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The issue: One of the best opportunities for sending out public messages to American households is the National Football League's annual championship game. The event more commonly known as the Super Bowl draws huge attention both in the United States and across the globe, with television ratings showing a viewership of at least a hundred million people in the last few years each. In accordance with the practice of previous years, this year's Super Bowl was preceded by an interview with the President of the United States of America. While [President Trump's first pre-Super Bowl interview](#) did not manage to receive television ratings as high as his predecessor's, his statements still made an impact. Specifically, President Trump re-emphasized his will to reshape U.S.-Russian relations, as well as his respect for President Vladimir Putin.

The background: Donald Trump's commentary on his attempt to 'get along' with President Putin was not surprising. First, it has been obvious that the Trump Administration will face other issues on top of its foreign policy agenda. Throughout and after the 2016 U.S. presidential campaign, the Trump team made it quite clear that its efforts would be directed at 'making America great again' i.e. prioritizing national interest, especially by rejecting deals that the incoming administration deems disadvantageous. Some of the cited deals included the two major highlights of the Obama Administration's foreign policy legacy: the Trans-Pacific Partnership and the Iran Deal. The former lacked approval of the Congress and therefore was not in effect, and one of President Trump's first executive orders officially withdrew America from the TPP deal. Although the Iran Deal's fate is still uncertain, the Trump Administration has recently announced that Iran is 'on notice' due to its provocative measures (including the test launch of a ballistic missile). Furthermore, the Trump Administration's most debated foreign policy step was the introduction of—and the subsequent fight for—a temporary (90 days) travel restrictions targeted at people coming from the Middle East (including a number of refugees). In other words, apart from President Trump having a telephone conversation with President Putin, he has not focused his activity on U.S.-Russia relations in his first weeks in office.

Secondly, President Trump has restrained from criticizing President Putin. This was clear throughout the hacking scandal. At first, Donald Trump questioned the veracity of claims that Russians meddled with the U.S. presidential elections via cyber attacks, and although later he accepted the intelligence community's findings on this topic, he added that these acts initiated from Russia did not affect the end result of the election. Moreover, his remark in his pre-Super Bowl interview about respecting President Putin suggests that he is still setting aside the [claim—voiced](#) by the NSA, the CIA and the FBI—that the hackings were ordered by the Russian premier himself. Two factors account for Trump's restrained response. On the one

hand, though President Trump's assessment that 'it is better to get along with Russia than not' may seem a general truth, his intention resembles previous attempts on the part of U.S. presidents to reach out to Russia. Several American presidents—even during the Cold War—tried to improve U.S.-Russian relations. President Barack Obama also started his presidency with a Russian 'reset,' which was followed by a cooling in the relationship largely due to the crisis in Ukraine. Such initial openings toward Russia are based on the country's necessary support in global challenges. During the Obama Administration, this primarily meant collaboration on nuclear arms reduction. Accordingly, the main achievement of the 'reset' was the New START Treaty in 2010. In the case of President Trump, the main field of possible cooperation with Russia would be the fight against ISIS and terrorism. Interestingly, the Trump Administration itself is divided about the possibilities for such a cooperative relationship with Russia. In his Senate confirmation hearing for his position as Secretary of Defense, James Mattis [described](#) the areas of cooperative engagement as decreasing in number, in contrast to the increasing number of areas where the U.S. probably has to confront Russia (such as the preservation of NATO).

On the other hand, President Trump's openness to mending bilateral relations with Russia is related to his 'anti-establishment' style. Specifically, while the President did not challenge the idea of his Russian counterpart being 'a killer', he also refused to distinguish the conducts of the two countries, reciting the 2003 Iraq War on the American side. This statement is unique from a President, as it implicitly challenges American exceptionalism, or the idea that the United States is qualitatively different in terms of society and political institutions from the rest of the world and thus it is on a moral high ground in its dealings within international affairs. President Trump's provocative statement may have its political consequences, as it challenges an idea that is most often defended by Republican politicians. Indeed, Senate Majority Leader (R) Mitch McConnell, an important political ally for the Trump Administration in a Congress currently under GOP majority, rejected the idea that the U.S. and Russia are more alike than different in their conduct of foreign policy. Of course, without seeing the specifics of President Trump's 'new deal' with Russia, it is too early to speculate about any serious debate between the presidency and Congress on the issue. Nevertheless, the President's remark is still relevant. The checks and balances within the American system may limit the President's power, but he still has the ability to set the tone of his administration. By implicitly questioning a historically key principle of American politics, President Trump upped the ante in American foreign policy.