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Assessment of tomorrow

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Trump's foreign policy continuity—fascination with dictators, dictatorships, and deal-making

When Donald Trump declared last December that he would be a dictator "except for day one" if re-elected president, both supporters and opponents took him seriously.

Some of his supporters even accepted having a president who would "abuse power as retribution," even if only for a day, while the rest did not hold him responsible for this announcement and continued to support him.

The Democrats, in particular, took him seriously. Eight months after Trump's disturbing promise, Kamala Harris labelled him a dictator in her election campaign if he were to move back into the White House.

"Donald Trump wants to turn our democracy into a dictatorship," said the Democratic presidential candidate in Las Vegas at the beginning of July.

Trump's consistently high ratings in the pre-election surveys confirm that his declaration from last December about being a dictator, if only for a day, did him no harm.

He probably also hopes that his benevolent attitude towards dictators and dictatorships around the world will not hurt him either. However, could this tendency of his still become an important criterion in the November presidential elections?

Voters care about foreign policy

Americans are no longer as disinterested in foreign policy as they have been for decades. 40% of them regard foreign policy as one of the top five issues that the future president and his administration should address, according to an earlier poll.

"Divisions over key foreign policy issues, from the war in Ukraine to Gaza, could play a pivotal role in determining the outcome of the 2024 presidential election," said Michael Cox, emeritus professor of International Relations at LSE.

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Trump might have underestimated Americans' interest in their country's foreign policy, as his affection for dictators and autocratic regimes around the world, which he displayed during his presidency, has not changed during the election campaign.

This style of conducting foreign policy was a confirmation of Trump's announcement before his 2016 election victory that he would conduct diplomacy like a business in his corporation and that he would make deals.

Making deals

According to campaign promises, Trump will not change such a strategy, which also means continuing direct and close communication with global autocrats.

Since December last year, he has persistently repeated that he could "have that done in 24 hours" regarding the war in Ukraine, given that it would be enough to talk to the presidents of Russia and Ukraine.

Even the Russian ambassador to the UN, Vassily Nebenzia, whose leader and government want Trump's return to the White House, said in early July that "the Ukrainian crisis cannot be solved in one day."

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to traditional American principles that run deeper than the globalist orthodoxies of recent decades - Robert C. O'Brien

Trump's camp defends his tendency to implement US foreign policy by making deals with autocrats around the world. This is an essential part of Trump's policy of discontinuity with the way politics has traditionally been done in Washington.

"Trump has never aspired to promulgate a 'Trump Doctrine' for the benefit of the Washington foreign policy establishment. He adheres not to dogma but to his own instincts and to traditional American principles that run deeper than the globalist orthodoxies of recent decades," Robert C. O'Brien, one of the US National Security Advisers during Trump's presidential mandate, wrote recently in Foreign Affairs.

One person's instinct against detailed strategies and policies is a clear indication that Donald Trump, should he become US president, will continue to deal with world relations without much concern for the work and attitudes of the US institutions whose job it is.

Furthermore, Trump's foreign policy would lead to the complete cancellation of the current US presence in the world as we have known it for decades.

Mr O'Brien criticised the current Joe Biden administration's commitment to defending "the rules-based international order," describing this concept as a "fictional abstraction."

Rule-based order as an excuse

This position comes very close to the views of Moscow, which justifies its aggression against Ukraine with, among other things, the injustice of the "rule-based world order" created after the Second World War, which Putin described as a "product of colonial mindset."

Furthermore, Trump's position coincides with China's opposition to the current model of global relations, which is why Xi Jinping's rule is characterised by the promotion of a new global order, in which China would understandably be its sponsor.

> "The old rules-based international order doesn't really exist anymore" - Ben Rhodes

But the opposing camp does not dispute the decline of the so-called "rule-based world order." "The old rules-based international order doesn't really exist anymore," Ben Rhodes, US Deputy National Security Adviser in the Barack Obama administration, wrote recently.

"Core institutions such as the UN Security Council and the World Trade Organisation are tied in knots by disagreements among their members. Russia is committed to disrupting U.S.-fortified norms. China is committed to building its own alternative order," said Mr Rhodes.

Hence, Trump's insistence on "draining the swamp" in Washington, at least when it comes to foreign policy, means nothing other than a justification for dealing with foreign affairs again in a way that is much closer to autocrats around the world than to American democracy.