

The dynamics of global politics in 2017

by Tarık OĞUZLU

As we have just entered a new year, it is now the most opportune time to offer some expectations as to how the year 2017 might unfold in terms of the dynamics of global politics. The first observation to make in this regard is that the allure of nationalism and geopolitical thinking will likely increase. Unlike the expectations of the liberal internationalist and Kantian idealists, we are not on the verge of transcending into a borderless world in which universal principles of secularism, human rights, cosmopolitan morality, unlimited globalization and multiculturalism prevail. The pressure on the liberal world order will intensify as the forces of illiberalism have now been taking hold in many quarters of the world. The rise of Putinism as a political ideology will likely find new followers. Not only the most Kantian political experiment, viz. the European Union, has faced existential crises in recent years, but also the rising powers of the non-Western world have contributed to the erosion of liberal internationalist dream through their Westphalian foreign and security policy practices abroad and the stress they put on conservative values, strong nation-state identity, strong leadership and state-led economic development process at home.

The United States appears to offer the latest example of a gradual turn towards a nationalistic



and anti-globalist understanding of international relations, as exemplified by the election of Donald Trump as the new American president on the ticket of realism, geopolitical reawakening, mercantilist economic policies, protectionism, anti-globalism and American nativism. Unlike former American presidents Trumps puts an overwhelming emphasis on the preservation of the constitutive values of the white Anglo-Saxon Protestant Americans and thinks that the United States has mainly suffered from the post-war era globalization process. Acting in the footsteps of one of the 19th century American presidents, Andrew Jackson, Trump thinks that the so-called American creed is what makes the United States exceptional among all nations and the US would do well not to promote these values to others in the name of making the world safe for democracy. Unless the US takes some extreme measures, such as shielding itself against the infiltration of Mexicans, Muslims, Chinese and others into the pure American society, he avers nothing would

be left as truly American. With Trump in presidency, Putin reigning in Russia and other strong nationalist figures at the helm of their countries, one can safely argue that the year 2017 will increasingly witness a return to the factory settings of world politics as they existed prior to the Second World War.

Second, great power cooperation and other traditional interstate cooperation schemas will likely be utilised more frequently than ever in finding solutions to diverse and myriad foreign and security policy challenges across the globe. Long-term alliance relations and durable strategic partnerships based on common values and solid threat perceptions will likely be out, whereas ad-hoc strategic cooperation based on pragmatic needs and common conjectural security needs will be heard more often. NATO will likely suffer under Trump's presidency as he seems to lash out against the alliance on the ground that allies have been free riding on the United States for long and it is now the time to pay back. Besides, Putin's efforts to divide the transatlantic alliance by cultivating stronger and cordial relations with potential Putin admirers will make it more difficult than ever to bring twenty eight NATO members around commonly shared threat perceptions and security policies.

Countries, irrespective of their power capabilities, geographical locations and internal characteristics will be more predisposed than ever to establish pragmatic and interest oriented cooperative relations with each other. Memberships in diverse international and regional organizations, no matter how different value preferences such organizations evince, will be a common practice in international relations. Turkey's efforts to join

the Shanghai Cooperation Organization and the Eurasian Economic Union while simultaneously pursuing membership in the European Union can be seen as a vivid demonstration of such pragmatic and realist thinking in foreign policy.

Third, the balance between security and freedom will be increasingly defined in favour of security as the Kantian expectations of achieving universal human freedom being realized in a globalising world based on common values and principles have mostly failed to take place across the globe. The practice of achieving security and welfare within the territorial boundaries of nation states and putting national belonging at the center of one's multiple identities will likely intensify in the years to come. Recent years have seen that the rise of transnational terrorism, unfettered market globalization, intensifying transboundary migration movements and erosion of state structures mainly in third world countries, have worsened security anxieties in both developed and developing countries. This suggests that people in many countries will likely turn to their state authorities as the most credible and reliable providers of security and welfare. Establishing strong state structures so as to fulfil security and welfare needs of people will be the most important challenge facing decision makers across the globe. Promoting liberal democracy abroad, particularly on the part of liberal Western powers, and working for the emergence of a truly global community of humankind will likely give in to attempts at strengthening strong state structures and cultivating internal legitimacy through nation-building at home. At a time of growing ambiguities and uncertainties, many states around the globe will put territorial defense and preservation of national sovereignty

at the center of their foreign and security policies. Scaling down foreign policy ambitions abroad and prioritising nation-building attempts at home will likely be the most common practices across the globe. The election of Trump to US presidency, the growing criticisms levelled against financial globalization and free trade in developed Western countries, the United Kingdom's withdrawal from the European Union, the revival of anti-integrationist and populist political movements across the European Union members, the rise of illiberal democracies and authoritarian state practices in different quarters of the world and the emphasis that rising powers of the non-Western world increasingly put on national sovereignty and territorial integrity do all suggest that security will likely take precedence over freedom and nation states will remain the most legitimate and respected political communities.

The transformation of the wider Middle East region into a textbook example of Hobbesian anarchy over the last couple of years demonstrates that neither freedom nor democracy can take root in an insecure environment in which there is no functioning state mechanisms. Unfettered globalization and growing interconnectivity have also made it clear that insecurities outside borders do never stay there. In today's world crises have contagious effects. Turkey's growing security anxieties in the context of the never-ending Syrian crisis show it convincingly that threats recognize no borders and strong state structures at home are what is required to deal with new kind of threats that thrive on technological developments, porous borders and fluid identities. Turkey's simultaneous struggle against ethnic Kurdish terrorism, as represented by PKK and its Syrian affiliates PYD-YPG, and

Islamic extremism, as represented by the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS), demonstrate that the need for having a strong state in terms of its extractive, coercive and administrative capacities as well as a strong and cohesive Turkish society united around commonly shared secular Turkish nationalism has never been this urgent.

Fourth, the kind of developments mentioned above will also result in the growing ascendancy of strategic realism as the most likely foreign and security policy approach to be employed by states around the globe. Realism seems to have lately overshadowed liberalism as the most influential prism through which countries in different parts of the globe define their foreign and security policy interests. Turkey offers the best example of the realist turn in foreign policy. In contrast to the early days of the so-called Arab Spring, Turkish decision makers do longer talk about the prospects of liberal democratic transformation of the neighbours to the south and Turkey's efforts to find solutions to the immediate security challenges, of which threats emanating from ISIS, PKK and FETÖ stand out, through closer cooperation with regional competitors, such as Russia and Iran, have intensified recently. The idea of 'decreasing the number of enemies while increasing the number of friends' seems to have been a realism-inspired correction of the idealist dream of 'zero problems with neighbours'. What matters in today's world is to be on good terms with as many countries as possible, no matter how they are ruled internally, so that states guarantee their territorial integrity and societal cohesion against outside challenges. This is a U-turn from the heyday of liberal optimism as practiced in the first two decades of the post-Cold War era.

The realist turn in US foreign policy will also likely intensify with the inauguration of the Trump presidency. The practices of turning away from liberal democracy promotion attempts abroad, relegating responsibility to regional powers as part of the offshore balancing security strategy, scaling down American military presence in war-torn countries in the Middle East, pressuring the European allies to spend more money on their defense, pivoting to East Asia as part of the attempts at containing China's rise as well as reassuring its allies, prioritising leading from behind over asserting liberal hegemony, opening to erstwhile enemies such as Iran and Cuba are the hallmarks of what analysts call the 'Obama doctrine' in foreign policy. Trump will likely continue such realist foreign policy practices. In addition, he will likely seek further avenues of cooperation with other great powers, notably China and Russia, in such a way to find solutions to pressing security problems in the Middle East, East Asia and Eastern Europe. Trump has made it clear that he is not fond of multilateral platforms, such as NATO. He will likely favour cooperation with great powers on bilateral grounds. Such a foreign policy understanding on the part of the United States would indirectly bolster Russia and China to act more assertively in their neighbourhood as well as prompt traditional US allies to seek their own security through internal balancing, regional security cooperation and accommodation with potential regional hegemony. All such foreign policy behaviours do squarely fall in the category of realist foreign policy tool kit.

Finally, the gradual decline of Western powers' primacy in global politics, as well as the erosion of the US-led liberal world order, will likely

continue in 2017 as the Trump administration adopts a pseudo isolationist and nativist foreign policy orientation and the United States's European allies devote much of their time and energy on intra-European challenges with a view to salvaging what has been left from the post-modern European Union integration process. Having emboldened by the gradual decline of the West, non-Western powers will likely play more decisive and influential roles in global politics that might indirectly result in the formation of regional power blocks around potential regional hegemony. China's 'One Road One Belt' initiative and the Russian-led 'Eurasian Economic Union' will likely get more global attention as many countries located in the wider Eurasian landmass will likely tend to view these initiatives more positively.

About BILGESAM

Established in 2008, the Wise Men Center for Strategic Studies (BILGESAM) is one of the leading think tanks in Turkey. As a non-profit, non-partisan organization BILGESAM operates under the guidance of a group of well-respected academics from different disciplines, retired military generals and diplomats; and aims to contribute regional and global peace and prosperity. Closely following the domestic and international developments, BILGESAM conducts research on Turkey's domestic problems, foreign policy and security strategies, and the developments in the neighbouring regions to provide the Turkish decision-makers with practical policy recommendations and policy options.

About Author

Prof. Dr. Tarık Oğuzlu is currently the Dean of the Faculty of Economics and Administrative Sciences and the Director of the Center for Social, Economic and Political Research (SEPAM, www.sepam.antalya.edu.tr) at Antalya International University. He holds a Ph.D. degree in International Relations taken from Bilkent University in 2003. He holds a Master of Science degree in International Relations taken from the London School of Economics and Political Science in 2000 as well as a Master of Arts degree in International Relations taken from Bilkent University in 1998. He is one of the co-editors of the book "Turkey's Rise as an Emerging Power". He has numerous academic articles published in such journals as Political Science Quarterly, Washington Quarterly, Middle East Policy, International Journal, Security Dialogue, Middle Eastern Studies, Turkish Studies, Cambridge Review of International Affairs, European Security, International Spectator, Contemporary Security Policy, Mediterranean Politics, Australian Journal of International Affairs, Journal of Balkans and Near Eastern Studies, Insight Turkey, Uluslararası İlişkiler, etc.