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## Trump is Alienating Europe, and This Is a Good Thing



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Thesis: the main achievement of the Trump administration to date has been to alienate European allies, in particular Germany, France and Britain, thus weakening the Atlantic Alliance. Originally concerned by candidate Trump's questioning of NATO's continuing relevance, they have been satisfied by Trump's re-commitment to the alliance (even as he moans about the member countries' general failure to shell out the 2% for "defense" the pact theoretically entails). But they've been dismayed by the U.S.'s withdrawal from the Paris Accord on climate, its pullout from the Iran nuclear deal (threatening sanctions on

European companies that in accordance with the deal want to trade with Iran), its abandonment of coordinated policy on Israel, its imposition of tariffs on European steel and aluminum, and its general barking tone.

These days Angela Merkel is feeling more in common with Vladimir Putin than Donald Trump. Putin speaks to her in fluent German, treats her with respect, and is generally predictable, unlike the erratic Trump.

He tells her: let's make more energy deals for mutual benefit, whatever the Americans think. And please don't support the expansion of NATO; enough already. We are a formidable power, but our military budget is tiny compared to NATO's and we are not about—and have no reason to—invade you. We just don't want your military alliance to completely encircle us. We understand that, as a U.S. ally, you had to echo Washington's condemnation of our annexation of Crimea and apply sanctions to us. But you know as well as I do that if Ukraine had been brought into NATO as the U.S. planned after the 2014 coup, our Crimea naval bases would have been transferred to NATO and we could never accept that. If you make the lifting of sanctions contingent on Russian withdrawal from Crimea, sorry, we will just have to accept them while applying counter-sanctions. Let us work together on the issues that unite us, like combating climate change and implementing the Iran agreement and protecting these agreements against U.S. obstruction.

This is potentially a key moment, in which finally the unholy alliance based on a Faustian bargain between the U.S. and European anticommunists in the late 1940s fractures. What is the greater threat to Europe? The Russian state, which has gone through the agonizing process of full-scale capitalist restoration and a period of total chaos in the 1990s giving way to recovery under Putin, and which currently spends about 14% of what the U.S. devotes to military expenses every year? Or the U.S., which (still) wants to dictate European policy, even as its GDP dips relative to Europe's? The EU GDP is now 90% of the U.S.'s.

Putin told Emmanuel Macron at the recent St. Petersburg economic conference: “Europe depends on U.S. in the realm of security. But you don't need to worry about that; we'll help. We'll provide security.” I don't think it was a joke.

Imagine a Europe not dominated by German banks deeply invested in support for U.S. imperialism using EU architecture to hold nations hostage to imposed austerity programs. Imagine a Europe of independent countries seeking rational equidistance between Washington and Moscow.

Putin has envisioned a free trade union including the EU extending from Vladivostok to Lisbon. It would be facilitated by China's "new Silk Road" infrastructure projects, which may indeed unite Eurasia as never before, even as the U.S. recedes into the Grey Havens. Russia will keep Crimea, as it has for most of the last three centuries; Ukraine will have to accord autonomy to the Russian-speaking Donbas region; Europe will lift its Russia sanctions gradually, because they are not in Europe's interest (and punish Europe for the U.S.'s sake); contempt for the U.S. will mount so long as Trump is president, and could even deepen if he's succeeded by Pence. The EU will continue to split on issues of immigration, austerity, Russian ties and other issues and the splits will deepen. The understaffed and clueless State Department will continue to urge trans-Atlantic unity. But having violated that unity repeatedly the U.S. has no moral authority to demand its continuation.

Meanwhile Putin plans a meeting with Japan's Abe Shinzo to resolve the Northern Islands question. Probably a swap of islands, Russia returning two to Japanese sovereignty. This would end the formal state of war between the two countries and pave the way to huge Japanese investments in Russia. And given the U.S. withdrawal from the Trans-Pacific Partnership Japan will likely be drawn more into the Shanghai Cooperation Organization dominated by China and Russia.

India under Modi is basking in a period of U.S.-Indian friendship. Having (without clear explanation) forgiven India for its robust nuclear weapons program the U.S. seeks more cooperation with India versus China. But the U.S. alienates New Delhi over Iran sanctions. India buys Iranian oil and will continue to do so.

Xi Jinping in China enjoys a good relationship with Trump, having cleverly flattered him and Ivanka. But he is not pleased with Trump's trade war threats and challenge to Chinese construction on the South China Sea atolls. The Chinese economy grows by leaps and bounds, and China's military strengthens inevitably. China is the main rival to the U.S. geopolitically, and it is strategically aligned not only with Russia but with Central Asian countries, former Soviet republics, in general.

The U.S. could at least once boast of hegemony over Latin America, where military dictatorships once comfortably secured U.S. interests. Now these are gone Latin America in general militates in different ways against U.S. imperialism. The spectacle of a U.S. president demanding the construction of a wall to keep out Mexican illegal immigrants and demanding that Mexico pay for it appears to hundreds of millions of people as a

perverse, sadistic move. Reports of kids separated at the border from their parents and disappearing in their hundreds doesn't help.

The U.S. is alienating Canada, for god's sake, by steel tariffs. Good good good good good. Let's break the whole thing, Donald!

The emergence of a multilateral world—in which the U.S. cannot oblige its allies (as it did in the case of the Iraq War) to embrace its own lies, and share in the ramifications of their acceptance—is on the horizon. The world sees a moron in the White House, handles him carefully, its leaders probably trading notes on his disturbing and unstable personality. Leaders assess the U.S. as a declining power with a horrifying arsenal and more horrifying willingness to invade countries for no good reason but diminishing geopolitical clout. The flurry of exchanges between European and Iranian leaders after the U.S. announcement on the Iran deal and stated determination of the Europeans to beat U.S. secondary sanctions, and strong EU statements of indignation at the U.S. decision, may signal a sea-change in relations.

European Council President Donald Tusk (a former Polish prime minister) last week criticized “the capricious assertiveness of the American administration” over issues including Iran, Gaza, trade tariffs and North Korea. adding: “Looking at the latest decisions of Donald Trump, someone could even think: With friends like that, who needs enemies? But, frankly speaking, Europe should be grateful by President Trump. Because, thanks to him, we got rid of all the illusions. He has made us realize that if you need a helping hand, you will find one at the end of your arm.”

You realize what this means?

These are significant words, under-reported by the U.S. media that appears to simply assume the continuation of the existing U.S. hegemonic order in the world, is addicted to the cult of promoting military “service” as a good in itself, and—while wanting to bring down Trump for various reasons—cannot challenge capitalism and imperialism or make astute analyses of present conditions because they are paid by corporations that have vested interests in promoting the CNN and NYT concept of reality. The fact is, the post-war U.S.-dominated world is collapsing, as it should. As empires do.

The fact that this collapse is aided by a colorful idiot in the White House merely adds dramatic appeal to the historical narrative. He will grandiloquently preside over some sort of Korean agreement to satisfy his ego, then perhaps attack Iran with zero European backing but frenzied Israeli and Saudi support, inaugurating a major if not world war. This would not further endear this country to the planet in general. Trump has no idea what he's

doing. He's surrounded by generals who insist on maintaining U.S. troops in Syria undermining the Syrian state, in Iraq and Afghanistan towing the line, in Yemen aiding the Saudis' anti-Houthy effort, while a listless Trump tweets about Fake News and the Russia investigation when he's not boasting about the employment rate under his greatness. The U.S. could sail into a war at any time and Trump will say, "I trust Mattis to handle it. I love my generals!"

And Europeans will say, What?