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**The Trump Administration's First 100 Days:
From Election Promises to the Challenges of Reality**

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The first hundred days of Donald Trump's presidency have been marked by tension between continued sharp and divisive rhetoric against political rivals at home and against "the media" on the one hand, and relative moderation and caution (along with moves showing determination and strength) in the conduct of foreign policy on the other. Five main factors have shaped this dynamic: the "clash" between election campaign promises and the challenges of reality; the absence of a fully formulated policy in many areas, coupled with a shortage of personnel and differences in attitudes among the President's close circle; deep tension between the desire to project strength abroad ("Make America great again") and the desire to turn inwards ("America first"); the emphasis on separation from the legacy of President Obama; and extensive political and public interest in the significance of Russian involvement in the elections ("Putingate").

Domestic Policy

Following his election promises, in his first days in the White House, Trump focused on steps to strengthen the American economy, with an emphasis on plans to create jobs at home and give preference to the consumption of domestic products. This was reflected in his meetings with the heads of industry, the withdrawal from the Trans-Pacific Partnership, the planned tax reform, and the reduction of regulation and internal barriers while imposing restrictions on imports.

Trump encountered bureaucratic and legal difficulties in his attempts to promote his objectives in other areas: the proposed health legislation to replace "Obamacare" failed to pass; immigration orders banning the entry of citizens from seven Muslim countries were rejected by the Courts; difficulties emerged with the plan to build a wall along the Mexican border; and although the

appointment of Judge Gorsuch to the Supreme Court did succeed and established its conservative majority, it was a close call.

Administration and Legitimacy

The “Putingate” affair (Russian involvement in the US elections and Russia’s ties with Trump associates) has cast a pall over the administration: alongside investigations by the FBI and the Congress into possible coordination between Russia and Trump and his associates, public and political concern about this matter has sparked angry reactions from the White House. At the same time, the affair has forced Trump to be very cautious in his dealings with Russia, since every foreign policy move is scrutinized and criticized against the question of Trump's obligation to the Kremlin.

This matter also hurt two of the most right wing figures in the administration: National Security Advisor Michael Flynn resigned when it was revealed that he had discussed US-Russian relations with the Russian ambassador in Washington before starting his job and had lied about this; and Attorney General Jeff Sessions, who also met with the Russian ambassador before being sworn in, recused himself from government investigations into Russian election interference, due to concerns about conflict of interest.

These, together with the removal of the President's Strategic Advisor Steve Bannon from the Principals Committee of the National Security Council (where his attendance set a precedent), reinforce the moderate wing in the President's circle, represented primarily by Vice President Mike Pence and Defense Minister James Mattis, who hold conservative establishment positions. In addition, Secretary of State Rex Tillerson and the President's son-in-law Jared Kushner, both new to the political arena, are also emerging as moderating factors in the President's inner circle.

Foreign Policy

So far Trump has adopted a relatively cautious policy vis-à-vis the superpowers, avoiding any dramatic reversals. The election campaign raised expectations of a significant improvement in relations with Russia (including discussions of possible scenarios for a bilateral "mega-deal"), and an escalation in relations with China (which Trump defined as the source of the United States' employment and trade problems). In fact, difficulties have arisen with Russia, due to

differences in attitudes and interests, and the series of investigations in the US, which are forcing the administration to distance itself from Russia. At this stage, the possible trade war between China and the United States has not materialized, and both countries seek to reach understandings regarding the economic issues in dispute and the crisis with North Korea, which is emerging as the major challenge for US foreign policy in terms of urgency and severity.

In his meetings with European and NATO leaders, Trump spoke of the importance of transatlantic relations as well as the need for the allies to honor their spending commitments and to focus on the terror threat. This comes when most NATO members actually identify Russia as their threat of reference.

As part of Trump's intention to rehabilitate the United States' global power image, the administration has signaled a change in its willingness to use military force as a deterrent and to leverage influence: on April 7, 2017, the US used cruise missiles to attack the Syrian air base at al-Shuayrat, from which Assad regime planes launched a chemical attack on civilians; on April 13, for the first time ever, it used the MOAB bomb (the largest conventional bomb in its arsenal) against the Islamic State tunnel network in Afghanistan; the administration also announced its willingness to use force against North Korea, if necessary. Perhaps these steps do not indicate additional military action at higher levels of risk, but in part they seem to increase the potential of this option.

Trump has placed the struggle against global jihad, and in particular the Islamic State, at the top of his priorities, and shown broader activity in this field: front line commanders have been given extended powers; marines have been permitted to enter Syria, to help the fighting organizations; air strikes against al-Qaeda in Yemen have intensified; and the MOAB bomb was used for the first time. However, it is still clear that Trump is avoiding deep military involvement in the Middle East quagmire, particularly in the absence of a comprehensive plan to stabilize the region politically and economically.

So far Trump has taken largely symbolic and declarative steps against the Shiite axis. Although the air strike in Syria was unexpected and set a precedent, it did not announce a new policy against the Assad regime and the administration has continued to insist that defeating the Islamic

State takes priority over a general regional settlement. The rhetoric against Iran is significantly fiercer, but no meaningful steps have been taken. According to senior officials, the administration is still examining the best ways of increasing pressure on Iran without undermining the nuclear agreement or fragile regional stability (particularly in Syria and Iraq).

The public "embrace" of the traditional US allies in the Middle East is influenced by an understanding of their importance against common enemies like the Islamic State and Iran, with an understanding of the political value of standing alongside them while "separating" from the legacy of Obama, who is cast as the one who abandoned them. However, while respecting the partnership, Trump is careful to clarify that they must pay in return for American support: Turkey, Egypt, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, and the Gulf states are expected to be more involved in the campaign against terror, and Israel is expected to be forthcoming on the issue.

Israel, which is perceived as an important ally by most senior officials (among them, the President himself) receives warm treatment from the White House and comprehensive backup in international forums, particularly in UN institutions (as made clear by Ambassador Nikki Haley). However, the administration's "flirtation" with extreme movements (including the alt-right, with which Steve Bannon is identified), disregard of the increase in anti-Semitism (notwithstanding the President's recent attempts to correct the impression in this context), and controversial statements about the history of the Jewish people – all these raise worrying question marks about relations between the administration and the Jews in the United States, many of whom are experiencing a growing dilemma between their traditional support for Israel and their opposition to Trump and the values of his administration as they see them.

Future Significance

At the strategic level, the shapers of Trump's administration will lead the President to persevere, as far as possible, with the strategy of "measured steps" in his foreign policy: alongside cautious diplomatic promotion of American objectives in each arena, the President is expected to maintain limited involvement that does not break the rules of the game, while sending out signals of power to back up his declarations. Challenges are already emerging that will put this strategy to the test, led by the growing tension and crisis with North Korea.

With regard to the superpowers, Trump will seek to reset respective relations: with China, that means the economy and its policy in East Asia; with Russia – the Middle East, Europe, and bilateral relations; and with Europe – NATO reform.

In the Middle East, the fight against global jihad will continue to expand, in view of the urgency, progress, and political capital to be gained by defeating the Islamic State. Although the Iran-led Shiite axis remains a primary threat to the United States and its allies, Trump is not expected to rush into a fight against it before he has subdued the Islamic State and repositioned the status of the US in the area, which he can then use to help reach an overall regional settlement and enforce the nuclear agreement with Iran.

In order to promote his goals in the Middle East, the administration is expected to support the moderate Sunni coalition, and it may link this support to a new political initiative to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian dispute in a "historic deal," following the initial contacts that are already underway. The President has referred to this ambition several times. Such a move, if advanced, could significantly challenge the current policy of the government of Israel.

In conclusion, Israel might well benefit from strengthened ties with the Trump administration, but it must know how to use them to promote its own interests, while clarifying its positions, in the framework of a strategic dialogue focusing on tighter supervision of Iran's compliance with the nuclear agreement (including the option of amending and expanding it) and joint preparations for the "day after"; reducing Iranian influence in the region, and particularly agreement over red lines with regard to the presence and involvement of Iran and its allies in Syria in the context of a future settlement; promoting Israel's role in the regional architecture that the US is formulating with its allies in the region, while seeking opportunities and minimizing risks; taking the initiative to vitalize positive trends regarding the Palestinian issue, including renewing the political process. This might occur given the stronger position of the US in the region, and a broader meeting of interests between the US administration and Israel on the one hand, and the moderate Sunni states on the other.