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– SPECIAL REPORT –

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## **PUTIN'S HELSINKI TACTICAL SUCCESS STRATEGIC FAILURE**



**PRESIDENT VLADIMIR PUTIN DURING THE MEETING WITH PRESIDENT DONALD TRUMP.  
SOURCE: KREMLIN.RU**

- **The Helsinki summit between Presidents Donald Trump and Vladimir Putin did not bring any breakthrough in relations between the two countries as the diplomatic crisis has only deepened since that time. As a result, no sanctions against Russia may be lifted nor restricted while it is not certain whether any further restrictions will be introduced in the near future. Trump’s fawning behaviour bolstered Russia’s critics in the USA and made it possible to undertake other anti-Russian steps, including more punitive measures. Following the Helsinki summit, the U.S.-led decisive policy encouraged Russian opponents of better relations with the United States to continue their hitherto practices. At the same time, the U.S. authorities have seemingly strengthened Moscow’s „party of the war”.**

- Putin has taken advantage of his exhaustive face-to-face conversation with Trump as well as following suggestions, some vague hints, not to forget little fortunate statements by his American counterpart at a press conference; thanks to all that, the Russian President could develop an information offensive only a few days after the summit. So the Russians were able to play with the American consternation, for instance by imposing their own interpretation on the alleged arrangements – even if each subsequent weeks brought some information about the lack of such compromise. Nonetheless, the Helsinki summit has shown that Russia was apt to carry out information warfare operations.
- Apart from „moral satisfaction” – as it was referred to as by some commentators – Putin did not gain much during the meeting in the Finnish capital. In addition, not only did the summit make Trump weaker but it also strengthened anti-Russian milieu in the United States. Such state of affairs is evidenced by a blatant increase in the Congress’ pressure on the U.S. President to take necessary steps against Russia such as implementing the CAATSA and the Magnitsky Act, hitting Russia’s banking system and recognition it as a „state sponsor of terrorism”.
- And Putin is already aware that Trump will neither lift the sanctions nor will he make any concessions on some key issues for his country. Thus, he ceases to be useful anymore. It would seem that in this case Russia will break with his policy of „good Trump” and „bad Congress”; however, the Kremlin has no intention of doing so. The American leader can potentially be used in a completely different way, for example as a conflict-maker, who will be constantly destabilizing the situation in the country.

## **PUTIN'S HELSINKI: TACTICAL SUCCESS, STRATEGIC FAILURE**

The Helsinki summit will go down in history as one of the strangest meetings between U.S. and Russian leaders and one of Trump's worst moments during his current term of office. In addition, it is difficult to explain his behaviour in Finland's capital: he is likely to have overestimated his business experience that he has been hitherto using to make his foreign policy. Compared to Putin's KGB-style diplomacy, it turned out to be highly ineffective – even if Russia should not have expected any great success. As for the U.S. President, he arrived in the Finnish capital in the context of a specific political situation; more attention should be drawn not to Trump's words and tweets, which may be perceived as pro-Russian, but to specific decisions taken by the American state during Trump's term of office, including the April sanction package against Russia or expelling 60 Russian diplomats following the attempt murder of Sergei Skripal. What is more,

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## **UNEXPECTEDLY WEAK TRUMP**

During his performance in Helsinki, Trump gave the impression of being badly prepared for his first official meeting with Vladimir Putin – neither substantively nor mentally. One might think that Trump had invested all his energy in Brussels only a few days before where he had been playing a key role at the NATO summit, pushing back German Chancellor Angela Merkel. The West could have been also worried by events that had taken place right before the meeting as well as by Trump's „Twitter diplomacy“. For example, the U.S. leader stated that poor state of both countries' relations had been induced by „many years of American stupidity“ and not by Russia's aggressive behavior. Indeed, it is bizarre why Trump, as an experienced businessman, had weakened his negotiating position only a day before the talks were started. Later, it was even worse. The press conference, held after the talks between the two presidents, appeared particularly embarrassing, especially in terms of the U.S. internal policy. Trump spent more time attacking Democrats and Hillary Clinton than talking about Russia's aggressive policy. And as for Russia's meddling in the U.S. presidential election in 2016, Trump recognized Putin's declarations to be more credible than determinations made by American special services. Trump's attitude in Helsinki sparked dramatic controversies amid Western countries – as their representatives even accused Trump of betraying their common interests. So in a sense, it was not the USA-Russia summit but rather the meeting between Trump and Russia. The very fact of

the conference was the Kremlin's success since only the Russians could take advantage of it while Trump clearly sought to act for his own benefits as he had counted for some potential achievements, also in the matter of his own problems related to Mueller's anti-Russian investigation. Both Putin and Russia managed to gain a lot; the Russian President acted as a strong leader who forced the greatest world power to recognize Russia as an equal partner. According to the overall message of the meeting, the only way to get out of a deep crisis in the U.S.-Russia relations is to revise the American foreign policy without any need to amend the Russian one. And as for Moscow, it has no intention of making any concessions in any matter. Due to his behavior and words, Trump has greatly contributed to such state of affairs.

Russia's U.S. Ambassador, Anatoly Antonov stated „it was an important meeting during which it was possible to reach important agreements.” Such impression seemed to prevail in the first days after the meeting. However, the reality has rapidly verified the Russian propaganda, especially in such essential issues as Ukraine and Syria. Moscow has used its best efforts to convince the public opinion that Putin and Trump had agreed on „something important” as for the annexation of Crimea and the war in Donbas. However, the results have appeared to be quite the opposite of the Kremlin's expectations. Even before the Helsinki summit, the Trump administration had been sending some ambiguous signals in the Ukrainian case, which may have raised concerns in Kiev and could be satisfying for Moscow at the same time. Following the U.S.-Russia top-level meeting, the United States Secretary of State Mike Pompeo formally announced the „Crimea Declaration”; the document confirms the U.S. official standpoint as well as rejects to

recognize the Kremlin's purported annexation of Crimea. In his statement, Pompeo declared that such policy could not be subject to any changes until the peninsula did not return to Kiev's sovereignty. In addition, the Americans have rapidly dispelled any Russian hopes related to the situation in Syria.

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## **It was not the USA-Russia summit, but rather Trump-Russia summit. Putin acted as a strong leader who forced the greatest world power to recognize Russia as an equal partner.**

The idea of military cooperation between the two countries in Syria was rejected by U.S. Central Command's General Joseph Votel, who claimed that he had had no rational reasons to deepen any further partnership with the Russians. They could only powerlessly attack the military official, claiming that he had undermined the position of the President as his superior as Trump had allegedly agreed to strengthen military assistance with Russia in Syria. Also Moscow's third defeat is closely connected with Syria. In Helsinki, Putin and Trump overtly suggested that they had agreed as soon as possible to make any steps aiming to increase Israel's security; Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu had paid



**RUSSIAN SOLDIERS IN SYRIA.  
SOURCE: MIL.RU**

numerous visits to Moscow as he had been seeking help in pushing Iranian troops out of Syria. However, it finally turned out that the Russians offered only a partial solution to the problem. In July this year, Russia's Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov and Chief of Russia's General Staff Valery Gerasimov visited Israel to meet Israeli PM. They presented a plan to withdraw both the Iranian and Shiite forces to a distance of 100 kilometres far from the Israeli-occupied Golan Heights. Israel rejected the offer for two main reasons. First of all, such proposal did not satisfy Netanyahu; secondly, the Israelis have been aware that the Russians could not be even certain whether they would manage to persuade Iran to construct a 100-kilometer „buffer zone”.

During a joint press conference, Trump stated that he had no grounds to believe that Russian had meddled in the U.S. presidential election in 2016. However, the U.S. counterintelligence services have drawn completely different conclusions. But, according to Trump, Putin had firmly rejected all the accusations. Asked about who was more credible – Putin or the FBI – Trump immediately replied that he had grounds to believe both sides. Thus, he provided his own services with the vote of no confidence. Surprisingly, Trump mentioned also some allegations that the Russians had supposedly set the hook on him. The U.S. President announced that if this had been the case – and it was about trips to Russia many years ago – Moscow would have revealed any compromising materials a long time ago. Putin used the opportunity

to ensure that „the Russian state has never interfered, and is not going to interfere, in internal American affairs, including the election process.” He also claimed that any charges would be discredited in court. Asked about U.S. indictments of twelve Russian GRU officers, Putin replied that he had not learned any information about the charges. His behavior appeared extremely shameless, as he had claimed that the U.S. authorities might request any potential suspects to be questioned in Russia; nonetheless, Russia would also ask for a similar procedure, by hearing Hermitage Capital founder Bill Browder. Previously, the financier had firmly got under Putin’s skin by effectively lobbying Western governments to adopt the so-called Magnitsky Act. Putin tenaciously rejected any allegations of Russia’s interference in the 2016 U.S. presidential election – along with Trump’s approach, as the President gave faith to the Russian leader, instead of his own services, which has been widely criticized by the American establishment. While referring to the U.S. internal affairs, for instance, Mueller’s investigation, Putin directly involved in Trump’s war with his political opponents in Washington, which constituted yet another blow to Donald Trump, especially in the light of the indictment against 12 Russian military officers by the grand jury only a day before the summit. At the joint press conference, Putin admitted that he had wanted Trump to win the 2016 U.S. presidential election. In addition, the Russian leader said that it was Trump who sought normal diplomatic relations with Russia; the approach that ultimately gave the U.S. President the kiss of death.

### **REVISION OF THE SUMMIT**

Following the Helsinki summit, the late Senator John McCain said that Trump had given „one of the most disgraceful

performances by an American president in memory” and he called the summit „a tragic mistake”. Another GOP Senator, Lindsey Graham, wrote on Twitter that the U.S. President had sent a blatant „sign of weakness”. His standpoint seemed to be also shared by Senate Foreign Relations Chairman Bob Corker, who claimed that Trump „made the United States look like a pushover.” All the commentaries concluded information that Putin had considered Trump as a weak leader while such situation may be really dangerous for American interests. In fact, all U.S. institutions, including the Congress and CIA, decided to distance themselves from Trump’s incomprehensibly powerless performance in the Finnish capital. Any arguments, which undermined the position of the American leader, constituted also a big blow to Russia. The anti-Russian attitudes, which have been growing amid U.S. politicians since 2016, have seemingly strengthened in the light of the aforementioned events. US House of Representatives Speaker Paul Ryan stressed out that Moscow remained hostile to America’s most basic values and ideals and he had no doubt that the Kremlin had been responsible for interfering in the U.S. 2016 election. Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell reiterated that „the Russians are not our friends.” Shortly after Trump’s press conference, Director of National Intelligence Dan Coats released a statement, in which he had emphasized that U.S. intelligence agencies had been upholding their findings on so-called „Russiagate” while FBI Director Christopher Wray pointed up that the Kremlin was continuously carrying out its disinformation offensive with the aim of wreaking havoc and dissent in the United States.

Also Trump’s behavior in the first days following the summit appeared pretty

much awkward as the President clarified his statements, either personally or via his spokespersons. In a video interview for American Fox News television channel, recorded on the day of meeting with Putin, Trump addressed many warm words to Russia and he spent much time attacking domestic adversaries. The U.S. leader blamed Tuesday a lingual slip while assessing Russia's interference in the U.S. election; at the same time, the President asserted that he had full faith and confidence in American agencies. Asked on Wednesday whether Moscow was still making any effort to meddle with the U.S. elections, Trump denied and thus, he declined any findings of the American intelligence services. It was only later than the White House announced that the President did not say that the United States had no longer been Russia's target as, according to the spokeswoman, a negative formulation referred to possible further questions and did not account for Moscow's meddling in the U.S. election. During a Thursday interview with CBS News, President Donald Trump said that he would consider Vladimir Putin personally responsible for Russia's meddling in the 2016 U.S. presidential election. The President declared that the United States would not tolerate any foreign interference into its electoral process. Press secretary Sarah Sanders informed that Donald Trump had instructed national security adviser John Bolton to invite the Russian leader this autumn. Nonetheless, the U.S. President had already been under political fire from some officials in Washington, which made him readopt anti-Russian attitudes. For instance, he quickly withdrew from the idea of inviting Putin to the White House. In addition, Trump accused Moscow of having intention to meddle with the U.S. November election in order to help the Democrats as the Kremlin was reportedly afraid of their tough policy.

## Trump's tweet caused a short-term decline in the value of the Russian currency.

His tweet caused a short-term decline in the value of the Russian currency. More controversies aroused after Putin suggested entitling Russian services to interrogate a group of American citizens, including a former U.S. Ambassador to Russia, Michael McFaul. On Wednesday, the spokeswoman announced that the White House was considering Putin's proposal; her words had caused such indignation the Trump administration immediately denied that such situation would be possible to happen in the future.

### **NO DIPLOMATIC RESET TO BE INTRODUCED**

The post-summit atmosphere in Moscow resembled the one from November 2016 that prevailed in Russia following Trump's victory in the presidential election. And just as it was the case two years ago, the Russian authorities rapidly felt disappointed; however, such discontent occurred much faster than at the beginning of Trump's term of office. Thus, if Putin's main goal had been to restore a U.S.-Russian dialogue, Russia's President had failed to achieve his objective. For instance, both sides have no intention to normalize their partnership – even if such idea was advocated during the meeting – while the relations between the two countries have plunged into an even greater crisis. In the first days after the Helsinki summit, U.S. congressmen launched a discussion regarding further restrictions against Russia; as a result,





**PRESIDENT VLADIMIR PUTIN AND PRESIDENT DONALD TRUMP AFTER JOINT PRESS CONFERENCE. IN THE BACKGROUND – FIRST LADY OF THE USA MELANIA TRUMP. SOURCE: KREMLIN.RU**

the U.S. forces detained an alleged Russian agent, Mariia Butina, while the Secretary of State released the „Crimea Declaration”. In addition, Russian hackers were accused of attacking U.S. energy networks. First, on July 19, the White House announced that Trump had asked his security adviser to invite Trump to Washington this autumn; nonetheless, only a week later, press secretary said the visit would be postponed until next year. What is more, no U.S.-Russian working groups were appointed while the Russian initiative to establish a joint cooperation group in Syria, which had been agreed on as a result of the Helsinki summit, was turned down by the U.S. Army Command.

Trump’s attitude in Helsinki has mobilized the U.S. establishment to carry out some operations on an unprecedented scale. Right after the meeting, Republican Senator of

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**A few days earlier in Brussels Trump had fiercely criticized the idea of the Nord Stream 2 project while, surprisingly, he basically surrendered during the diplomatic meeting in Helsinki.**

Wyoming John Barrasso introduced a bill to the Congress imposing restrictions against the Nord Stream 2 pipeline. His draft law constituted a direct reaction to Trump's surprisingly soft standpoint on the project. A few days earlier, at the Brussels summit, he had fiercely criticized the idea of the Nord Stream 2 project while, surprisingly, he basically surrendered during the diplomatic meeting in Helsinki. Interestingly, it is not about pursuing Russia's narrative, according to which any U.S. opposition results from pure business calculations as the Americans seek to compete with the Russians in terms of their LNG supplies. Trump suggested that any decisions on the construction were made by Berlin and, at the same time, he did not mention any punitive measures.

### **UKRAINIAN PROVOCATION**

The Ukrainian issue constituted one of the three key topics of discussion during the talks in the Finnish capital. In addition, this topic embodies an example of the Kremlin's information game that consists of publishing statements and leaks about alleged U.S.-Russian arrangements. At the Helsinki summit, Putin expressed his uttermost expectation that the United States would exert pressure on Kiev to implement the Minsk agreements. During the press conference, he admitted that both countries had completely distinct views on the issues of Crimea and Donbas. Trump did not say anything, letting Putin impose the overall narrative. To make matters worse, he started to play the Ukrainian card. In Kiev, the summit has almost sparked panic as Putin stated in his first post-summit TV interview as follows: „We talked about Ukraine and we mentioned some new ideas how to solve the crisis in south-eastern part of the country. We have agreed that this should be done at expert level”, he added. At an annual meeting of

ambassadors, Putin announced that „there is a serious risk of aggravation of the situation in south-eastern Ukraine [...] due to non-compliance of the Ukrainian authorities with their own commitments.”

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## **Bolton: during a recent meeting with Putin, Trump confirmed that Washington had no intention of recognizing Russia's annexation of Crimea.**

His words triggered Kiev's immediate reaction as the Ukrainian authorities asked Washington for further clarifications. But still Moscow managed to achieve what it had pursued for, by playing Ukraine off against its most important ally. In addition, there emerged some leaks that Putin had used his best efforts to convince Trump to approve the idea of a referendum in the pro-Russian separatist region of Donbas, similar to the Crimean one. On July 20, the White House declared that the Trump administration „would not support Putin's proposal to hold a referendum in Donbas.” On July 24, U.S. Special Representative for Ukraine Negotiations Kurt Volker declared that any idea of holding any kind of the referendums in Russia-occupied Donbas would be neither possible nor legitimate. Moreover, the envoy assured that following the Trump-Putin summit, Washington had not changed its policy towards Kiev. Any other doubts could be dispelled by the U.S. Crimea Declaration. In the document, U.S.



**PRESIDENT PUTIN'S SPEECH AT THE ANNUAL MEETING WITH AMBASSADORS.  
SOURCE: KREMLIN.RU**

Secretary of State Mike Pompeo announced that the United States would never recognize Russian annexation of Crimea and the country would continue to insist on restoring Ukraine's full territorial integrity. Two days later, the House of Representatives of the U.S. Congress approved the allocation of 250 million dollars for military assistance in Ukraine in 2019. One fifth of the amount (approximately 50 million dollars) may be spent on deadly defensive weapons. Such attitude of the USA could not be satisfying for the Kremlin. U.S. Special Representative for Ukraine Negotiations Kurt Volker is clearly acting for the benefit of Ukraine, Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Sergey Ryabkov said in a press interview published on August 23. On the same day, the U.S. leader congratulated President Poroshenko on the occasion of Ukraine's Independence Day on August 24. „The United States will always stand shoulder to shoulder with Ukraine”, Trump announced.

The U.S. President has assured that his state would continue to support the country that „has bravely opposed the Russian military aggression over past four years.” A day after, Bolton arrived to Kiev; his visit took part right after the talks with his Russian counterpart. He said that American sanctions against Russia would remain in force until Moscow changed its behavior. Bolton also reiterated that, during a recent meeting with Vladimir Putin, Donald Trump confirmed that Washington had no intention of recognizing Russia's annexation of Crimea.

### **NO CHANGES IN SYRIA**

It seemed that, like last year in Hamburg, both Trump and Putin would make it easy to conclude a deal on Syria. While the Russian President sought to mention improving the country's humanitarian situation – mostly on the pretext to get money for the regime of al-Assad – the U.S. leader focused mostly on

the pretext to get money for the regime of al-Assad – the U.S. leader focused mostly on removing any Iranian influences out of the Syrian territory. So Trump primarily aimed to pursue all goals of Israel's policy. For instance, he announced that both Moscow and Washington would enter into cooperation for Israeli security whereas American and Russian military officers maintained friendly relations. In an interview with Fox News, Trump also said Putin was a strong supporter of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. As for the Russian leader, he took advantage of the Helsinki summit to declare that the United States and his country came to an agreement on the reconstruction of Syria. And the Kremlin kept up the momentum: Sergei Lavrov and Valery Gerasimov tried to convince Israel, France and Germany that it was best for Syria to let al-Assad exercise power over the country while huge financial support from Western countries, whose example would be followed by the countries of the Gulf, would make it possible to stop Syrian refugees and facilitate their return to the homeland. According to the Russians, stable Syria – of course, under al-Assad's rules – will also constitute an excuse to send back migrants who had fled to Europe. Israel has never experienced any problems – neither with the continuation of al-Assad regime nor Russia's military presence in Syria; in this case, the Israeli government aims to push out of Syria Iranian military forces, Shiite militias as well their missiles that might possibly be a threat to the Jewish State. This idea is advocated also by the United States and the Gulf countries. Meanwhile, even up to 100,000 soldiers and militants obedient to Tehran may be active on the Syrian territory. And, for Putin, such state of matters is extremely troublesome as the President faces the challenge of reconciling Syrian interests of both Iran and Israel while controlling Trump's policy.

The civil war in Syria is coming to an end with the last rebel-held enclave remaining in Idlib province. So neither the Shiite militias nor Iranian forces are helpful to fight on land. As for Moscow, it may opt for reducing Iranian influences in Syria provided that the West allows al-Assad to govern the country as well as contribute financially to Syria's rebuilt and recognize Russia's military presence at the bases of Khmeimim and Tartus. For a long time, Russia has allowed Israeli aircraft to attack Iran's facilities in Syria; now, the Kremlin may make it possible also for the Americans. Nonetheless, Netanyahu rebuffed Russian offer to keep Iranian forces 100 kilometres from Golan Heights. Cited by Reuters, an Israeli official has reportedly said that Netanyahu informed Lavrov that „we [Israel] will not allow the Iranians to establish themselves even 100 kilometers from the border.” Nor was it possible to convince American generals that some arrangements had been made with Trump in Helsinki. Now Moscow accuses them of having undermined Trump's authority – as their immediate superior – as they had refused to enter in a close cooperation with the Russians in Syria.

On July 27, Pentagon chief declared that U.S. policy had not changed since then. Jim Mattis assured that the Helsinki summit had not brought any changes to their instructions; moreover, Pentagon had not been provided with any other indications about further proceedings in Syria. The American attitude towards Russia has been hardening with each subsequent week. On August 22, Bolton warned that the United States would respond „very strongly” if forces loyal to al-Assad used chemical weapons in an offensive to retake Idlib province. But most importantly, Trump's adviser said that Russia got „stuck” in Syria. Hence the search for states that would be willing to finance the rebuilding



**RUSSIAN JET FIGHTER IN SYRIA.  
SOURCE: MIL.RU**

of the country. But the Department of State said the U.S. did not intend to support Syria's rebuilt until a „trustworthy” political process under the aegis of the United Nations began on its territory. The Americans have no intention of going along with the Russians since the Kremlin is even not able to push Iran out of Syria. The topic was mentioned by Bolton on August 23 during the talks with his Russian counterpart but it seems that he did not achieve any desired results. Trump's aide reminded that Putin had informed the U.S. President in Helsinki that Moscow could not force Iranians to leave Syria. „We're going see what we and others can agree in terms of resolving the conflict in Syria. But the one prerequisite there is the withdrawal of all Iranian forces back in Iran”, Bolton said shortly after the Geneva meeting. This means no breakthrough in Syria. So the U.S. Department of State has clearly stated that the American military presence in Syria (the United States deployed as much as

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## **U.S. Department of State has clearly stated that the American military presence in Syria (approx. 2,000 troops) would last until the Islamic State was completely defeated.**

2,000 troops) would last until the Islamic State was completely defeated. At the end of July, the jihadists controlled around 5 percent of Syria's territory, mainly in the Euphrates Valley. There still remain as much as 14,000 fighters in the region.

## **NO CONTROL OVER ARMS**

Apart from the issues of Ukraine and Syria, Putin and Trump discussed also the matter of arms control. Russia's President called on his American counterpart to talks about the extension of the New START deal; in addition, he mentioned the confirmation of the INF treaty as well as a series of the Russian charges against the U.S. missile defense shield. Moreover, the Russians allegedly urged to reaffirm the mutual commitment into two multilateral agreements: the Vienna Document 2011 – on confidence and security building measures – and the Open Skies Treaty. Russia wants to extend the New START treaty. The deal is set to expire in 2021 while Donald Trump has criticized it, saying that its structure might actually be harmful for the U.S. interests. So it is not advised to use it to restrict modernisation and expansion of the U.S. nuclear arsenal as the new presidential administration, unlike the previous one, considered Russia as an extremely dangerous rival in terms of nuclear weapons. New U.S. doctrinal documents stipulate the modernization and expansion of American

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## **New U.S. doctrinal documents stipulate the modernization and expansion of American nuclear capabilities.**

nuclear capabilities. No one should trust Russia in this respect, as evidenced by numerous violations to the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty. Only a day after the summit, Russia's Defense Ministry expressed its readiness to implement the

alleged arrangements between Trump and Putin, including extending the New START treaty. Interestingly, Russia did not comment on the U.S. accusations against a test launch of an Iskander ballistic missile; according to the Americans, Moscow violated the INF treaty, also by firing Kinzhal supersonic missiles. In fact, there were no further arrangements on the Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty. Bolton has sharply opposed the new deal that had been pre-agreed during the Obama administration.

And even though, Moscow keeps mentioning the issue of disarmament. On August 14, Russia's Deputy Foreign Minister, Sergei Ryabkov said „Moscow was ready to discuss its newest strategic weapons with the United States even though they were not part of the INF arms control treaty.” Such was the reaction to the fact that President Trump signed the 2019 Defense Act; the document contained some accusations that Russia might have some weapon systems that were not allowed by the INF treaty. Ryabkov said Washington had violated the New START treaty by modernizing its nuclear arsenal. It seems quite understandable why Russia has sought to maintain – or even extend – the mechanisms of mutual arm control; if they were implemented, the United States would not be able to counteract the modernisation of Russian nuclear weapons.

The United States finally responded to Russian efforts by signing a \$761 billion defense policy bill, also referred to as John S. McCain National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2019 (NDAA). The act provides for increased spendings on any measures that might constitute a response to the threats from the Kremlin. It also contains a list of conditions for the decision on the permanent deployment of the US Army's combat group

in Poland. The act provides for higher expenditures on American armed forces stationed in Europe and for increasing the U.S. military presence on NATO's eastern flank.

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**John S. McCain  
National Defense  
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In addition, the NDAA provides for creating space forces – as suggested by President Trump – and supporting production of miniature nuclear weapons that could be put on missiles fired from U.S. submarines. Such modernization is a response to similar actions carried out by Russia. Also the U.S. Congress, which accused Russia of not complying with the provisions of the Open Skies Treaty, included in the act a special prerequisite, according to which, it may be possible to suspend financing of certain conditions of the

treaty, which hinder them to be implemented by the United States. It will be possible to resume further financing only after the Trump administration ensures that Russia remains committed to its obligations under the treaty. Moscow has recently reduced the number of its air bases, which can be monitored by the Americans, and imposed restrictions on flights over the Russian exclave of Kaliningrad.

**SO WHY DOES PUTIN NEED TRUMP?**

When analysing both the course and final effects of the Helsinki summit, it needs to be taken into account that Russia had no intention of making one of the candidates win in the 2016 presidential election. Besides, the Russians assumed Hillary Clinton would win. The goal was to destabilize the U.S. policy and to weaken the legitimacy of a new president – whoever he or she would be – at the beginning of his or her new term of office. And Moscow's real success was the victory of Donald Trump, an extremely controversial candidate even within his own political camp – in the GOP primaries. Following the victory of a Republican candidate, Moscow prepared two possible scenarios to be pursued; according to the maximum plan, it would be possible to repeat the reset, previously introduced by the Obama administration, or even to go much further. And even the stake was much higher than in the times of President Obama as Trump became the U.S. President after the annexation of Crimea, the war in Donbas, Russian intervention in Syria and new Western restrictions against Moscow. The second option, however more modest, aimed to use Trump as a tool to destabilize the U.S. internal situation, fuel the conflicts initiated by Russia's interference in the 2016 election and, as a result, to reduce the American activity and effectiveness on the international arena. It seems that the outcomes of the Helsinki

summit will induce the Kremlin to opt for the second version.

And, according to some members of the Russian elite, the summit attended by the President could be perceived as a victory as its consequences caused great panic in the United States. For Russia's siloviki, the main goal was not to conclude an agreement with the USA and Trump but rather to use the President as a tool to destabilize the situation in the United States. Thus, any specific agreement with the U.S. leader cannot be perceived in terms of a success; instead, the Russians hope to make the deal as much destabilising and controversial as it is possible.

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## **Moscow's victorious approach inflamed its political opponents and triggered an immediate reaction – new U.S. sanctions. Once again, Putin – an excellent tactical player – turned out to be a fatal strategist.**

During the meeting in the Finnish capital, Putin almost openly defended Trump against his own establishment. Nonetheless, Russian cannot invest in Trump's partnership in the long run and, at the same time, hit the U.S. statehood; in such case, either Trump would have to defend his country – while Russia

could irrevocably lose its powerful ally – or the American leader would be politically destroyed by the country as an ally of the enemy whose actions could be dangerous for the state. So it is much easier to use Trump as a tool that would be thrown away when no longer useful. It is not possible to introduce any deal, mostly due to the internal situation in both countries. Trump still has to deal with pro-Russian allegations while the U.S. establishment represent rather some anti-Russian moods. Putin is not Stalin yet to conclude a new Ribbentrop-Molotov pact while Russian public opinion is characterized by anti-American attitudes. Nonetheless, the situation has been gradually changing and thus, it may be assumed that most Russians will consider Americans – or at least Donald Trump – as their friends right after a long-lasting mass media campaign. In this situation – there is no hope to implement Plan A (so-called reset 2.0) – so Moscow can only implement its Plan B, consisting of introducing political turmoil in the United States, weakening Trump's position and setting Democrats against Republicans as well as causing some conflicts between GOP representatives and the President. The United States has recently been weakened by its internal problems, several misunderstandings and general distrust while such state of affairs are playing to the detriment of the country on the international arena.

Both during and after the Helsinki summit, Putin did not make any – even symbolic – concessions to Trump and the USA. And this is why he committed a strategic mistake. The diplomatic meeting could have been much more effective in Russian politics if the President had given any impression of a compromise that would have perhaps meant greater benefits to Moscow but that would not constitute any defeat for Washington, either.



eyes of the Russian society and – more importantly – the country’s political elites (including the siloviki), however, it was rather a Pyrrhic victory. Moscow’s victorious approach inflamed its political opponents

and triggered an immediate reaction – new U.S. sanctions. Once again, Putin – an excellent tactical player – turned out to be a fatal strategist.

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**Warsaw Institute**  
**Wilcza St. 9, 00-538 Warsaw, Poland**  
**+48 22 417 63 15**  
**[office@warsawinstitute.org](mailto:office@warsawinstitute.org)**