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Trump, Putin, and Europe: The U.S. Now Has No Friends or Enemies, Only Interests



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What does friendship mean? How deep are historic diplomatic ties? Dramatically, President Trump announced tariffs against Canada and Mexico, the two closest U.S. neighbors and longstanding traditional allies as well as threatening tariffs against the European Union. Whether or not these tariffs are implemented, they are unfriendly menaces towards countries that are supposed to be U.S. partners. On the other hand, Trump seems sympathetic to Vladimir Putin, the leader of a country that has been an American adversary for some 80 years. As Mark Mazzetti observed in *The New York Times*: “The president [Trump] sees common cause with Mr. Putin, a merging of interests...”

How is the transactional Trump significantly transforming traditional U.S. alliances as well as relations with a hostile country that it almost went to nuclear war against? During French President Emmanuel Macron’s recent visit to Washington, Trump praised the historic

relationship between the two countries; “France is America’s oldest ally, our cherished partnership has been a force for freedom, prosperity and peace from the very beginning,” Mr. Trump said. During another late February visit, Trump called British Prime Minister Keir Starmer “a very, very special person,” and talked about the United States and the U.K. having “a special relationship, like no other, passed down through centuries.”

That’s all wonderful. But if the two relationships are so special and historic, why did the United States vote against France and the United Kingdom at the U.N. General Assembly on a resolution condemning Russia as the aggressor in the war in Ukraine? Why did the United States vote with Russia, North Korea, Belarus, and Syria? How singularly “cherished” and “special” are U.S. relationships with democratic France and the United Kingdom that allow the U.S. to vote with Russia, a country ruled by an autocratic dictator?

Mazzetti further commented on the puzzling nature of Trump’s pro-Putin sensitivity; “The relationship between Mr. Trump and Mr. Putin has for years been scrutinized...Taken together, they [the investigations] have unearthed evidence to support an array of theories addressing Mr. Trump’s affinity for a Russian strongman who has spent a career trying to undermine American interests.” Interests! What about common values and history so touted by Trump during the Macron and Starmer visits?

The International Criminal Court’s (ICC) warrants for Putin highlight the perversion of “Trump’s affinity for a Russian strongman” and abandonment of democratic, liberal values.

“Today, 17 March 2023, Pre-Trial Chamber II of the International Criminal Court (“ICC” or “the Court”) issued warrants of arrest for two individuals in the context of the situation in Ukraine: Mr Vladimir Vladimirovich Putin and Ms Maria Alekseyevna Lvova-Belova.

Mr Vladimir Vladimirovich Putin, born on 7 October 1952, President of the Russian Federation, is allegedly responsible for the war crime of unlawful deportation of population (children) and that of unlawful transfer of population (children) from occupied areas of Ukraine to the Russian Federation (under articles 8(2)(a)(vii) and 8(2)(b)(viii) of the Rome Statute)...There are reasonable grounds to believe that Mr Putin bears individual criminal responsibility for the aforementioned crimes...”

The bromance between Putin – allegedly responsible for war crimes – and Trump – himself convicted of 34 felony charges and twice impeached – should be placed in the context of their similarities. The two leaders think and act as if they were above the law. Their mutual interests in rare earth minerals or reaching a peaceful end to the Ukraine crisis should not cancel their criminal records.

As well as the context of the illegal actions of Putin and Trump, it is helpful to place the U.S./Soviet Union (Russia) relationship in perspective as well. For not only is Trump shunning traditional allies and common values, he is reversing the United States' policy towards Russia. Trump's sensitivity to Putin undermines years of U.S. foreign policy.

The United States and the Soviet Union were allies during World War II. The alliance did not last long. Churchill's 1946 "Iron curtain" speech highlighted how quickly ideological, political, and military differences shattered their mutual interests in fighting a common enemy. Whatever memories of Soviet/Allied World War II cooperation remain were dismissed with recent Russian aggressions; because of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, Russia was not invited to the 2025 ceremonies marking the 80th anniversary of the D-Day landings although 11 million Soviet soldiers died fighting the Axis powers.

Trump has radically changed U.S. policy towards Russia with international consequences. European leaders, meeting in Brussels in early March, agreed to significantly increase their defense spending because of a wariness about future U.S. support facing Russian belligerence. If Trump is becoming closer to Putin and the United States closer to Russia, Europeans are willing to spend billions more on their own defense. "I want to believe that the United States will stand by us," French President Emmanuel Macron said in an address to the French nation on the eve of the summit. "But we have to be ready if that is not the case." European leaders are quickly moving beyond depending on Uncle Sam for their security.

How is this tectonic shift in U.S./Russia policy playing out in the U.S.? Militarily, Secretary of Defense Pete Hegseth had ordered a halt to offensive cyberoperations against Russia. Politically, various traditional anti-Russian G.O.P. politicians are changing their tune. Senator Lindsay Graham led a 2022 bipartisan resolution condemning Russia and President Putin for human rights abuses, war crimes and crimes against humanity. Now, he says Biden is responsible for the war, Trump has the right policy towards Russia, and Zelensky should resign.

What's going on now in U.S./Russian relations is not just a flip flop. It is a tectonic, historic shift. In a very short period of time, Trump has managed to call into question years of transatlantic unity and cooperation. (One of the ironic benefits of Trump's "America First" policy is how quickly the leaders who met in Brussels have decided to work together to further develop a European defense system.)

What do friendships and special relationships mean? How deep are historic diplomatic ties? For all his weaving on many issues, Trump has answered these questions definitely in his approach to neighboring countries, Putin, Russia, and Europe; Not much. Confidence

between the United States and its traditional allies has been broken. Interests and values are not the same.

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