

МИР ТА ВІЙНА У НАУКОВО-ТЕОРЕТИЧНОМУ ТА ПРАКТИЧНОМУ МЕДІАДИСКУРСІ

THE TRUMP-PUTIN COLLUSION, REPLAY OF THE MOLOTOV-RIBBENTROP PACT? A METAPOLITICAL/METAMESIC COMPARISON

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The summit held in Riyadh on February 18 2025 between the US Secretary of State Marco Antonio Rubio and Sergey Lavrov, the minister of foreign affairs of the Russian Federation, marked a dramatic turning point in the war in Ukraine. In the wake of the Putin-Trump phone call on February 12 and ten days before the Trump-Zelensky clash on February 28, the Riyadh summit can be considered a shift in the new cold war that is opposing the Western world to the alliance of anti-occidental powers led by Moscow. The expected impact of this diplomatic volte-face is difficult to evaluate. Instead of foreseeing possible scenarios in the future, a task that cannot be seriously undertaken by serious academic analysis, it would be wiser to try to understand it in the light of the past and to ask relevant questions regarding the immediate consequences of the US-Russian rapprochement on the confrontation between the New Axis of Evil including China, Russia, Iran, and North Korea (CRINK) or Axis of upheaval on the one hand (Leach, 2024), and the camp of freedom and democracy formerly led by the USA and gathering NATO and pro-Western countries in the Far East: Japan; South Korea; Taiwan and ASEAN on the other hand.

We shall first ask whether the US-Russian rapprochement can reasonably be compared to the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact on August 23/24 1939. Admittedly, analogies of this kind are disputable. However, they could help us measure the possible consequences of what is happening now under our eyes. More relevantly, this comparison is fully legitimate when we try to delve not so much into the political and diplomatic game that is going

on now but rather into the repercussions thereof in the media. A discourse analysis-oriented evaluation of the mediatic reactions to the dramatic evolution in US diplomacy could legitimate a comparison of the reactions of free-minded journalists to Trump's volte-face with the way the free press of the Western democracies covered the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact on the eve of WWII.

Another point deign of interest in the US-Russian rapprochement is the role played by Saudi Arabia in the Rubio-Lavrov summit. Indeed, Riyadh is not just a geographical venue: it is also the capital of a kingdom whose role should not be underestimated in the reshuffling of the alliances that we are witnessing today. As a matter of fact, Muḥammad ibn Salmān's way of wobbling between the blocks and axes may provide a fundamental key of interpretation for the new world disorder. Let us remember Saudi Arabia and Iran recently improved their mutual relations in a meeting held on March 2023 under the auspices of China. Retrospectively this major change in Saudi's policy toward Iran can be considered a prodrome of the emergence of a new world order (or disorder) characterized by a convergence of former enemies (Saudi Arabia against Iran; USA vs. Russia) at the expenses of the coalitions that stood behind Saudi Arabia and the USA, respectively: the Sunni world, and more specifically, the pro-Western Gulf monarchies in the first case; NATO in the second one.

Both the Saudi-Iranian rapprochement and the Trump-Putin convergence show that the above-mentioned confrontation between the new Axis of Evil and the Western world is not so systematic inasmuch as it displays some weak links and contradictions that constitute the ferment of actual and future disorders.

One of these contradictions regards the lack of solidarity between Ukraine and Israel although both countries are confronted to the same strategical alliance between Russia and Iran, two rogue States united by a very tight alliance. Iran provides to Russia its drones of the model *Shāhed 136* whereas Russia is helping Iran's nuclear program in addition to its constant support in other kinds of weapon (conventional; ballistic; chemical; biological) (Eisenstadt, 2001) in the frame of a long lasting defense cooperation (Esfandiary-Tabatabai, 2018: 134-145). Yet Ukraine and Israel are fighting their respective adversaries, Russia and Iran, as if those actors were not connected with each other. Israel's position with respect to the Russian-Ukrainian war is quite disappointing because the actual Israeli government is reluctant to support Ukraine in its war against the Russian aggressor. Netanyahu's benevolent indifference toward Russia sharply contrasts with Yair Lapid's courageous declaration at the beginning of the

war as he served as the minister of Foreign Affairs of Israel and later in 2022 as an interim Prime minister. The contradiction that consists in preserving relatively good relations with Russia in spite of this country's strong ties with Iran is characteristic of a multi-vector diplomacy. It is reminiscent of some exceptions in the polarization that characterized the Cold war. By that time Ceaușescu's Romania was the only country among the signatories of the Pact of Warsaw to have kept diplomatic relations with Israel after 1967. More specifically, Israel's ambiguity toward Russia is partly dictated by the fact that Russia in spite of its former involvement in Syria and the military presence it was maintaining in Ṭarṭūs and Ḥmeimīm was tolerating Israel's periodic airstrikes against Hezbollah and Pasdaran military capacities in Syria. However, with the downfall of Assad's dictatorship in Syria, the Russians are far less present in Syria and there is no longer any reason to manage the Russian susceptibilities in that theater of operations.

Yet the main contradiction in the actual binary polarization between CRINK and the Western world still remains Trump's rapprochement with Putin's Russia. In the European media this illogical step has often been compared with the Munich agreement of September 1938. However, the most convincing analogy that comes in mind in view of Trump's infamous step is the Molotov-Ribbentrop non-aggression Pact of August 1939. Munich 1938 could be used as a paradigmatic precedent to describe the weakness of the European Union in its opposition to Russia's aggressive policy. Let us remind Olaf Scholz's tergiversations regarding the supplying of weapon to Ukraine or more blatantly, Hungary's and Slovakia's collaborationist positions on the Russian-Ukrainian war. Likewise, the pro-Putinian sympathies of many extreme-right formations in Europe (German AfD and French RN to name the most notorious cases) are reminiscent of the attitude of the French right on the eve of WWII when Hitler was commonly considered preferable to Léon Blum (*Plutôt Hitler que Blum*, as right wing people used to say in that time). In light of the events that occurred during the eleven past years, the analogy between Putin and Hitler is quite legitimate and it is tempting to see in Trump's volte-face a replay of Stalin's machiavelic choice to strike a compromise after the 1934–1939 period when Soviet foreign policy was supposedly on the side of Britain, France and Czechoslovakia against Nazi Germany (McDermott-Agnew, 1996: 120-157).

To answer the question whether Trump's treason looks more like the Munich agreement or the Molotov-Ribbentrop non-aggression Pact is difficult because anyway it is a mere analogy. However, since the media are fond for analogies of this kind, it could be interesting to use this criterium –

either Munich or the Hitler-Stalin Pact – as a barometer of the public mind with regard to Trump’s rapprochement with Putin. In the media of the countries that took a clear position against Russia (Ukraine; UK together with the eastern flank of EU and NATO not including the above-mentioned collaborationist Hungary and Slovakia) the Molotov-Ribbentrop analogy is mostly used. In the states that display a more complicated not to say ambiguous stand against Russia (Germany; France; Bulgaria; the Russian opposition channels) the Munich paradigm seems to be used more often. However, if one considers what is at stake in the alternation between the Munich and Molotov-Ribbentrop paradigms, one thing should not be forgotten: Munich is an antonomasia for capitulation whereas the Molotov-Ribbentrop precedent is synonymous with a pact between two bloodthirsty dictators at the expense of the democratic world. In the first hypothesis Trump appears as a new Chamberlain; in the second one, he looks more like one of the two dictators who signed the non-aggression pact that lasted from August 1939 to June 1941. It is nowadays unacceptable to underestimate the atrocities perpetrated by Stalin and his regime under the pretext that Hitler is the paramount of evil. Such comparisons are tantamount to compare the respective dangers involved by plague and cholera. Yet cholera is probably a little less mortiferous than plague. Having this epidemiological metaphor in mind, we could say that Trump is probably more similar to Stalin than to Hitler whose indirect continuator is well known to whoever suffers from Russian brutality.

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