

## USA

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# Donald Trump, the new president of the United States: 10 Questions, 10 Answers



ON JANUARY 20, 2017, DONALD TRUMP WILL TAKE OFFICE AS THE 45TH PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA. THE KONRAD-ADENAUER-STIFTUNG, ON THE OCCASION OF HIS INAUGURATION, HAS COMPILED 10 QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS.

That Donald Trump won the Presidential election in November 2016 was a surprise to many. Since then there is rampant speculation about the future political agenda of the United States. Many questions remain. Sound review of domestic and foreign policies of the new Trump Administration will only be possible after he takes office and concrete political steps have been taken. Especially since the United States and the transatlantic relations are in Germany's central strategic interest such analysis should not be led by media hysteria and rash conclusions, even if Donald Trump himself promotes speculation and excitement.

## 1. Did the Americans lose their mind by electing Donald Trump as President?

The outcome of the Presidential election in the U.S. has many reasons. Donald Trump had a clear message with "make America great again" and an effective campaign. He benefited from the bad image of the political elites in Washington DC, as well as a weak candidate and an ineffective campaign by the Democrats.

The campaign was especially marked by Trump's aggressive rhetoric, the targeted undermining of trust in political institutions and personal attacks of his rivals. Since the election there is an intense discussion in the U.S. of the possible influence of "fake news" and attacks by Russian hackers. Nevertheless there is clear evidence that many Americans and traditional Republican voters put their their material hopes, their wish for change, their

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yearning for protection from negative effects resulting from globalization onto Trump's election. Many of the Americans did not vote for Trump because of the often ugly campaign but despite of it.

The election results still leave many open questions and will need further analysis. Despite the surprising outcome, Germany and Europe should respect the democratic election results and not judge across-the-board or presumptuously about "the Americans."

## 2. Will President Trump differ from candidate Trump?

Since the beginning of the 1980's, Donald Trump has been a public figure in the U.S. In the last 14 years he was at the center of a very successful reality TV show. His personality, his impulsiveness, impatience, contentiousness, unpredictability, and narcissistic behavior have been well known in America for the past 30 years. It is highly unlikely that Trump as President will change his behavior completely.

Trump is an absolute TV and media pro, who applies his public appearances and comments with clear intentions. His political actions as president will depend on his team. He will also work with the political environment, in particular with the Republicans in the Senate and House of Representatives. Members of Trump's inner circle voice their opinions that he is a fast learner, has a pragmatic approach to problems, and is solution-oriented when addressing political challenges.

Possibly, one might have to learn to distinguish between the public comments and announcements made by Trump, and the actual policies of his Administration.

## 3. What is the meaning of Trump's statement "America first?" Will America under President Trump wall itself off?

"America first" implies especially that American domestic policy will be at the center of Trump's administration. With the onset of the new administration the agenda will mainly consist of pursuing tax breaks for companies, restructuring of the Affordable Care Act (also known as "Obamacare"), and attempting to modernize American infrastructure.

A stronger focus on domestic policy and less shouldering of global responsibility were tendencies that already shaped the Obama Administrations. Even if Trump's emphasis on "America first" might irk some: it is normal that national interests shape the positions in international negotiations. The more important questions are rather how Trump and his advisors will define American interests and how this might impact American short- and long-term decision making.

The negotiating position of the United States is globally not as strong in 2017; Trump cannot so easily impose his will on other countries. "America first" could provide an impulse for Germany and Europe to map out their own interests and develop their own negotiating positions.

There are concerns, however, that an aggressive "America first" rhetoric could exacerbate hostile sentiment towards the U.S. in Germany and Europe. This can neither be in the interest of the United States nor of Europe's.

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#### **4. Is there a danger that the U.S. will become an authoritarian country?**

The Constitution of the United States of America is the oldest democratic constitution in the world. Even if Trump's behavior during the campaign can be seen in a critical light, one should not conclude that we now will be threatened by an authoritarian regime. Nobody has to lecture the U.S. on democracy. The construction of checks and balances in the American political system with its separation of power between the President and Congress - with its two chambers, the strong judiciary branch, the federal structure and staggered elections are strong democratic mechanisms that have withstood many trials.

As president, Trump will have authority especially in foreign and security policy. Most political undertakings, which have also captured news headlines, will require working with the U.S. Congress. Although the Republicans have the majority in both chambers, Senators and Congressmen are self-confident, tough negotiators, and will try to influence Trump's policies. Parties in the U.S. are not comparable with German political parties. During the campaign Trump's relationship with many Republicans was very tense. Especially on domestic issues, which are at the heart of Trump's agenda, he won't always be able to get his way. To succeed, it will be critical how the Chief of Staff Reince Priebus and Vice President Mike Pence define the relationship with Majority Leader Paul Ryan and his colleagues.

#### **5. Will Trump as president continue to provoke on Twitter?**

Donald Trump announced that as president he will continue to tweet as a means of communication. One can observe that every one of Trump's tweets causes worldwide reactions in the media and even in the political world. This way, Trump can stay on the media offensive and set the agenda. The question for the future is whether this will continue to be effective. It is possible that the media and political leadership will learn to deal with such tweets in a more coolheaded and calm way.

One should not forget that President Obama as @POTUS (President of the United States) had also been very active on Twitter and other social networks.

The danger of Trump's Twitter communication is especially that he reacts very harshly to criticism and thereby conflicts could escalate quickly. This is especially critical when it is not a personal matter, but when it pertains to relations between nations.

#### **6. Why does the U.S. economy react so positively to Trump?**

Trump is an entrepreneur with many acquaintances and friends in business circles. He even nominated several well-known business leaders for his cabinet. The business community embraces the fact that people with business expertise will be placed in high level political positions. Trump and the Republicans share a common view on downsizing bureaucracy and cutting taxes, so that many entrepreneurs and analysts expect quick and concrete political action. All this could improve the business climate and increase profit. Furthermore, Trump has called for large government contracts to modernize the infrastructure, from which many American companies anticipate an economic boom.

The American stock market has already recorded a "Trump rally". Since the election stock values have increased dramatically. It is to be expected that the market values will fall again if his promises do not materialize. As in other political sectors, there is a lot of specu-

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lation in play. Recently, pharmaceutical stocks noticeably lost value after Trump announced, contrary to previous expectations, that he wants government health programs to bargain over medicine prices.

## **7. Will the United States under Trump continue to guarantee security for Germany and the other European NATO members?**

Trump often criticized NATO. He finds fault with the alliance in that it does not provide effective protection against terrorism and that not all members pay their financial dues. At the same time, Trump's appointed National Security advisor Michael Flynn and nominated Secretary of Defense, James Mattis, have clearly voiced their support of NATO and its security guarantee.

Even while Trump was making critical statements against NATO in a BILD-Zeitung interview, only days before his inauguration, American troops arrived in Poland to enforce the safety of the European Union together with other NATO units. Simultaneously, American troops have also been stationed in Norway. This proves that the U.S. continues with its security obligations.

It is a justified request that Germany and the other European NATO partners must meet their obligations. Even before the U.S. election, a number of initiatives have been taken in Germany and Europe to strengthen the European contributions towards security, defense and military capabilities. Trump's position could be taken as an incentive to intensify a common EU security and defense policy.

## **8. Will there be a new friendship between the USA and Russia? Will Putin and Trump strike a "deal" at the expense of other nations?**

Trump has continuously made friendly gestures towards Putin and has alluded to a possible repeal U.S. sanctions towards Russia. Generally speaking, there is nothing wrong wanting to have good relations with Russia. Even Germany and the EU are seeking this. But the international law - contravening annexation of Crimea, the Russian interference in Eastern Ukraine, and the Russian military intervention in Syria make it impossible to have good relations.

Trump has expressed that he is under the assumption that Russian hackers were active during the U.S. elections. He, however, denies that this may have influenced the election to his benefit. The nominated Secretary of State, Rex Tillerson, and the nominated Secretary of Defense, James Mattis, expressed their criticisms towards current Russian politics. Mattis, during his confirmation hearing, even called Russia the biggest threat to the U.S. In the U.S. Congress there are a number of influential Republican politicians with Russia expertise, who harshly criticize Putin's politics.

Even the Obama Administration at the beginning wanted to have a "reset-policy" and do over the relations with Russia. This policy failed, however. If Trump will strike "deals" with Putin, is even according to Trump himself, an open question. If the personalities of the two presidents, who both want to demonstrate strength, are taken into consideration, it is very possible that tension will arrive.

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### 9. Will the U.S. exit the Paris climate agreement?

Trump and parts of the Republican party deny climate change and consider climate protection unnecessary and harmful to the economy. Nevertheless, after the election, Trump has modified his position and has stated that there is a link between human behavior and climate.

The United States ratified the Paris Climate Agreement. Therefore the Trump administration is also bound to this international agreement. A retreat is not easy and it would take years. Because this issue appears not to be a personal priority for Trump and the new administration, the actual implementation is put into question. However, will not go into effect until 2020.

### 10. Does Trump's election give a boost to rightwing populists in Germany and Europe?

Developments in the U.S. on one hand, and in Germany and other European Democracies on the other hand, cannot be treated equally. Large differences exist between the political systems, the election systems, the parties, the political cultures, the media, and domestic challenges. Drawing conclusions from the U.S. campaign and Donald Trump's election for the coming elections in Germany and Europe is impossible in a serious manner. Also, the motives of Trump voters differ greatly from those of supporters of populist parties on the right in Europe.

Even though rightwing populists, such as representatives of AfD, Marine LePen, Nigel Farage or Geert Wilders, welcomed Trump's election, polls show no influence of the U.S. election on support for rightwing populist parties in Europe. Furthermore, it has been the right populist position in the past to voice anti-American sentiment and who have taken the position to fight against a stronger American influence in Europe.

It is questionable whether U.S. campaign methods of provocation, targeted undermining of trust and personal attacks are possible in German election campaigns. "Negative campaigning" for example, which has dominated U.S. campaigning for decades, has never taken a foothold in Germany election cycles. In total there are more differences between the U.S. and Germany than they have common.

Trump's election and his provocative public statements harbor the danger that established parties in Germany and Europe will be tempted to use anti-American rhetoric to garner voter support.