TA Tomorrow's Affairs

Analysis of today
Assessment of tomorrow

By: Timothy Snyder

Putin is strong only because of Trump's feebleness

Earlier this year, when I first described the guiding principle of Donald Trump's foreign policy as superpower suicide, it was already obvious that the US President's war of whimsy against Iran was a strategic catastrophe.

Five months on, this failure is all the more glaring. Worse, it has provided Trump with another pretext to reward Russia. Weakness has begotten more weakness.

Iran knew from the beginning that Trump would never commit to an invasion, ensuring that it could escalate at will.

The United States has been forced to shrink its footprint in the Middle East and even to withdraw strategic bombers from the United Kingdom—until recently an unthinkable prospect.

Meanwhile, Iran's allies can strike American allies with impunity throughout the region: the Houthis attack the Riyadh airport in Saudi Arabia's capital, and there is not much anyone can do about it.

At home, the war is extremely unpopular, not least because it has raised fuel prices.

Ahead of the midterm elections, this vulnerability has dovetailed with Trump's other main weakness: his long-held desire to submit to Russian President Vladimir Putin.

Trump finds a way to help Putin

Trump, on whom the Kremlin pinned its hopes for victory in Ukraine, has largely done Putin's bidding, mostly ending American weapons transfers and sales to Ukraine and, just last week, agreeing to buy Russian diesel, before blaming high fuel prices on Ukraine.

The injustice of these accusations is palpable in Ukraine, where Russia has been destroying energy infrastructure with ballistic missiles and gas stations with drones.

Ukrainians risk their lives to refuel, and Americans pay more at the pump, because Trump chose a calamitous defeat in Iran over support for Ukraine.

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The apparent motivation behind this deal with the Kremlin—a quick fix for lower diesel prices before the midterms—makes no sense.

It is unclear that Russia can actually deliver the fuel, given its domestic shortages.

Like a typical Trump deal, this could very well end with US taxpayers paying double or triple the price for something that was advertised as a gift.

Let us imagine, however, that Russian ships dock in American ports with diesel. This would most likely mean that Russia had stiffed its other partners to make Trump feel grateful.

The supply of diesel on the global market would not change, nor would its price.

Trump is aligning the US with Russia

But the symbolism is unambiguous: Trump is visibly aligning the US with Russia. The only effect of easing sanctions is to help Putin.

Of course, given that Russia has offered lucrative oil deals to Trump's "negotiators," who happen to be the US president's son-in-law and friend, one cannot rule out that it results in personal payoffs.

At this point, the US does not have a foreign policy in the normal sense; it has clans that seek to transform Trump-made disasters into grifts.

This commingling of weakness and corruption

is another hallmark of superpower suicide.

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US strength is based on the rule of law. Buying diesel from Russia is effectively illegal, given that a 2022 law prohibits it unless Russia withdraws from Ukraine. Trump also just signed a law that provides for tougher sanctions against Russia and punitive tariffs on countries that import Russian fuel.

It not only makes the whole situation even more grotesque, but also renders US law meaningless, further weakening the country.

Even if one attempts to enter the MAGA mental world and imagine that Trump's foreign-policy priorities are exactly as he says, his wildly contradictory actions toward Iran and Russia generate a self-reinforcing cycle of weakness.

Trump is helping Iran

As everyone knows, Iran and Russia are close allies that supply each other with weapons and intelligence.

Iran supplies Russia with drones and even sent drone trainers to occupied Ukraine early in the war.

Russia is openly backing Iran in its war with the US, while its nuclear specialists are hard at work in the country.

Trump's calls for Ukraine to elect a new president endorse the notion that invaders, not voters, should choose governments - Volodymyr Zelenskyy

By sending dollars to Russia, Trump is helping Iran, courting a leader who is supporting his enemy.

Trump's openly pro-Russian foreign policy has created a more dangerous world.

If Russia wins its full-scale war against Ukraine, aggressors everywhere will be emboldened.

And Trump's calls (parroting Russian propaganda) for Ukraine to elect a new president endorse the notion that invaders, not voters, should choose governments.

He seems to believe that Ukraine must stop defending itself against Russia, while Russia refuses to submit or negotiate a peace proposal.

Putin is strong only because of Trump's feebleness

The reason why Putin has no intention of negotiating is Trump's pliability. Trump decided that the US should buy Russian diesel after a phone call with Putin to discuss a plague scare at a Siberian laboratory.

Such an extraordinary change of subject suggests that Trump turns to putty before Putin.

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The irony is that Putin is playing a very weak hand in the war against Ukraine; he is strong thanks only to Trump's feebleness.

Trump, unable to win his foolish war against Iran, blames its consequences on Ukraine, and uses the lie to justify ending sanctions against Russia, thereby extending that war as well.

This is war through weakness, not only as a fact, but almost as a doctrine. America must lose, lose, and lose again, and wars must be started, prolonged, or promoted, so that Trump and his cronies can make money.

To pretend that Trump can be trusted with power of any sort is to participate in America's ongoing superpower suicide.

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