

## President Trump's Security Policy



Ambassador Dr. Klaus Scharioth, Dean, Mercator Fellowship on International Affairs

A coherent security policy of President Donald Trump is not yet discernable. He has neither made his mark as a distinguished foreign policy thinker, nor is he an ideologue. Many very different schools seem to exert some influence on him. Beyond his family, two groups stand out: One is the antimodern, somewhat nationalist camp around Steve Bannon, Steve Miller, and Sebastian Gorka (some of whom have left government, but still wield some influence informally); the other is represented by Secretary of Defense James Mattis, National Security Adviser H.R. McMaster, and Chief of Staff John Kelly – all very experienced security policy executives who know much about NATO and its advantages to the U.S. These camps share little or nothing with each other. While the following list of observations should not be taken as a conclusive analysis of the erratic security policy of President Trump, I want to share some general and topic-specific insights that can already safely be made.

Donald Trump does not believe in the logic of win-win. If something is good for another country, he believes, it cannot be good for the U.S. He can't imagine solutions which might benefit all involved. He views everything as a zero-sum game. My experience in foreign policy points to the exact opposite: Most international challenges (with the exception of war and aggression) are win-win. Only agreements that are seen by all sides as beneficial to them, will last. Most international organizations and agreements are not zero sum, but based on the idea of mutual benefit: NATO, EU, WTO, the Iran nuclear deal, or the Paris climate accords are just a few examples.

More specifically, Donald Trump is not convinced of the benefits of multilateral agreements and institutions to the U.S., although the current international system was largely invented or at least significantly shaped by the U.S. (UN, Bretton Woods institutions, international courts, NATO, WTO). In this regard, the influence of Steve Bannon is still felt, who believes that the existing multilateral international order is not worth preserving, but rather should be weakened, if not destroyed. In Trump's view, the U.S. is strongest alone, it does not need friends or allies. It should no longer be the guarantor of the liberal international order. Mattis, McMaster, and Kelly disagree.

There is damage done to NATO's standing by Trump calling it "obsolete" and by hesitating for a long time to reiterate clear Article 5 guarantees. But I expect Mattis, McMaster, and Kelly to win the debate on NATO inside the administration, as they fully understand the crucial importance of NATO, also for the U.S.' role as a European power. Germany could help the advocates of NATO by continuing to increase its defense spending significantly. Like many other countries, Germany harvested a prolonged "peace dividend" after 1991 by reducing its military budget decisively.

But now we live in a more dangerous world again: The annexation of Crimea, the destabilization of eastern Ukraine, terrorism and violent extremism, upheaval in the Middle East are just examples. So, by strengthening its defense, Germany acts in its own self interest.

There should be a deal not only with the U.S., but also among EU and NATO members, on an increase in overall international security spending: This includes defense, but also diplomacy, crisis prevention, development cooperation, aid to refugees, and support for multilateral institutions. Not all problems are military problems; in fact, most challenges are of a political, diplomatic, or economic nature. The Balkan wars had to be followed by the Stabilization Pact for Southeast Europe. Europe needs to increase its defense efforts significantly, as the U.S. should refrain from cutting its spending on diplomacy, crisis prevention, international organizations, or development cooperation and live up to its obligations under the Geneva Convention by taking in more victims of civil war.

Trump has been strangely silent on Putin turning in Ukraine against the European Peace Order built together by the Soviet Union/Russia and the West (Helsinki, Charter of Paris, Budapest Memorandum, NATO-Russia Founding Act). It will be crucial to convince the Trump administration that sanctions against Russia have to be continued and look the same on both sides of the Atlantic, until Russia's obligations under the Minsk Agreement have been fulfilled.

Trump might not kill the EU 3+3 agreement directly, but rather undermine it indirectly by introducing new sanctions. Radicals in Iran who never liked the deal would be delighted and try to shed Iran's obligations under the agreement. Less stability in the region would be the result.

Trump's loose rhetoric (encouraging Saudi Arabia, Japan, and South Korea to acquire nuclear weapons) is outlandishly dangerous, might lead to a world with more nuclear weapons, and end efforts of previous U.S. administrations to reduce the spread of them (i.e., Obama's Nuclear Posture Review). In North Korea, nothing should be done without having China on board.

What this means in summary is that Europe must pursue a dual track approach toward the U.S. under the Trump administration. Europe and Germany must strengthen their engagement, especially in the domain of defense. At the same time, European policymakers must reach out toward those influencing President Trump and his advisors in order to convince them to retain the transatlantic partnership and take a stand for a rules-based, multilateral world order.