

Trump's Dramatic U-Turns

News:

On April 12, 2017, the US President, Donald Trump, reversed his position on a number of foreign policy issues, for which he was effectively elected for. Trump presented himself as anti-Establishment and someone who represented the true American populace who lost their jobs to China and who the political elite have neglected. His pitch was that he was part of the alternative right, who believed nationalism came before globalization and American disengagement coming before the needs of corporate America's foreign profits. On April 12, Trump abandoned 4 of his key campaign promises, which must be a world record.

Comment:

Trump made so many statements in support of Russia during his campaign that many considered Russia to have influenced the outcome of the Presidential election. Trump praised the ruling capabilities of Vladimir Putin and mentioned on more than one occasion he got on with Putin well. When Trump announced Rex Tillerson as US Secretary of State who at the time was leading ExxonMobil and with had significant contracts in Russia, Trump positioned himself as someone who would be able to work and deal with Russia. But on April 12 Trump stated: ["We're not getting along with Russia at all. We may be at an all-time low in terms of a relationship with Russia."](#) The suggestion that Russia and the US could become allies was always a lie, but served Trump well to get into the White House. For America a continental power is a direct challenge to America's position in the world and something the US knows well from its decades long battle with the Soviet Union. Whilst today's Russia is not Soviet Union, Russia still seeks to expand influence beyond its borders. Both Russia and the EU could be continental powers and for the US, it does not want to see one dominated by the other. The US needs to keep both Russia's and Europe's power in check, and an effective way of doing this involves allowing them to confront one another. Therefore what is good for the US is the exact opposite of what is good for Russia. There is little to no middle ground for compromise. Trump's statements finally aligned with the ground reality - the inherent conflict of strategic interests between the US and Russia.

Criticizing China was central to Trump's bid for presidency. He criticized China for manipulating its currency and using unfair trade practices. Trump was extremely aggressive towards China and made this a mainstay of his election campaign and promised to rectify this imbalance once in office. It was these reasons that the summit made between Donald Trump and Chinese premier Xi Jinping in Mar-a-Lago on April 6th and April 7th all the more important. The summit closed with friendly words about mutual understanding and respect including a shared interest in what the US Treasury Secretary, Steven Mnuchin, described as the ["need to get to a more](#)

[balanced trade environment.](#)” But it transpires now Trump will now not be following through on any of these electoral campaign pledges. Trump has now revealed that the US will offer a good trade deal to China in exchange for help with North Korea, but also that he would [no longer consider China a currency manipulator.](#) It is very likely that North Korea’s imminent achievement of integrating a nuclear warhead onto a medium-range missile forced this change in position.

Trump in his campaign for the White House called NATO obsolete stating that the US pays too much to ensure the security of allies, he said: [“NATO is costing us a fortune, and yes, we're protecting Europe with NATO, but we're spending a lot of money.”](#) Now it is perfectly clear the rhetoric implying that the US was ready to abandon NATO was simply campaign talk. His office attempted to present the campaign promises not being literal. But on 12 April, standing next to NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg, Trump made an unequivocal reversal on NATO when he stated, [“I said it \[NATO\] was obsolete. It’s no longer obsolete.”](#) Trump’s rhetoric served as a threat to European countries to send the message that Washington would focus on bilateral relations more than the NATO. However, those that subscribe to multilateralism and internationalism in the US policymaking establishment forced the change.

Similarly, Trump said the US would leave NAFTA as it was costing American jobs and begin construction of a border wall to stop Mexican illegals entering the US. Trump has now downgraded his NAFTA rhetoric from leaving the association to revising the current agreement. The much publicized wall is not even close to beginning, it has yet to receive any congressional funding and it already faces at least one lawsuit.

US presidents operate in a world of constraints and limitations despite their rhetoric to the contrary. In Trump’s case, he confronts a reality which will be more problematic due to the extreme positions he took during his electoral campaign. Trump is a weak president as he lost the popular vote and lacks broad support from the Republican Party. His approval rating, according to Gallup, is around 41%, among the lowest presidential approval ratings this soon after Inauguration Day. Trump won office by portraying himself as a radical isolationist, but such an extreme stance alienated him from those whose support is necessary to govern. This is why Trump has now made moves to shift his position on key issues hoping to gain support. Like all previous presidents, the reality has made campaign promises outdated.

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