

With Biden, Don't Expect this 'Cold War' to Thaw Anytime Soon

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Russian President Vladimir Putin is no stranger to changes in the US administration. In the last couple of decades, as a member of Boris Yeltsin's office, then as both President and Prime Minister he has dealt with Republican and Democrat administrations in equal measure. And every four years, around the time of the US elections, he is asked what he expects from the new American President and his government. In response, he gives pretty much the same answer every time: US administrations come and go, but the policies remain the same.

Prior to his election in 2016, there was some hope and expectation, from Russia included, that Donald Trump's foreign policy would be different from previous administrations. There was a view that Trump, having expressed [dissatisfaction](#) with America's 'nation-building' abroad and with the 'disaster' of the Iraq war, would end the never-ending cycle of regime change wars embarked on by the US military-industrial complex. Given Trump's previous positive rhetoric on Russia and Putin, and experience of doing business in the country, it was also thought that his presidency could mark the start of a new beginning in US-Russia relations. Thanks to the Democratic lobby and weight of the US neoliberal establishment however, Trump found himself powerless to control the narrative around him in which he would be punished for four years for having defeated Hillary Clinton in the election. For what real influence can a president have when even his tweets are censored by Twitter?

Being merely a pawn in the hands of hawks around him (Mike Pompeo and John Bolton to start with) Trump therefore proceeded to make certain moves which only worsened the relationship with Russia further. Arming Ukraine, maintaining a presence in Syria, piling sanctions on Russia and using every possible leverage to prevent the Nord Stream 2 pipeline, are just some of the ways the Trump administration has 'contained' Russia. In addition, the US withdrew from both the Intermediate Nuclear Forces Treaty and has declared no interest in renewing the START (Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty) when it expires in 2021.

The moral of the story? The US President is actually quite limited in his ability to realize his own policies. President Putin in a recent interview cited the example of Barack Obama, who when he came to power, expressed his intention to close the controversial Guantanamo Bay military prison. Did he end up doing it? No. There are many such examples of US Presidents having to toe the party line, and Donald Trump has been no different. Therefore, when it comes to Joe Biden, it's likely that we will see a continuation of the anti-Russian rhetoric, and to an even greater extent. For Joe Biden has been decisively critical of Russia throughout his presidential campaign, and worked in previous governments who took a harder line. He himself is a relic of the Cold War and therefore fails to shake off the mindset

that goes with it. Biden has even gone as far as to say that Russia is the 'biggest threat' to the liberal international order, making baseless accusations that it is attempting to destroy both the EU and NATO.

Trump was of course not a fan of NATO, which he referred to as 'obsolete', with the businessman in him telling him it was a waste of money, along with WHO membership, which he also gave up. Biden, on the other hand, has referred to Article 5 of the NATO treaty, which reads that an attack on one member of the transatlantic military alliance is considered an attack on all, as a "sacred obligation". Indeed, Biden has always been a staunch supporter of the organization. In one notorious [video](#) he bragged about calling for the 1999 NATO bombing of Serbia: 'I was suggesting that we bomb Belgrade; I was suggesting we send in American pilots and blow up all the bridges on the Drina'. Doesn't bode well for Russia, does it?

When it comes to the personal relationship between Biden and Putin, it has been said that the two don't like each other, which could hamper any cooperation. This could be due in part to Biden's labelling of the Russian President as a 'tyrant' and 'dictator', rhetoric which the Kremlin has no doubt got used to from its western 'partners' but which nevertheless will not be forgotten. Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Ryabkov is amongst those who remember the role played by Biden in the Obama administration and speaks of the '[ugly behaviour](#)' staged by the White House after Trump won the 2016 election. Indeed, the Russian government has yet to congratulate Biden with his victory, which although is understandable given the controversy surrounding the result and Republican allegations of voter fraud, is significant.

It's also worth pointing out that Biden leads a neoliberal movement which is inherently Russophobic and which has spent the last few years painting Russia as enemy number one. For many in the US now, Russia has become a dirty word, after the fantasy that was 'Russiagate' in which it was alleged, without any real foundation, that Russia had influenced the US elections and Donald Trump was working for Putin. Russia and its president have become such useful scapegoats in the political arena that we are unlikely to see this tactic abandoned by the Democrat camp.

The road ahead for Russian-US relations is therefore likely to be rocky. The current 'cold war' in which we find ourselves will no doubt remain the status quo for some time, and possibly even intensify under Biden's leadership. Unfortunately in these circumstances, the chance of it transforming into a hot war, by some unforeseen event, is therefore high. As the late Stephen F Cohen asserted in his book 'War with Russia', the current confrontation between the two powers is more dangerous than at any time during the previous cold war. We can only hope that Russia's coolheaded pragmatism will be enough to keep this cold war from hotting up.

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