

Time to end 'pandemical nervosity' in Europe over Trump

By Conrad Black

This has been an eventful political week for Europe. The German Social Democratic Party (SPD), as expected, the party of Willy Brandt, Helmut Schmidt, and Gerhard Schroeder, has been thrown out of office with only a sixth of the total vote, its worst performance since Bismarck's time. Friedrich Merz is completely vindicated in his long disagreement with former four-term chancellor Angela Merkel and takes office as a declared disciple of Ronald Reagan, but is recoiling from what he thinks is a Trump policy of American estrangement from



Macron comes in close: now Europe must define democratic freedoms and raise military strength. (Photo by Tasos Katapodis/Getty Images)

Western Europe. French President Emmanuel Macron had a very convivial visit in Washington and claims to have lobbied President Trump successfully to avoid a Ukraine

peace without adequate security guarantees to deter further Russian aggression. (Trump didn't need to learn this from Macron.) British Prime Minister Kier Starmer is about to make his first official visit to the United States, professing to be a bridge between Trump and Europe, arriving less than three days after the president of France has departed Washington, having declared that that bridge has already been opened. President Trump has declared that peace in the Ukraine war is

very close.

There is, as always with any substantial change in Washington, pandemonium in Western Europe about the reliability and worldliness of American perceptions of international issues. This week is the third anniversary of the Russian invasion of Ukraine and there has never, until the inauguration of the Trump administration five weeks ago, been any remotely plausible satisfactory exit strategy from the war. Trump has made it clear many times that the war was started by Russian aggression, which with considerable reason he thinks was the consequence of his predecessor's weakness. He recognises that because Ukraine was part of Russia for 300 years and never existed as a jurisdiction until it was set up by Lenin as a Soviet Republic in 1919, and because approximately a sixth of Ukrainians are Russian-speaking, some attention has to be paid to Russian claims, but that these must not compromise the right of Ukraine to be conclusively guaranteed as a legitimate sovereign nation, albeit within slightly modified borders.

There is nothing in this that justifies these European flutters. Trump has said Ukraine must have adequate guarantees from the West, consisting of two elements. A number of prominent NATO European countries will produce a group guarantee and designate forces to support that guarantee though they will not be pre-positioned within Ukraine. Existing NATO arrangements assure that if those forces, likely led by Poland, Germany, France, the United Kingdom, and Italy, but including a number of smaller NATO countries, are attacked by the Russians, Article 5 of the NATO agreement will assure American support of its NATO allies. The second element is the arrangement proposed by Ukrainian President Zelensky himself that Ukraine will buy sophisticated weaponry and ordnance from the United States and pay for it with strategic minerals which the United States will assist in extracting from Ukrainian soil. It need hardly be laboured that any such important

commercial activity carried out by American personnel and equipment will constitute strong deterrence to renewed Russian aggression in Ukraine.

The fears about the United States betraying democracy and transferring its allegiance from the Western European democracies to the tyranny of the Kremlin is hysterical nonsense. The suggestion that Ukraine was not entirely blameless in the start of the war, like the American failure to condemn Russia in the UN on Monday as the aggressor in the Ukraine War, are just atmospherics to assist in completing the deal the US is brokering between the parties – this isn't the time for name-calling. All the world really needs now is a cease-fire on agreed lines and the assurance that Ukraine will not be invited into NATO. The US and other European countries are perfectly free to make whatever arrangements they wish with Ukraine. Peace must come first and there wasn't a peep about it until Trump's return. The war has probably caused more than a million dead and wounded, and millions of refugees. Once peace reigns, Ukrainian national integrity can be rapidly buttressed by the European powers and the United States. The United States and the West can then get on with the other great Western objective of the Ukraine war: the loosening of China's suffocating embrace of Russia.

President Macron said almost as much as he departed Washington on Monday night. What Prime Minister Starmer thinks he will achieve in presenting himself in Washington as a human bridge eludes the imagination of this commentator. He and President Trump disagree on every serious matter of public policy, including immigration, climate change, and taxation, and the concept of shared values of personal freedom that Vice President Vance expressed concern about in Munich last week. British Foreign Secretary Lammy has resoundingly stated that Trump will not be invited on a state visit to Britain, (not that there's the slightest indication that he wishes to make one).

After five weeks in government, President Trump appears to be on the brink of a satisfactory peace in the Ukraine. Western Europe is left with the task of defining its current notion of democratic freedoms and raising its collective military strength to the point where it is no longer simply a grumpy freeloader in the baggage train of the Americans. This is surely not remotely beyond the capabilities of the greatest and most venerable states of Western Europe, and both the president of France and the incoming chancellor of Germany have offered reassurance on that point. Merz will not be able to enact the programme he wants in coalition with the SPD or Greens. He should bite the bullet and work with the Alternative leader, Alice Weidel, who mainly espouses Reaganian and Trumpian views. In one year, Germany would become the third most influential country in the world, just behind China.

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