

Trump's NATO Successes

With his leadership, an alliance built to contain Communism is facing the new threats created by its demise.

by Conrad Black



As the Democrats toil to make their impeachment effort look like something other than a partisan smear job and legal scam, President Trump is at the NATO leaders' meeting in London, observing the 70th anniversary of that organization, and is able to take some pleasure in the success of his foreign policy. His enemies, who have swarmed in the media every day since he declared his candidacy for the Republican nomination – first in derisive hilarity, then in a rising state of alarm, and finally in seething hatred – claim that he has alienated allies, swaggered absurdly, and generally brought the United States into disrepute while accomplishing nothing useful and giving comfort to the nation's rivals and opponents. There will be some frictions at the NATO meetings, but the president can reflect on the fact that when he assumed office, only three NATO countries of 27 apart from the U.S. were meeting

the agreed target of devoting 2 percent of GDP to defense: the United Kingdom, Poland, and mighty Estonia. Today that number is eight, and commitments are in place to take it up to 18 out of 30 within four years, a total increase in alliance defense spending of \$400 billion.

It is a well-known fact that NATO is the most successful alliance in the history of the world. It was set up in urgent circumstances, when Stalin ruled all of Europe east of the Iron Curtain, from Stettin on the Baltic to Trieste on the Adriatic, with over 300 divisions in the victorious Red Army, most of Europe in ruins, terrible problems of poverty and social disintegration, millions of refugees, and Communist parties supported by about a quarter of the voters in France and Italy. The eastern border of the Western World was only about 120 miles east of the Rhine at one point. Only the nuclear preeminence of the United States deterred Stalin from moving against an almost prostrate Western Europe. The initial North Atlantic Alliance was only twelve countries, but it grew steadily, and in parallel with remarkable economic progress spurred by the Marshall Plan. The American strategic team under President Truman, Generals Marshall and Eisenhower, and senior diplomats Dean Acheson and George Kennan devised the system of peaceful containment, which was steadily applied for more than 40 years until, suddenly, peacefully, the Soviet Union disintegrated and international Communism, as it had been known, withered. No shot was ever fired between the Western and Soviet blocs. Other alliances have been victorious in world struggles, but not bloodlessly.

Precisely 40 percent of NATO's history, 28 years, has been spent since the collapse of the threat that gave birth to it, and that survival is also a considerable achievement, because NATO has not, since 1991, been an alliance devoted to the achievement of any particular objective, as it had been to containment of the Soviet threat. For many years the countries formerly in the USSR itself (Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania) and

those occupied by it (Poland, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, Romania, Bulgaria) wanted the assurance of the principle in Clause 4 of the NATO Treaty that “an attack upon one is an attack upon all,” a condition that has only once been invoked, after the terrorist attacks on the United States on September 11, 2001. The following clause states that each member state can determine how it wishes to respond to the attack, but the principle has been strong cement for the alliance – everyone wants the military guarantee of the United States. President Roosevelt enunciated the pledge in his war message of December 8, 1941, following the attack at Pearl Harbor, that “we will make very certain that this form of treachery never again endangers us,” and the deterrent power of the United States has been effective against all other nations these 78 years. Only non-national terrorists have dared to initiate hostilities against the United States directly since then, and not often.

It has been a challenge to define a new role for NATO. Presidents Clinton and George W. Bush allowed NATO to degenerate into “an alliance of the willing,” which in practice meant that the so-called allies would cheerfully accept having their security assured by the United States but would not, except the British and the Poles among the larger countries, lift a finger to defend themselves or support any alliance-wide causes. President Obama proclaimed “a pivot to Asia,” but it got only as far as withdrawing American forces from Europe, not deploying them elsewhere. Trump inherited a dispirited, underfunded, and effectively purposeless alliance, and he has at least revitalized it to a condition of Cold War strength and effectiveness. French president Emmanuel Macron says it is “brain-dead,” but Turkish strongman Recep Erdogan, who is a poor ally and a dodgy character but leads a considerable military power, has replied that it is Macron who is “brain-dead,” not NATO.

President Trump recognizes that pushing Turkey into the arms

of Russia, and Russia into the arms of China, would be terrible mistakes. The two greatest conceivable strategic threats to the U.S. are Russia aligning with China, so that tens of millions of Chinese move to Siberia and tap its resources as a concession power, paying Russia a royalty and rivaling North America as a resources treasure-house; and Turkey joining with Iran to impinge upon Israel and the Arabs, especially Saudi Arabia and Egypt. Trump had to extract the 400 American soldiers supposedly separating Turkey from Kurdish nationalists, and he could not harass Saudi Arabia grievously over the murder of journalist Jamal Khashoggi, grotesque though it was. Russian nationalism has to be encouraged to be independent of China, and Turkey has to be accommodated up to a point. I believe NATO should be expanded to other regions (Turkey is already a long way from the North Atlantic) and should embrace all friendly countries that are at least as democratic as Turkey. Its goal should be the gradual and peaceful stabilization of the whole world. Israel, India, Japan, South Korea, Indonesia, and Australia are among the countries that would be strong additions, and Russia should not be made to feel permanently excluded, depending on its conduct. NATO's role in developing responses to cyber-threats is progressing well and will be increasingly valuable. (Macron's talk about individual nations fending for themselves is a Parisian fantasy, a luxury of the unthreatened.)

As the NATO meeting takes place, another, more vivid success of Trump's foreign policy can be seen in the tumult and upheavals in Iran. Where the Obama administration appeased Iran while cold-shouldering Israel, Saudi Arabia, and Egypt, giving the ayatollahs a green light to deploy nuclear weapons in ten years, Trump is squeezing Iran with sanctions so severe that the regime is shaking. Efforts to blame the economic shambles caused by a 90 percent reduction in oil exports on America have failed, and in the past week the corrupt medieval theocracy in Teheran has killed over 500 demonstrators. No regime so unsuccessful and unpopular can fire live ammunition

at its own civilians without courting a general and irresistible revolt. When Nicolae Ceausescu ordered his security forces to kill demonstrators in Romania in 1989, they seized and summarily executed him and his terrifying wife instead. The ayatollahs are enriching fissile material to try to frighten France, Germany, and the U.K. into demanding that the U.S. lift sanctions. That isn't working. They aren't really agitating, Trump won't do it, and if the ayatollahs get close to a deliverable nuclear weapon, the United States will take it down with air strikes and the Iranian government will collapse – the Iranian people will cheer such a strike. That will crush the windpipe of the Hezbollah (Lebanon), Hamas (Gaza), and Houthi (Yemen) terrorists, making peace possible in the Middle East, and will not go unnoticed in Pyongyang.

Not much can be said before these events occur, but the increasing military strength of NATO, and the deterioration of terrorism-sponsoring despotism in Iran, are important achievements of this administration and will be undeniably visible as such by Election Day.

First published in