

RE-NEGOTIATING THE TRANSATLANTIC PARTNERSHIP AND THE US-EU RELATIONS: U.S. FOREIGN POLICY UNDER THE DONALD J. TRUMP ADMINISTRATION

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One of the most important issues of contention during the election campaign for the Presidency of the United States has been President Trump's positions regarding the future of NATO and as an extension the future of the relations between the United States and the European Union. This contention has been exacerbated due to President Trump's approach to US- Russian relations.

During the electoral campaign, President Trump attempted to articulate a strategic vision about the relations between the United States and its European friends and allies. The problem is that he said most of these things in a rather disjointed way. Nevertheless, if one looks at the substance of what he has said, one can extrapolate a coherent albeit radical foreign policy. In fact, President Trump proposes a redefinition of U.S. foreign policy towards Europe based on current realities, and not those of the past. In other words, President Trump believes that the transatlantic partnership should be re-negotiated on the basis of the current capabilities of the allies and not those of the fifties and sixties.

President Trump's main strategic argument is that the United States is overextended to the point that its national interests are not fully served. He believes that in its efforts to help other countries, Washington is entangled in complex relationships that create risks and place burdens on the United States. However, Washington's commitments are not matched by its European allies either in capability or in intent.

The United States and the Future of NATO

According to President Trump's reading of the situation, the United States has been involved in various wars, such as in Afghanistan and Iraq, without NATO providing adequate strategic support to U.S. efforts to bring these wars to a successful and speedy completion. Although many NATO member states have provided what support they could or what support they wanted or what support their domestic pressures allowed them to provide, that level of support was, according to President Trump, below the real capabilities of the NATO allies.

According to President Trump, despite their economic strength and industrial capacity, NATO member states have taken for granted that Washington will bear the primary burden for the

defense of Europe both in terms of financial and military capabilities. Moreover, President Trump makes the point that on many important issues, the United States has not received the political and practical support of many NATO member states. For example, France and other NATO allies objected to the U.S. operation in Iraq and did not provide significant support. President Trump is aware of the principle that NATO members have no obligation to join in out of area operations initiated by the United States but he believes that in these important instances the organization has been irrelevant to U.S. strategic needs. This creates a strategic and political imbalance in the sense that the United States is liable for the defense of Europe but the European allies are not liable for defending U.S. interests. As a result, President Trump is of the opinion that the transatlantic partnership should be renegotiated. In case that renegotiation is not possible, the alternative, according to President Trump, is the U.S. withdrawal from NATO and the development of bilateral relations with European countries that are capable and prepared to actively support the United States in its efforts to achieve its national interests world-wide in return for guarantees from Washington. This could be a nightmare scenario for the future of NATO in the sense that even if the remaining member states agree to carry on with the organization, it would be almost impossible for some member states to balance their NATO commitments and priorities with those they may share with the United States on a bilateral basis.

The Future of US-EU Relations

The future of the US-EU relations will not only be determined by the U.S. stance on NATO but also by the Washington's stance on international trade. For President Trump the Post-World War II period of multilateralism is over and that continuing to act otherwise is harmful to the United States' interests. In addition, his view on international trade is that the United States' primary concern should be trade relations that are beneficial to the Washington's interests and U.S. citizens and not an *a priori* commitment to free trade. President Trump made it clear in his campaign that he strongly believes that the current international trade regime has not benefited the United States. His recent decision to withdraw from the Trans-Pacific Partnership and his commitment to re-negotiate NAFTA are indicative of this approach.

At the center of President Trump's approach is the belief that the primary economic need is to create trade relations that build jobs in the United States. Free trade may well increase America's GDP, but it does not effectively address critical societal issues. As a result, the previous goal of aggregate growth of an economy without regard to societal consequences is no longer the accepted view. Therefore, the terms under which most international trade agreements have been structured are unacceptable to the new U.S. administration. Moreover, large multilateral free-trade agreements are far too complex to fine-tune to the American interests. Consequently, emphasis will be placed on bilateral treaties, or of smaller multilateral treaties, such as NAFTA, that can be reshaped to serve Washington's interest. The important point is that in negotiations of this kind and magnitude, the United States, as the strongest economic power in the world, holds the strong hand and therefore can determine favourable outcomes.

Other things being equal, President Trump will seek to re-negotiate the US-EU trade agreements with the goal of achieving a new settlement that would significantly increase the benefits for the U.S. economy. But if such an agreement is not reached, the United States may attempt to negotiate trade deals with EU states on a bilateral basis thereby undermining the existence of the European Union.

The United States, Europe, Russia Entanglement

It seems that the future of the US-European relations will also be determined by the developments in the Middle East. For the United States, 9/11 remains a defining moment and fifteen years of unsatisfactory military operations in the Middle East is something that new American President cannot accept. Moreover, at this juncture, the United States' central preoccupation in foreign policy is what President Trump likes to call "radical Islamic terrorism". The Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), al Qaeda and other related terrorist organizations are all regarded by President Trump as an intolerable menace not only because terrorist attacks can be escalated, but also due to the significant psychological burden of terrorism. President Trump believes that the terrorist threat cannot be defeated without the use of overwhelming power. Therefore, the United States and its allies must bring overwhelming force to bear. To this end, President Trump is ready to work with any country prepared to dedicate resources to this goal and to share risks. Since NATO members are either unwilling to commit to this effort, or have very little to commit, the United States should, according to President Trump, seek other states with a common interest, and the most important among those is Russia, which has an internal problem with "radical Islamic terrorists" and has significant capabilities it could deploy in the war against them.

Despite Russia's involvement in cyber activities during the presidential elections, President Trump thinks that his election had nothing to do with those activities and that a new start in U.S.-Russian relations is possible. Moreover, he strongly believes that in his presence, Russia will not repeat such activities not only because he would be tough in his response but, most importantly, due to the fact that the U.S. and Russian interests coincide. In this context, Washington and Moscow could agree on the neutralization of Ukraine. In President Trump's view, Kyiv would have economic and political ties with the West, but Ukraine would not be part of any alliance system, nor would it be a base for Western forces. This U.S. stance is compatible with the interests of Russia as Moscow always opposed the expansion of NATO eastwards and argued about the necessity of a buffer zone between the alliance and Russia. At the same time, the United States wants a buffer to protect its Eastern European allies albeit at the expense of Ukraine in which it does not have an overriding interest. Russia, on the other hand, wants a degree of autonomy in Eastern Ukraine and retention of its interests in Crimea, where it has already treaty rights in Sevastopol. Moreover, for the new American President, the Ukrainian issue can be managed in the context of joint anti-radical Islamic operations. Last, but not least, President Trump is aware of economic problems in Russia, and he sees therein a lever to achieve his foreign policy goals.

At the same time many European countries, such as France and the Netherlands, experience a wave of support for populist political movements and parties and the traditionally dominant centrist political parties are fearful that the election of Donald Trump could boost support for right-wing and left-wing populist movements across Europe. With so many important elections coming up in the near future, there are concerns that isolationism and populism will be major vote-winners in many European countries in the coming months.

But perhaps the most important challenge that European countries face has to do with Russia. Many European governments are afraid that the Trump Administration will abandon Europe at a time when the region is facing the threats of a resurgent Russia in the east and conflict and unrest

in the south. Moreover, the close relationship between the new American President and Russian President Vladimir Putin has raised alarms in those areas of Europe, such as in Poland and the Baltic States, where Russian influence was once much greater, and where Russia maintains a high level of interest.

Under these circumstances, it remains to be seen if Europe will be able to effectively deal with the challenges to the region's security and stability.