

Points on U.S. Russian Relations in an Upcoming Trump Administration  
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1. The new U.S. Administration sees foreign policy issues primarily through the lens of their domestic effects. For example, critiques of trade, immigration, and alliance policies are framed by their direct implications for American citizens. This perspective will likely inform policy on Russia.
2. It is easy to caricature Tweets and flamboyant statements, but it is also probably wrong. President-elect Trump's opponents have consistently underestimated him. Moreover, some statements are probably intended to create trade space in negotiations.
3. It is possible to infer an internally consistent strategy from the statements we have seen so far:
  - a. Ruthlessly prioritize perceived threats to U.S. interests—first, the Islamic State, and second Chinese trade practices and aggressive regional behavior—while disengaging on lesser issues.
  - b. Defend *more* forcefully core U.S. interests, while accommodating Russia on its perceived vital interests—hence the apparent welcoming of an arms race (presumably with Russia), while questioning the need for U.S. leadership on Ukraine.
  - c. If a rising China, not a declining Russia, poses the main strategic threat to U.S. interests, keep Moscow at least neutral. This is an updated version of Kissinger's balancing.
4. Nonetheless, much remains to be sorted out among the Administration's senior officials. Secretary-designate Tillerson and Mattis, and CIA Director nominee Pompeo have all spoken more skeptically of Russia and more favorably of U.S. alliances than President-elect Trump.