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DONALD TRUMP AS CHAMPION OF SUMMITS. BEHIND THE WASHINGTON MAINSTREAM



If we look at the US president Donald Trump's behavior during the press conference in Helsinki on July 16, 2018, the relationship between him and Vladimir Putin can be considered as stable and confident. Trump believes that this special 'chemistry' that has emerged between them may help to obtain much more significant agreements on a wider agenda of Russia-US discrepancies, and will allow him to preserve the image of 'champion of summits'. With good reason Trump plans to invite Vladimir Putin for a second full-scale meeting within six months.

Despite political crisis that caused the so-called 'weak' Trump's performance at the joint press conference with Putin, Trump himself seems to be satisfied with those agreements which he managed to obtain with the Russian president during the face-to-face talks. Nevertheless, the main problem is that the mentioned 'chemistry' may not bring to seminal agreements, because in the USA Trump meets with the frontal opposition in Congress (both from Democrats and Republicans) and heavy criticism in the media.

During the midterm elections in November Trump will have to face the challenge that may make clear whether this blustery anti-Trump campaign influences president's support ratings and the Republican party's rating support as well.

Current figures point to the fact that about 70% of Trump's supporters still back his program and do not consider his Russian policy as inappropriate. However, in the next several weeks he will have to invest his own political capital in order to support the Republican party during the midterms. After all, in case of success Trump will manage to regain a part of autonomy from the Republican establishment, including his policy toward Russia.

Those steps taken by the American establishment against its own president are at least indirectly aimed against Russia. First of all they are designed to paralyze Donald Trump, and thus they cannot be considered as a signal of the US 'state-to-state' animosity against Russia.

The mid-level Washington bureaucrats tend to distrust their president. And the fact that the Russian citizen Maria Butina was arrested on July 16, right on the summit day, shows that the US officials send to Trump a concrete message: none of the agreements made behind the back of the Washington mainstream will be fulfilled, because they will meet with the frontal opposition from the Washington bureaucrats. For this reason one cannot call the last summit fully successful.

Anyway, the bilateral high-level summits are definitely useful. Even if they do not produce any particular progress, they create new information environment containing both negative and positive outcome. Moreover, the new environment thanks to summit results makes it possible to turn the page and somehow to change the current situation. The fact is, that there is no shared desire to increase escalation between the US and Russia.

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