Commentary
February 13, 2025

Trump instead of War: United States ascertains global power balance

Yauheni Preiherman

Originally published by Caliber.az

Summary

Hardly intentionally, but through a series of shocking decisions and statements, Donald Trump and members of his administration are experimentally feeling out the real balance of power in a world that is no longer unipolar. In history, such "feeling out" was typically done through major wars.

Contents

1 The hurricane of shocking decisions and statements
2 How "Hurricane Trump" is interpreted
3 Navigating a new global balance
4 Trump instead of War
5 United States ascertains global power balance
6 The hurricane of shocking decisions and statements
7 How "Hurricane Trump" is interpreted
8 Navigating a new global balance

Donald Trump continues to sweep through the foundations of international and domestic American politics like a hurricane. Each new day brings not just unexpected, but staggering news. In their statements and actions, the new Republican administration spares no topic, even addressing issues that, it seemed, had been unquestioned for decades, challenging norms and practices of international life and diplomatic constants in the most volatile regions of the world.

A similar storm is unfolding within the U.S. itself, where Trump and his team have wasted no time in shifting from words to action. He no longer complains about the so-called "deep state," which the new-old president has long regarded as the source of many American problems. Instead, he has set out to destroy it. Or, at the very least, to

reformat it and fill it with new people who are minimally connected to the experience and worldview of the bureaucratic continuity that was once considered a great asset to Washington.

This massive “Hurricane Trump” provokes diametrically opposed yet very strong emotions from various people inside and outside the U.S. Many simply cannot believe that something like this is happening in reality, and as a result, they are overwhelmed with emotions about the unfolding events. Just a few weeks ago, the mantra of universal readiness for Donald Trump’s new ascent to the presidential summit was endlessly repeated. As we have already noted, this is not something one can prepare for. At least not bureaucratically.

> We are clearly witnessing a systemic phenomenon, a brave new world, rather than a temporary aberration. However, amidst the flood of emotions and tension, few attempt to understand what is happening on a systemic level.

This means looking beyond personal perceptions of Trump and the MAGA (Make America Great Again) movement he leads, as well as beyond the specific topics and regions that capture the White House’s attention.

At the same time, with each new stunning piece of news from Washington, the desire to ask the question grows: What, in the grand scheme of things, is actually happening? Is it possible to comprehensively understand what the administration of the 47th president of the United States is doing right now? Not in each specific case, but in general? Are there any overarching strategic plans behind this? Or, even if there is no conscious systemic plan, does the hurricane of decisions made by Trump have any strategically significant implications for the entire planet? It seems that it does.

The hurricane of shocking decisions and statements

Before piecing together the various surprising decisions and statements of the newly formed Republican administration into a unified puzzle, let’s quickly revisit the most striking stories that have shocked the global imagination in recent weeks.

It all started with statements made by Donald Trump even before his official inauguration regarding the Panama Canal, Greenland, Mexico, Canada, and the Gulf of Mexico/America. After the inauguration, he began to develop these ideas and put them into action. Some of these decisions have already led to concrete changes “on the ground.” For instance, he unilaterally renamed the Gulf, without seeking anyone else’s

opinion. Regarding Colombia, he announced a 25% tariff on goods exported to the U.S., and the country immediately agreed to take back all U.S. deported citizens, despite previous doubts.

Similarly, the American president “persuaded” his closest neighbours. By dangling the same Damocles sword of 25% tariffs over them, he secured agreements from the leaders of Mexico and Canada to significantly strengthen border security in order to reduce the flow of illegal migration and drug trafficking. U.S. officials issued even more alarming warnings to Panama, even suggesting military action if it did not change its stance on the Chinese issue, which concerns Washington. As a result, Panama is now withdrawing from the Belt and Road Initiative and actively considering further steps to meet U.S. demands.

With Greenland, Trump has not yet achieved lightning-fast results. His claims on this vast and strategically important island have generated a lot of media noise, statements from politicians on both sides of the Atlantic, and behind-the-scenes conversations. However, the situation has not shifted yet. Still, the very fact that mainstream Western media are now discussing the issue substantively, considering the significance of Greenland for the future great power rivalry, speaks volumes. So, this story will likely continue.

Before these cases could even be fully processed in these countries, in the U.S., and around the world, President Trump detonated a new and even more resounding information-political bombshell. During a joint press conference with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, he declared that the U.S. was ready to take control of and restructure the Gaza Strip, relocating Palestinians to Egypt and Jordan. There’s no need to explain that such proposals completely overturn the approaches to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict that international diplomacy has pursued for decades. And, to put it mildly, they were met with little enthusiasm, except among certain political circles in Israel and the U.S. Therefore, the uproar surrounding the idea of a “Middle Eastern Riviera” is no trivial matter.

More is to come. The shocking news from the White House will not stop. It is obvious that Trump will continue to speak out on the EU and NATO countries, from which he expects a “fair” trade structure and significantly higher military spending. The first steps have already been taken regarding Iran. Both conciliatory and, conversely, extremely harsh thoughts are being expressed in the context of the stated ambition to stop the fighting between Russia and Ukraine. Finally, China will undoubtedly be the main focus of the Republican administration’s long-term ambitions.

> At the same time, it is already clear that American diplomacy, from a position of strength, does not turn everything it touches into gold.

On the China front, for instance, it cannot boast of quick successes. The White House is also imposing tariffs on imported goods from China. However, unlike with Canada, Mexico, and Colombia, these tariffs are set at 10% for now. Beijing predictably responds, signalling its intent to resist pressure, even if it means a future trade war.

The Chinese authorities have taken several retaliatory actions: they imposed their own tariffs on certain American imports, initiated investigations into some American companies, and tightened export controls on rare earth metals that interest the U.S. While it is clear that China has tried to minimize its own losses from these countermeasures, its stance in this tariff-diplomatic exchange with Washington is understandable. This is crucial for our further reflections on the unfolding global puzzle.

How “Hurricane Trump” is interpreted

In commenting on the flow of decisions and words from the White House, members of the administration and its supporters emphasize that Trump is fulfilling the promises he made as a candidate during the election campaign. And, in general, this is something one can agree with. It’s not just about the specific promises, but also about the fact that after his previous presidential term, voters should have known what they were signing up for.

Administration members also highlight that Trump’s unconventional negotiation style, rooted in his business background, allows the U.S. to achieve foreign policy results as quickly as possible. According to them, Trump’s business diplomacy from a position of strength is far more effective than decades of traditional approaches by the “deep state.” In this context, references to Albert Einstein’s definition of insanity often arise: “doing the same thing over and over again and expecting a different result.” The MAGA administration aims to move away from such insanity and change the course of history with unconventional approaches and creative ideas.

From the perspective of Trump’s political and ethical opponents, of course, entirely different assessments are heard. The main criticism boils down to the idea that everything happening is a result of the unpredictable eccentricity of the head of the White House and the total chaos within his administration. Perhaps, even these characterizations cannot be entirely dismissed.

However, in reality, what is important is not so much the cause of the overwhelming hurricane of news but what it means for the world. And here we return to the main point.

Navigating a new global balance

In essence, through such unconventional approaches and creative ideas, the new U.S. leadership is practically testing the limits of what is possible for Washington in a world that has changed significantly in recent years. The fact that the world is no longer what it was a decade ago has finally become an accepted truth. The newly appointed U.S. Secretary of State, Marco Rubio, made this assertion central in his first major interview in the role.

> Judging by Rubio's words, the Trump administration will build its foreign policy strategy on the fundamental understanding that absolute American dominance in a unipolar world has ended, and we have entered a period of intensified great power competition for stronger global positions.

However, this understanding of the situation remains at a fairly abstract, theoretical level. It is crucial for diagnosing the global situation correctly, but for states to develop a strategy with concrete content in this context, they must accurately assess the practical balance of power, potentials, and the willingness to engage them in geopolitical confrontation. And this is precisely the "research" that the American authorities are currently conducting.

In terms of international relations theory, the series of shocking actions and statements from the Trump administration can be seen as a process of determining how, in reality—not just in theory—the power dynamics in world politics currently stand. It is a kind of semi-laboratory experiment, where unconventional impulses from Washington are testing the stress resistance of various global actors and their readiness to defend their own interests. Based on the information gathered, balances and imbalances in modern international relations are being identified.

Meanwhile, it is difficult to say whether Washington is doing this consciously. Most likely, it is not. The administration's rhetoric certainly does not suggest so. It seems that the MAGA Republicans are more concerned with something else: that U.S. power in the world is not sufficiently respected and feared, and as a result, its interests are systematically disregarded. Therefore, in their view, the shocking actions directed at allies and opponents likely have less "research" goals and more "educational" ones—to remind the world of American power.

> However, in reality, the “research” and “educational” components here are not necessarily at odds with each other. In fact, regardless of the true intentions of the new U.S. administration, it is essentially conducting a semi-laboratory study of the actual power dynamics in the global system and its regional subsystems.

This is not only an interesting but also a very important process for the entire planet. Historically, similar “research” into the actual power dynamics during periods of transformation in the international system took the form of particularly destructive wars. Now, in the nuclear age, it is taking on these new forms. And, in fact, this is happening for the first time, because when the bipolar world transitioned to a unipolar one four decades ago, there was simply no need for such research. Everything was already crystal clear.

Today, however, everything is the opposite—extremely unclear and unpredictable. It is possible that, despite the nuclear factor, the ascertaining of the real balance of power and potentials in the world will still be accompanied by the expansion of a global chain of proxy wars. In some ways, Washington’s current unconventional creativity may even fuel this process. However, the U.S. “research” through words and actions will, in any case, provide a huge amount of valuable information about this brave new world, which, with political will and diplomatic maturity, both the U.S. and other states could use to reduce the risks of global confrontation. Perhaps this will ultimately prove to be the historical mission of Donald Trump’s second presidency.

*Director, Minsk Dialogue Council on International Relations***OMMENT**

Originally published by Caliber.az

Trump instead of War

United States ascertains global power balance

Hardly intentionally, but through a series of shocking decisions and statements, Donald Trump and members of his administration are experimentally feeling out the real balance of power in a world that is no longer unipolar. In history, such “feeling out” was typically done through major wars.

Donald Trump continues to sweep through the foundations of international and domestic American politics like a hurricane. Each new day brings not just unexpected, but staggering news. In their statements and actions, the new Republican administration

spares no topic, even addressing issues that, it seemed, had been unquestioned for decades, challenging norms and practices of international life and diplomatic constants in the most volatile regions of the world.

A similar storm is unfolding within the U.S. itself, where Trump and his team have wasted no time in shifting from words to action. He no longer complains about the so-called “deep state,” which the new-old president has long regarded as the source of many American problems. Instead, he has set out to destroy it. Or, at the very least, to reformat it and fill it with new people who are minimally connected to the experience and worldview of the bureaucratic continuity that was once considered a great asset to Washington.

This massive “Hurricane Trump” provokes diametrically opposed yet very strong emotions from various people inside and outside the U.S. Many simply cannot believe that something like this is happening in reality, and as a result, they are overwhelmed with emotions about the unfolding events. Just a few weeks ago, the mantra of universal readiness for Donald Trump’s new ascent to the presidential summit was endlessly repeated. As we have already noted, this is not something one can prepare for. At least not bureaucratically.

We are clearly witnessing a systemic phenomenon, a brave new world, rather than a temporary aberration. However, amidst the flood of emotions and tension, few attempt to understand what is happening on a systemic level. This means looking beyond personal perceptions of Trump and the MAGA (Make America Great Again) movement he leads, as well as beyond the specific topics and regions that capture the White House’s attention.

At the same time, with each new stunning piece of news from Washington, the desire to ask the question grows: What, in the grand scheme of things, is actually happening? Is it possible to comprehensively understand what the administration of the 47th president of the United States is doing right now? Not in each specific case, but in general? Are there any overarching strategic plans behind this? Or, even if there is no conscious systemic plan, does the hurricane of decisions made by Trump have any strategically significant implications for the entire planet? It seems that it does.

The hurricane of shocking decisions and statements

Before piecing together the various surprising decisions and statements of the newly formed Republican administration into a unified puzzle, let’s quickly revisit the most striking stories that have shocked the global imagination in recent weeks.

It all started with statements made by Donald Trump even before his official inauguration regarding the Panama Canal, Greenland, Mexico, Canada, and the Gulf of Mexico/America. After the inauguration, he began to develop these ideas and put them into action. Some of these decisions have already led to concrete changes “on the ground.” For instance, he unilaterally renamed the Gulf, without seeking anyone else’s opinion. Regarding Colombia, he announced a 25% tariff on goods exported to the U.S., and the country immediately agreed to take back all U.S. deported citizens, despite previous doubts.

Similarly, the American president “persuaded” his closest neighbours. By dangling the same Damocles sword of 25% tariffs over them, he secured agreements from the leaders of Mexico and Canada to significantly strengthen border security in order to reduce the flow of illegal migration and drug trafficking. U.S. officials issued even more alarming warnings to Panama, even suggesting military action if it did not change its stance on the Chinese issue, which concerns Washington. As a result, Panama is now withdrawing from the Belt and Road Initiative and actively considering further steps to meet U.S. demands.

With Greenland, Trump has not yet achieved lightning-fast results. His claims on this vast and strategically important island have generated a lot of media noise, statements from politicians on both sides of the Atlantic, and behind-the-scenes conversations. However, the situation has not shifted yet. Still, the very fact that mainstream Western media are now discussing the issue substantively, considering the significance of Greenland for the future great power rivalry, speaks volumes. So, this story will likely continue.

Before these cases could even be fully processed in these countries, in the U.S., and around the world, President Trump detonated a new and even more resounding information-political bombshell. During a joint press conference with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, he declared that the U.S. was ready to take control of and restructure the Gaza Strip, relocating Palestinians to Egypt and Jordan. There’s no need to explain that such proposals completely overturn the approaches to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict that international diplomacy has pursued for decades. And, to put it mildly, they were met with little enthusiasm, except among certain political circles in Israel and the U.S. Therefore, the uproar surrounding the idea of a “Middle Eastern Riviera” is no trivial matter.

More is to come. The shocking news from the White House will not stop. It is obvious that Trump will continue to speak out on the EU and NATO countries, from which he expects a “fair” trade structure and significantly higher military spending. The first

steps have already been taken regarding Iran. Both conciliatory and, conversely, extremely harsh thoughts are being expressed in the context of the stated ambition to stop the fighting between Russia and Ukraine. Finally, China will undoubtedly be the main focus of the Republican administration's long-term ambitions.

At the same time, it is already clear that American diplomacy, from a position of strength, does not turn everything it touches into gold. On the China front, for instance, it cannot boast of quick successes. The White House is also imposing tariffs on imported goods from China. However, unlike with Canada, Mexico, and Colombia, these tariffs are set at 10% for now. Beijing predictably responds, signalling its intent to resist pressure, even if it means a future trade war.

The Chinese authorities have taken several retaliatory actions: they imposed their own tariffs on certain American imports, initiated investigations into some American companies, and tightened export controls on rare earth metals that interest the U.S. While it is clear that China has tried to minimize its own losses from these countermeasures, its stance in this tariff-diplomatic exchange with Washington is understandable. This is crucial for our further reflections on the unfolding global puzzle.

How "Hurricane Trump" is interpreted

In commenting on the flow of decisions and words from the White House, members of the administration and its supporters emphasize that Trump is fulfilling the promises he made as a candidate during the election campaign. And, in general, this is something one can agree with. It's not just about the specific promises, but also about the fact that after his previous presidential term, voters should have known what they were signing up for.

Administration members also highlight that Trump's unconventional negotiation style, rooted in his business background, allows the U.S. to achieve foreign policy results as quickly as possible. According to them, Trump's business diplomacy from a position of strength is far more effective than decades of traditional approaches by the "deep state." In this context, references to Albert Einstein's definition of insanity often arise: "doing the same thing over and over again and expecting a different result." The MAGA administration aims to move away from such insanity and change the course of history with unconventional approaches and creative ideas.

From the perspective of Trump's political and ethical opponents, of course, entirely different assessments are heard. The main criticism boils down to the idea that everything happening is a result of the unpredictable eccentricity of the head of the

White House and the total chaos within his administration. Perhaps, even these characterizations cannot be entirely dismissed.

However, in reality, what is important is not so much the cause of the overwhelming hurricane of news but what it means for the world. And here we return to the main point.

Navigating a new global balance

In essence, through such unconventional approaches and creative ideas, the new U.S. leadership is practically testing the limits of what is possible for Washington in a world that has changed significantly in recent years. The fact that the world is no longer what it was a decade ago has finally become an accepted truth. The newly appointed U.S. Secretary of State, Marco Rubio, made this assertion central in his first major interview in the role. Judging by Rubio's words, the Trump administration will build its foreign policy strategy on the fundamental understanding that absolute American dominance in a unipolar world has ended, and we have entered a period of intensified great power competition for stronger global positions.

However, this understanding of the situation remains at a fairly abstract, theoretical level. It is crucial for diagnosing the global situation correctly, but for states to develop a strategy with concrete content in this context, they must accurately assess the practical balance of power, potentials, and the willingness to engage them in geopolitical confrontation. And this is precisely the "research" that the American authorities are currently conducting.

In terms of international relations theory, the series of shocking actions and statements from the Trump administration can be seen as a process of determining how, in reality—not just in theory—the power dynamics in world politics currently stand. It is a kind of semi-laboratory experiment, where unconventional impulses from Washington are testing the stress resistance of various global actors and their readiness to defend their own interests. Based on the information gathered, balances and imbalances in modern international relations are being identified.

Meanwhile, it is difficult to say whether Washington is doing this consciously. Most likely, it is not. The administration's rhetoric certainly does not suggest so. It seems that the MAGA Republicans are more concerned with something else: that U.S. power in the world is not sufficiently respected and feared, and as a result, its interests are systematically disregarded. Therefore, in their view, the shocking actions directed at allies and opponents likely have less "research" goals and more "educational" ones—to remind the world of American power. However, in reality, the "research" and

“educational” components here are not necessarily at odds with each other. In fact, regardless of the true intentions of the new U.S. administration, it is essentially conducting a semi-laboratory study of the actual power dynamics in the global system and its regional subsystems.

This is not only an interesting but also a very important process for the entire planet. Historically, similar “research” into the actual power dynamics during periods of transformation in the international system took the form of particularly destructive wars. Now, in the nuclear age, it is taking on these new forms. And, in fact, this is happening for the first time, because when the bipolar world transitioned to a unipolar one four decades ago, there was simply no need for such research. Everything was already crystal clear.

Today, however, everything is the opposite—extremely unclear and unpredictable. It is possible that, despite the nuclear factor, the ascertaining of the real balance of power and potentials in the world will still be accompanied by the expansion of a global chain of proxy wars. In some ways, Washington’s current unconventional creativity may even fuel this process. However, the U.S. “research” through words and actions will, in any case, provide a huge amount of valuable information about this brave new world, which, with political will and diplomatic maturity, both the U.S. and other states could use to reduce the risks of global confrontation. Perhaps this will ultimately prove to be the historical mission of Donald Trump’s second presidency.

Yauheni Preiherman
Director, Minsk Dialogue Council on International Relations