Tomorrow's Affairs
Analysis of today
Assessment of tomorrow

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The destruction of the transatlantic West will weaken America itself

The North Atlantic is undergoing sweeping historical changes as the rift between Europe and America widens.

Under President Donald Trump, the United States is seeking to create a world order based solely on spheres of interest, and dominated by the "big three" global powers: the US, China, and Russia.

To achieve this, the Trump administration is prepared to abandon the traditional foundations of US influence: its network of alliances to the values that have underpinned American democracy for 250 years.

While Trump's foreign policy tends to "follow the money," MAGA (Make America Great Again) ideology is also playing a role in this dark vision.

As Trump and his MAGA movement see it, Europe is the second major battleground (after the US itself) that needs to be conquered.

And because this will require breaking up the European Union, the decades-long transatlantic alliance has given way to enmity in remarkably short order.

It is worth dwelling on how radical a break this is. The US emerged from World War II as the principal victor in both the European and Pacific theaters.

It then went on to defeat the Soviet Union in the Cold War, which was not just a costly thermonuclear arms race between two superpowers, but also a struggle between two socioeconomic and normative systems.

The Western combination of individual liberty, democracy, and the market economy was pitted against the Soviet one-party police state, with its sclerotic planned economy.

The choice between two alternatives was clear, and America's model ultimately prevailed. The Soviet Union collapsed, dissolved, and vanished, leaving a Russian rump that, unable to reconcile with a post-imperial identity, became increasingly revanchist.

Europe's great failure

But with Trump's election and then re-election, Americans made clear their frustration with serving as the world's policeman and shouldering whatever burden that entailed.

Thus, Europe's great failure over the past decades after the end of the Cold War is that it did not assume more responsibility for defending its own borders – a precondition for preserving sovereignty.

From the Kremlin's perspective, Europe's vulnerability was an opportunity.

The new US National Security Strategy, together with Trump's plan to end the war in Ukraine – which largely endorses Russia's maximalist positions – leaves no doubt about this administration's objectives.

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In a typically deranged fashion, Trump and his MAGA acolytes claim that the EU is an anti-American project that must be destroyed.

Countries that have been friends and allies for eight decades are now being portrayed as adversaries, while Vladimir Putin's Russia is to be admired.

By staking out these positions, Trump has effectively dismantled the transatlantic West.

In its place, he is creating an imperial America to mirror Russia's imperial dreams, as well as those increasingly being pursued by China. In this new world order, raw power, not the rule of law, is all that matters.

Betraying Europe

In pursuit of this vision, Trump has made George Orwell's gifts of prophecy look even more impressive.

In Orwell's classic dystopian novel, 1984, the world is similarly divided between three continental powers. Under Trump, the traditional values of American democracy have become obstacles to sweep aside, while foreign authoritarian regimes have become models to emulate.

Perhaps Trump hopes that by betraying Ukraine – and, by extension, Europe – and siding with Putin, he can draw Russia onto his side in the struggle with China.

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But Putin is not going to play ball. He knows that without China at his side, Russia is far too weak to maintain its precarious great-power status.

Besides, both China and Russia are seeking a reordering of the global hierarchy at America's expense. Trump will fail; the only question is the cost of his failure.

The destruction of the transatlantic West

It should be obvious that the destruction of the transatlantic West will weaken America itself.

Trump and his MAGA followers might tell themselves that America is self-sufficient, but they are mistaken.

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The US needs Europe at least as much as Europe needs America. The strategy Trump is pursuing amounts to self-sabotage.

Betraying longstanding US allies will not make Putin more inclined toward peace.

On the contrary, he will be further emboldened. Drunk from his victory over the West in Ukraine, he will start planning his advance westward. A ceasefire on his terms is nothing but a tactical pause.

Already, the risk of a wider war is rising along Eurasia's main axes: in the Far East between China and Japan, over Taiwan, and on NATO's eastern flank. Europe must prepare for hard times ahead.

This dangerous geopolitical crisis has been compounded by its own weak growth and failure to keep pace with China and America technologically.

This gap must be closed. Sovereignty may come at a high price, but Europe's freedom is priceless.

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