



POLICY ROUNDTABLE:

Trump and the Future of NATO

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1. Introduction: Trump and NATO — Disruption or Distraction?

By James Goldgeier

U.S. President Donald Trump's aggressive disdain for America's NATO allies has left many wondering whether the U.S. commitment to the alliance, and particularly its Article V collective security provision, has weakened since he took office. He is not the first president to complain about insufficient European defense spending, but he is the first to tie the defense spending levels of allies to a willingness to defend them if they are attacked. Strangely, he also appears to believe that allies pay the United States directly, as if NATO collected membership dues rather than members contributing to their own national defense as part of their alliance obligations. As Thomas Wright has observed, Trump's belief that allies have taken advantage of American largesse to get rich while Uncle Sam pays to defend them is one of his most deeply held views.¹ Meanwhile, Trump has gone out of his way to praise Russian President Vladimir Putin, who authorized the invasion of Ukraine in 2014, resulting in the imposition of sanctions on Russia by the West and an increase in activities to bolster NATO's eastern members.

At the same time as Trump derides America's allies, NATO continues to enjoy strong support in the United States from members of Congress, with the Senate reaffirming its support for the alliance through a non-binding resolution that passed 97-2 on the eve of Trump's departure for Europe in July. U.S. Secretary of Defense James Mattis and U.S. Ambassador to NATO Kay Bailey Hutchison have issued strong public statements backing NATO. The United States has continued to support efforts to reassure NATO's eastern members in the face of Russian aggression by deploying troops as part of the European Deterrence Initiative and joining military exercises. And despite Trump's disruptive public statements before and during the July 2018 NATO summit in Brussels, the communiqué issued by the heads of state and government was quite strong and comprehensive.²

¹ Thomas Wright, "Trump's 19th Century Foreign Policy," *Politico*, Jan. 20, 2016, <https://www.politico.com/magazine/story/2016/01/donald-trump-foreign-policy-213546>.

² "Brussels Summit Declaration," NATO, July 11, 2018, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_156624.htm.

So, is Trump destroying NATO or is he merely a distraction as the alliance hums along? The *Texas National Security Review* has put together an outstanding group of European experts to consider NATO's future from the Continent's perspective. Dr. Ulrike Franke of the European Council on Foreign Relations possesses deep expertise on European defense and security, particularly in the area of new technologies and the future of warfare. Ambassador Imants Liegis is a career diplomat who has served previously as Latvia's ambassador to NATO and as minister of defense. Professor Sten Rynning, of the University of Southern Denmark, has written widely on NATO operations and organization.

Franke is rightly concerned that NATO is getting caught up in partisan U.S. domestic politics as views among conservative and liberal voters regarding support for NATO are beginning to diverge, and the alliance "could become a casualty of partisan fighting." She also notes quite pointedly that "Europeans are starting to perceive the United States as just another geopolitical player," no longer seen as defender of the West. Franke lays out the European initiatives being undertaken in response — it will be important to watch in the coming years how serious these efforts become. The United States reluctantly entered the European security space a century ago. It decided, after two world wars, to stay militarily engaged on the continent and reaffirmed its commitment after the Cold War ended. But now America has a president who talks about leaving Europe. It is completely reasonable for Europeans to try to pursue their own defense strategy, but how realistic that goal is will depend, in part, on their ability to overcome the diverse opinions and ambitions that exist among E.U. members, particularly as concerns Russia, as Franke notes.

Liegis argues that this summer's Trump-Putin meeting in Helsinki was "not as bad as it could have been" for the Baltic nations, a sentiment shared by the other two authors regarding NATO more generally. After all, many observers were concerned prior to Trump's visits to Brussels and Helsinki that he might do what he did after his Singapore meeting with Kim Jong Un and propose the cancelation of military exercises in Europe as he did regarding U.S. joint exercises with South Korea. "It was no mean feat that NATO emerged from the [Brussels] summit well intact," writes Liegis.

Liegis' contribution makes two other important points. First, that European defense and security initiatives outside of NATO benefit rather than weaken the alliance. The United States has gone back and forth over the past two decades with respect to its attitudes toward Europe's own foreign and defense policy. Liegis is right: Washington should welcome anything the Europeans can do to enhance their defense capacity. The second point is in reference to Canadian troops deployed in Latvia, offering a helpful reminder that transatlantic relations are not solely about the United States and Europe.

If Liegis is arguing that NATO is basically moving along as before and has even strengthened despite Trump, Rynning is much more pessimistic. He argues that we are witnessing a fundamental change in the international order and, if that is the case, asks whether the alliance is prepared for it. For Rynning, Trump's major disruption is bringing Germany back in as a major power, and he fears that differences could soon emerge between western and eastern Europe. He argues that the European powers are eager to retain the status quo and therefore have accommodated U.S. interests, because their primary interest is in continuing to see NATO play its longtime role in containing German power. If the United States leaves, writes Rynning, the eastern European question will reemerge, and he believes a NATO without the United States cannot protect the Baltics.

Questions abound regarding Trump's personal imprint on American foreign policy. This excellent trio of authors helps guide us through the key issues when it comes to his self-professed desire to disrupt U.S.-European relations.

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2. Now What? Lessons for Europe from the NATO Summit

By Ulrike Franke

It is time for Europe to start considering a future in which the transatlantic relationship is no longer the bedrock of European security and the guide for European international policy. Such is the realization in many European capitals these days. “The Atlantic has widened politically,” writes Germany’s foreign minister, Heiko Maas, in a recent op-ed published simultaneously in German and English, in which he explains that he is “making plans for a new world order.”³ The NATO summit in July in Brussels served as a reminder that this new world order is quickly becoming a reality, despite assurances from some to the contrary.

I was in Brussels during the summit, participating in the outreach conference, “NATO Engages.” One of the most striking moments of the conference was during the panel on U.S.-NATO relations — the number one topic of this summit. Two U.S. senators, Jeanne Shaheen (D-NH) and Thom Tillis (R-NC), spent an hour reassuring the audience that there was “broad public support for NATO in the United States’ public and in the U.S. Congress.” They pointed to the motion that the Senate had passed with an overwhelming majority the day before, reaffirming the ironclad American commitment under NATO’s Article 5.⁴ However, they had trouble convincing the skeptical audience, and, some 45 minutes into the debate, the feel-good session was disrupted by the news that President Donald Trump was allegedly threatening to withdraw the United States from NATO if allies did not agree to increase their defense spending.⁵

³ Heiko Maas, “Making plans for a new world order,” *Handelsblatt*, Aug. 22, 2018, <https://www.handelsblatt.com/today/opinion/heiko-maas-making-plans-for-a-new-world-order/22940622.html?ticket=ST-5205142-xEbVl6PKam40poKWJaqi-ap3>.

⁴ “Senate Passes Reed Motion to Strongly Reaffirm U.S. Commitment to NATO Alliance,” July 10, 2018, <http://lprnoticias.com/2018/07/10/senate-passes-reed-motion-strongly-reaffirm-u-s-commitment-nato-alliance/>.

⁵ Anna Palmer, Jake Sherman, and Daniel Lippman, “POLITICO Playbook: Trump causes chaos at NATO summit,” *Politico*, July 12, 2018, <https://www.politico.com/newsletters/playbook/2018/07/12/trump-nato-withdraw-threat-285401>.

In the moment, one could not help being carried away by the commotion. But, in the end, Trump's tantrum did not have any substantial impact on the summit's outcome. Several commentators considered the 23-page summit communiqué that was signed to be one of the more substantial declarations in recent years, including a new Iraq mission and an invitation to Macedonia to join the alliance.⁶ While Trump claimed victory as Europeans agreed to increase their defense spending, the reality is that this has been the trend for several years, predating the current U.S. president's term. It seems likely that any other American president would have gone home with exactly the same results.

It is tempting to take solace in the fact that NATO continues with business as usual, but Europe must not fall into the trap of complacency. And there are signs indicating that Europe is indeed beginning to come to terms with the new international realities.

America as a “Normal” Geopolitical Actor

Although polling suggests that NATO remains popular in the United States,⁷ such opinions could change if the president continues to tell his voters that NATO is robbing the United States. Contrary to the bipartisan elite consensus presented by Shaheen and Tillis, there are significant differences in opinion between conservative and liberal voters when it comes to NATO. In the United States, support for the alliance is turning into a topic of partisan politics, and could become a casualty of partisan fighting.

More importantly, Europe and the United States are gradually drifting apart.⁸ By withdrawing from the Paris Agreement, pulling out of the Iran nuclear agreement, and

⁶ “Brussels Summit Declaration. Issued by the Heads of State and Government Participating in the Meeting of the North Atlantic Council in Brussels 11-12 July 2018,” NATO, July 11, 2018, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_156624.htm; David Wemer, “Here’s What NATO Achieved at Its Brussels Summit,” Atlantic Council, July 12, 2018, <http://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/new-atlanticist/here-s-what-nato-achieved-at-its-brussels-summit>.

⁷ Bruce Stokes, “NATO’s Image Improves on Both Sides of Atlantic: European Faith in American Military Support Largely Unchanged,” Pew Global, May 23, 2017, <http://www.pewglobal.org/2017/05/23/natos-image-improves-on-both-sides-of-atlantic/>.

⁸ Ulrike Franke, “Watching for signs of NATO’s end of times,” *War on the Rocks*, July 10, 2018, <https://warontherocks.com/2018/07/watching-for-signs-of-natos-end-of-times/>.

unilaterally imposing tariffs, Trump has called into question Europeans' formerly unshakeable faith in diplomacy as a way to resolve disagreements. Rather than basing America's commitment to NATO on shared values and interests, Trump views it in a transactional way. The longer he remains president, the more alien to Europe the United States becomes as a country. But these changes extend beyond Trump. As Maas writes, "I am skeptical when some ardent trans-Atlanticist simply advises us to sit this presidency out."

In other words, for Europe, the United States is becoming normalized. Rather than being seen as special, with global or, at a minimum, western interests in mind, Europeans are starting to perceive the United States as just another geopolitical player. This shift can be seen most strikingly in the results of a recent study done by the European Council on Foreign Relations (where I am a fellow), based on work by researchers in all 28 E.U. member states.⁹ According to this study, five E.U. countries have begun to see the United States as "somehow a threat" or even "a moderate threat." Asked about how the United States was viewed ten years ago, there was agreement among the researchers that no E.U. country would have considered the United States as a threat at that time. Even more concerning, when asked about how U.S.-E.U. relations might develop over the next ten years, the number of countries expected to consider the United States as some kind of a threat in the future rose to eight. These results indicate that this deterioration in relations is expected to continue beyond Trump's presidency.

Europe Responds

It will be up to Europe to build up its own capabilities and get ready to face the threats Europeans are most concerned about, rather than relying primarily on the United States. Europe needs to face the fact that NATO is unbalanced and will not be able to continue indefinitely in its current form. Acknowledging this fact is not about placing blame on particular countries — there is a historical reason for these imbalances. But if NATO

⁹ Susi Dennison, Ulrike Esther Franke, and Paweł Zerka, "The Nightmare of the Dark: The Security Fears that Keep Europeans Awake at Night," European Council on Foreign Relations (July 2018), https://www.ecfr.eu/specials/scorecard/the_nightmare_of_the_dark_the_security_fears_that_keep_europeans_awake_at_n.

members want to preserve the alliance, they need to prepare it for the future, both with regard to the alliance's capabilities as well as with regard to burden-sharing. Unfortunately, it is this strategic debate that has become a casualty of Trump's tantrums, as everyone at NATO is distracted defending the alliance from Trump's ad hominem attacks.

While Europe has already been looking into strengthening common European capabilities — like increasing defense budgets — the Trump presidency, in combination with concerns over Russia and Brexit, has given European, and particularly E.U., initiatives a new impetus. The Permanent Structured Cooperation, known as PESCO, was signed in November 2017, and today encompasses a range of projects, from a European Medical Command and sharing platforms for cyber attacks, to the development of a European Armoured Infantry Fighting Vehicle.¹⁰ French President Emmanuel Macron's proposal for a European Intervention Initiative aims at slowly creating a shared European strategic culture, an approach driven by the wish to create European "strategic autonomy."¹¹ Even before Trump's election, the concept was prominent in the 2016 European Global Strategy,¹² but Trump has given the idea a new boost as well as a new sense of urgency.

None of these initiatives are contradictory to NATO, but they suggest that it might be in these fora where the forward-looking projects will be pursued, rather than in NATO which is bogged down in a fight to justify its existence toward the United States.

Although the mechanisms for strengthening European capabilities are still taking shape, there is widespread agreement throughout the European Union that security threats are on

¹⁰ "Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO) first collaborative PESCO projects - Overview"

<https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/32079/pesco-overview-of-first-collaborative-of-projects-for-press.pdf>.

¹¹ Nick Witney, "Macron and the European Intervention Initiative: Erasmus for soldiers?" European Council on Foreign Relations, May 22, 2018,

https://www.ecfr.eu/article/commentary_macron_and_the_european_intervention_initiative_erasmus_for_soldiers.

¹² "Shared Vision, Common Action: A Stronger Europe," European Union, June 2016,

https://eeas.europa.eu/archives/docs/top_stories/pdf/eugs_review_web.pdf. Also see Nick Witney, "Brexit, defence, and the EU's quest for 'strategic autonomy,'" European Council on Foreign Relations, June 25, 2018, https://www.ecfr.eu/article/commentary_brexit_defence_and_the_eus_quest_for_strategic_autonomy.

the rise: Respondents in the abovementioned study judged that the threats their countries faced intensified between 2008 and 2018, and will intensify further in the next decade.¹³ The most important threats that Europe needs to prepare for are, in descending order, cyber-attacks, state collapse or civil war in Europe's neighborhood, external meddling in domestic politics, uncontrolled migration into the country; and the deterioration of the international institutional order.¹⁴ Respondents expect the order of importance of these threats to remain largely the same over the next ten years (with terrorist attacks joining the deterioration of the international order in fifth place), and each threat to grow more intense. With regard to the international actors Europeans perceive to be most threatening, jihadists top the list, with Russia and international criminal groups sharing second place, and North Korea coming in third.

Some of these threats are easier for Europe to take on than others. While increasing and better cooperation with regard to cyber threats should be an achievable goal, Russia is the elephant in the European room.

Indeed, it was the shared view among the experts present at the NATO summit in Brussels that the summit would only be truly over, and Europe's NATO members able to breathe freely again, once the Putin-Trump summit in Helsinki was finished — and did not end with Trump handing Putin Crimea, or promising NATO or U.S. troop withdrawals. In this regard, the Helsinki summit turned out better than feared. While the bizarre Trump-Putin press conference caused major debate in the United States, in Europe, the view was generally that it could have gone worse.¹⁵ Nevertheless, the strangely close relationship between the American and Russian presidents is particularly worrisome for Europe, as Russia remains a topic of contention within the European Union.

¹³ Dennison, Franke, and Zerka, "The Nightmare of the Dark."

¹⁴ Dennison, Franke, and Zerka, "The Nightmare of the Dark."

¹⁵ Marcin Gocłowski, "Trump-Putin Meeting Could Have Been Worse, Poland Says," *Reuters*, July 17, 2018, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-poland-nato-morawiecki/trump-putin-meeting-could-have-been-worse-poland-says-idUSKBN1K71GT>.

Although there is broad agreement among E.U. member states on most threats and actors, it is on Russia that the most problematic divisions exist.¹⁶ Seven countries — Estonia, Finland, Germany, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, and the United Kingdom — regard Russia as the most important threat to their security, and six others consider it a significant threat. However, five predominantly southern countries — Greece, Italy, Portugal, Hungary, and Cyprus — view Russia as no threat at all. The only way that the European Union can deal with these differences in opinion is by focusing on the areas of vulnerability rather than on the potential perpetrator of a given attack — for example, strengthening all E.U. member states against external meddling or cyber attacks in general. Nevertheless, the European Union is walking a tightrope with regard to its Russia policy. And an American president who is so unpredictable in his policy toward Russia, and who actively seeks to divide the European Union, introduces significant instability into the situation.

It is in this context that Trump's attacks against Germany's policy on gas imports from Russia at the NATO summit are so problematic. While the Nord Stream II pipeline, over which Trump attacked Chancellor Angela Merkel, is highly controversial throughout Europe and even within the German political establishment, Germany has been one of the most important advocates of Russian sanctions. Furthermore, accusing Germany of being too close to Russia, while simultaneously nourishing a highly unusual relationship with the Russian president appears dishonest.

Europe has to bring its own house in order if it wants to guarantee its security and keep NATO as the backbone of European defense. And it needs to prepare for a future in which that might no longer be possible.

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¹⁶ Dennison, Franke, and Zerka, "The Nightmare of the Dark."

3. It Is Premature to Announce the Demise of NATO

By Imants Lieģis

Despite the brouhaha surrounding this summer's NATO summit in Brussels and subsequent Trump-Putin meeting in Helsinki, the game is far from over for NATO. Given the inextricable link between the NATO summit and the Helsinki meeting, it is worth reflecting on the outcome of both.

Helsinki: Better than Bad

In Moscow, France may have won the World Cup, but President Vladimir Putin was victorious in terms of public relations: He held a tête-à-tête with President Donald Trump the day after the final. Passing the ball firmly into the hands and court of the U.S. president, both physically and metaphorically, allowed Putin to return from Helsinki well-pleased. As Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov commented about the Trump-Putin meeting, "Better than super."¹⁷ Lavrov's spin and Putin's smiles, however, should not detract from the fact that, on substance, Russia may have come away from Helsinki with very little. For his part, arriving back in Washington, Trump had to deal with his "own goal" about Russian interference in U.S. elections, by explaining his slips of the tongue.¹⁸

But for the Baltics, including my home country of Latvia, the result of the Trump-Putin encounter was better than bad, or at least not as bad as it could have been. And there are no reasons for concluding that the Putin-Trump meeting was necessarily bad for NATO either. Although it will remain difficult to obtain a precise readout of the one-on-one discussion held by the two presidents in Helsinki, there appear to have been no surprise decisions, such as those taken by Trump at his meeting with North Korea's leader Kim Jong-un

¹⁷ Damien Sharkov, "Trump and Putin's Meeting Was not just "Super," It was "Fabulous," Says Russia," *Newsweek*, July 16, 2018, <https://www.newsweek.com/trump-and-putins-meeting-was-not-just-super-it-was-fabulous-says-russia-1026727>.

¹⁸ "Trump Putin: US President Reverses Remark on Russia Meddlin," *BBC*, July 18, 2018, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-44864739>.

relating to the cancellation of joint U.S.-South Korean military exercises.¹⁹ Excessive damage to the alliance seems to have been averted and the briefing at NATO immediately after the Helsinki meeting by the U.S. ambassador to Russia, Jon M. Huntsman, helped to alleviate concerns.

NATO's approach to Russia has been based on a two-track policy of engaging in dialogue with Russia while simultaneously strengthening the defense and deterrence posture of the alliance. Trump's meeting in Helsinki was entirely consistent with this approach. After all, a few days earlier he signed up to the declaration adopted by heads of state and government at the NATO Summit. The declaration reaffirmed the strong condemnation of Russia's destructive behavior during the last few years with updated references to this year's attack in the United Kingdom using a military-grade nerve agent.

NATO: Better on Substance than Style

Looking more broadly at the results of the Brussels summit, Latvia came away with a sense of relief and satisfaction. For all the drama, it was a good summit on substance. Unity of the alliance was retained. Regional security was further bolstered. And relations with Russia still depend on a positive change of behavior by Latvia's neighbor.

Given the disruption that has been witnessed to the international order over the last few years, it was no mean feat that NATO emerged from the summit well-intact. Various nightmare scenarios were prevalent in the lead-up to the summit.²⁰ These were partially based on events surrounding the G7 meeting in Canada, after which Trump decided to

¹⁹ Steve Holland, Soyong Kim, and Jack Kim, "In Surprise Summit Concession, Trump Says He Will Halt Korea War Games," Reuters, June 11, 2018, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-northkorea-usa/in-surprise-summit-concession-trump-says-he-will-halt-korea-war-games-idUSKBN1J72PM>.

²⁰ Tomas Valasek, "Will Trump Make NATO Obsolete?" *Politico*, July 11, 2018, <https://www.politico.eu/article/donald-trump-nato-defense-make-nato-obsolete/>; Jacques Hubert-Rodier, "L'alliance Atlantique résiste aux humeurs de Trump [NATO Resists Trump's Mood]," *Les Echos*, July 12, 2018, <https://www.lesechos.fr/monde/enjeux-internationaux/0301967525050-lalliance-atlantique-resiste-aux-humeurs-de-trump-2191826.php>; Demetri Sevastopulo, "Trump Hits Out at Germany Ahead of NATO Summit," *Financial Times*, July 9, 2018, <https://www.ft.com/content/0c4837e0-837b-11e8-96dd-fa565ec55929>.

annul the declaration signed by him and the other G7 leaders.²¹ According to the analysis in France's leading daily newspaper, *Le Monde*, the prospect of a U.S. exit from NATO at the Brussels summit remained at the level of a threat. It was perceived more as a lever Trump was using to obtain an increase in allies' defense expenditure.²²

Thus, it was a positive outcome that NATO was able to retain unity, overcome differences of opinion, and emphasize, yet again, basic principles of the alliance. Defense and deterrence issues were highlighted in the final agreed text, along with the core principle of collective defense.²³

The NATO summit also witnessed further strengthening of regional security on the eastern flank, specifically the Baltics and Poland, without losing sight of broader challenges faced by NATO in southern Europe. It should be recalled that NATO's refocus on territorial defense was prompted, in particular, by Russia's illegal annexation of Crimea in 2014 and subsequent and ongoing military intervention in eastern Ukraine. As a result, NATO decided, at meetings in Wales (2014) and Warsaw (2016), to re-assure countries on the eastern flank by establishing an "Enhanced Forward Presence" of four battalions from numerous allied partner-countries in Poland, Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania.

This has been a commensurate and measured reaction to Russia's aggression during the past few years, aggression which has encompassed speed of military action, rapid decision-making, unpredictability, and an increasing array of threats posed by hybrid war elements. On the latter point, it is important to note that the "Summit Declaration" once again links hybrid warfare to a possible invocation of Article Five of the Washington Treaty and even mentions disinformation as being a distinct part of hybrid actions.

²¹ Clare Foran, "Trump Criticizes Justin Trudeau, Says US Won't Endorse G7 Statement," *CNN*, June 10, 2018, <https://www.cnn.com/2018/06/09/politics/trump-justin-trudeau-g7-communicue/index.html>.

²² *Le Monde*, July 17, 2018, print edition, 17.

²³ "Brussels Summit Declaration," NATO, July 11, 2018, para. 1, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_156624.htm).

What's New?

So what else was new at the Brussels summit?

First, decisions were taken to improve NATO's readiness and ability to act. Latvia's offer to set up a Multinational Divisional Headquarters at its military base some 20 kilometers from the capital Rīga, was accepted. These headquarters will improve NATO's capabilities in defense-planning and will enhance the performance of practical defense tasks in the region. It will be an integral part of NATO's force structure, allowing easier command of troops stationed in the Baltic states. The NATO Readiness Initiative will, in turn, improve the rapid response capability by providing "an additional 30 major naval combatants, 30 heavy or medium maneuver battalions, and 30 kinetic air squadrons, with enabling forces, at 30 days' readiness or less."²⁴ This was a proposal launched earlier in the year by U.S. Defense Secretary Jim Mattis.

Second, the question of military mobility was addressed.²⁵ This is of paramount importance in the Baltic region vis-à-vis a potential need for additional allied forces to cross borders speedily by land, air, or sea. It ties in with coordinated efforts also being made in this regard through the European Union. A pre-summit joint declaration by E.U. and NATO leaders on coordination measures was likewise perceived in a positive light by Latvia. Military mobility goes hand-in-hand with the earlier-mentioned issue of readiness and ability to act.

Third, sharpening the focus on defense spending and European burden-sharing is producing results. As Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg pointed out at the start of the summit, "[A]fter decades where Allies were cutting defense budgets by hundreds of billions of dollars and euros we are seeing now that they are adding billions of euros to their defense budgets."²⁶ He pointed out that European allies and Canada have pledged a further \$266 billion to their defense budgets by 2024. The three Baltic countries have all ensured

²⁴ "The NATO Readiness Initiative," para. 14 of the "Brussels Summit Declaration."

²⁵ "Brussels Summit Declaration," paras. 16-18.

²⁶ Jens Stoltenberg, "Doorstep Statement," NATO Summit in Brussels, July 11, 2018,

https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions_156730.htm.

spending 2 percent of GDP on defense this year, although Estonia has been doing so already for a number of years.

Russia's military intervention in Ukraine in 2014 was the catalyst for this approach. Cutting a deal by suggesting an increase to 4 percent of GDP may not have been the best way for Trump to address this issue in Brussels. At the same time, it should be recalled that the U.S. financial commitments to Europe's defense currently remain solid. Washington's European Deterrence Initiative funding has, after all, continued to grow from \$789 million in 2016 to a proposed \$6.5 billion next year.²⁷

The realization that European countries need to do more for their own security is a positive outcome of the Brussels summit, on the basis that more European strategic autonomy does not contradict NATO's collective defense commitments. Indeed, there are a number of European initiatives that act as an important supplement to measures already being taken by the alliance as a whole. For example, together with eight other northern European countries, Latvia recently signed up to the Joint Expeditionary Force initiated by the United Kingdom. France has also promoted the European Intervention Initiative, with a total of nine European countries — including the United Kingdom, Germany, Denmark, and Estonia — having signed an agreement in June to work more closely together.²⁸ None of these initiatives should, in any way, weaken NATO, but, on the contrary, help to strengthen the alliance.

Maintaining the Transatlantic Link

The fundamental concern of Latvia and its two Baltic neighbors is to maintain a strong transatlantic link with the United States, keeping it firmly engaged in Europe. U.S. allies

²⁷ Frederico Bartels and Daniel Kochis, "Congress Should Transform the European Deterrence Initiative into an Enduring Commitment," Heritage Foundation, May 29, 2018,

<https://www.heritage.org/europe/report/congress-should-transform-the-european-deterrence-initiative-enduring-commitment>.

²⁸ A good description of these and other European defence initiatives is offered in Elisabeth Braw, "Europe's Little Alliances Can Help Bolster NATO," *Wall Street Journal*, July 10, 2018,

<https://www.wsj.com/articles/europes-little-alliances-can-help-bolster-nato-1531263637> .

should do their utmost to preserve that link by focusing more on substance and less on cacophony. U.S. engagement and commitment was emphasized during the meeting between Trump and his three counterparts from Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania in the spring. Likewise, U.S. relations with Poland, including Trump's visit to Warsaw last year, indicate mutual understanding about threats to Europe's security. As Europe moves to mark the centenary of the end of World War I in November, the lessons of the last century illustrate how Europe's fate has been inextricably linked to U.S. engagement. Woodrow Wilson's Fourteen Point Plan in 1918 and the D-Day landings in 1944 both paved the way for subsequent peace. So the decision by Trump to join other heads of state in Paris on November 11th to remember the day the Great War came to a close in Western Europe can be welcomed.²⁹ Prevailing uncertainties surrounding Russia's actions, Brexit, and the European Union, as well as a slightly Orwellian situation evolving in the United States, mean that preservation of the transatlantic link remains crucial.

Canada has certainly stepped forward as a staunch upholder of that link. Canadian troops lead the enhanced NATO presence in Latvia. Prime Minister Justin Trudeau paid a visit to Latvia on his way to the NATO summit in Brussels and committed to Canada's troops staying in Latvia for a further four years beyond 2019. This steadfast expression of solidarity by our Transatlantic NATO ally was highly appreciated in Latvia.

Conclusion: 70 Years and Counting

Next year, NATO will celebrate its 70th anniversary at a time when the rationale for the alliance's existence still remains as relevant as it was in 1949, albeit facing a totally different array of security threats. Latvia will mark 15 years of being a member of NATO. The alliance initially brought an unprecedented sense of security, never felt since the establishment of the nation in 1918. However, it was subsequently unsettled, first by Russia's actions in Georgia in 2008, and then even more so after the attack on Ukraine in 2014.

²⁹ Erin Kelly, "Donald Trump to Mark 100th Anniversary of World War I Armistice in Paris," *USA Today*, Aug. 31, 2018, <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/politics/2018/08/31/donald-trump-mark-100th-anniversary-wwi-armistice-paris/1160552002/>.

No group of 29 democratic nations can exist without differences of opinion that can sometimes threaten the very foundations of the organization. The Brussels summit passed the test of overcoming these differences. NATO made decisions that ultimately strengthen the security of Latvia and its neighborhood. At the ripe age of 70, next year will bear witness to NATO's ongoing relevance, not just to Latvia's security, but to the security and well-being of the people living in the length and breadth of the alliance's territory. Despite the vagaries of the main protagonist, the NATO show rolls on.

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The views expressed in this paper are those of the author alone and do not necessarily represent the opinion of Latvia's Ministry of Foreign Affairs.



4. The Return of European Geopolitics

By Sten Rynning

When asked about President Donald Trump's July 2018 visit to Europe, Henry Kissinger presciently noted, "I think Trump may be one of those figures in history who appears from time to time to mark the end of an era and to force it to give up its old pretenses."³⁰ In other words, for all the uproar surrounding the president's personality, something bigger is going

³⁰ Edward Luce, "Henry Kissinger: 'We Are in a Very, Very Grave Period,'" *Financial Times*, July 20, 2018, <https://www.ft.com/content/926a66bo-8b49-11e8-bf9e-8771d5404543>.

on, and Trump has come to personify it. Perhaps the biggest challenge is, therefore, to put words to this shifting ground and imagine its potential consequences.

In this short essay, I argue that NATO is actually witnessing a return of European geopolitics that runs in parallel to the questioning of geopolitical priorities occurring in the United States. European allies clearly prefer continuity when it comes to NATO, but are also coming to realize that as power shifts, so too must institutions. If the big shift comes and the United States leaves NATO, Western Europe may scrape by, but Eastern Europe will pay the price with the loss of sovereignty. Averting this major shift requires a stronger Europe within NATO, not only in terms of budgets but also political influence. Yet it is not clear that the Atlantic allies are ready to recast their bargain and stick to it.

The German Question

Geopolitical malaise accompanied Trump at every stage of his European visit. His disdain for NATO allies was remarkable — at the NATO summit, he threatened that the United States might “go it alone” and later questioned whether he would come to the defense of Montenegro, a NATO ally³¹ — as was his disregard for British Prime Minister Theresa May’s need for a functioning special relationship with the United States, and his camaraderie with Russian President Vladimir Putin in Helsinki. Geopolitically speaking, it is appropriate that Trump should give much attention, first to Germany, and then two of its neighboring powers, Britain and Russia, but Trump’s German policy (and policy might be too strong a word) is both contradictory and incomplete.

The contradiction relates to the interpretation of whether or not Germany is masterfully in control of events. On the one hand, Trump indicates it is when he portrays Germany as a savvy mercantilist nation that out-trades its partners to run up outsized trade surpluses. This is not “fair and reciprocal,” he argues, but rather a critical national security threat to

³¹ Robin Emmott, Jeff Mason, and Alissa de Carbonnel, “Trump Claims NATO Victory After Ultimatum to Go It Alone,” *Reuters*, July 12, 2018, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-nato-summit/trump-claims-nato-victory-after-ultimatum-to-go-it-alone-idUSKBN1K135H>; Krishnadev Calamur, “Trump Goes After Montenegro, a ‘Tiny Country’ with ‘Aggressive People,’” *Atlantic*, July 18, 2018, <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2018/07/trump-montenegro/565475/>.

industries in the United States. This explains why the president can designate the European Union a “foe” of the United States ahead of traditional geopolitical rivals such as China and Russia.³² On the other hand, Trump argues that Germany has essentially lost its geopolitical free will and has become hostage to Russia on account of energy imports: “Germany is totally controlled by Russia,” is how he framed it at an opening event of the NATO summit in July.³³

Ruthless mastermind or Russian subject? These contradictory narratives about Germany may simply be tools of convenience for a president determined to disrupt relations and gain bargaining advantages, but they also reveal an incomplete understanding of Germany’s role in European and transatlantic geopolitics. Germany is the quintessential power in the middle that either gets to define the geopolitical order by East-West “flank” diplomacy, or which is brought into a wider order by one of its flanks — East or West. NATO is the face of a western order that, as Lord Hastings Ismay, NATO’s first secretary-general, famously put it, serves to keep the United States in, Germany down, and Russia out.

By questioning the U.S. security guarantee in NATO, and by disrupting the Atlantic horizon that has defined the focal point for German foreign policy since the founding of the Federal Republic (post-1945), Trump is effectively inviting the return of European flank diplomacy. He has never addressed this issue and shows no sign of understanding its implications, and therefore there is no way of knowing how he feels about it. European diplomats clearly understand the drift, and abhor the prospect. To the extent that they will be successful in containing the scope of change, they must grapple with the intricacies of enlarging the European footprint inside NATO — Europeanizing the alliance — while simultaneously satisfying both American and European interests. If they cannot do this, they face the prospect of Atlantic disconnect and a fuller return to European geopolitics that might allow

³² Andrew Roth, “Trump Calls EU a ‘Foe’—Ahead of China and Russia,” *Guardian*, July 15, 2018, <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2018/jul/15/donald-trump-vladimir-putin-helsinki-russia-indictments>; see also the op-ed by Trump’s assistant for trade and manufacturing policy, Peter Navarro, “The Era of American Complacency on Trade is Over,” *New York Times*, June 8, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/06/08/opinion/trump-trade-g7-russia-putin-navarro.html>.

³³ David M. Herszenhorn, “Trump rips into Germany at NATO chief breakfast,” *Politico*, July 11, 2018, <https://www.politico.eu/article/donald-trump-nato-summit-rips-into-germany/>.

for continued collective defense in Western Europe but, tragically, a type of appeasement policy for Eastern Europe.

The Strategy of Choice

The strategy of choice of European leaders is to contain the possibility of full-scale Europeanization of security and defense issues. It implies NATO continuity, meaning a continued U.S. commitment to temper the geopolitical impulses of the European continent. To achieve this, allies are willing to let Trump claim (exaggerated) credit for raising allied defense budgets: According to my sources, on day two of the NATO summit when Trump, quite unprecedentedly, derailed a partnership meeting with renewed criticism of allied defense spending, allied heads of state urged him to claim credit for budgetary increases they knew full well had been set in motion before the Trump presidency.³⁴ More than this, they have invested in the range of policy issues that align with mainstream U.S. security interests — force readiness and conventional deterrence, counter-terrorism, cyber defense, enhanced support for Afghan security force training and North Korean diplomacy, and addressing Iran’s military capabilities — all of which featured in the NATO summit declaration.³⁵ It is effectively a message that European allies continue to support the infrastructure — NATO — that not only stabilizes Europe but also offers the United States both a staging ground for Middle Eastern, South Asian, and African engagements and early warning systems for the defense, not of allies, but of the continental United States.³⁶

The strategy of choice is, thus, to push for a greater European footprint inside NATO, where European allies invest in shared, but also, notably, U.S. security priorities in return for NATO’s continued containment of flank diplomacy in Europe. It is not a strategy that resonates with Trump, but it does resonate with the U.S. defense establishment led by Secretary of Defense Jim Mattis, as well as the vast majority of the U.S. Congress. Thus, to align with the latter and steer clear of presidential tantrums, some allied and NATO officials

³⁴ Author’s interview with two NATO summit participants, July 12, 2018.

³⁵ NATO, *Brussels Summit Declaration*, July 11, 2018, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_156624.htm.

³⁶ Carl Bildt, “The End of NATO?,” *Project Syndicate*, July 18, 2018, <https://www.project-syndicate.org/commentary/trump-nato-russian-aggression-by-carl-bildt-2018-07>.

have toyed with the idea of changing the format of NATO summitry to privilege defense business over political grandstanding — a possible change of pace for the alliance’s 70th anniversary summit in 2019.

Even if this attempt at containing both Trump and full Atlantic disconnect is successful, the allies will still face the challenge of change — of shifting more of the burden to Europe and creating a more equal partnership. How Europe (and Canada) can gain a voice in an alliance traditionally shaped around U.S. leadership is a key question. The United States has historically opposed a European caucus inside NATO, and Europeans are not going to settle for a division of labor whereby they do light development work and leave serious defense business to U.S.-led coalitions. At a minimum, therefore, in this new era exposed by Trump’s presidency, the allies must take on the challenging task of shifting burdens to Europe but also offering Europe greater influence in alliance affairs — something that conflicts with Trump’s preference for bilateral negotiations.

How a more European but still Atlantic NATO could work out is really anybody’s guess. NATO has a treaty provision, Article 4, guaranteeing “consultations” on issues of major importance to allied nations, but the format for such consultations has historically been contested and varied.³⁷ For as long as the U.S. commitment to NATO seemed rock solid, the European allies were generally content to shape U.S. policy by various, indirect formats of European cooperation — sometimes in improvised format (such as European Political Cooperation), sometimes via low-level initiatives in NATO (such as the Eurogroup), sometimes by reviving dormant frameworks of consultations (such as the Western European Union), and sometimes by exploiting the security dimension of the European Union. Now, in this new era, as Kissinger labels it, the challenge is one of moving Europeanization to the highest political level inside the alliance itself to satisfy desires in the United States for burden-sharing and in Europe for influence in a continued alliance.

³⁷ Sten Rynning, “The divide: France, Germany, and Political NATO,” *International Affairs* 93, no. 2 (March 2017), <https://doi.org/10.1093/ia/iivo60>.

Western Europe Versus Eastern Europe

There are many obvious risks involved in the current strategy of choice, and Trump's inclinations and behavior are not the only ones. American impatience with allied efforts could become systemic in the U.S. body politic and inside the defense establishment, or Europeans could come to demand too many diplomatic concessions of the United States. If either comes to pass, the dreaded prospect of full Europeanization presents itself. It will not be without costs for the United States, which would lose its staging area along with a significant number of operational and political partners, and would have to engage an emboldened Russia. Still, it is a prospect that cannot be written off.

The challenge for Europeans is then to contain flank diplomacy within a European framework of institutionalized cooperation, which is going to be difficult under the best of circumstances. It will involve France and Britain cooperating with Germany to maintain the collective institutions that are the precondition of Germany's current restrained foreign policy. France will be the partner of choice in the European Union, while Britain will have a lead role to play in a fully Europeanized NATO — in effect taking over the offshore role from the United States. But neither institution will have much muscle power on the eastern flank.

Getting such a Western European construct to function would not be impossible, although it would be difficult. Britain seems particularly unprepared for the task as it has exited the European Union and become engulfed in a crisis of national identity. The political forces behind Brexit offer various dubious visions of global or transatlantic engagement that consistently depict Europe as being in contradiction to the interests and ideas of a mythic Anglosphere. For the foreseeable future, Britain will be preoccupied with its divorce settlement with the European Union. After that, it will have to start afresh in articulating its long-term interest in engaging a German and French-led European Union, on the one hand, and Russia on the other. Britain's troubled relationship with Russia might seem to presage a leadership role in a Europeanized NATO, but the political strength of such a recast NATO presupposes Britain's reconciliation with France and Germany.

France, meanwhile, seems as unprepared as Germany and other E.U. partners to contemplate the idea of extending French nuclear deterrence as a bulwark of continued E.U. integration, particularly in the domain of defense and hard security where the European Union hitherto has thrived in the shadow of a transatlantic NATO. Should the strategy of choice — Europeanization within NATO — fail, France and Germany will have to tackle this delicate topic.³⁸ It will likely take the shape of a grand bargain involving financial integration (in addition to monetary integration) and security and defense policy integration. It is unthinkable that France will engage this in a European Union of 28 or more members. Remaining in line with both its historical and current policy, it will demand the “deepening” of institutions along with the “widening” of common competences, with deepening being a code word for a multi-tiered E.U. structure built around a core of Franco-German cooperation. The European Union would thus undergo a transformation, gaining political depth by returning to its point of origins — the geopolitics of Rhineland cooperation — and once again questioning the place and role of Eastern Europe in the European security order.³⁹

Eastern Europe is, then, where one most vividly encounters flank diplomacy. Most of Eastern Europe has made it into the two big western institutions — NATO and the European Union — but as the West diminishes, the Eastern European question reappears. The central issue is whether Western Europe can reorganize itself and extend security eastwards. In terms of collective defense guarantees capable of effectively deterring Russia, it seems implausible.

European diplomats will be aware of the history of the 1925 Locarno Pact through which the western powers and Germany, by settling the western flank, de facto exposed the eastern

³⁸ A review commissioned by the German Parliament concluded in May 2017 that Germany could legally finance French or British nuclear weapons in exchange for their protection. Max Fisher, “European Nuclear Weapons Program Would Be Legal, German Review Finds,” *New York Times*, July 5, 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/07/05/world/europe/germany-nuclear-weapons.html>. At the fringe of this debate a few lone voices call for an independent German nuclear force: see Christian Hacke, “Why Germany Should Get the Bomb,” *National Interest*, Aug. 12, 2018, <https://nationalinterest.org/feature/why-germany-should-get-bomb-28377>.

³⁹ The dividing line between east and central Europe is up for debate. For the sake of clarity here, I refer to Germany as Europe’s central power and the countries between Germany and Russia as Eastern Europe.

flank to the expansionary policy of Germany. By 1939, Eastern European questions led the world into renewed world war. At Locarno, the issue was one of defense credibility: Western powers could offer credible assurances in regards to their own western borders but not those in Eastern Europe. Thus, Locarno became a de facto invitation for the revisionist power, Germany, to orient its appetite for aggrandizement eastwards. In the post-Cold War world, transatlantic NATO has prevented such sacrificing of Eastern Europe. However, if the United States leaves NATO, the question is how a revisionist Russia will be inhibited from acting similarly. Russia is not Germany in the 1930s, for sure, but Putin's repeatedly expressed regret over the collapse of the Soviet Union, and Russia's subsequent annexation of Crimea, stoking of eastern Ukrainian "insurrections," and engagement in hybrid war more generally signal a return to this type of geopolitical question.⁴⁰

Russia's fortune is that the coordination of U.S. and Western European détente policies is likely to remain difficult for the foreseeable future. The United States, if it leaves NATO to the Europeans, could be expected to focus its Russia dialogue on China and the wider Middle East: This is already the subtext read into Trump's personal diplomacy with Putin by some observers (in effect, a reverse Nixon, opening Russia to contain China).⁴¹ Meanwhile, Western Europe would primarily seek a settlement — an accord — for the continent. They might bring in the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe to provide cover, but this really would be a de facto movement of the East-West frontier westwards, opening a wider space for dual or mixed influence. Naturally, Eastern European countries would not silently submit to this process, but they would have few options with U.S. priorities moving from NATO to containing China, and Western Europe struggling to cohere, and thus contain western flank diplomacy.

⁴⁰ Reuters staff, "Putin, Before Vote, Says He'd Reverse Soviet Collapse if He Could," *Reuters*, March 2, 2018, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-russia-election-putin/putin-before-vote-says-hed-reverse-soviet-collapse-if-he-could-agencies-idUSKCN1GE2TF>.

⁴¹ Simon Tisdall, "Donald Trump Trying to Play Nixon's 'China card' in Reverse," *Guardian*, Dec. 12, 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2016/dec/12/donald-trump-us-china-relations-taiwan-nixon>; John Pomfret, "45 years ago, Kissinger Envisioned a 'Pivot' to Russia. Will Trump Make it Happen?" *Washington Post*, Dec. 16, 2016, https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/global-opinions/wp/2016/12/14/45-years-ago-kissinger-envisioned-a-pivot-to-russia-will-trump-make-it-happen/?utm_term=.d5135490527e.

Geopolitically speaking, in such a new European order, countries in proximity to Germany, notably Poland, the Czech Republic, and Slovakia, and perhaps Hungary, Slovenia, and Croatia would have a fair chance of resisting Russian influence by adhering to the core E.U. powers — if that is their desire. However, political currents in both Poland and Hungary indicate it may not be.⁴² The litmus test would be the three Baltic states of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania: Would Russia respect their sovereignty, or would its appetite for influence grow as NATO's role diminishes?⁴³ Perhaps Western Europe and the United States could manage to coordinate their détente policies toward Russia to the point where Russia would become convinced of making gains elsewhere (e.g., central Asia and the Middle East), if it were to go easy on Eastern Europe. It is an uncomfortable hope for Eastern European nations, however, and the prospect for such hopeful thinking would, again, be easiest to detect in the Baltics. The underlying fact remains that, if the United States were to leave NATO, the power underpinning NATO enlargement would be gone and geopolitical adjustments in Eastern Europe would be necessary.

Conclusion

NATO is unraveling and world crisis is upon us, writes Robert Kagan in response to the 2018 NATO summit.⁴⁴ Kagan thus starkly depicts the worst-case scenario outlined in this essay. If Trump embodies a fatigue in the U.S. political system with enduring alliances, and if Russia becomes a U.S. partner of choice in tipping the scales of Eurasian land power against China, then NATO as a transatlantic alliance would indeed unravel, and Europe's peace would be in question.

Still, even in this bleak scenario, it is unlikely that NATO would go away. Rather, Britain is likely to step in as continental Europe's offshore power, though, of course, with diminished

⁴² Poland might change course as it is even more critical of Russia than of E.U. governance.

⁴³ See Carl Bildt, "The Baltic Litmus Test: Revealing Russia's True Colors," *Foreign Affairs* 73/5 (September/October 1994), <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/baltics/1994-09-01/baltic-litmus-test-revealing-russias-true-colors>.

⁴⁴ Robert Kagan, "Things Will Not Be Ok," *Washington Post*, July 12, 2018, https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/everything-will-not-be-okay/2018/07/12/c5900550-85e9-11e8-9e80-403a221946a7_story.html?utm_term=.3523e69af209.

capabilities compared to those of the United States. A Europeanized NATO would tie Britain to the continent and perhaps become part of the answer to the troubled British-E.U. relationship. The European Union would not be able to stand still in the face of such a security transformation. France and Germany would likely seek to rescue their institutional project by accelerating the construction of a core that would allow France to extend security guarantees to Germany in return for French access to German financial governance, and which would create an E.U. periphery, notably in Eastern Europe, alongside countries such as Ukraine and Belarus. It is probable that Western Europe could rescue its commitment to collective institutions, including collective defense, but it is unlikely that it could extend security guarantees far eastwards, as NATO today is able to. A revised bargain with Russia will then become necessary, one in which the sovereignty of Eastern European countries will be questioned.

Naturally, this is not the current strategy of choice. Rather, NATO diplomats are hoping to wait out Trump while simultaneously acting to secure Europe's greater input into, and say within, NATO. The hope is that, by Europeanizing NATO sufficiently, the allies can continue the transatlantic bargain that contains the geopolitical impulses of the European continent — keeping Russia at bay and keeping Germany embedded within a solid collective institution. However, even if Trump were to go, such a renewed bargain raises difficult questions of how Europe can take on more burdens and gain a greater voice in an alliance to which the United States remains committed. In this regard, Trump has done the allies the service of exposing the scope of NATO's geopolitical challenge. Perhaps enhanced political awareness thereof will make the strategy of choice — of continued transatlantic cooperation — more likely to endure, but there is no going back to “your daddy's NATO,” to paraphrase former NATO secretary-general Lord George Robertson. Geopolitical adjustment will take place. The question is whether western leaders will remain in control.

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