



# **THE BIDEN ADMINISTRATION: RISKS AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR RUSSIAN DIPLOMACY**

**THE DIPLOMATIC ACADEMY OF RUSSIA'S MFA**

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Like any other major event in international life, election of Joe Biden President of the United States has created challenges and certain opportunities for Russia's foreign policy. It doesn't override general developmental trends of the United States, the West, the world in general and international relations, but rather fits into them. This also applies to Russia's current role and place in international politics. Moreover, in some way it accentuates them and makes the essence of what is happening clearer, thus dotting the i's.

First, the elections left American society more divided than ever before in modern history. Biden failed to achieve the convincing landslide that the Democratic Party and America's liberal elites hoped for. He got 7 million more votes than Trump, but the latter has also reinforced his support base receiving over 74 million votes, or 11 million more than in the 2016 election. The share of votes he received from Hispanic Americans (Latinos) increased as well. The Democrats lost 10 seats in Congress, but gained control in the Senate.

In any case, Trump's coming to the White House is not an aberration, but a pattern. Trumpism, as some observers aptly pointed out, will have as much transformative impact on the country as Reaganism in its time, but this time it will lead America towards withdrawal and protectionism. Some of the sharp edges of Trump's policies will be smoothed out, but fundamental trends will remain, namely, restoring the internal basis of the US economic power, including protectionism and rivalry with China - this time under a soft slogan "Buy American!" and "competition" rather than total confrontation.

"Healing the wounds" will be a challenging process, also because Trump's base believes that "the election was stolen," which is hard to prove



in courts within the constitutional deadlines prior to inauguration of a new president. But the murky electoral system which is fragmented across the states makes systemic and multi-level falsification of results possible, especially in the context of an “undeclared civil war.” The transformation of America, which has become the main victim of globalisation (it has revealed the antagonism between the interests of the investment classes and the rest of the nation), will only slow down. Revenge of the liberals could be a “Pyrrhic victory” if the demands of the Democratic Party's motley electorate (African Americans and other minorities, women, youth, the LGBT community, environmentalists, Hollywood and Silicon Valley) cannot be met at the expense of the interests and demands of born-and-bred White conservative America. Fighting the coronavirus and economic recovery are unlikely to become a unifying agenda for the new administration. The question is whether “soft” measures will resolve the problems, or drastic measures, such as a lockdown, will be needed, which will cause protests. The economy is of primary concern to the Americans (34% of respondents). By winning the election, Biden risks losing the country.

Thus, we will have to deal with an internally weaker America in stagnation and an attempt to “rebuild” it, as Biden himself admitted, or the “America of Brezhnev-Chernenko” with a collective gerontocratic rule that shuns young people and their demands for radical change. This leads us to the conclusion that there will most likely be little or nothing behind Washington's return to “liberal” interventionism, although there will be more than enough rhetoric and enthusiasm on behalf of the actors. It would not be an exaggeration to state that the entire post-war foreign policy and its philosophy of aggressive assertion of “American leadership” in the world was and remains a specific commodity to be consumed by the US elites and



does not reflect the country's genuine national interests. Another point is that America is withdrawing from the period of “wars of choice” abroad, and, as history shows, its armed forces, represented by the same motley social groups as Biden's electorate, are by no means ready to seriously fight against adversaries such as Russia or China that are equal in terms of firepower and technical equipment.

Second, the issue of “Russia’s intervention” is disappearing not only because Biden has gained the upper hand, but also because it is absurd to convince Trump's growing electorate that they are “acting at the behest of the Kremlin.” This would run counter to the goal of achieving “national healing” in the United States (unless, of course, the new government takes the path of “re-educating” its opponents). Russia can also easily live through the “repair” period of transatlantic relations based on anti-Russian sentiment. We can calmly move on to the residual agenda of the Cold War, meaning arms control, which will help Biden prove himself a responsible politician (seemingly unlike Trump), especially so since he was directly involved in it (visit to Moscow and meeting with Andrey Gromyko in 1979 at the height of detente and the ratification of START I in the Senate). We can talk about extending New START without preconditions with an agreement to continue bilateral arms control, thus postponing the request for Beijing to join it (although the US military will continue to insist on it).

The image of a responsible politician will help Biden respond rationally, in accordance with the expectations of the Europeans, to the challenges in the sphere of European security, namely, the non-deployment of medium and short-range ground-based missiles in Europe and the refusal to permanently deploy brigade-level combat units in the Eastern European NATO members. The latter would have buried the existing



structure of our official relations with NATO, which is enshrined in the Founding Act of 1997 and the Rome Declaration of 2002, which established the Russia-NATO Council. Clearly, one shouldn't expect Biden to make any abrupt moves regarding his European policies: he must behave as anti-Trump. The post-Soviet space, though, especially Ukrainian affairs, in which he was personally involved under Barack Obama, is different.

Just like many in the Democratic Party, Biden opposes the method of fracking during production of shale oil and gas, which is likely to result in conflict with the US energy industry (or his own base), and which is unlikely to reduce the pressure on the Germans regarding Nord Stream 2. Overall, it is difficult to presume that Biden's victory will give a "second wind" to the tired European elites, who have their own problems with the protest electorate. They are even less likely to further complicate their position with foreign policy extremism with regard to Russia, which is already associated with Trump. In addition, the sanctions pressure on Russia has reached acceptable limits: if pushed further, it will have a destructive effect on the monetary system controlled by the United States and, most likely, cause objections from its European allies.

Third, there is no need to come up with the positive agenda in our international cooperation with the US or the EU. It already includes fighting the coronavirus, terrorism and climate change. Biden has promised to return America to the WHO and the Paris Agreement. Biden does not want to risk looking like a "Trump's clone," and will move to a softer position on Iran (JCPOA), Cuba and Venezuela. This is more than enough for us to have something to talk about. The world, including the West and international public opinion, needs to see us work together. Overall, it would be in our interest to have the United States return to the fold of the international legal



order with the UN playing the central role. We see eye to eye with the EU on this matter. Trump's radicalism has scared his allies, and everyone would like to return to normal so that "everything is the way it was."

Fourth, it is important to proceed from the position that until the West, including the United States, completes and acquires normalcy in accordance with the requirements of the post-Cold War era, that is, the elite drop their ideological prejudices of the past and recognise the priority of their own development problems, our relations with it are unlikely to become normalised. The election in Germany in September 2021 and France in April 2022 will be quite telling in this regard. Mid-term elections to the US Congress will take place shortly after in November 2022. They will come as a test for the Biden administration. The enthusiasm of their electorate is likely to wane, and the desire of white conservative America to take revenge for the 2020 election is unlikely to weaken. After all, the US elites' problem is not with Trump, but his base, which is not going anywhere. Relations with the EU can wait at the current "zero" level, since we will have things to discuss with Brussels and leading Western European capitals on a broader global agenda.

We shouldn't forget about Brexit, either. Biden called Boris Johnson a "physical and emotional clone" of President Trump. He and Nancy Pelosi stated that they would not let any bilateral trade agreement with Great Britain pass through Congress if London fails to comply with its obligations under the existing EU-UK Withdrawal Agreement in terms of land border regulations with Ireland (which remains in the EU), which would negatively affect a Northern Ireland settlement. Biden has Irish and Catholic roots, and he likes to compare himself to John F. Kennedy.



Fifth, no matter how hard Western observers may try to camouflage this fact, Biden's win objectively meets the interests of China, which will be free from the pressure of total confrontation with the United States and gain time to change gears of its own economic development and focus on domestic demand (as part of the so-called “double circulation” concept) and also to strengthen its investment and technology positions in Western countries. This would help strengthen multi-polarity and further weaken the historical West.

Sixth, during the four years of Trump's presidency, the world has changed a lot, something Biden admits. Trust in America has been irreparably undermined. The split in American society did not go anywhere, and more surprises can be expected from the Americans. In any case, they are no longer reliable. This strengthened the trend towards regionalization of global politics, that is, towards greater influence of regional powers and finding regional answers to regional problems and conflicts, which until recently were the subject of geopolitical competition between the leading global powers. This produced the largest effect in the Middle East and East Asia. After the US election, an agreement has already been signed to create a Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership with the participation of China and US regional allies.

The Western countries themselves provide an example of such regionalization, like Brexit and the prospect for strengthening the “special relationship” between London and Washington, US relations with “old” and “new” Europe, the Visegrad Four, the alliance of Hungary and Poland for “their values” in the EU, and Warsaw and Vilnius’ “Belarusian enterprise.” Probably, the entire complex of our relations with the CIS countries across the regions - European, South Caucasian and Central Asian - deserves to



be rethought, or at least re-considered, from this angle. There's no doubt that we are following the right course on Eurasian integration, including the SCO, the troika with China and India, the CSTO and the Moscow process on Afghanistan, as well as our relations with the ASEAN countries.

Seventh, the way the leading IT companies (Twitter, Facebook and Google), which are in dire need of being prosecuted under antitrust laws, censor Trump and his supporters, provides powerful arguments in favour of online and related international cooperation sovereignty. The EU is already dealing with this, and the Republicans will not leave them alone, either. In any case, the establishment is trying, with the help of corporate censorship, to control social media based on Trump's "lessons" who talked with his base directly bypassing traditional media. As a result, platforms like China's TikTok and the Telegram messenger ensure freedom of speech for Americans, which is very symbolic of a qualitatively new state in the world.

In general, the new US administration creates a reason for a timely fine-tuning of the entire range of our foreign policy issues from the standpoint of not only greater self-confidence, but also greater clarity - including for all other players - of the promising trends in global development and global and regional policy. We are also talking about the smart implementation in global affairs of our achievements of the last two decades. This would also meet the interests of our internal development, which is the ultimate foreign policy resource of any state. Such adjusting/updating in accordance with the requirements of the time will inevitably affect strategic planning and mobilization preparedness, which have most clearly shown itself during the coronavirus pandemic.

