

100 DAYS THAT SHOOK THE WORLD



Barry Zellen, PhD, reports on President Trump's grand strategy for a new American empire

Since triumphantly returning to the White House in January, Trump 2.0 has been a whirlwind of creative, innovative, paradigm-shifting American defence and security policy. Staggering in its vigour and bold in its willingness to take risks for what is hoped will be transformative gains. It's been one of the most exciting starts to a new presidential term since Gorbachev ascended to the pinnacle of the Soviet system and kept the West on its toes as Russia underwent its revolutionary transformation. It's been a wild ride in these first 100 days, with more turbulence expected in the weeks and months to come.

Indeed, the bold risks Gorbachev took in the end caused the entire Soviet system not to reform, but to collapse, both at home and abroad. Could we see the same happen to America? With Trump's 'Liberation Day' trade war starting off with a bang, world markets teetered on the brink of collapse with China briefly emerging (oddly enough) as a safe haven for much of the world, forcing a rethink and a slowdown of its rollout – suggesting a collapse of global order is

unlikely, and while a deceleration in its frenetic pace, hopefully not an end to this fascinating and courageous restructuring of the world economy and an historic and just rebalancing of trade with America.

As an old Arctic hand, it was both surprising and heart-warming for me to see the Arctic feature so prominently and centrally in American policy. This is both smart geopolitics for a warming world, and an ironic recognition of the deep, strategic impacts of climate change on world politics. But there is risk in hyping the wrong things in the Arctic, such as overstating the threat posed by China, which is not an Arctic state, or Russia, which is the largest Arctic state but one that is inherently defensive in its utilisation, development and ultimately its defence of its Arctic territories and waters – with the largest Arctic population, economy and territory, Russia has much more skin in the game and much more to lose in the event the region becomes destabilised.

The real and present danger to the Arctic is not posed by either China or Russia, but rather by internal gaps

in wealth, human development, cultural stress and marginalisation of its native peoples who have made great strides but who still find themselves to a large degree second-class citizens in their own homelands, whose powers while greatly expanded remain subordinated to the still largely colonial states that govern over them and their traditional territories. I've been writing about this fundamental risk to the Arctic's human terrain for decades, and to the importance of rebalancing state-tribe relations across the region and the world. President Trump, with his and Vice President Vance's direct appeal to Greenlandic Inuit to join America and leave their colonial existence behind them, understands that this internal fault line that runs across the entirety of the circumpolar Arctic is not only salient to the region's order, but increasingly essential to American and global security.

Looking ahead, we can be prepared for many more innovations to come. We can look forward to an end to America's own 'green colonialism' (a phrase I first heard from Greenlanders who have long opposed the EU's ban on seal products central to their local Arctic economies), and a more robust integration of Alaska's petroleum resources into America's growing energy independence, with more federal support for oil and gas development both on and off shore, and new mining ventures both in Alaska and perhaps, if Trump succeeds in his goal to integrate Greenland into America's constitutional polity, Greenland as well – joining Russia and the other Arctic states in their continuing efforts to develop their vast repositories of energy resources to meet their needs, enriching Arctic communities along the way. As for Greenland, we can anticipate continued creative and dynamic diplomatic engagement, with President Trump's instincts for strategic and economic opportunity aligning with the continuing polar thaw and converging with Greenland's own aspirations for continuing decolonisation culminating in, Greenlanders hope, their sovereign restoration and independence, and we Americans hope in their eventual constitutional union with America.

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HOW MIGHT THIS PLAY OUT?

The conversation with Trump started with his territorial acquisition/statehood vision, and has been evolving from there toward support for Greenland's independence as his administration's relationship with Greenlanders grows, along with his desire to extend more robust American protection to Greenland – this is somewhat akin to how Trump 1.0 de facto evolved its views on Afghanistan, whose forever war Trump inherited and which despite two decades of mission creep and institutional momentum within the pro-war military-industrial-academic complex, he brought to an end. Trump found through peace negotiations with the Taliban that his administration and his political base (rooted in the MAGA movement) had ultimately more in common with their military opponent (the Taliban), as people of faith, than they did with America's own military ally, its very own (and very corrupt) client state that it had installed in Kabul 18 years prior.

As a change-making president with a mandate to "drain the swamp," Trump 1.0 internationalised this mandate and extended it not only to the forever war in Afghanistan where in the end it chose its opponent over its own client state much that way America did

after its long peace talks with the North Vietnamese in the Seventies. Trump 2.0 has taken its "drain the swamp" mission even further in both domestic politics and foreign policy, with the new Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE) purging federal payrolls by the tens of thousands while shuttering wasteful foreign aid programmes that propped up governments around the world as American taxpayers footed the bill for social and health programmes they are often denied, or couldn't afford, at home.

CHINA MAY BE UNWILLING TO ALLOW FOR SUCH A KINETIC REVISION TO THE WORLD'S BORDERS

Trump 1.0's approach to peace in Afghanistan is a guide for what we can expect next in foreign policy. Look no further than the new forever war in Ukraine, where a rapid and decisive peace favouring the Russian invader has become prioritised over a restoration of the territorial integrity of allied Ukraine. Indeed, finding common cause with Russia, perceived as a state that shares a commitment to traditional values, will allow for the restoration of global stability from Europe to Asia with Russia serving as a bridge of stability across the Eurasian heartland. And demanding a stake in Ukraine's mineral wealth promises to return to the American taxpayer some of the funds that were spent in Ukraine under the Biden administration, bringing economic justice to the American heartland. Moreover, Trump likes to test and provoke America's allies, and in his peace overture to Russia we see more of this.

And while China remains in many ways the American "bogeyman," with the heartland of America still recovering from the economic collapse that resulted from China's industrial rise and the intergenerational pain still fresh (having itself fuelled the rise to prominence of Vice President JD Vance), China and America share being two hard-working and innovative nations that have tamed much of their respective continents, stabilising their respective hemispheres to a large degree. In time, forging a lasting peace with China and ending the new cold war before it starts, and reintegrating our economies more equally and fairly, could cement Trump's legacy not only as one of the greatest dealmakers in history, but one of the greatest presidents as well. This will have to wait, of course, until the American heartland is ready to mend ties with Beijing, but Trump can show the way. Then, it won't be only Nixon who could go to China, but Trump as well. But that remains for later in the term.

IT'S NOT ALL PEACE AND HARMONY

As we see with Ukraine, a major world power (Russia) has changed the map of Europe and the price has been high in Ukrainian blood and American treasure. This may be just the beginning. Next, Greenland could become part of America, for a second redrawing of the world map. And, if America

wants to secure the Arctic and protect its own flanks, it may then have to expand its new Arctic territory in Greenland to also include parts of Canada's Nunavut territory sitting astride the Northwest Passage. This would be the third revision of the world map. And by the same logic that propels Trump's geopolitical interest in Greenland, we may see Russia emulate America's actions by taking Svalbard, Norway's remote, offshore archipelago that threatens Moscow's ability to project naval power beyond the Barents. But Norway, like Denmark/Greenland, is an integral part (and founding member) of NATO.

FORGING PEACE WITH CHINA AND ENDING THE NEW COLD WAR COULD CEMENT TRUMP'S LEGACY

Can the alliance survive both Denmark's loss of sovereignty over Greenland and Norway's loss of sovereignty over Svalbard? Perhaps so, as these islands are remote offshore possessions and not core constitutional parts of either Denmark's or Norway's traditional home territories, and the same can be said for the Northernmost parts of Canada's Nunavut, which were only settled in the mid-20th century as part of a Cold War relocation of Quebec Inuit to the High Arctic. Thus revising national boundaries to exclude these newly contested offshore island territories may well be achievable

without major war, as few Europeans will be willing to die to defend their nations' remote, colonial territories home to few residents and very limited industrial or strategic infrastructure.

China, for its part, may be unwilling to allow for such a kinetic revision to the world's borders without being part of this new wave of expansion – and this means ultimately that Taiwan will have to accept Beijing's sovereign control much the way that eastern Ukraine and Crimea will soon have to accept Russian control, and Greenland (and possibly Northern Nunavut) may soon choose to accept American control. More worrisome is if China and Russia agree to jointly take Hokkaido to protect essential sea lanes linking Chinese ports via the Northern Sea Route to European markets; it, too, is a remote island territory with a much briefer constitutional union with its sovereign partner, and thus not unlike Taiwan, and may thus find itself similarly contested. Being remote island territories with relatively small populations and limited infrastructure, major war seems unlikely and protracted or global war exceedingly so.

In one swift surge of territorial expansion, we may thus witness the formation of a new foundation for generations of stability to come, all precipitated by Trump's bold and innovative imagination and strategic prescience. Further down the pike, we could see these same re-expanding great powers finding common cause in dividing Antarctica into territorial concessions, thereby retiring the Antarctic Treaty with its multilateral, demilitarised vision of the world. But that's for another day ●

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