

Though Mischaracterized by Media, Trump's NATO Remarks Make Sense



by Conrad Black

The Canadian reaction to the re-emergence of the possibility of an American Trump presidency has generated a disappointing variety of responses in Canada.

Prime Minister Trudeau is promising a "[Team Canada](#)" approach to this impending danger. Editorial comments are being made in the usual places that we should brace ourselves for what amounts to the American renunciation of the Western alliance to be replaced by U.S. non-aggression pacts with Russia and China, which would enable those countries and the United States to carve any spheres of influence for themselves that they wished and demarcate the world at their pleasure. If

Canadians had not learned by now that they cannot rely upon their journalists for anything, and especially not a sophisticated analysis of international affairs, the country would be in a mood of acute anxiety over possible impending developments in the United States.

If Canada had been governed seriously in the past eight years our economic growth would be at least equal to that of the United States, we would not still be a contemptible freeloader in NATO with a defence policy that has essentially consisted of making sure we have access to the Pentagon in case we are attacked by anybody, and we would greet political events in the United States and other countries with the equanimity of a rich, internationally responsible nation confident of our alliances and of our strengths. For all of its history as a coherent political entity, the national identity of Canada has been that we are not Americans.

Very few Canadians can define the serious differences with that country, although they exist, and in general raising the point brings a pallid and unconvincing claim that we are a kinder and gentler place and that we have a large number of French-speaking Canadians and a closer historic relationship with the United Kingdom than the Americans do. There is some truth to all of that too, but it falls far short of a serious explanation of our national *raison d'être*. It is demeaning that a year before the next Inauguration Day in the United States, campaign remarks of the former president seeking re-election are so warped and misinterpreted that we are told by some apparently plausible journalists to prepare for the abrupt end of the Western Alliance.

What former President Trump told a wildly applauding group of corn-fed South Carolina wool-hats last week was that he was not as president going to use their money to defend Europeans against Russian leader Vladimir Putin if they were not prepared to defend themselves. There is nothing unreasonable in this, and nor is there any reason to be alarmed about Russia as long as the alliance continues to be firm in its

resistance to Russian aggression. Russia has a smaller GDP than Canada as well as four West European NATO members—Germany, the UK, France, and Italy—and we have seen the difficulty with which it has made significant inroads against Ukraine, a former constituent member of the Soviet Union with barely a quarter of Russia's population.

NATO was founded in 1949 to give Europeans a comfort level that America would defend Western Europe against attack by Stalin's USSR, which at that point had a nuclear pre-eminence amongst European powers. All of the initial European member states had been severely damaged and taken substantial casualties in World War II. It has proved the most successful defensive alliance in history, and after 42 years the Soviet Union peacefully disintegrated and a number of former constituent units of the Soviet Union and all of its former satellite states have joined NATO.

It then became, in practice and not by agreement, "an alliance of the willing," which meant that all members would be happy to enjoy what amounted to an American military guarantee under Article 5, which holds that an attack upon one member is an attack upon all, but as for anything not directly involving them, the members would decide if they wanted to do anything about it or not. At this point, the Western Alliance was in danger of becoming a farce.

The former Iron Curtain countries in NATO would dutifully contribute token numbers to American-led projects that were largely ignored by the rest of the alliance. There had always been differences of perspective between the Europeans and the Americans, and in response to American complaints about excessive burden sharing, the Europeans would reply that it was compensated for by their increased risk-sharing, as if the United States had an obligation to pay more for the defence of the European countries than they paid themselves because they had the misfortune to be closer to the potential danger posed by the Soviet Union.

Trump's complaint remains that even though the threat posed by Russia in Ukraine is in Europe, and a number of the European countries have responded magnificently including Poland and the United Kingdom, others such as Hungary have not, and it is time for the Europeans to recognize that Russia is no longer a threat to the United States but it remains a threat in Europe and the Europeans should increase defence spending accordingly. There is nothing wrong with that argument, and Trump always opens any comments on this subject by pointing out that if he had been president, Ukraine would not have been invaded at all because his warning to Putin not to do it would have been so explicit that the Russian leader would have had the intelligence not to proceed. That is almost undoubtedly true also and does not reveal any isolationist or anti-Alliance tendencies by the former president.

It is time that NATO responded to changed events, and Canada, as one of the founding members, would be an ideal party to propose such reforms—if it had a credible military capability. Basically, it should become a defensive alliance of democracies extending throughout the world and committed to the retention of existing borders other than in the case of voluntary consensual changes. Canada and the Europeans should show much more respect for the commitment that most of them have failed on of allocating 2 percent of GDP to defence. Apart from our security, it is also the most stimulative and high-tech public sector spending and by far the most advanced form of adult education.

For their part, Americans of both parties should recognize and be somewhat chastened by the instability they provoked in assisting in the end of the Iranian regime of the Shah, and in smashing up Iraq and Syria and sponsoring an invasion and occupation of Afghanistan, without an apparent thought to the consequences in the region.

We should all pull our weight with the Americans and use our added earned influence to urge upon the United States the same

constancy of purpose in other regions that they demonstrated so successfully in the Cold War in Europe. Canada, meanwhile, has nothing to fear from Donald Trump—he likes Canada.

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