

TRUMP AND A BRAVE NEW WORLD (OR, IS IT?)

Q&A

Maybe this world is another planet's hell

Aldus Huxley

Tassos Symeonides
(RIEAS Academic Advisor)

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President Trump has introduced a new style of American leadership rattling traditional elites and upending postwar “constants” few believed they could be touched. This is particularly true in regard to US-European relations. Where do we stand now?

Since Day One of his administration, Donald Trump has signaled his dislike, even rejection, of the US approach to the postwar status quo prompting a storm of protest.

To the horror of traditionalists, he has taken the additional step of *acting* on his apparent decision to shake up policies and redefine “constants” that seemed unassailable until November 2016. He didn’t hesitate, for instance, [to describe](#) the EU as an economic “foe” of the United States causing his liberal opponents to go into conniptions. His opening to President Putin has been blasted by those in the United States who claim (without any concrete evidence so far) there is a “Russian conspiracy” to influence US elections and cause long-term

damage to America by subterfuge, social media manipulation, and “influence peddling.” And his back-and-forth with Kim Jong-un continues to stir US “mainstream” news.

It is obvious what would be perhaps recognized as the “Trump Doctrine” down the road has little respect for the current model of US-European relations, viz. (a) the United States carries the bulk of NATO maintenance while (b) the Europeans reduce defense spending to a trickle, especially after the collapse of the USSR, to sustain domestic objectives including generous social entitlements and handouts.

Trump has also done the unthinkable, even if in a circumferential manner: he has questioned the European definition of “alliance” according to which each “ally” *picks and chooses what he likes or dislikes to do through an endless process of “consultations.”* Trump’s kicking the prevailing model in the shin had an immediate effect though, indirectly confirming the truth behind his criticism of the US-Europe “alliance:” Angela Merkel rushed to endorse a French initiative for a [joint European defense force](#), as an alternative to waning US interest in NATO, to be deployed to what the Europeans would define as “trouble spots” around the world.

These are tectonic changes that will continue, in one form or another, even after Trump is not at the White House. The fall of the USSR *did not lead* to a necessary NATO redefinition—and some still argue NATO should have been dismantled altogether. After 1990, NATO thought it was best to continue business as usual by absorbing former Soviet sphere members and thus fueling “new age” tensions with post-communist Russia. Its core purpose—keeping the USSR from attacking Europe—is gone and it would be a man (or a woman) with lively imagination who would suggest Russia is still committed to sending her armored divisions to reach the English Channel sparking a nuclear war.

Turkey has emerged as an impossible conundrum for both America and Europe. Few have any practical ideas about how to proceed with this supposed “Western bastion” in Asia: Europe is obviously not prepared to accept Turkey in the EU as a full member and Trump has adopted an

unprecedented hard-knuckles approach to his dealings with Ankara. What is to be done?

To those who noted Erdogan's Islamic roots when he first emerged (and they were very few) it was almost certain Turkey was going to veer off sharply from its supposed "European identity" at some point in the future. This future has arrived and we are now dealing with an aggressive, mercurial, and dangerous opportunist authoritarian, who believes Turkey has no fear because Allah is on her side and increasing interest rates causes inflation.

Now, suddenly, even conservative Americans, who always put their money on the US-Turkey "relationship," are angry at Erdogan's dictatorial antics and begin, for example, to remember how [Turkey treated US requests](#) in 2003 for strategic support re. the Iraq war.

The continuing imprisonment of American pastor Andrew Brunson, which has infuriated the powerful American Evangelical community and continues [causing](#) an unprecedented stir in relations with Ankara, has emerged as the true test of Turkey's "Western" inclinations.

Erdogan is failing this test disastrously for his country and her people. And Trump, again bucking the trend, has slapped economic sanctions on Turkey causing Ankara's fans to [call for saving "the U.S.-Turkey relationship,"](#) which, they fail to see, *does not really exist*. The POTUS, meantime, [promises](#) continuing tough action if Brunson is not released immediately.

The present crisis with Ankara is qualitatively different from past similar spats. Between Trump's "spoiler" tactics, and Ankara's calamitous attempts to prove Turkey is a "great power," Erdogan is caught both in his own stubborn idiosyncrasies and his failure to avoid unnecessary risks, particularly in Syria. Such is the polarization of Turkish society, now split between progressive secular elements and the mass of Islamist Asiatic "devout," that even a sudden Erdogan departure won't signal any immediate change as Turkey faces insurmountable economic and strategic festering crises.

Furthermore, with Turkey's bid to join the EU all but discarded by Brussels, Erdogan is caught between a rock and a hard place. His rather desperate

maneuvering with Moscow and Tehran can hardly fill the void left by smashing relations with the West. This is not going to end well for NATO's "bastion" to the great disappointment, for certain, of the shrinking but still busy pro-Turkey lobby in Washington.

Is this then the time to revise old habits and look into new geopolitical strategies? Can Erdogan's pranks redefine NATO?

Turkey could be the ignition of a *radical change of direction in US-European relations* over the rise of a "brave new world" which resembles *nothing* of what we knew until a short time ago. In 1949, Lord Hastings Ismay, NATO's first secretary general, summed up the alliance purpose as aiming "to keep the Russians out, the Americans in, and the Germans down." Today, the Russians are still out, the Germans are busy fanning tensions inside the EU, and the Americans are on their way out, if only with tentative steps.

From Washington's perch, NATO isn't all that helpful in this "brave new world." The "war on terror" after 9/11 appeared to mobilize the European allies [under Article 5](#) of the Washington Treaty, yet Afghanistan is a [quagmire now in its 17th year](#) and European "support" of the US ally is still symbolic. American calls for more NATO troops to deploy in that country have been rebuffed by European capitals with little finesse.

As for Turkey, she has been the most problematic NATO "friend" since anyone can remember thanks to a deplorable free hand offered Ankara by successive US administrations. The apex of this license to literally kill was the 1974 invasion of Cyprus, which has morphed into *permanent Turkish military occupation of EU territory*. But now Erdogan, in his neo-sultanic folly, is overplaying his hand with abandon. His threats about terminating access to Incirlik are largely empty as NATO is already looking elsewhere for support (notably Jordan and, to a lesser extent, Greece).

Turkey's stubborn interference in Syria isn't helping either. Erdogan trying to go tit-for-tat with the US over economic sanctions is a dud, to put it kindly. His tightrope tactics over armaments—buying AA missiles from Russia, protesting

the US promise not to deliver the F-35 to Turkey—is only [fueling](#) more US congressional resentment. And his stubborn refusal to release the American pastor, laced with the [typical Erdogan bluster](#), shows the Turkish authoritarian continues to miscalculate what could, and would, happen to Turkey’s economy if he does not tone down soon.

Against this background, Erdogan’s [threats](#) to look for “new friends and allies” hardly rattle Trump whose negative view of NATO is well known. And since history is often created by “accidents” and irrational behaviors, Erdogan’s pranks could be the beginning indeed of a new era in US-European security relations and the competition with Russia.

What would be the features of this “brave new world” for NATO and its “bulwark” in Asia? Is this an exercise in “controlled demolition” or are we simply wading straight into a dangerous unknown?

Change always comes with insecurity, especially for those who have invested in “guaranteed” constants. Turkey continues to believe, for example, that her bulk and geographic position make her invulnerable to changing geostrategic currents. Her illusions are fed, in part at least, by those in the West, and especially in the US, who insist *we cannot live without Turkey*. But *nothing* in international relations is vested with such “eternal” value. Turkey has badly miscalculated in this respect just like her supporters continue to do so.

The “brave new world” continues to face the challenge of nuclear weapons and deterrence, yet, since 9/11, it has also entered the extremely treacherous phase dominated by fanatical Islamism and the war it has declared on the West.

Europe has yet to realize the trouble we face thanks to misguided and juvenile “certainties” that “multiculturalism” can conquer all. The US is also struggling with similar currents which lead to deep political and social divisions. How we deal with this “brave new world,” therefore, will be decided by the West’s ability to ***clearly recognize the Islamist threat and its inseparable concomitant of mass population “irregular” [read: illegal] movements from Asia and Africa into Europe.***

Erdogan's Turkey, her supporters forget, is an entirely different beast from the one they knew until 2003 when the neo-sultan first emerged. Under Erdogan's "democratic dictatorship" Turkey has been rapidly Islamized, her armed forces, once guarantors of her secular identity, thoroughly suppressed, purged, and emasculated as political players. Turkish society is under enormous pressure to become "devout." The head scarf, once almost invisible, has become the new Erdoganist banner everywhere—no university, for instance, would dare today to apply "neutrality" on its student body and focus on academic and personal freedom ignoring the Directorate of Religious Affairs (*Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı*) charged with promoting Sunni Islam. The call of the muezzin is Turkey's *new voice*, and if this does not rattle her supporters it should and fast.

It would be self-inflicted madness to continue the current "Western bastion" puppetry with Turkey, and, by extension, with Islamist fanaticism and collaboration with Islamic terrorists so eagerly practiced by Ankara. The question really is not whether Turkey succeeds or not in her search for "new friends" but, rather, what can happen *if Turkey isn't booted out of NATO*. As a recent analysis presciently [put](#) it: "Indeed, the real danger to NATO is not that Turkey will withdraw or pivot to Russia, but rather that it remains inside. Because NATO decisions are consensual, Turkey can play the proverbial Trojan Horse to filibuster any action when crisis looms. It is true there is no clear mechanism to expel NATO members – *but NATO's survival nonetheless requires purging Turkey*. The West should call Erdogan's bluff" [emphasis added].

That's the question we must urgently address and resolve at *Ankara's expense*.