
On the Rostrum of the RAS Presidium

De-Escalation of Tension Is Beneficial for All

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Received December 7, 2020; revised December 7, 2020; accepted December 21, 2020

DOI: 10.1134/S1019331621040043

Let me offer several theses concerning how the results of the past presidential elections in the United States may affect relations in the United States–Europe–Russia triangle. In this case, by Europe, I conventionally mean the EU members, plus Britain, which left it.

Brussels, as a kind of center of the European Union, as well as Berlin, Paris, and other European capitals positively and, many, gleefully perceived the victory of J. Biden in the US elections. The past four years under President D. Trump were the greatest test for Euro–Atlantic solidarity. Trump was the personification, and rather crudely, of the US strategy of recent decades on the strategic decoupling with its European allies.

This is an objective process, caused by the rise in the last 30 years of Asia, especially China, as an economic and political locomotive of globalization, not inferior to the United States. Eurocentrism of international relations largely ended back in 1945. For several decades, world politics was determined by relations between the United States and the Soviet Union. Today, it is the force of attraction and repulsion between Washington and Beijing that is becoming its axis.

Nevertheless, the Euro–Atlantic establishment, the Atlanticists, still maintain a strong position. Their vision of the world is still focused on the West, which they understand as a union of European and other liberal, or rather neoliberal, democracies led by the United States. At the same time, over the past four years, those European politicians who are striving to strengthen the EU’s independence in world affairs have acted with a vengeance. Their understanding of the modern world is based on the principle of strategic autonomy of the European Union, which implies double autonomy—both from the United States and from China, although, of course, with an incomparably greater bias in favor of the United States.

The competition between these two parts of the European political establishment—Euro-Atlanticists and Euro-autonomists—has been growing for a long time. Atlanticists believe that, under Biden, relations between the United States and the European Union can return to the days of B. Obama. Autonomists, while recognizing that the Biden administration will be much more convenient for Europe than the Trump administration, nevertheless do not consider it necessary to abandon the goal of the EU’s strategic autonomy. They ask themselves, “Very well, under Biden, relations with the United States will improve. Yet what will happen in four years if Trump or a similar politician returns to the White House? Let us become more self-reliant regardless of who is at the helm in the United States.” Paris clearly adheres to this position. Berlin is waiting until it becomes clear, not in word but in deed, what Biden’s victory will bring for Europe. Rome and Madrid are keeping track of the behavior of Paris and Berlin.

There are states in Europe that have mixed feelings about Biden’s victory, even if they do not demonstrate this openly. Examples are Britain, Poland, Hungary. The ruling parties in these countries have reaped many benefits from the Trump presidency. It refers to Euro-sceptics of different colors, who used Trumpism for their political purposes both in their own countries and in relations within the European Union. Now they will not have this lever. Even for Berlin, Biden’s victory does not mean that the problems with American opposition to the completion of the Nord Stream 2 project will disappear or at least weaken. Until now, Biden has been very active against it.

In general, no matter what European country we take, the illusion prevails in few places that fundamental changes in US foreign policy and strategy should be expected under Biden.

First, under Trump, if we set aside his eccentricities, much in the behavior of the United States remained, in fact, familiar. Washington’s course regarding the Middle East, except for Iran, and regarding Russia, China, and the European Union generally continued the policy of the previous presi-

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dents. Sometimes Trump went too far, but in most cases, he did not leave the broad mainstream of American politics.

Second, half of the country voted for Trump in the recent elections, and few people will undertake now to predict whether the outgoing presidency will become an exception in history, or whether Biden's rule will be just a pause before returning to Trump-style politics. Many hold that, if not for the pandemic, Trump would have won. In this sense, Biden was lucky.

Third, for Europeans, Biden is more convenient than Trump in many ways but not necessarily in everything. For example, regarding China, Biden will become a more ideologically minded president than Trump. However, this is not so much a matter of his adherence to ideology as the fact that China continues to gain strength. No matter who is in the White House, the competition between the United States and China will grow. In such conditions, the Europeans, as well as Russia, will have less and less space for foreign policy maneuvering.

Under Biden, a further deterioration in relations between Washington and Ankara is quite probable, which also bodes little good for the EU and NATO. At present, they already have more serious problems in interaction with Turkey than ever before.

At the same time, it is obvious that, if in the past four years America had not Trump but a Biden-style politician as president, the United States would not have withdrawn from the Paris Agreement on climate and from the nuclear deal with Iran, as well as from the Trans-Pacific Partnership and would not have blocked the activities of the World Trade Organization and the World Health Organization. On these issues, the United States under Biden will soften its position, which is generally perceived positively in the world.

Obviously, the election of Biden will prove beneficial for both Europeans and Russia in terms of arms control and strategic stability. Still, the situation is rather ambiguous in this respect too: after all, the course towards destroying the Intermediate-Range

Nuclear Forces Treaty was taken under George W. Bush and continued under Obama. Under Bush, the ABM Treaty was destroyed. Nevertheless, with a Democratic president, the chances of prolonging New START are higher, and on better terms, than under Trump. There is also hope that under the new president a more favorable situation will develop for the preservation of the Treaty on Open Skies, even though the United States withdrew from it on November 22. There is a possibility that, under Biden, Washington will not obstruct the remaining 33 parties to this treaty in its implementation, albeit in a truncated form.

A sign that there is potential for improving the situation in arms control is the results of the international project to reduce the risks of military confrontation between Russia and NATO in Europe. Since June 2020, the RAS Institute for US and Canadian Studies and the RAS Institute of Europe have held a series of 20 online seminars on military security on the European continent with the participation of more than 40 leading Russian and Western experts. The result of this work was the development of joint recommendations (<https://www.instituteofeuropa.ru/images/stories/structura/gromyko/publications/rd.pdf>). By the end of the year, this document had already been signed by more than 160 experts from the United States, Russia, and 16 European countries. Among them are former high-ranking politicians and the military (17 former foreign and defense ministers, 25 ambassadors, and 27 retired generals and admirals), as well as nongovernmental experts from 55 institutes, universities, and research centers.

The scale of support for this initiative indicates that not everyone perceives the current extremely difficult situation between Russia and NATO, and therefore the United States, as a natural situation. It is necessary to continue work to de-escalate tensions in their relations, including in the field of conventional weapons in Europe and in the field of strategic stability.

Translated by B. Alekseev