Commentary
March 3, 2025

The American Revolution

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Originally published by Caliber.az

Summary

Staying in the United States, against the backdrop of astonishing news from there in recent weeks, it is hard to shake the impression that this is a revolution. The American Revolution, that is. The only question is whether it will have its own “February” and “October.”

Contents

1 “This is a revolution!”
2 Is there a strategy?
3 Will the “culture of anger” lead to an American “February”?

Immediately after Donald Trump’s triumphant victory in the third round of the presidential elections last November, representatives from various countries began flocking to Washington and Florida, the main base of the new-old head of the White House. At the early stages, before the inauguration day, most were seeking a straightforward answer: How to make connections with those close to the elected president who could lobby for specific decisions?

This remains a key concern for the many visitors today. However, against the backdrop of all the noise and upheaval, their focus has shifted to a much larger question: What is actually happening?

It is clear that this question is even more pressing for the Americans themselves—especially those whose professional roles require them to not merely observe, but deeply understand and explain. It is also significant for those who had once been certain of the immutability of long-established narratives about the boundaries of what is possible in both domestic and foreign American politics. Having spent the last week in intensive discussions with such Americans in Washington and at Donald Trump’s “southern headquarters,” the author is deeply struck by what he has heard and seen.

“This is a revolution!”

The phrase “this is a revolution” is most commonly heard in conversations with American experts and intellectuals. It is uttered both by Republicans and Democrats, by supporters of Trump and his MAGA movement, as well as by their staunch opponents. It comes from the typically reserved diplomats and from the more outspoken researchers and analysts. All of them acknowledge the unprecedented scale of the ongoing real-time changes, and none can think of a better term to describe them than “revolution.”

> However, the attitude toward the revolution varies widely.

Some pronounce the word with unmistakable disgust or even fear and horror. Others still cannot fully believe that something like this could actually happen in real American life, rather than in Hollywood fiction. Some are simply bewildered and unsure how to respond to what is happening. And there are others (and many of them) who hold out great hopes that after several months of revolutionary turbulence, the American state will breathe new life, shedding the burden of numerous systemic problems.

In this regard, it is especially interesting to talk to those Republicans who, as a result of Trump’s whirlwind of decisions, lost their jobs or found themselves in a career limbo, yet still remain staunch supporters of the White House boss. These individuals themselves are perhaps the most striking confirmation that what we are witnessing is indeed a change of revolutionary proportions, rather than just a passing gust of wind.

Regardless of the personal feelings of various interlocutors toward the rapid changes, it can be confidently stated that there is a growing consensus: this is serious, and it is here to stay. A process is unfolding that will, in any case, change much in both American foreign and domestic politics. Given the scale of the ongoing changes and the depth of the societal and political layers they affect, it is clear that by the end of Trump’s presidential term, there will be no return to the old normalcy in the functioning of the government.

It also carries a sense of revolutionary change in the struggle over symbols, which has become a routine and inseparable part of the ongoing transformations. For example, just recently, the name of the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), which the new government began dismantling right after the inauguration, was proudly displayed in its usual spot on the Ronald Reagan Building in Washington. Then, it was removed from the building, but on some of the directional signs around, the abbreviation “USAID” seemed to live on, almost as if it were eternal. MAGA Republican opponents likely fixated on these signs, hoping that soon everything would return to the way it

was. But now, most of those signs have been carelessly covered with black tape. And it seems that this negligence symbolizes something greater than just the technical implementation of government decisions.

Is there a strategy?

There is no longer any doubt: Donald Trump and his team are set on a large-scale, decisive course. In this regard, a clear contrast is felt with his first ascent to the presidency. Back then, many of the president's ideas and even decisions got stuck in the bureaucratic webs of the "deep state" and were restricted or even blocked by the so-called "adults in the room." This latter term emerged eight years ago in reference to a number of officials appointed by Trump to key national security and foreign policy positions. Those individuals had extensive bureaucratic experience and sought to use it to slow down what they considered to be the president-businessman's misguided decisions.

> This time, it is clear that both Trump himself, his closest allies, and, in a broader sense, the MAGA movement are much better prepared for the new term in the White House.

As a result, they are more resolute in their actions and their understanding of what is right and what is wrong.

The main activity in the Washington corridors of power right now is speculating about the administration's next steps and trying to find a common framework that can explain the key logic behind Trump and his team's decisions and statements. A particularly popular hypothesis at the moment is that Trump has adopted the "flood the zone" strategy, proposed by Stephen Bannon back in 2018, across all areas, including foreign policy.

The idea is simple: political opponents can be destabilized and rendered ineffective by overwhelming the public-political discourse with so many initiatives that it becomes impossible to keep up with them in a conscious and politically savvy way. The result should be the disarming of political opponents and the media that are critical of the administration. Meanwhile, the numerous initiatives and statements will take on a life of their own: some will be forgotten over time, while others will be implemented in one form or another.

This is indeed an intriguing and even brilliant idea in its simplicity. However, political technology by definition cannot be a strategy. Therefore, it's important not to overestimate its significance for the future development of the socio-political situation in the U.S. Especially since Republicans won't be able to "flood the zone" with exclusively positive results for long. The flip side of this approach will quickly start to show, and it could bring more problems than benefits to the White House and the MAGA movement. It is at that point that it will become clear whether there is a truly substantive strategy behind the initial whirlwind of statements and decisions.

Will the "culture of anger" lead to an American "February"?

Although, if we are truly witnessing an American revolution, even what might seem like a strategy today could have little to do with the course of real events tomorrow. As the old Soviet song went, "Revolutions have a beginning, but no end!" Especially since this revolution has deep cultural and value-driven roots.

Some of these are quite evident. It is essentially a direct clash between liberal and conservative value platforms within American society. This society was born and has evolved as a result of a permanent value conflict that has always been in plain sight. But now it has entered an especially sharp phase, which is easily visible, including in the results of several recent electoral campaigns in the U.S. In this sense, the new Donald Trump administration, in revolutionary spirit, is dismantling liberal notions of what is right and normal that have been entrenched at the federal level for decades. This includes everything related to the ideas of political correctness and wokeness. The revolutionary process is aimed both at these value systems and at the individuals in the "deep state" who are associated with them.

> However, it may well turn out that the American revolution will go much further than this apparent value conflict.

What has happened in the first month of Trump's new presidency might just be the beginning of a long and deeply consequential path, and certainly not the resolution. A kind of pre-revolution. Or, to draw historical analogies, the American version of the "February Revolution," which may very likely be followed by its own "October."

The main driver of such potential future dynamics could be the "rise of the culture of anger," as one famous American political scientist characterized the current situation in a conversation with the author. This is likely what the fact points to—that after the first revolutionary month, the sitting president has stable approval ratings. Although, like the ratings, the overall dynamic is sure to undergo significant changes in the future.

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