



# US Foreign Policy in the Era of Global Confrontation



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## LONGREAD OF THE SESSION OF THE XXIV YASIN (APRIL) HSE CONFERENCE

### Chairman:

Dmitry Suslov, Deputy Director of the Centre for Comprehensive European and International Studies, HSE University

### Discussion participants:

Keith Darden, Associate Professor of the School of International Service, American University

Maxim Suchkov, Associate Professor of the Department of Applied International Analysis, Director of the Institute for International Studies, MGIMO University

George Beebe, Director of Grand Strategy Program, Quincy Institute

Yevgeniya Prokopchuk, Analyst of the Center for Comprehensive European and International Studies, HSE University

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## **Report “US Foreign Policy in the Era of Great Power Rivalry”**

**Speaker: Keith Darden**, Associate Professor of the School of International Service, American University

I would take the issue with a couple of aspects, but first, I just want to talk about what drives the US foreign policy. What really shapes the US foreign policy? There is a historic tension in interpretations of the US foreign policy and in the policy-making process itself, it partly gives rise to these tensions. There is a tendency to focus on strategy documents, particularly, when looking from the outside, when people, for example, wait the US National Security Strategy with great anticipation.

To some extent, it is well placed, the US is a country of laws, it is a very large bureaucracy, and the National Security Strategy governs a lot the allocation of resources within a bureaucracy, and it has a design of a long-term vision for the direction this giant ship is ought to be moving. In the introductory part the autocracy versus democracy cleavage was mentioned – and that the US is standing squarely on the side of democracy. But also, we should remember about the great power rivalry – just picking up from the previous National Security Strategy under the Trump administration it is hard to disentangle those two things because great power rivals are also non-democratic.

Two components – idealism and power – are usually put into the discussions of those great power rivalries, and that is why it is quite hard to interpret the US foreign policy. The realization of the US ideals requires military power and the engagement in a kind of power politics. This National Security Strategy reflects the same sort of “muscular idealism” that the previous ones had. That pushes us into a global cleavage with Russia, China, Iran on the one side, and the US and Europe on the other side. I would say that the Strategy is only a small part of the actual US foreign policy. It has been always heavily influenced by crises. The Strategy stands for the long-term allocation of resources, it creates possible avenues for foreign-policy actions. But crises or other unanticipated events require significant commitment of resources and drive the foreign policy even more than the Strategy itself. When the crisis of 9/11 happened, the US entered the period of nation-building, ideological warfare in the Middle East, although in the beginning Bush campaigned the end of “idealism”.

For the US, the Russian invasion in Ukraine became a crisis too, so the US should focus more on how this crisis is going to influence the allocation of resources within the US. The military escalation was a complete surprise for the US, because, firstly, somebody decided to violate some core principles and norms that were important to the US foreign policy after 1945, and secondly, due to the type of warfare – what happens now does not look like a quick, decisive victory. We also see now a heavy reallocation of resources away from that Strategy that was focused more on China.

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This crisis, I think, will shape our strategies in many ways over the much longer term, and it will have three basic effects. First, it is the rapid deglobalization. After the end of the cold war there was a wide-spread opinion that the interdependence is a good thing, it increases the welfare and efficiency. This rapid deglobalization, which means the reduction of dependence, we see nowadays will affect our relations with China more than our relations with Russia. What is more, the increased politization of trade is expected, and sanctions is only one part of this process. Another one is efforts to have a direct political intervention, to use trade relations as a weapon against rival states. Second, we can see the wave of global rearmament. After the end of the cold war, the US wanted Europe to start the process of disarmament – NATO became relatively weak, and it was a good thing because it, in fact, excluded the possibility of a war between member states. That all is changing now. There is a real external threat – Russia, so there is a need to increase the military production and strengthen the armies of European countries, Japan, Australia, and the US itself. Third, we see the renuclearization – talks about the possible use of tactical nuclear weapons in Ukraine has led to the US rethinking of its own red lines - today we think that we should have a more flexible response, have more nuclear options available.

**Report “‘Double Containment’ and ‘Adaptive Leadership’: US Strategy in the Emerging Order and Russia's Role”**

**Speaker: Maxim Suchkov**, Associate Professor of the Department of Applied International Analysis, Director of the Institute for International Studies, MGIMO University

What we see today is a litmus test for the US leadership and dominance in the international system, and the USA cannot afford to fail. From Russian perspective, the USA as a relatively young power has had the experience only of great power confrontation without building a strong relationship with an equal partner. For the USA and its political elites, the only source of inspiration and intellectual policy planning is to seek for an enemy – confrontation helps the USA to feel successful. It is the reason for the desire of the USA to defeat both China and Russia. However, to defeat China, the USA needs to embrace Russia.

American policy resembles nowadays the way of acting during the presidency of Truman, which was based on the dual confrontation – both with Russia and China. Today's American foreign policy follows the after-war pattern, when Europe was the place where the USA could spread their global dominance and influence, the USA had the USSR and its satellites as enemies and a set of democratic ideas and organizations, through which these democratic ideas could be spread. The USA was successful after the end of World War II. Later the unipolar moment in American history happened – a new enemy appeared – Islamic terrorism. In the time of peace this role got China. 80 percent of the US strategic documents focus on the Chinese threat, however, 80 percent of the current debate in the US National Security Council is devoted to Russia. To be successful, the USA needs to upgrade several elements of its leadership – values and institutions, alliance system, supply chains.

## **Report “US Foreign Policy: Can Washington Adapt to a Multipolar World?”**

**Speaker: George Beebe**, Director of Grand Strategy Program, Quincy Institute

When Biden entered office, he was convinced that the main geopolitical challenge of the USA was the rise of China, so the strategy he laid out was, on the one hand, focused on China and, on the other hand, tried to stabilize the US-Russian relationship. Biden intended to deal with China by strengthening the rule-based order, promoting global cooperation to solve transnational problems. The implementation of this strategy should have helped to enhance global stability and bring greater prosperity for the Americans (“foreign policy for the middle class”). However, the crisis in Ukraine intruded on this plan and revealed weaknesses of the strategy. Once Russian invasion in Ukraine occurred, several countries did not agree with the American policy towards Russia – they did not support sanctions, for instance. The USA needs to adapt its strategy to new conditions – the point of view that the world is moving towards a new bipolarity with China and the USA as poles of power is being reconsidered. Foreign policy becomes more complex – India, for instance, supports cooperation with NATO, but is quite reluctant to suppress Russia.

Our new reality also tends to be more psychologically uncomfortable for the Americans. Many of them used to see the world in blocks, in terms of good and evil. Today the USA is going to be challenged to approach the world in a different way. The situation is quite comfortable for the Europeans as they are used to dealing with each other through the lens of Realpolitik to keep the balance of power. The USA needs to adapt its strategy in a proper way to deal with the reality characterized by the rise of multipolar order. What is more, the Americans are losing trust in the Washington foreign policy establishment, believing that their foreign policy benefits elites and is not essential for the well-being of the Americans. All this makes the situation in the US foreign policy very unpredictable.

## **Report “Cooperation and Rivalry Between the EU and the US in the Field of Decarbonization”**

**Speaker: Yevgeniya Prokopchuk**, Analyst of the Center for Comprehensive European and International Studies, HSE University

Environmental sphere became the first area where cooperation and the implementation of initiatives suffered significantly after the outbreak of the Ukrainian crisis. European countries – Germany, France, Greece, the Czech Republic – started rehabilitating their coal industries after a long period of decarbonization. In February 2022, while the whole world was watching the development of the situation in Ukraine, several changes happened in relations between the EU and the USA. Both the EU and the USA have a significant influence on the global decarbonization process and promote a sustainable development agenda. The EU considers itself a climate leader. This circumstance affects not only the transatlantic relations, but also the world economy as the USA and the EU together account for over 40% of global GDP.

However, American climate policy is quite controversial – it is a result of struggles of different interest groups. According to the Pew Research Center, the Democrats tend to trust scientific data on climate change and believe that policies can make a difference. The Republicans are more skeptical of climate agenda and state that the problem of climate change cannot be influenced. In this regard, party belonging affects approaches of different administrations to their environmental policy.

Over the past years, the EU has accused the USA of not paying enough attention to climate change and not implementing proper decarbonization policies. Different US administrations signed, withdrew, and rejoined the Paris Agreement, pursued controversial policies to decarbonize the American economy, and provided subsidies to the oil and gas sector, easing environmental regulations.

Today the question “What prevails in the US-European relationship - cooperation or rivalry?” stays still open.





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