

Trump to stop all aid to Ukraine? Claptrap

By Conrad Black

The fantasyland of contemporary Western European notions of the Western Alliance was well-illustrated this week by an article published by the former foreign minister of Spain and senior executive of the World Bank, Ana Palacio, now a visiting scholar at Georgetown University in Washington. She claimed that among the unusual range of uncertainties facing Europe is now an "unreliable" American ally which she divined (rigorously from her own imagination), is apt abruptly to terminate all aid to Ukraine. The entire extensive record of the utterances of President Trump or anyone authorised to speak for him on the subject of the Ukraine War could be ransacked without producing one scintilla of evidence to justify such claptrap. He specifically stated in his last debate with President Biden, which effectively ended Biden's political career, that he did not accept as adequate President Putin's publicly stated conditions for peace in the Ukraine War.



Trump reckons most NATO members are freeloading slackers (Photo by Omar Havana/Getty Images)

President Trump's criticism of Western policy in Ukraine does not now and never has implied acquiescence in the Kremlin's objectives. He acceded to the Ukraine government's request for javelin antitank missiles when the Obama administration with the full agreement of the Merkel government in Berlin withheld those defensive weapons on the grounds that use of them would merely escalate hostilities. That was the pre-Trump NATO policy: giving the Ukrainians any ability to defend themselves from swarming invasions of Russian tanks constituted an escalation of the war. It is reminiscent of the European imposition of sanctions in the former Yugoslavia: nothing would be done to curb or even discourage the continuous airlift of supplies by Russia to Serbia but an airtight arms embargo would be imposed upon the peoples Serbia was slaughtering. This was the recipe for peace: avoid escalation by letter allowing one side simply to massacre and subjugate the other.

The tendency of most NATO members to ignore their commitments to dedicate two per cent of their GDP to defence, by which is meant actual military defence, not veterans' hospitals and enhanced pensions for former peacetime service members, is

only part of Trump's problem with NATO. There is no great mystery about this; he could scarcely have been more clear. He also includes the self-serving attitude encapsulated in the concept of "an alliance of the willing." In practice, this means countries that will graciously accept a guarantee of their sovereign integrity by the United States of America but will decide on a case-by-case basis whether they wish to support any other proposed NATO mission. Trump's objection to the lassitude of modern NATO is not just that most of the fellow alliance members are freeloading slackers who won't take adequate measures of self-defence; it is that the spirit of the alliance apart from the United Kingdom and some of the countries with lively recent memories of being involuntary republics or satellites of the USSR, is that they will languidly decide if any aggression or provocation justifies their lifting a finger of objection.

In fairness, most of the European NATO countries have responded reasonably positively to Ukraine's request for assistance in repelling the Russian invasion. The Biden administration by its disgraceful flight from Afghanistan and Biden's virtual invitation to Putin to take a few provinces if he wanted from Ukraine, effectively encouraged Russian aggression. The then-chairman of the US Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Mark Milley, showing the piercing insight of American military intelligence when he was at the head of it, predicted at the outset of the Ukraine War that Russia would occupy the entire country in a few weeks and the capital of Kiev in the first weekend. Biden then offered asylum to the Ukrainian president and his family. Only when he saw the strength of Ukrainian resistance did he provide assistance for Ukraine and then it was steadily enough to strengthen resistance but not to repulse the invader, a gradual escalation of hostilities which assured ever-increasing casualties but no clear outcome.

Trump's position has been that Biden should have warned Putin that if he invaded Ukraine at all the United States would make

sure that he did not win and that he would suffer an open wound of casualties and counteroffensive action, and that Biden never provided Ukraine with enough to win or even negotiate a reasonable cease-fire, and that he has had no exit strategy at all. All of these are legitimate complaints. The United States, as it has done since it led the founding of NATO 74 years ago, should have stated that such an invasion was unacceptable and that it would do the necessary to make sure that it did not succeed. Beyond that, discreetly conducted negotiations should have been undertaken to make some modest concession to Russia's authentic historic position in at least part of Russian-speaking Ukraine and to allow Putin to withdraw from the war without being completely humiliated and then to get on with the very important task of outbidding China for the goodwill of Russia without compromising any NATO principles or interests.

Apart from assuring that Russia did not subdue or emasculate Ukraine and demonstrate to the world that the Western Alliance was a paper tiger, and instead assure the permanent legitimacy and security of Ukraine, albeit in slightly revised borders, the West's principal objective is to end this war and enable the successful pursuit of a rapprochement with Russia compatible with the integrity and interests of the Alliance. How Ms. Palacio can construe that as the unreliable abandonment of Ukraine and defection of the United States as a serious ally eludes the imagination of anyone familiar with Trump's views. But it illustrates the stubbornly short-sighted attitude of many contemporary Western European policymakers. Europe will have no problem with Trump if it accepts the principle that all members of an alliance must contribute to it according to their means and with a reasonable state of consistent resolution.

First published in the [Brussel's Signal](#)