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Era of Uncertainty and “Trump Factor”

US President Donald Trump is only accelerating the processes of a new world order being shaped up, by pushing countries to search for preferable solutions outside the West’s sphere of influence

January 2018 and April 2025. Two dates in history, which have a lot in common and a lot of what is significantly different. The first date is related to the imposition by the administration of the recently elected, unknown US President Donald Trump of higher tariffs on goods, imported primarily from China. The second date is related to the tariffs on goods from 211 countries and territories, slapped by Trump early in his new presidential term.

His actions may sometimes seem absurd or, at least, rash. These are quite obviously promoting a destruction of the world order, favorable for the USA, but only reflect the start of a period of global changes. It is not Donald Trump with his strong “rebel” image, who is breaking the long-standing order. He only accelerates the decay of an obsolete system.

The Washington administration believes that the measures taken are aimed precisely at maintaining dominance of the USA. Washington assumes that this can only be done by force, either military, political or economic one. Sending an aircraft carrier

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group to the Red Sea would at once make the Houthis, Iran and others more amenable. Imposing tariffs would bring the whole world to its knees. However, the processes taking place in the world cannot be resolved by force and do not bring the result, desired by Washington.

In 2018 the Washingtonian “rebel” deeply scared the international community. Today many countries have realized that the destruction of the Western-centric world that emerged after the collapse of the USSR is inevitable. “The existing world order is being called into question not only in the sphere of geopolitics. Now there are major cracks along all key lines, - says Victor Kuvaldin, D.Sc. (History), Professor, Head of the Department of Social Sciences and Humanities at the Moscow School of Economics (MSU). – Unfortunately, the United States have no experience of equal partnership, nor the slightest inclination towards it, that’s why it would be totally unrealistic to expect any constructive approach from Washington”.

One could, of course, wait out four years, just like in 2018. This is the last term of Donald Trump in office, one could hope the boss in Washington would be replaced by someone who would not be as heavy-handed. But it is already abundantly clear, that it is not about Trump and his nostalgia for the industrial America of the mid-XX century at all, and that other American administrations will keep trying to maintain the hegemony of their country. Maybe, these efforts will not be as extravagant, like a cavalry charge, but they will be as painful, and probably even more catastrophic. Washington has only one goal, and means for its achievement may vary insignificantly.

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This is why there are at least three clear-cut positions in today's world.

The first position is expressed as being ready to beg for terms on one's knees, sacrificing sovereignty and national identity. This has been the decision of governments of 75 states, essentially hit by tariff sanctions of the USA. Many of these had no other way out – they are completely dependent on the White House's favor.

The second position is based on the understanding of one's own strength and that national interests must not be sacrificed, that looming global issues cannot be resolved by "good quarrel", but require peaceful dialogue, acceptance of happening changes and joint development of a new order with clear, more equal conditions and interaction rules.

The third position is to avoid any escalation with the old-school globalists, represented by the USA and the West, but to try to mitigate the uncertainty, fueled by Trump and other Western countries. This category includes a significant part of the Arab East, the Asia-Pacific region, Africa and Latin America.

For many ASEAN countries, for example, the MAGA policy (Make America Great Again), declared by Trump, creates major risks of reduction of foreign direct investment (FDI). If Trump succeeds in stimulating American companies to bring their capitals back home, then Singapore will suffer the most damage. The country accounts for $295 billion of American investment out of $346 billion for the whole South-East Asia region.

Vietnam, Thailand, Malaysia and Indonesia are also in the risk zone. They have significant trade surpluses with the USA, and President Trump has been very clear that he won't let anyone "rob" America.

Decisions of the Washington administration have made even their most long-standing and reliable partners doubt validity of the previously executed documents. Washington could refuse to honor these any time, should it consider them disadvantageous. This is why some countries are rushing to update their agreements in the hope that Washington will be merciful and will impose less deadly tariffs. Others are looking for options to expand cooperation with other countries, particularly with Russia, despite the sanction walls being erected around it.

There are several reasons to choose Russia. Moscow has demonstrated that it is possible to confront ill-intentioned actions of the West and to uphold national interests. Being under pressure of the unprecedented sanctions, one could develop in all areas, including electronics, economy, technologies, science. Russia is also attractive due to its clear-cut foreign policy, focusing on development of a new, more equitable world order, and not through strength, which is quite enough, but through

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dialogue.

This is the reason why the trade turnover between Russia and, let's say, the United Arab Emirates last year reached up to the record $10 billion, of which a little less than $3 billion could be attributed to the city of Moscow. And the trade turnover with Indonesia has set up yet another record, having increased twofold versus 2023. It is telling that the Prime Minister of Malaysia visited Russia twice in the last three years.

Malaysia is interested in an accelerated development of trade and economic ties with the RF, despite the risk of sanctions and pressure from the West. The local business has been very scared by 24% American tariffs. By 2024 results, over 50% of all Malaysian exports to America, were made up, particularly, by various small electronics, microchips, semiconductor manufacturing equipment etc.

Naturally, any tariffs could be passed over to consumers by including them into prices, but this will not even help maintain supply volumes. This is why Malaysia is trying to minimize the damage from the actions of Washington, by looking for promising joint investment projects in other parts of the world. Kuala Lumpur needs reliable contracts for export and import of knowledge, innovative services and goods, food, energy resources, fertilizer, drugs and many others. By 2024 results, Russia became a key importer of Malaysian electronics – more than 22% of total Malaysian exports in this category, and the mutual trade amounted to $3,2 billion.

A synthetic rubber plant, built with Russia's participation, is successfully operating in Malaysia. Russian fish and seafood supplies have grown by 35%. Malaysia receives potassium and nitrogen fertilizers under long-term contracts. Counter deliveries of agricultural products are growing, including products under Halal Islamic standard.

An increasingly growing share of trade with Malaysia is contributed by Russian regions. In 2024, according to Sergey Cheremin, Minister of the Government of Moscow, Head of the Department for External and International Relations, the Russian capital has doubled its exports of non-resource, non-energy products to South-Eastern Asia countries, the largest recipients being Malaysia, Indonesia, Vietnam, Thailand and Laos.

In the opinion of Cheong Loon Lai, Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of Malaysia in Russia, a real partnership between the two countries is being born right now, and the factor of anti-Russian sanctions multiplied by the US tariff wars is creating a strong impulse for its development.

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Alexander Troitsky

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