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Facets of the American Split

V. N. Garbuzov[#]

Institute for US and Canadian Studies, Russian Academy of Sciences, Moscow, Russia

e-mail: v.garbuzov@iskran.ru

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Abstract—American society has always been characterized by heterogeneity and lack of internal unity. This was determined by the very process of the emergence, formation, and evolution of the American nation, in which all ethnic groups and races existing on the globe are represented. Dividing lines and associated group, ethnic, racial, social, and political conflicts, potentially able to cause internal division, have accompanied Americans throughout their history. However, being a classical society of group interests, American society has developed a mechanism for reconciling and regulating such contradictions. Democracy has become such a mechanism, aimed at finding an acceptable compromise between interested groups. From time to time, the lines of potential split made themselves felt. The modern era in this regard is no exception for the United States. Over the past three decades, a large-scale internal political crisis has been developing in that country. It is indicated by the deep polarization of society, accompanied by a sharp interparty split and intraparty riots. The Democratic and Republican parties, around which the political space in the United States was organized for decades, have found themselves in a crisis, which spreads to both the electorate and the party elite.

Keywords: political polarization, United States, group interests, Republicans, Democrats, crisis, Trump, confrontation axes, sanctions, dual containment policy.

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American society, being the most segmented in the world, has always been characterized by extreme heterogeneity and lack of internal unity. This was favored primarily by the very process of the emergence, formation, and evolution of the American nation, in which all ethnic groups and races existing on the globe were represented. From the first years of its founding, the United States became a haven for bearers of various ideological convictions and political views, of all beliefs and religions of the world. Dividing lines and associated group, ethnic, racial, social, and political conflicts, potentially able to cause internal division, have accompanied Americans throughout their history.

However, being a classical society of group interests, American society has developed a mechanism for their coordination and regulation. Democracy has become such a mechanism, aimed at finding an acceptable compromise between interest groups. Its instruments (electoral process, parliamentarism, political parties, judiciary, the press, lobbyism), operating under conditions of separation of powers and systems of checks and balances, fulfill an important mission of seeking social peace and harmony, without which American society would be doomed to inevitable disagreements.

From time to time, lines of potential split made themselves felt, which was also manifested in the colonial era, when loyalists and revolutionaries tried to solve the problems that arose in the relationship between the colonists and the royal power. This became the main line of the conflict and subsequent confrontation between the planters of the South and industrialists of the North, who were unable to overcome peacefully the contradiction between slavery and free labor, aggravated in the process of the continental expansion of the 19th century. A social split overtook American society in the 20th century as well. Its most radical manifestations were spontaneous riots in black ghettos, student demonstrations, and other protest movements of the 1960s, against the background of which the high-profile political assassinations of that time took place (J.F. Kennedy, R.F. Kennedy, and M.L. King, Jr.).

The modern era in this regard is no exception for the United States. Over the past three decades, a large-scale internal political crisis has been developing in the country, an indicator of which is the deep polarization of society, accompanied by an acute interparty split and intraparty riots. The Democratic and Republican parties, around which the political space in the United States was organized for decades, have found themselves in an unprecedented deep crisis that spreads to both the electorate and the party elite.

[#] Valerii Nikolaevich Garbuzov, Dr. Sci. (Hist.), is Director of the RAS Institute for US and Canadian Studies.

Democrats. In the Democratic Party, three interrelated crises have become apparent.

(1) *Electoral crisis.* The large and growing but heterogeneous, segmented (mostly black and colored), and rather poorly organized electorate no longer responds to the previous party settings.

(2) *Crisis of program settings.* The ideological background of the party, based for decades on the legacy of F.D. Roosevelt and the “New Deal,” which, true, went through the renewal of the era of “New Democrats” and W. Clinton in the 1990s, again needs a certain revision. However, the time for new reforms is hopelessly lost.

(3) *Leadership crisis.* The inability of the party to solve effectively the problem of renewing the authorities and party leadership affected the results of the 2016 presidential elections. With an abundance of Democratic candidates who participated in the primary elections, the electorate and the party bureaucracy still relied on the representatives of the old guard—H. Clinton and J. Biden.

The party itself in the second decade of the 21st century turned out to be seriously split. By this time, contradictions had accumulated, and a gulf had formed between the party elite and its ordinary members. Back in the first decade of the 21st century, the leftist grouping of the party began to gain strength. It was this part that in 2008 brought to the White House the first black President B. Obama, whose policy was perceived by conservative America as ultraleft. It was this group that provoked in response an unprecedented upsurge of right-wing conservative radicalism, embodied in the massive and rather noisy “Tea Party Movement.”¹

A little later, the intraparty revolution also reached its climax. The senator from Vermont B. Sanders, 78, a participant in the presidential primaries of 2016 and 2020, became a kind of banner of American youth left radicalism of the 21st century. It was he who, criticizing the party elite and seeking to radicalize the electoral masses and thereby introducing serious discord in the camp of Democrats, appeared as an uncompromising and recognized defender of the lower classes.

Almost all the Democratic contenders who entered the 2020 presidential election quickly retreated, leaving the battlefield for only two main rivals: a moderate protégé of the top circles and a classical product of the party bureaucracy, former US Vice President Biden, 77, and the progressist and the informal leader of the youth revolution Sanders, who unsuccessfully tried to take revenge for his defeat in 2016. The battle that unfolded between them was, in essence, a reflection of the long-standing contradictions that had accumu-

lated between the party—political elite and ordinary members of the Democratic Party. During the primary elections, all its administrative resources were aimed at restraining Sanders and providing an advantage to Biden, who was supposed to fight Trump in November 2020.

Republicans. The Republican Party, unchanged for decades, was also hit by three crises simultaneously.

(1) Its *electoral crisis* manifested itself in the steady decline in the number of the traditional—white—voters. Being more organized and cohesive, this part of the electorate of the Republican Party, which was under a serious blow as a result of migration processes and the challenges of globalization, thereby called into question the prospects of the party itself.

(2) *The crisis of program settings* also struck the Republicans, who had not seriously updated them since the days of H. Hoover and the Great Depression of the 1930s. By virtue of its own conservatism, the “Grand Old Party” has remained essentially unchanged for many decades. Conservative ideas, which have long become its ideological base, used to unite many generations of Americans. However, in the late 20th—early 21st century, they began to lose their former momentum. George W. Bush tried to solve this problem by putting forward during the election campaign in 2000 the idea of “compassionate conservatism” [1], which was supposed to give the Republican Party a more attractive image. However, the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, and the subsequent “war on terrorism,” which became the focus of the entire policy of the Bush administration, pushed the new ideas into the background and did not allow them to be fully developed.

(3) *The leadership crisis* that gripped the Republican Party manifested itself in the apparent inability of the old elite to find and nominate such a leader who could, like R. Reagan in his time, become the unifier and banner of all conservative forces in America. The very conservative movement in the post-Reagan period began to go through difficult times, having entered a long era of decline.

In these difficult circumstances, the logy Republican Party elite, who shy away from changes and reforms, inevitably had to face internal resistance. Such an intraparty resisting force turned out to be the populist, billionaire, and showman D. Trump, who did not have the skills of governing. Coming into American politics from business, he began to act quickly and decisively, filling with himself all its space, oversaturated with long-standing interparty confrontation. A participant in the 2000 presidential race from the Reform Party, a Democrat who supported H. Clinton in 2004 but deserted to the Republicans in 2009, Trump, pushing aside the old Republican Party elite and staging an internal party riot, joined the decisive battle for the Oval Office in 2016.

¹ The Tea Party Movement is a conservative—libertarian political movement in the United States that emerged in 2009 as a series of coordinated local and national protests, caused, among other things, by the 2008 Emergency Economic Stabilization Act and a series of health insurance reforms.

Playing on the antielite instincts of the man in the street and promising to “return power to the people,” he managed to bypass all his competitors easily in the 2016 Republican primaries, including the favorites of the initial stage of the preelection race. Despite opposition from the party leadership, winning the nomination at the party convention, and subsequently drawing off part of the Democratic electorate, Trump won a shocking victory over Democratic candidate H. Clinton in November.

The phenomenon of Trump. It should be admitted that Trump’s victory in 2016, even if unexpected, was still logical [2]. It was the result of a complex of long-standing processes and phenomena in the United States. The globalization of the economy and its consequences, in particular, the transfer of production to cheaper sources of raw materials and labor and sales markets, led to a change in the situation and discontent among some segments of American society, which quickly affected their electoral preferences.

The families of white workers who were fired from their jobs in connection with the transfer of enterprises from the United States abroad and lost their previous incomes recoiled from the Democratic Party, because it did not protect them against growing globalization. Using this, Trump managed to win them over quickly. The long-standing accumulation of problems in immigration and the health care and welfare systems also contributed to the formation of that critical mass of controversy, which impeded progress and ultimately contributed to the election of Trump.

Another important circumstance favored his appearance in Washington. The arrival of the left Democrat Obama to the White House in 2013, accompanied by unjustified hopes and a strong leftward shift of the political spectrum in the United States, provoked an immediate response from the right-wing extremely conservative forces, most vividly expressed in the “Tea Party Movement” [3], aimed at protecting traditional foundations of America. This movement was the first major signal of the need for change, which at that time was never taken seriously, primarily by the elite of the Republican Party, as well as by the Democrats.

Thus, the inability of the bureaucracy to change itself and the country in a timely manner led to the unexpected arrival of Trump, who turned out to be a political breakaway, becoming a powerful internal detonator of both the Republican Party and the entire American society with its traditional but already rather shaky two-party consensus.

Perceiving this as a real catastrophe for the country, liberal America, gripped by revanchist sentiments, immediately began to form a response to Trump. Applying the available tools (the news media, the Congress, bureaucracy, special counsel investigation, impeachment), it began to do everything possible to

openly discredit and quickly remove this stranger from power.

Trump’s politics. Being a powerful mobilizer of the conservative electoral masses, Trump, as a real populist, offered Americans attractive, simple, and understandable but radical and bold recipes for solving long-standing social problems, which his predecessors had been in no hurry to tackle [4]. He proposed to ensure border security; block the flow of illegal immigration; and at the same time solve the problems of crime, drug trafficking, and unemployment quickly and easily—by building a wall on the border between the United States and Mexico. Trump also offered to get rid of unnecessary international obligations decisively—to break them. This happened to the Trans-Pacific Partnership, the deal with Iran, the Paris Agreement on climate, the INF Treaty, NAFTA, WHO membership, the Treaty on Open Skies, etc.

The president intended to achieve economic recovery by lowering taxes and introducing protectionist measures, in particular, by increasing import trade duties. Trump proposed similarly simple and quick solutions to health care and welfare reforms, as well as to many problems in world politics.

Trump’s foreign policy strategy, based on his natural intuition and common sense, proceeded from the need to “make America great again” by ridding it of unnecessary international obligations. It was primarily characterized by the following [5].

(1) National globalism, which presupposes the preservation of the dominant position of the United States in the world combined with the rejection of burdensome international obligations. Trump’s foreign policy, often accompanied by respective rhetoric, was perceived as antiglobal, although in fact it was not.

(2) Trump’s foreign policy activity was distinguished by deliberately demonstrative declarative isolationism, the desire to use the deterrent effect of military force without its real use.

(3) Trump often accompanied his maneuvers on the world stage with demonstrative rhetorical militarism, which did not grow from verbal threats into real use of force. Indeed, the fact that during his rule he never unleashed a war, limiting himself only to speech demarches, speaks in his favor.

(4) The foreign economic orientation of Trump’s policy developed in line with economic nationalism in the spirit of the 19th century trade classics. Putting aside the principles of free trade and market competition, which the United States had supported for more than 70 years, Trump recalled the experience of the distant past. Using protectionism and mercantilism as the main instruments of protecting the American manufacturer and stimulating the return of American enterprises from abroad, he sought to revive the part of the American economy that once had formed the basis of the productive forces located in the country.

(5) In general, Trump's foreign policy became a mirror not only of the revival but also the apogee of the development of open American unilateralism and out-right state egoism that had flourished after the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, during the "war on terrorism" of the administration of George W. Bush.

However, Trump's strategy did not affect the constants of American foreign policy behavior that had been forming for decades and remained unshakable under him. Global economic, military, and geopolitical domination; messianism aimed at the world around, which is based on the universalism of American values; incessant global expansion; and American superpower and hegemonism have long become the unshakable basis of US behavior, which is not seriously questioned inside the country by anyone.

For all the problems, challenges, and threats facing the United States today, it remains the only informal empire in the modern polycentric world, retaining its global dominance. Faced with challenges from two major powers, i.e., China and Russia, the United States embarked on so-called dual containment. The result was the formation of large confrontational axes, which became the basis of two bipolarities: the first axis is the United States–China, and the second is the United States–Russia [6].

The Russian factor. As is known, the foreign policy behavior of new Russia after the collapse of the Soviet Union has not been consistent. During the first decade of its existence (in the 1990s), its foreign policy was aimed at integration into the Western space and its institutions. However, the problem of American leadership, or rather, the quickly realized obvious reluctance of its open recognition on the part of Russia became a significant obstacle in implementing such integration.

A radical change in the foreign policy course of the Russian state took place when the post of President of the Russian Federation was occupied by V.V. Putin, who turned it in a different direction. The open rejection of American leadership, the creation of its own geopolitical fields, the formation of new integration of economic and other structures, and diplomatic and geopolitical opposition to the United States in the post-Soviet space were regarded by the United States as a manifestation of awakened Russian revisionism and revanchism and as the overt desire of renewing Russia in one form or another to restore its role as a great power. The American response to such actions was anti-Russian sanctions adopted on a two-party basis, supported by American allies, and aimed at containing and adjusting Russia's foreign policy and slowing down its further development. Since then, the model of Russia–America interaction has been formed around a new, negative, agenda, namely, the sanctions spiral, which is the main pivot of the long-term asymmetric confrontation between the two countries: the United States, the superpower that won

the Cold War, and Russia, the main successor of the Soviet Union—the superpower that lost and collapsed in the course of the bipolar global confrontation of the 20th century.

Observing the domestic political action unfolding today in the United States itself, one involuntarily pays attention to its main focus. The 2016 presidential campaign revolved around the problem of Russian interference, as well as suspicions of some kind of "collusion" between Republican candidate Trump and Russian President Putin, as a result of which the former found himself in the White House. The attention of the press to these problems, the results of the activities of the commission of Special Counsel R. Mueller finally convinced most Americans and the entire US political elite of the veracity of such statements. The stubborn denial of interference in Trump's fate by the Russian authorities only strengthened the suspicions.

As a result, the Russian mass consciousness and the psychology of the domestic elite formed a personality cult of Trump—a subverter of the foundations, capable of considering Russian interests and thereby weakening bilateral tensions. Moreover, Trump, with his sporadic pro-Russian rhetoric, regularly fueled this conviction, thereby continuing to form his own "bright" but illusory image, which had developed back in 2016 in the eyes of Russians. His words about the need to get along with Russia created an atmosphere of unjustified hopes and expectations in the Russian power environment. After all, none of the personal meetings between Putin and Trump led to serious results. Verbal agreements were not implemented, and the parties were clearly not ready for written ones.

Trump's combination of lulling pro-Russian rhetoric with unprecedented anti-Russian policy and expanding sanctions lists has become the hallmark of this White House resident. The aspirations of the Russian authorities associated with him could finally be dispelled only with the departure of Trump, whose defeat in the 2020 elections and the arrival of Biden in the White House will undoubtedly form a different atmosphere in the United States itself, where a second coming of Trump, receding into history but clinging to power, is hardly possible.

Rejection of Trump. Having found himself amid political confrontation, giving free rein to his authoritarianism, President Trump acted tough and assertive, not bothering to search for a "useless" compromise with the Democrats, who saw in him only a dangerous destroyer, who had seized power and split America further. All his activity was perceived as a frontal attack on democratic institutions and American values, as a blow to them from within.

Trump's reformist radicalism, his desire to achieve quick results, an unacceptable style of communication with political opponents and the press, and, finally, his hypertrophied conceit and self-promotion did their job. Undoubtedly, the sudden coronavirus pandemic,

the economic crisis, and protests that hit the Americans in the midst of the 2020 election campaign also played a role. They changed its initial focus and quickly nullified all the achievements of the Republican administration.

Having turned himself into a hostage to the prevailing circumstances, Trump, alien to Washington, could not resist. The federal bureaucracy, Democrats, the press, and the arrogant head of the White House have never found common ground. The state machine, operating according to its own laws, on the third attempt, during the presidential elections in 2020, finally rejected Trump [4].

The immediate agenda is to rethink, revise, and overcome the deepened political division and inter-party discord—the social and political “chaos” (as the Democrats claim) that Trump left as a legacy of his provocative policies. It is with the fulfillment of this mission that President-elect Biden will begin his rule, opening a new era—the era of post-Trumpism.

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Throughout history, the political process in the United States has been characterized by traditional competition between two political forces. Since the mid-19th century, it has been between Democrats and Republicans. Such a political confrontation, having become both the basis for the search for a two-party consensus and a kind of social constant, ultimately has always prevented the monopolization of the internal political space.

It is this feature, often perceived as a manifestation of weakness, instability, chaos, and collapse, that actually reflects the facets of the American split, that invariable specificity of American society that was originally formed not only as an aggregate society of various large, medium-sized, and small interest

groups defending their own interests but also as a single, unique, developing organism, striving, despite the lines of division, to seek a compromise and preserve the historically formed integrity. It was this circumstance that made the most segmented society in the world resilient, even during periods of the deepest and most large-scale internal upheavals, and made the American state strong, still able to pass strength tests and counter threats to its existence and greatness.

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