

Sharing the NATO Arrangement

by Michael Curtis



No one is ever likely to mistake Donald J. Trump for a lyric soprano at the New York Metropolitan Opera. Yet Trump, the political performer, resembles a musical performer in capacity to express himself, *colla voce*, taking the lead in a free manner and having others follow his tempo and rhythm. In conciliatory style President Donald Trump showed this as a rock star in his command of the stage in Saudi Arabia and at the Western Wall in Jerusalem. He was equally central in his more confrontational behavior at the NATO summit meeting in Brussels in May 2017 which was not greeted with applause, and at the G-7 summit at Taormina, Sicily on May 26-27, 2017.

Irrespective of any of his controversial utterances, Trump displayed his presence physically in assertive manner if not in assault tactics, as well as in his remarks. While touring

the new lavish glass NATO headquarters in Brussels, he shoved aside a fellow member Dusko Martovic, Prime Minister of the tiny state in area and population of Montenegro, about in June to become the 29th member of NATO, in order to claim the spotlight according to the prearranged family photo with assigned positions of the leaders. Photos also show Trump engaged in what is possibly history's most intense, prolonged handshake with Emmanuel Macron, new President of France, with its formidable display of white knuckles and clenched jaws.

In Saudi Arabia Trump received warm treatment and was feted like royalty. Indeed, he was met at Riyadh airport by King Salman. His trip was not only successful economically in the \$110 billion deal in US arms sales and new investment that is likely to result in thousands of jobs but also in political accord. Trump, following his speech on May 20, 2017, appeared to be successful in persuading Saudis decision makers, who spoke of his vision, strength, and decisiveness, that they were pursuing the same objectives as the US in dealing with counter-terrorism, the threat from Iran, and regional security. He carefully avoided in Saudi Arabia discussing, especially not reprimanding his hosts, of troublesome issues such as deficiencies of human rights and discrimination against women, and in Israel the issue of Jewish settlements in the West Bank.

In stark contrast, Trump's welcome in the Belgium capital was cool, and this reception indicated that Trump is not beloved by most of the leaders of the NATO countries. In Brussels he lectured his fellow leaders on the issues important for him, while paying little attention to the issues stressed by the Europeans, climate issues, reduction of greenhouse gas emissions, global warming, trade issues, and defense preparations against possible Russian aggression.

Trump's reluctance at Brussels and then at Taormina on May 26-27, 2017 to agree to the Paris accord of November 2016 on climate change is understandable due to Trump's emphasis on

the importance of coal for US jobs, a political dilemma and balancing act. Yet the contrast on the issue with his predecessor was too conspicuous. This became even more striking with the article by Barack Obama published in *The Guardian* on May 26, 2017, with his assertion that of all the challenges in the world, "the challenge of climate change is the one that will define the contours of this century more dramatically perhaps than the others."

Trump was criticized most strongly for his failure in Brussels to mention in precise explicit fashion the US commitment to Article V of the North Atlantic Treaty of April 1949. This Article commits all member states to consider an armed attack against one member state in Europe or North America to be an armed attack against them all.

This principle of collective defense was initially created to counter the risk of the expansion of the Stalin controlled Soviet Union into Europe. It has been in fact been invoked only once, by the US after the 9/11 attacks. Presumably Trump believed the US commitment to the Article and to the Treaty is so obvious that there is no need to mention it explicitly. Perhaps the European point of view embodies an old saying: if a commitment is so obvious that it does not need to be mentioned, it goes even better if it is mentioned.

Trump however hammered home his thoughts on two other issues: the financial contributions of members to defense and therefore indirectly to NATO; and the imperative fight against Islamic terrorists. The basic NATO agreement since 2006 was that all countries would contribute at least a minimum of 2% of their GDP to defense purposes and therefore could contribute to NATO. Europeans were forewarned by Trump. In almost every one of his campaign speeches and continuing since he reached the White House, Trump has emphasized the general refusal to honor the 2006 agreement.

Trump is not the first US official to criticize Europeans for

their lack of allocating funds for defense purposes. Secretary of State John Foster Dulles in 1954 warned of a “agonizing reappraisal” if allies of US didn’t make a more serious effort to approve the European Defense Community and necessary funding, and agree on the commitment to European security. During the 2016 presidential campaign both Bernie Sanders and Hillary Clinton spoke of the need for Europeans to spend more on defense.

The 2006 agreement has been regarded as a guideline, a baseline, rather than a decree with penalties, and consequently states have rarely fulfilled their financial commitment. President Trump is not the first to complain that the US has always been the main contributor, far more than its fair share of total capabilities.

The disproportionate US contribution to NATO is understandable since other countries cannot afford some of the high end military capabilities, aircraft carrier forces, ballistic missile defenses, electronic warfare and global logistical capabilities. The NATO alliance therefore depends mainly on the US for these long range capabilities. Without them the most countries would not be able to mount an effective deterrent.

Nevertheless, the disproportion of the contribution to NATO for collective defense, crisis management, and cooperative security has to be addressed and Trump is correct in emphasizing this . Consider the current NATO military budget. Cost sharing arrangements of the 28 countries in the NATO–common-funded budgets in 2017 range from the lowest Albania, 0.08% to the highest , the US, 22.1%. Budgets of this kind in previous years have supported operation costs in various conflicts such as Afghanistan, and also for training, exercises and communications, A civil budget provides funding costs for NATO headquarters and staff.

The current contribution in defense of each country in 2016-17

runs from 3.61% by the US to 0.44% of Luxemburg. The main cause of discontent by Trump and others is that only five countries adhere to the 2% agreement: U.S., Greece, Britain, Estonia, and Poland. France contributes 1.78%, Germany 1.19%. and Italy 1.11%. Of the total amount of \$2,052 million in direct contributions, the US pays \$455 million, Germany \$301 million, France \$218 million, and UK \$202 million.

Trump may have been too abrasive and clearly was undiplomatic in his lecturing to the leaders of the other 27 countries of NATO. But Europe today, if politically troubled and bedeviled by the issue of Brexit, is not poverty stricken. It is able to reach compromises with the U.S. on the complex issue of trade and open markets.

It is appropriate for the European countries to heed the scolding of Trump and engage in burden sharing for common objectives and priorities. It is also incumbent for them to join with the U.S. in what Trump while in Saudi Arabia called the fight of good against evil. Climate, trade, relations with Russia , are all important issues, but first with overwhelming priority is the fight against Islamic terrorists. That is NATO's first task.