

Trump and Eurasian Foreign Policies

ZORAWAR DAULET SINGH

The United States' (us) political revolution or convulsion, depending on where one sits on the ideological spectrum, has produced ripple effects across the world. While the vast network of allied states in West Europe and East Asia have their own reasons in keeping the "American goliath" engaged in these areas, Eurasia's rising powers confront a different challenge. The principal challenge for these states is one of adapting to a lighter American footprint while also responding with their own order-building ideas to prevent a destabilising power transition.

Let us explore what the three Eurasian powers—Russia, China, and India—were doing on the world stage, and the possible impact of Donald Trump's ascent on their foreign policies. Before the November 2016 election in the us, each of these three countries had been pursuing different roles based on a common assumption that primacy and exceptionalism would remain the default image of American policymakers.

Shared 'Special Responsibility'

The basic contours of Russian foreign policy were set in 2000, when Vladimir Putin assumed power. The goal was restoring Russian strength and prestige, if not to its erstwhile status, then at least commensurate with the material resources of that vast country. Through the 2000s, Moscow gradually pushed back to the us's expansion in its "near abroad." Each thrust outwards was timed carefully and backed by resolve and power. The turning point came in 2015 when Russia finally outflanked the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) by breaking out of its own region and positioning itself in West Asia. The Syrian intervention was part of a prolonged contest between NATO and Russia, and it led to what many at the time declared was the second Cold War. The presumption that

American elites would maintain their basic world policy drove a series of geopolitical moves, including a significant deepening of the Russia–China relationship.

The dramatic collapse of the mainstream political position within the us has led Moscow to re-evaluate its strategies to rein it in. Nothing has given the Kremlin more hope than Trump's own exhortations, consistently espoused during 2016 and after his inauguration, to attempt crafting a *détente*. Moscow might see in Trump a world view that goes back to the brief, but pivotal, us–Soviet partnership during World War II: that the us and Russia can jointly manage global security and stability. Trump's words in a recent press conference, where he stated that "there is no upside" in a us–Russia conflict and that global stability depended on the two nuclear superpowers, must have resonated in the Kremlin. For, it immediately echoed in Sergey Lavrov's remarks in the Munich Security Conference, 2017 that both countries shared a "special responsibility for global stability."

Trump's determined pushback to the anti-Russian hawks in the us Congress and the security establishment will probably persuade Putin to play his own cards carefully. But, the basic Russian goal since the collapse of the Soviet Union—to buttress its own global position and promote a multipolar world—has not changed. Yet, the expansion of Russia's geopolitical gaze and involvement in other regions—both in West Asia as well as a renewed interest in East Asia—suggest that order-building goals will also shape Moscow's global policies and strategies. This opens up potential opportunities for tacit and active cooperation between Russia and the us in various subregions and multilateral settings.

If Russia's preference for a polycentric world order emerges from its enduring

self-image as a great power with system-shaping experience and capabilities, for China such an impulse is linked to its changing material position and political economy characteristics. For the Chinese, the tipping point in their international policy came with the 2008 global economic crisis. In many ways, 2008 displaced the central facet of Deng Xiaoping's image: that of a bandwagoning rising power plugged to a pre-existing and flourishing us-dominated order. Reluctant to place further bets on the us's economic revival or will to preserve a global economy with the scope for rising participation for Chinese capital, Beijing undertook a slew of policy moves to project an alternative framework to the old Bretton Woods system. Not only did Beijing sponsor and support new multilateral institutions, such as the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) and New Development Bank (NDB), and ideas such as the "Belt and Road" initiative, it opened its treasury to put its money where its mouth was.

But, these competing geo-economic policies are not like the old zero-sum mercantilist revolt of pre-1945 Germany and Japan. Interdependence is not a vision, but recognition of the structural changes in China's political economy during the "reform and opening-up" era. Unable to put the horse back into the stable, the Chinese Communist Party has decided to double down on a hybrid economic structure of a formidable state-owned economy and dynamic private capital accumulation. And, it is the global realm that offers an outlet for all Chinese capital, thus staving off an inward turn that might precipitate an existential crisis in the political economy and for the party's preponderance. Arguably, Xi Jinping's globalism and geo-economic plans have the support of private capital and conservative ideologues, with both sides wary of the power struggle and factionalism that might ensue if China lessened its global economic involvement.

It is, therefore, not surprising that "isolationism," "closed regionalism," and more generally a fragmentation of the global economic system are perceived as a highly disruptive and dangerous scenario for China's own sociopolitical stability.

Nothing exemplifies China's new internationalist outlook more than the recent statements by Xi Jinping. In his now famous speech at Davos (World Economic Forum 2017), Jinping extolled the virtues of economic globalisation as an inexorable historical trend, and urged that the world "should adapt to and guide economic globalisation, cushion its negative impact, and deliver its benefits to all countries and all nations." Any turn away from interdependence "into isolated lakes and creeks is simply not possible." This was followed by a significant speech in Beijing on 17 February 2017 during a national security seminar, where Jinping set the new line that China "should guide the international community to jointly build a more just and reasonable new world order."

The us's internal contest between the neo-liberal globalists and the economic nationalists is a mixed blessing for China. At one level, Beijing is finally on the cusp of great power, if it has not already attained it. Since the prospect of a geopolitical containment policy is improbable under a stable Trump administration, the abiding fear of the us obstructing China's rise would have abated in Beijing. At another level, a total implementation of Trump's vision might open up scenarios where Chinese commerce would struggle to tap big opportunities in the industrialised world. Of course, the flip side is that Chinese capital in terms of foreign direct investment (FDI) and infrastructure investment might, ironically, find reception in the us as policies to resuscitate the domestic real economy are pursued more seriously. Indeed, it is not far-fetched to forecast a bilateral us-China investment treaty during Trump's tenure.

But, even on bilateral trade, the forecast of a conflict might be exaggerated. According to a recent Oxford Economics report ("Understanding the us-China Trade Relationship," January 2017), China has emerged as "the third-largest destination for American goods and services." In 2015, "us exports to China directly and indirectly supported 1.8 million new jobs and \$165 billion in GDP." The economic benefits of trade with China are even higher when investment flows are accounted for. Not surprisingly, Trump does not

confront pressures from the political establishment on the China policy as he does for Russia. The anxiety that Trump's brief rhetoric on the One China policy evoked across the establishment was instructive. Plainly put, a basic consensus makes us-China deal-making easier to operationalise given the scale of economic interdependence that already exists.

India's Balancing Strategy

Unlike Russia and China, who have sought to reform and even transform the us-led order, India has been quite content to integrate with the post-1991 order, albeit with perfunctory reforms. Consequently, neither was a post-unipolar world imagined, nor its contours fathomed. Operating under the comforting assumption of prolonged us preponderance, much of contemporary statecraft and geostrategies have been formulated under such a world view. And, nothing has shaped India-us ties more than the rise of China.

But, this shared threat perception has always found itself at odds with the complex reality of us-China relations and the enduring characteristics of us-Pakistan relations. An optimistic framework for an Indian balance-of-power strategy has relied on a hypothesised replay of the old Indo-Soviet congruence in Asia and the subcontinent. Yet, unlike the old Cold War geostrategy that was underpinned by leveraging fundamental cleavages in the international and regional systems, India's us play has been crafted upon a more complex geopolitical landscape, yielding paradoxical outcomes. For instance, each successive China move with the us by Delhi has precipitated a proportional Pakistan and subcontinental countermove by Beijing. Significantly, most of these moves by China have not been deflected by the us-India partnership, leaving Delhi worse off than when it started.

Until Trump's victory, Delhi had been willing to absorb the costs. Perhaps, the premise was that a more enduring Indo-American strategic partnership would ultimately emerge to stabilise the sub-regional environment as well as provide options to bargain with China. The uncertainty around Trump's South Asia policy suggests that Delhi's bold policy is now even more of a gamble. Trump's

basic impulse to stabilise the great power setting of us-Russia-China, as well as a reluctance to heighten competition in non-core regions like the subcontinent will further complicate Delhi's balancing strategies, even if Washington maintains general continuity on its India policy.

Beyond geopolitics, the shifting fulcrum of economic globalisation from the West to the East will again challenge the dominant assumptions of the past two decades. Curiously, unlike in China, Indian policy-makers have not engaged in serious debates about the post-2008 global economy. Trump's likely displacement of the old geoeconomic approach (where the us evaluated economic choices through its global ambitions) towards a more national and allied-centred economic strategy (prioritising socio-economic stability and the American middle class over ambitious geopolitics) will compel Delhi to muddle its way towards a changing economic order.

Towards a Polycentric Order

While all three would naturally frame and pursue their policy goals based on their intramural and regional contexts, the window for order-building and contribution to global governance by the non-Western world has been jarred open. As Dmitri Trenin recently suggested in the *Global Times* (22 February 2017), "China, India and Russia can build a core group to lead the order-building process." Not only are there possibilities for influencing the orderly re-orientation of America's global role, there is a necessity to stabilise the transition and channel the world order in more sustainable directions.

A central question for all three states is as to how they can ensure that a multipolar world retains elements of interdependence and multilateralism. As each have independent national interests—both material and ideational—in promoting such a polycentric order, the policy and academic discourse ought to now thoughtfully examine the diverse pathways that could be charted by Eurasia to promote regional and global stability.

Zorawar Daulet Singh (zorawar.dauletsingh@gmail.com) is a senior fellow at the Centre for Policy Research, New Delhi.