric. Trump's leadership style is unconventional, shaped by his background as a businessman rather than a traditional politician. He is not a skilled economist in the traditional sense but instead a pragmatic negotiator who operates through leverage, threats, and even blackmail. In this case, Trump's demand for European countries to purchase arms from the U.S. and remain engaged in the war reflects his broader transactional foreign policy.

The Economic and Strategic Interests: A Repetition of Past Deals?

This approach echoes past U.S. strategies in the Middle East, particularly during the Iraq War. Trump's behaviour is reminiscent of the deceptive deals brokered by the U.S. under George W. Bush, where Russia was promised a share of the spoils following Saddam Hussein's removal from power. In that scenario, Russia was led to believe that it would receive a stake in Iraq's oil revenues, only to find itself sidelined when NATO and European powers took control of the region's resources. Similarly, in Libya, Russia was excluded from any significant role in the aftermath of the Gaddafi regime's fall.

In the case of Ukraine, however, the dynamics are different. Ukraine shares both historical and cultural ties with Russia, and its geographical proximity makes it strategically significant to the Russian Federation. Unlike Iraq or Libya, where Russia's involvement was peripheral, Ukraine is seen as a vital space for Russian influence, especially given its role as the heir to the Soviet Union's legacy. Analysts suggest that Putin cannot afford to step back and allow the U.S. to dominate the region, particularly under Trump's leadership. A retreat would not only weaken Russia's position but also risk a significant loss of face.

Putin's Dilemma: A Historical Decision for Russia's Global Standing

If Trump were to allow Ukraine to fall under the influence of the West, it would be seen as a monumental failure for Putin. The comparison with the U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan is inevitable. Just as the U.S. found itself embarrassed by its hasty retreat from the Taliban, Russia risks a similar humiliation if it does not assert itself in Ukraine.

Putin is aware of the stakes. The war in Ukraine represents much more than just a regional conflict; it is about maintaining Russia's standing in the world and ensuring that the West does not encroach further into what is considered Russia's sphere of influence. Therefore, it is likely that Putin will adopt a more resolute stance than ever, determined not to let a potential defeat in Ukraine tarnish Russia's global position.

A Common Thread: Biden and Trump as Two Sides of the Same Coin

For Putin, the challenge presented by the U.S. is not significantly different regardless of whether Biden or Trump occupies the White House. Both leaders are fundamentally committed to challenging Russia's strategic interests, particularly through the former Soviet republics and other regions where Russia has traditionally held sway. The ongoing war in Ukraine is, in many ways, a continuation of the broader U.S. policy to keep Russia entangled in a war of attrition.

Trump's past dealings with Ukrainian leadership suggest a willingness to engage in what some analysts describe as a "shameful deal" with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky. This deal, some argue, involves the exploitation of Ukraine's vast natural resources, particularly in regions like Pokrovsky and Kramatorsk, which are rich in minerals and energy reserves. Under the guise of supporting Ukraine's defence, Trump's approach might well aim at securing American economic interests, turning Ukraine into yet another piece of geopolitical leverage in the broader contest with Russia.

Washington's Policy on Ukraine: A Dangerous Economic Phase for Russia

Washington's policy toward the war in Ukraine has not only remained unchanged but has entered a more perilous economic phase. If President Putin does not take firm and decisive action, Trump could become another significant challenge for Russia, much like the pressures exerted by the Democratic establishment in the past. As highlighted in the introduction, in geopolitics, trust plays a limited role, while national interests are paramount. These interests are the ultimate drivers of policy and decision-making.

Should Putin Place His Trust in Trump?

In this context, the question arises: Should Putin trust and rely on Trump? Today, Trump pursues a policy marked by colonial tendencies and a bellicose stance, particularly when it comes to the people of Gaza. His rhetoric, which often invokes violent imagery and warlike rhetoric, reflects a leader who is willing to deploy force to achieve his objectives. At the same time, Trump's approach seems

to align with the broader interests of American hegemony, pushing for aggressive measures that benefit the U.S. while disregarding regional sensitivities.

Putin, as a strong regional power, remains notably silent on many of these issues. His silence toward the Middle East, particularly regarding Gaza, has led to questions about his leadership and his ability to influence global events. This cautious and somewhat indifferent stance undermines confidence in Putin's role as a challenger to the unipolar world order. While Russia's influence is undeniable, these quiet positions on critical global issues have led to scepticisms about Putin's intentions and long-term strategy.

The Limits of Trust and the Reality of Political Interests

In international relations, trust is secondary to the pragmatic pursuit of national interests. Negotiations with Trump—or with any U.S. leader, for that matter—should not be grounded in the belief that personal rapport will shape the course of action. Instead, these discussions must be driven by a clear-eyed recognition of the power dynamics and the shifting global order. For Russia, engaging with Trump could be useful only if Moscow is able to secure tangible gains—territory or influence—in the new rules of the game. It is essential for Russia to ensure that its interests are safeguarded through a strategic and meaningful position at the negotiating table.

Adopting a Strong Policy Toward Washington

Further advancements in Russia's war positions based on flexibility and tolerance—whether in Ukraine, the Middle East, or elsewhere—are unlikely to yield favourable outcomes. According to experts, Russia must adopt a more robust policy toward Washington, one that avoids falling into the trap of negotiation without clear strategic objectives. In this regard, the Kremlin must capitalize on the rifts between Europe and the U.S., which have been exacerbated by Trump's policies, as a tactical tool in future negotiations. These gaps present an opportunity for Russia to position itself more advantageously in the global order.

Conclusion:

As the U.S. enters a new phase of leadership under Trump's return to the White House, the dynamics of U.S.-Russia relations remain as complex and fraught with tension as ever. While Trump's policies may differ in style from Biden's, they ultimately continue the strategic rivalry that has long defined global geopolitics. With Europe distancing itself from the U.S. and Russia asserting its regional dominance, the battle for influence in Ukraine and the broader Middle East is far

from over. In this high-stakes geopolitical game, trust takes a backseat to the cold calculus of national interests, and Russia's path forward will require astute leadership to navigate the shifting global order. The question remains: can Trump's America and Putin's Russia find a common ground, or will they remain locked in an endless cycle of competition, driven by conflicting ambitions and historical grievances?

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