

# What can be the international implications of Donald Trump's election? Questions on the evolution of the global geopolitical situation

Sunday 19 March 2017, by [ROUSSET Pierre](#) (Date first published: 26 February 2017).

**The International Committee of the Fourth International met in mid-February. It continued the discussion on the preparatory texts for the next World Congress. The text below is based on the introductory report to the first of these documents, dealing with the transformations of the geopolitical situation. [1] It focused on the question: what are the implications of Donald Trump's accession to the US presidency?**

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The accession of Donald Trump to the presidency of the United States most likely represents a turning point in geopolitical disorder and global instability. However, it is too early to measure its consequences. Trump himself and a large part of his team have no political past in government that would offer a reliable point of reference. Presidential power is limited in the USA (much more so than in France!), by the powers of the Congress, the judiciary and the states, as evidenced by the trial of strength after the decree prohibiting the territory's access to nationals of seven Muslim countries (even those who had a residence permit or were residents) - a decree whose application was suspended by judges.

Therefore, we cannot base a judgment on just the vengeful Tweets, phone calls and peremptory statements in which Trump specializes, nor on the many corrections, sometimes made in haste: on Taiwan and the One China policy, on Russia in Eastern Europe... It is nevertheless necessary to start now to locate the major issues that are being or may be affected by the constitution of the new US administration - we are talking here only of the international implications; the consequences of his election in the United States itself will not be discussed here.

**Trump and... instability.** The election of Donald Trump is in itself a new factor of international instability. Indeed, it was neither intended nor desired by the dominant sectors of the American bourgeoisie: control over the electoral process escaped them. That this could have happened in the principal imperialist country is a matter of great concern for the rulers in the rest of the world. How can you *foresee* anything when US governance becomes so random?

Trump's initial measures have increased this concern: the withdrawal from the Trans-Pacific Partnership Agreement (TPP), the criticism of NATO, and so on. The frameworks of concertation between states and bourgeoisies seem to be threatened by an administration that appears *unilateralist*. The meaning of the slogan "America First" would then become "America Alone". The

multiplication of bilateral agreements - where the US is in a position of strength in relation to its interlocutors - would take the place of multilateral agreements.

There is, of course, continuity between the policies announced by Donald Trump and those of previous administrations, including Obama; but there are also possible points of rupture, a general inflection and an escalation that is at least verbal. The United States presented itself yesterday as the leader of various alliances (without necessarily being able really to assume this function); Trump threatens to go it alone. He thus allowed Chinese President Xi Jinping to present himself as the successor during his speech in Davos: do not worry about the US withdrawal, we are ready to ensure the continuation of the process of capitalist globalization!

**Trump and... the global ecological crisis.** Donald Trump was elected at a moment when in terms of atmospheric warming, in particular, we are already on a razor's edge. However, a climate sceptic is at the head of the United States Agency for the Environment. The new president is the mouthpiece of the extractive industries and rejects the conclusions of the scientific studies in this field. The extent of the multifaceted ecological crisis that we face and the extreme gravity of its consequences are being ignored and denied.

The commitments made by governments at COP21 were very inadequate and the policies advocated (geo-engineering ...) are dangerous: they do not make it possible to limit global warming to 1.5 per cent. To limit it to 2 per cent (a level already far too high) seems very difficult. That would become unattainable in the event of US withdrawal, if it was to be confirmed.

Major recent intergovernmental climate agreements have been "set up" through prior bilateral negotiations in Washington and Beijing. Admittedly, China and other "big" countries are now promising to maintain their targets for the reduction of greenhouse gas- but Trump's backward step will serve as a pretext for other countries. Each government will tackle major national problems (such as pollution in China...) or develop industrial sectors that it deems to be internationally promising, but the sum of these egoisms will not be the foundation of an overall policy.

**Trump and... women.** Donald Trump has decided to cut off all funding to NGOs that bring up the issue of abortion (not just those who practise it). Republican presidents have done this more than once in the past. The consequences are very serious on the international level, as many of the associations concerned do not have the financial means to continue their activities of aid to women once these funds are withdrawn.

The price to pay for Trump's policy is likely to be particularly high today, because the reactionary (especially religious) far right is getting stronger. Churches are often themselves on the offensive against women's rights: in fact, we are seeing a dramatic decline in the status of women in much of the world. The role of the Trump administration can be particularly baleful in this situation - which certainly explains, in part, the international echo of the Women's Marches in the United States during the inauguration of the new president and the announcement of other world days of action.

**Trump and... ideological reaction.** Donald Trump literally "oozes" reaction. What is true for women probably will be for LGBT+, for racism, for obscurantism.

Trump is not against "science." He is against scientific research where it can create problems for the economic interests that he defends - he then becomes negationist. Like Harper before him in Canada (who wanted to destroy the databases that made it possible to trace the history of the climate), he wants to control research and muzzle researchers. To do so he has taken exceptionally brutal measures to isolate and censor climate scientists and environmental agencies - provoking the organization of a great march of scientists on Washington in April.

Even though it is “targeted” on environmental and climate issues, Trump’s denunciation of the scientific approach has general consequences: legitimizing obscurantism at a time when creationism (including its “intelligent design” version) continues its offensive, in particular conducting a long-term battle over school curricula in many countries.

**Trump and... the far right.** For the far-right movements in Europe, the victory of Donald Trump at first appears to be very good news. Breaking *on the right* with “globalism” is possible, there is the proof! The rejection *by the right* of the “elites” too.

However, it is not obvious that the Western far-right movement want to identify too closely with Donald Trump. The great-power nationalism of “America First” is a threat - and no one knows whether his administration will succeed in stabilizing itself. Ridicule can end up by killing. Predicted for the moment to win the first round of the presidential election in France, Marine Le Pen has not started talking “à la Trump”.

The fundamentalist Islamist far-right movements, for their part, salute the election of Trump as a gift from heaven. This was already the case in France, after Prime Minister Manuel Valls supported illegal decrees adopted by some municipalities against wearing the burkini - dismissing the advice of the Council of State (he was thus playing at being Trump before Trump: “The Council of State says what the law is, I do politics” - so a Prime Minister can ignore the law?).

Valls was just a story on the inside pages (except for us in France) that people abroad had a good laugh about. We are no longer laughing with Trump’s “Muslim Ban”, forbidding access to the United States for nationals of seven Muslim countries. The spontaneous mobilizations in the USA, at the airports, to allow the entry of stranded foreign residents, and the suspension by judges of the decree signed by Trump have a very important impact internationally. They are breaking the extreme bipolarization desired by both Trump and the fundamentalist far right.

## Impact on the relationship of forces between powers

**Trump and... Latin America.** Imperial arrogance did not keep Donald Trump quiet regarding Latin America, the “private hunting ground” of the US. The heads of state of this region must not have appreciated the brutality with which he repeatedly humiliated the Mexican president by a torrent of Tweets, each of them more lapidary than the one before.

The same is true of the threat of a unilateral challenge to the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) between the United States, Canada and Mexico. The policy of the protectionist coup de force concerns primarily the entire continent. The militant Left in Latin America will have to mobilize against the new imperialist dictates, without, however, defending the present order and the neoliberal agenda [2]

Mexico is the country on the “front-line” with the United States, particularly with regard to the international implications of the anti-immigrant, anti-Latino xenophobia and racism of the Trump administration, symbolized by a policy of mass expulsion, a forced march, and by the construction of the border wall. All Latino immigration is concerned! Muslims are far from being the only ones concerned, far from it.

**Trump and... the Middle East.** Donald Trump banged his fist on the table to denounce Obama’s and NATO’s failure in the Middle East; he announced a disengagement from the Iraqi-Syrian theatre for the benefit of the Russian Federation; he promised to move the US Embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem (which would amount to recognizing it as Israel’s capital - but he will not do it); he broke

with the two-state (Palestinian and Israeli) policy, the basis of the peace negotiations; he is targeting as a priority Iran and the nuclear agreement with Tehran, while opening up to Saudi Arabia and the Gulf monarchies; he advocates a regional military alliance including these states and Israel to “contain” Iran...

That said, everything suggests that Trump does not have the slightest idea of the complexity of the Middle East “game” or, perhaps, of the fact that in this domain the decisions are not within the mandate of his presidency, but of Congress in particular. Even more so than on other international issues, it is better to wait to conclude what will become the policy of the new administration.

**Trump and... Russia.** In the diplomatic field, one thing seemed clear: among his priorities, Donald Trump wanted a rapprochement with Russia, and Moscow was counting on it. Since then, the picture has become somewhat blurred. We will see.

In the world of Trump, where great-power geopolitics is used very directly to do business, this choice (if it is confirmed) makes sense: Unlike China, Russia is not a global competitor. The extractivist (petroleum) industry that he wants to embody has forged close ties in Russia. There can be convergence in the Middle East. A Washington-Moscow axis would isolate Beijing, the main enemy...

If this schema is confirmed, Russia’s position would emerge consolidated in the Syrian-Iraqi theatre of operations and in Eastern Europe, at the expense of the EU.

**Trump and... the European Union.** Russian-American collaboration would have many implications for the European Union, of which Donald Trump has made his low opinion quite clear. In spite of the flights of fancy about Europe as a great power, it has not been able, nor known how to, nor wanted to constitute a global geopolitical power. The new US presidency has threatened to reduce its commitment to NATO, refusing to pay *ad vitam æternam* for its defence. The EU is under pressure, while it is in crisis: Brexit, increasing heterogeneity, unpopularity...

The recent Munich conference on security - called the “Davos of Defence” - did not reassure the EU. Admittedly, many Washington envoys tried to clear the minefield of Trump’s remarks (for example, describing NATO as “obsolete”), US Vice President Mike Pence did not even pronounce the words “European Union” in his speech - and no concrete dossier has made any progress. [3]

The question of really arming Germany is becoming increasingly pressing for European leaders. There is no European army. The British and French armies only filled this absence very partially, being mobilized especially within the framework of national choices. They have had to cope with contradictory demands: to reduce costs in the name of austerity policies while increasing their exterior and also interior (France) commitments. The equipment and military personnel are worn out to the extent of risking “burn-out”, which is probably already the case in Britain, whereas this “brutal withdrawal” is likely soon to be announced in France. [4]

In this situation, even the unthinkable happens. Kites are flown on issues that are taboo. Thus, a member of the Christian Democratic Party, Roderich Kiesewetter, said that if Trump’s America “no longer wants to offer a guarantee of nuclear security, Europe still needs a nuclear umbrella.” An editor of the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* drove the point home: considering Russian rearmament and the smallness of the Anglo-French strike force, let us think “the unthinkable” - our “own nuclear deterrent”. [5]

Is British Prime Minister Theresa May also wondering about the consequences of Trump’s election for European defence? For a long time, the United States has been asking the EU members to do

more and criticizing NATO - but Trump is capable of putting his words into action, while Obama, who is more aware of the complexity of the dossier, did not. May is (was?) an unconditional supporter of NATO. The *Financial Times* has published an article by Anne Applebaum urging the United Kingdom to promote a new security pact, despite Brexit. [6]

The uncertainty does not only come from across the Atlantic. Nothing serious can be discussed in the EU before the outcome of the next French and German elections. European construction is in structural crisis. The Union is incapable of playing its role on the international level in maintaining an imperialist order. Whoever is President of the United States, Washington does not know what it can hope for from the Europeans.

**Trump and... China.** How will the US-China confrontation evolve under Trump? This is one of the most serious issues we have to follow in the period ahead. A growing number of commentators even talk about the possibility of a new world war (in what form?) that the situation in East Asia is prefiguring.

Without venturing into the debate on “the coming war,” we should note that Trump is faced with a problem that Obama could not answer: how to take things back in hand in East Asia after leaving the initiative to China for too long? Especially since Beijing has recently consolidated its regional hold. Its economic hold has increased in the region, as well as its political and diplomatic weight. The militarization to its benefit of the South China Sea is now almost accomplished. The construction of artificial islands is sufficiently advanced to make it an operational defence network: aviation runways, the installation of numerous surface-to-air missiles, etc. The Chinese fleet is thus navigating in its environment. A qualitative threshold has been crossed.

No pressure will force Beijing to withdraw. The stakes are too great: the control of access to the oceans, the question of who will have the dominant influence in the region (the USA or China), great-power nationalism (the ideological cement of the regime)...

The bar has been placed very high. The US Seventh Fleet can certainly show its presence in the South China Sea, but it cannot drive back the Chinese army - without at least engaging in an active conflict of which no one can measure the consequences.

The situation is more contentious and fluid in North-East Asia with the belligerent face to face between Japan and China; the North Korean factor and the latent crisis in the peninsula; Taiwan's assertion of its own identity and the need for Beijing to bring Hong Kong's population under control. However, the relationships of forces are not fixed in this part of the world, contrary to what many people seem to believe. The new capitalist China has emerged from the defensive strategic posture inherited from Mao. The United States must reestablish its leadership there, particularly as it has lost it in the South-West.

Uncertain of the future, the militarist right in Japan is pushing for a complete rearmament of the country. North Korea is playing the nuclear game of the weak deterring the strong, but it is triggering a new chain of reactions: the establishment by Washington in South Korea of a base of Thaad interceptor missiles likely to cover a large part of Chinese territory, reducing China's deterrent capacity. Beijing has therefore decided to deploy its submarines armed with nuclear warheads in the oceans to protect them from an enemy first strike. [7]

This has not been done and it is easier said than done. Chinese submarines are still “noisy” (easily detectable), the range of their ballistic missiles is too short, they need to produce more technologically reliable multiple-headed weapons, the establishment of a chain of command capable of acting in times of crisis is problematic - and all this is very expensive...

The military escalation in North-East Asia, however, is today taking on a nuclear dimension. The “minor” powers must then show that they have a serious second-strike capability, in case Russia on one side and the United States on the other try to destroy their launch sites all at once. France, Great Britain and China cannot do that. The question is still theoretical in Europe. Beijing is now worried about its vulnerability, as its nuclear submarine deployment programme seems to attest.

## **China and Russia**

Russia is asserting itself as a “world power” (with its stock of nuclear weapons in particular), but with a “regional zone of influence”. We do not see Putin displaying himself in Davos, as Xi Jinping did, as guarantor of capitalist globalization.

China is a world power with a much more discreet military profile, although it is steadily rising. However, its zone of economic and diplomatic influence is already almost universal. This is the result of a policy of expansion that has been systematically implemented for nearly thirty years - and of the relationship between national issues and international deployment. As a capitalist country, China is experiencing the crisis and will continue to do so. Today, there are strong overcapacities of production, the real estate crisis, indebtedness, very bad debts, tensions on the labour market, capital flight...

International deployment responds in part to these “internal” factors of crisis. It must guarantee the regular supplying of the economy with raw materials (purchase of land, mines, transport companies, ports...). By investing heavily in the building and public works sector abroad, it provides markets to a sector in great difficulty at the national level and outlets for surplus production (cement, steel, etc.). It makes it possible to export labour. It reinforces the ideology of the regime - great-power nationalism.

In various countries, these investments (financed by Chinese banks) are politically risky. A debt-stricken state can easily mobilize the population against “the Chinese” to get rid of the debt, once the work has been done, but for now China’s expansion is maintaining its dynamism. Until when? A big question.

Because it is the world’s leading power, the United States has lost the strategic initiative: unable to assume all its responsibilities, unable to expect much from the Europeans, it has left a free hand to the Russians in Syria and the Chinese on the international level. Because he seems to know nothing of the complexity of global power relations and regional geopolitical combinations, Trump began by asking the European Union and Japan “to pay more” (give me my money!) , and institutions such as NATO to comply with the priorities unilaterally defined by his administration. Reality will not bend to his imagination. How will he try to counter China, by provoking what chain reactions? We can be worried about that.

## **Period and solidarity**

The election of Trump expresses and enhances the contradictions of capitalist globalization as a mode of domination. Freedom of movement of capital results in popular disaffection in a growing number of countries, through national or regional crises of legitimacy and governability. Moreover, the sovereign functions of states are not globalized in the same way as capital. There is no harmonization between predatory economic policies on the one hand, and on the other ideological frameworks, security policies and wars, which are still the responsibility of the (nation-) states.



There is at present no solution to these contradictions. For several decades, the bourgeoisie has been conducting a frontal class offensive to take back all that it had to give up after the Second World War and the revolutions of the twentieth century. Since the implosion of the USSR, this offensive has taken on a truly global turn. Since the financial crises of 1997-1998 and especially of 2007-2008, it has become increasingly clearly counter-revolutionary. The extreme violence with which multiple counter-revolutionary forces have been mobilized in the Middle East to break the extraordinary popular momentum initiated in 2011 testifies to this.

We have entered a new era. I spoke in my report of a counter-revolutionary period, which provoked considerable reticence and incomprehension. Because of the word "period", which seemed too "long", too "dark"? I would say a "moment" (in the sense of a time of indefinite duration), but I fear that such a term does not pass the test of translations! Counter-revolutionary does not mean that the counter-revolution has prevailed - but that is what we are faced with, whether openly, as in much of the Muslim world, or more insidious, as often in the West.

Let us look for words that best express the nature of the present times, but let us not prettify them.

In one part of the world, the violence of the attacks provokes sometimes spectacular mobilizations, as in the United States after the election of Trump: women's marches, support for the victims of the "Muslim Ban", march for Earth Day and scientists... It is a wave of protest on a rare scale. The "rightward evolution" of the rulers also provokes the emergence of political processes on the left, as with Corbyn in Great Britain. This offers many opportunities for action for our organizations.

To this extent one can speak of bipolarization - reactionary and progressive; still, it must be made clear that it is a very unequal bipolarization. Theresa May is in government, not Jeremy Corbyn. The really existing Brexit has opened the way to a racist and xenophobic explosion, not to an offensive of the working class.

On the other hand, in another part of the world, opportunities are being rapidly reduced. The popular struggle continues in the Middle East, but in terribly more unfavourable conditions. I would like to give an example that has marked me personally. For several consecutive years, I have been in Pakistan in solidarity with struggles that are exemplary for their tenacity. The religious fundamentalists, the secret services of the army, the henchmen of the possessing classes were already conducting a reign of terror, but the popular resistance continued nevertheless with great force. I was able to speak in meetings involving several thousand people. In the military farm of Okara - where all the peasant cadres are now imprisoned and tortured. With the textile workers in Faisalabad - whose trade union leaders are now imprisoned and tortured. I met Baba Jan, an indefatigable Gilgit-Baltistan militant, today sentenced to life imprisonment after being tortured. Terrorist attacks follow one another in Lahore, where I lived. In a few years, the situation has become brutally marked by defeat. Resistance continues - and obviously still deserves our support - but in a qualitatively worse situation than before.

I will not return here to aspects of the discussion which have concerned other items on the agenda (the "revolutionary subject" and the social movements, the construction of "useful" parties. [8]). But I would like to conclude on our tasks of solidarity.

We are confronted today with forms of violence that are genuinely limitless, but also without any pretence. Hyper-violence is no longer denied, but displayed. This is obviously the case for terrorist organizations such as the Islamic State, which thus portrays the negation of the humanity of the victims; but this dehumanization of the adversary and of whole groups [9] is also found in the theme of the "ethical war" or holy war, the fight against evil praised by Bush after the attacks of September 11 [10]. The "humanitarian war" is being freed from humanitarian law and from the laws of war. The

“absolute” enemy is no longer entitled to any rights – people rot in fundamentalist jails or in the “black hole” of Guantanamo and the secret prisons of the CIA. Recourse to the “crimes” of blasphemy, of lèse-majesté, of breach of national security (or identity or symbol) is more and more widespread. Some people are proposing in France the preventive confinement in camps of retention of anyone who is suspected of being capable tomorrow of being involved in a terrorist act...

Let us recall that dehumanization was one of the objectives of the Nazi concentration camp system. The insidious return of the policy of dehumanization is not only a sign of reactionary times, but of counter-revolution. It defines a new terrain of resistance whose importance must be measured. No end can justify such means. The humanity of the adversary, whoever they may be, cannot be denied. That is the point we are at.

### **Unlimited repression calls for the expansion of the tasks of solidarity**

We are at present confronted with “collective” solidarity tasks: towards populations affected by humanitarian catastrophes of various origins: towards migrations and forced displacements (which are now more extensive than at the end of the Second World War); towards peoples who are under attack; and towards the activists who are imprisoned in their countries... We will have to welcome exiles, personally threatened, with particular care: in exile, they may continue to be persecuted. This is already the case of journalists and intellectuals from the Arab world against whom fatwas are being launched. It is also the case of Thais, “guilty” of lèse-majesté and forced to hide because they are denounced by ultra-royalist networks operating in France. It is already or will be the case with Kurds and Turks, whom the services of Erdogan have been or will be ready to assassinate. We must not only welcome them but also protect them.

All this requires the reconstruction of a “collective culture of solidarity” in progressive circles. Solidarity (in many humanitarian, political and financial forms must be integrated into the “current” tasks of popular organizations (associations, parties, trade unions, etc.). [11] Collectivized, concrete solidarity is one of the pillars on which the new internationalism we need can be founded. [12]

*February 26, 2017*

**Pierre Rousset**

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**P.S.**

\* Translation IVP: <http://www.internationalviewpoint.org/>

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### **Footnotes**

[1] Updated versions of the draft resolutions will be published at the end of March.

[2] Statement by PRT Mexico, ESSF (article 40171), [Statement \(Mexico\): Against Trump and Peña: unity from below and without borders](#):  
<http://www.europe-solidaire.org/spip.php?article40171>:



[3] *Le Monde*, February 20, 2017. Available on ESSF (article 40356), [Au « Davos de la défense », l'incertitude Trump : Grave crise de confiance entre l'Europe et les Etats-Unis:](http://www.europe-solidaire.org/spip.php?article40356)  
<http://www.europe-solidaire.org/spip.php?article40356>

[4] Nathalie Guibert, *Le Monde*, December 22, 2016. Available on ESSF (article 39901), [« Armée bonsaï » – L'armée française craint un décrochage brutal en 2020:](http://www.europe-solidaire.org/spip.php?article39901)  
<http://www.europe-solidaire.org/spip.php?article39901>

[5] See Josef Joffe, February 13, 2017, *Financial Times*.

[6] *Financial Times*, February 15, 2017.

[7] Julian Borger, ESSF (article 40404), [New arms race – China to send nuclear-armed submarines into Pacific amid tensions with US:](http://www.europe-solidaire.org/spip.php?article40404)  
<http://www.europe-solidaire.org/spip.php?article40404>

[8] On this last point, see in particular Pierre Rousset, ESSF (article 40093), [Réflexions sur « la question du parti » \(bis\) – Un tour d'horizon:](http://www.europe-solidaire.org/spip.php?article40093)  
<http://www.europe-solidaire.org/spip.php?article40093>  
This article will be available in English shortly.

[9] ESSF (article 40417), [Human Rights: Toxic political agenda is dehumanising entire groups, Amnesty warns:](http://www.europe-solidaire.org/spip.php?article40417)  
<http://www.europe-solidaire.org/spip.php?article40417>

[10] Daniel Bensaïd, ESSF (article 40412), [Le nouveau discours de la guerre – « le monde entier en état d'exception permanent »:](http://www.europe-solidaire.org/spip.php?article40412)  
<http://www.europe-solidaire.org/spip.php?article40412>

[11] On this latter aspect, see the balance sheet of the activity of ESSF (article 39722), [2005-2015 : Onze ans de solidarité – un bilan des campagnes financières d'ESSF:](http://www.europe-solidaire.org/spip.php?article39722)  
<http://www.europe-solidaire.org/spip.php?article39722>, 2005-2015].

[12] New spaces are being created to collectivize reflection and the exchange of experiences and to strengthen synergies in this field. See, for example, for Intercol, ESSF (article 40460), [Intercol: Presentation of the Working Group "Internationalism and International Solidarity":](http://www.europe-solidaire.org/spip.php?article40460)  
<http://www.europe-solidaire.org/spip.php?article40460>