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Probable U.S. Policy Directions under President Trump

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Donald Trump has been elected as the 45th president of the United States. He ran against the fallout from the economic crisis and for reducing U.S. involvement in solving global problems. One can expect that President Trump's general policy will concern selective and conditional U.S. engagement abroad and abandonment of the notion of free trade. Trump's campaign suggests a transactional approach towards foreign policy.

Donald Trump defeated former U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton in America's presidential election on Tuesday. At the same time, the Republicans maintained their majority in both the House of Representatives and the Senate. In retaking the White House, Republicans have gained full control of both the executive and legislative branches of the United States. However, the party's effectiveness will depend on the level of cooperation between the populist president and establishment wing, which suffered from unprecedented division in the course of the campaign (including withdrawn endorsements and the "Never Trump" movement). The election result gives Trump a strong position as he chooses nominees for positions within his administration. His choices for these posts may help alleviate tensions within the party.

The New U.S. Political Map. The key to Trump's victory was not Florida, typically a pivot point in presidential elections because of its 29 electoral votes (EV), where he won by 1.3 percentage points (p.p.) over Clinton. It was essential to his victory, but the most important states were those where Democratic candidates had won for at least the last 24 years—Pennsylvania (20 EVs), Wisconsin (10) and, when confirmed, Michigan (16). The loss of all these EVs was a breakthrough for the Republicans and meant total defeat for the Clinton campaign.

The most critical factor in Trump's victory was the mobilisation of white Americans with no college education, so-called blue-collar workers. According to exit poll data from Edison Research, only 8% of African-Americans and 29% of Hispanics voted for Trump, but 58% of white Americans did so. The majority of people without a college education supported the Republican candidate while most of those with higher education went Democratic. Among the white population with no college, Trump attracted about 14 p.p. more than Mitt Romney in 2012. The higher the share of voters with a bachelor's degree or higher in a state, the lower the support for the Republican candidate.

Another factor in Clinton's defeat was that support from minorities fell below expectations. A higher share of African-American and Latinos voted for Barack Obama four years ago than for Clinton in 2016. Despite Trump's controversial statements, the Democrats failed to rally support for the former secretary of state among those voters. Moreover, fewer women than expected turned away from Trump: in the end, 42% of female voters went with him while 53% of men chose the Republican candidate. This indicates that the negative opinion of Clinton as a candidate and indignation towards the Washington establishment—with her as its symbol—helped to shape American voting preferences that led to her defeat.

Less U.S. Involvement. Pew Research's pre-election surveys looked at the expectations of voters regarding foreign policy. Among those polled, 70% of the Trump supporters leaned towards a belief that the U.S. should only take care of its domestic policies while 56% of Clinton supporters thought that the country should help overcome problems in other countries. Although the majority of voters recognize NATO to be a useful organisation for the U.S., as much as 37% claimed that other Allied countries benefit from it to a greater extent than the U.S. Equally important seems Republican supporters' assessment of free trade. In 2014, 55% assessed free trade as positive, but by October 2016, that had slipped to 24%.

After taking office, President-elect Trump will try to implement goals in line with his main election slogan, "America First."¹ The approach he outlined aims to reduce U.S. involvement in solving global problems in terms of economic and political cooperation and in security matters. The potential for a reduction of U.S. military involvement in the world could affect countries such as Japan and South Korea. Trump probably will also seek to reduce military aid and financial assistance to U.S. allies in the Middle East (except for Israel). Trump also is likely to continue to call on NATO member states to meet the financial commitment of spending 2% of GDP on defence. He might also lay out tough conditions for a continued U.S. military presence in Europe.

Trump's stated intention to intensify political communication with Moscow eventually could lead to the easing of sanctions introduced after Russia's annexation of Crimea and aggression against Ukraine. In addition to distancing the U.S. from European countries, a challenge may be if Trump takes a transactional approach to Russia, especially if an agreement would violate the interests of U.S. allies.

The upcoming administration's support for the non-proliferation of nuclear weapons remains unknown. Trump has strongly criticized the U.S. agreement with Iran worked out under President Obama. It is also worth noting that Trump made a statement during the campaign encouraging Japan and South Korea to acquire their own nuclear weapons, which could raise tensions in the region. Less U.S. involvement in Southeast Asia may also lead to a consolidation of China's assertive policies and increase their significance in the region.

Meanwhile, the Republicans' victory in Congress will have a significant impact on the new administration's policies. The new president will probably have a strong position at the head of his faction, thanks in part to the ability to give Republicans official posts in the federal administration. This would then free him to implement foreign policy without serious consultations with Congress.

In other areas, Trump represents significant change in U.S. policy. In his campaign, he was highly critical of actions to mitigate climate change and he repeatedly said U.S. policy on the issue would be reviewed. It's expected that Trump and his administration will try to undermine the Paris climate agreement, which would weaken the relationship between the EU and the U.S., and with developing countries, including the least-developed countries most vulnerable to climate change. The most radical potential step would be if the U.S. were to withdraw from the group of signatories of the agreement, which is possible in November 2019, three years after its entry into force.

In another area, Trump's statement about the need to restore an "element of unpredictability" to U.S. foreign policy actions may lead to the perception of America as an unreliable partner and uncertain ally. This position based on selective and conditional engagement would affect the ability of the U.S. to achieve compromise.

Also, he said he plans to reject the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), an agreement with 11 countries in the Pacific region, which may result in China's economic domination of Southeast Asia. On the other hand, if negotiations on the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) with the EU also collapse, the transatlantic states could lose the opportunity to influence the regulatory system of world trade.

Conclusions. After assuming the U.S. presidency on 20 January 2017, Trump seems intent on implementing his campaign pledges, including a reduction of U.S. engagement abroad and withdrawal from support for free trade. It may be expected that the new president will be a very difficult partner to negotiate with on common goals and that less U.S. engagement in solving global problems will negatively affect international relations. It also poses a risk that Russia and China will fill the void left after a U.S. withdrawal. It will be particularly sensitive and risky in the transition period when Trump's administration is still being formed. That may be the moment when other countries test the assertiveness of the new U.S. government and its willingness to take action.

Trump's opposition to the current balance of power in the world and international relations may ultimately lead to the weakening of NATO and a deterioration in relations with the EU. The new U.S. administration will likely focus on direct relations with Russia and China, bypassing partners and allies in Europe and Asia. One should also expect a re-evaluation of U.S. policy in areas in which Obama's tenure played a dominant role, such as the nuclear negotiations with Iran, economic sanctions against Russia, involvement in Southeast Asia and climate policy.

¹ More about Donald Trump's foreign policy guidelines presented during the campaign—see. M. Wąsiński, "Foreign Policy in the Election Campaign of Donald Trump, *PISM Bulletin*, no. 38 (1388), 16 June 2016.