



NATO Foundation  
*Defense College*

## Russia & Caucasus April 2017

### **NEW ORDER, NEW DISORDER**

The Russian expectations to normalize the relations with the US after the new President Trump election were dashed. Within a few months, the new administration has taken positions in stark contrast with Russian interests or has maintained silence on the open dossier of common interest: fighting terrorism and ISIS annihilation, a common vision on post-Assad in Syria, what to do in Ukraine, lifting of sanctions, cyber security, etc.

The new US president has shown a willingness to overturn 180 degree US policy on many subjects: protectionism and international trade, immigration and the wall with Mexico, the Arab-Israeli conflict, the Iran deal, the North Korea threat, and ultimately also the relations with Europe and NATO's role. There were also changes in position, sometimes suddenly, from week to week and day to day, and now the Russians have no still a clear vision of what will be with the US.

This raises the perplexity in Moscow about a perceived sort of confusion that seems to them to reign in Washington: the Russians wonder whether it is voluntary or accidental, or governed by a new communication policy, or generated by emotional effects, or imponderable, or for exclusive needs of domestic policy, or to heal balances in the society and in the American establishment that appear to be skipped after the Trump election. From their point of view all this makes the dialogue with the US unpredictable and unreliable.

No one in Russia doubts the power of the American superpower, but when the main nation leading the West, the world's leading economy, the main actor in all conflicts and wars closer to home and away from home, is perceived by Moscow as unpredictable and unreliable, this is not good news for the international security. It is expected, as it is used to say in these cases, some maturity, responsibility and competence, that in these first months the Russians perceived as missing by the US administration, for appearing solely in complicating and worsening the relations with almost all the major countries.

Paradoxically, the eventual outcomes of this policy are considered in favor of Moscow: more enemies growing against America, more friends for Russia. We assist, albeit with very different motivations, to a shift of interests or rapprochement by many countries: Turkey, Iran, Libya, Iraq, Egypt, the Palestinians and Kurds and other Arab countries, even Saudi Arabia.

In North Africa and the Middle East, American policy does not seem to generate much consensus and the results of this are evident. It has been created a huge space of influence and presence for Russians that was not there before. This not only has generated the re-entry of Russia in the region, but has given to Russians a new role, gained by them on the field. Many countries in the region then look at Russia now for modeling their policies and business interests.

On a different level, in Europe several nations (except Ukraine) are perceiving Russia as a key partner not only for business but also for continental security. The exit from European Union of the main ally of the United States, Great Britain (Scotland let's see) further fuels the feelings already present in different peoples and European governments, of a Europe less Anglo-Saxon and consequently less pro-American. The meeting of foreign ministers of the G-7 in Italy and emerged statements are an example.

All that's happening in North Africa, Middle East and apparently also in Europe is the result obviously of the previous American Presidencies too, not only of these months of Trump's Presidency today. The fight against terrorism in the Middle East and North Africa, and how to protect from terrorism cities and citizens in Europe is a shared priority of both Russians and the Atlantic allies. For such a reason, it might be possible for the European NATO members to play a role in eliciting such a collaboration with the Kremlin.

NATO could have the opportunity to reverse the paradigms of the past and perform a new mission, right in the continent where it has protected the population against external threats, Soviet Union in the first place. Because the major threat of today is terrorism, Russia could be now an ally in this battle. Conversely, the isolation of Russia does more than a favor for the Kremlin, generating consensus and expectations toward it, even in countries belonging to our block. The Cold War has finished, and the enemy is changed.

**Roberto D'Agostino** - *Executive and Italian Honorary Diplomat based in Russia, expert in Government Relations and Russia's domestic and international affairs. Graduated in Oriental Studies in Italy, he specialised in Middle East and Soviet Studies in Cairo, Moscow and New York*