

World Instability Is Not on Pause

Despite unrest at home, the Trump Administration has made notable progress in U.S. foreign policy.

by Conrad Black



In the clangorous pre-electoral atmosphere created by the COVID-19 crisis, its economic consequences, and the disorders that have followed the apparent murder of George Floyd in

Minneapolis, there have been some important foreign policy developments, though they are largely ignored by the media. The Trump Administration's exasperation with the conduct of Germany and China, as well as the perennial problems of Iran and North Korea, have not conveniently abated while America's domestic preoccupations have unfolded.

Germany potentially is and should behave as if it were the third most powerful country in the world after the United States and China. It has more than twice the economy of post-Soviet Russia, and, as all European statesmen from Richelieu on have recognized, a united Germany is the most powerful jurisdiction in Europe. It is a truism to say of Germany that it was too-late unified, had great difficulty resolving whether it was an eastern or western-facing country, and that whenever it set out to assure its own security it did so at the expense of its neighbors.

These problems have been resolved. The governmental structure of the Federal Republic of Germany has proved to be by far the most successful that has ever existed in the Germanic world; that includes the ramshackle but imperishable 700-year Habsburg Holy Roman, Austrian, and Austro-Hungarian Empires that were notoriously none of those adjectives. In effect, it was a dilapidated regime holding a perpetual costume party.

As 8 million to 12 million Germans in Eastern Europe moved west ahead of the Red Army between 1943 and 1945 on foot and by oxcart, Germany became unambiguously a people of the West. Germany's security has been assured since the Berlin airlift of 1948-49 by the American military guarantee in the NATO framework and by the agile and statesmanlike accommodation that President Eisenhower made for Germany in the Western alliance—as if the armies under his successful command just a decade before had not been liberating death camps in Germany that were illustrative of possibly the greatest crimes in human history.

German Conduct Today

Not since the man-child Emperor Wilhelm II fired the founder of the German Empire, Otto von Bismarck, in 1890 has a fully autonomous Germany behaved responsibly as Europe's leading power. Wilhelm fumbled Europe into World War I. The Weimar Republic that replaced him was a child of defeat and was swept away by Hitler in the Great Depression as Germany commenced its descent into hell, taking most of Europe with it again.

German conduct was impeccable throughout the Cold War and the highest act of statesmanship in the world since World War II was probably when the founder of the Federal Republic, Konrad Adenauer, declined Stalin's offer of reunification in exchange for neutrality and carried German opinion with him. Since the end of the Cold War and the reunification of Germany, that country has drifted steadily away from serious attachment to the American alliance. It remains snugly in its cocoon of the European Union and the NATO alliance, but its defense budget is anemic, and it has made itself an energy vassal of shriveled Russia. Submission to an over-mighty and unreasonable green movement has caused the government of four-term Chancellor Angela Merkel to shut down nuclear power and terrorize the world-leading German automobile industry. has caused the government of four-term Chancellor Angela Merkel to shut down nuclear power and terrorize the world-leading German automobile industry.

This is not Germany responsibly growing into her natural role in Europe, which the world has been waiting for these 30 years, and resuming a Bismarckian vocation. It is a misguided sloughing off of the American alliance for ill-considered deference to Russia and the long-discredited, failed, chimera of the East European Left.

Merkel, who had every opportunity to be a co-leader of the West and the undisputed premier statesman of Europe, started fairly well as chancellor 15 years ago, showing the

sensibility of the daughter of a Lutheran pastor from the former communist state of East Germany. She gradually transformed herself into a placeman whose morally highest point was in the admission of a million pitiful refugees from the humanitarian disaster of the Middle East and North Africa. But she has largely squandered the mandate of her Christian Democratic Union and has been struggling rather ineffectually for several years, giving way to pressure as it arose.

Merkel is retiring in the next year; it is not clear who will succeed her, and the two traditional main parties of Germany—the Christian Democrats and the Social Democrats—are clinging to each other while treading water, barely able to maintain a parliamentary majority, while the other half of the electorate is divided between the old eastern Communists, militant greens, a partially skinhead right-wing alternative party, a party of cyber-kooks, and the entirely respectable small business-based Free Democrats.

If it becomes impossible for Germany to produce a government based on fewer than four or five parties, it is going to become politically erratic; the historical precedents for such a condition in Germany are discouraging.

The Trump administration is right to require Germany to behave like a serious ally or cease to expect to be treated like one, but the time is coming, presumably right after the U.S. election, when serious and constructive proposals should be made to rebuild the vital American alliance with Germany, from which Germany has derived a great deal more benefit lately than has the United States, as Trump points out in his inimitable fashion from time to time. The recently announced 30 percent reduction of American forces in Germany is justified, but this important association of the West's two most formidable countries must not be allowed simply to disintegrate.

China and Hong Kong—and Don't Forget North Korea

China has taken advantage of the tumultuous events, including the coronavirus it produced and negligently allowed to spread, to try to suppress Hong Kong completely. This is a violation of its treaty with the United Kingdom, to which British Prime Minister Boris Johnson has intelligently replied that he will accept all of the 3 million citizens of Hong Kong who were alive at the time the treaty went into effect in 1997. The United States should offer to receive the rest, and the governments of the United States, the United Kingdom, and Japan should coordinate with the financial establishments in New York, London, and Tokyo to take all of Hong Kong's strategic financial industry and divide it between themselves, leaving only crumbs for the People's Republic of China unless it honors its treaty commitments.

The skirmishing between China and India in the Himalayas is an opportunity for the United States to strengthen further its excellent and important ties with India. And the Iranians and North Koreans must understand that if they proceed to the threshold of a nuclear military capability, the United States will unilaterally destroy those programs militarily. Those regimes have been given every opportunity to reform their conduct and make themselves less clearly ineligible for the status of nuclear powers, or to negotiate, with no embarrassment, arrangements that confirm their non-nuclear status for valuable consideration. If they persist, the United States must stop them. Only the United States *can* do that and it can do it easily in one hour with precise missile attacks from the adjacent forces it has in place, with no American casualties.

This would be a salutary lesson to all those tempted to emulate the ayatollahs and the Kimists in seeking the dangerous mystique of nuclear military power. All the

neighbors of both countries would be grateful to the United States for this service. Success, however it came, for American efforts to avoid a nuclear-armed North Korea coupled with reasonably subtle encouragements of Taiwan in its ostentatious wish not to be absorbed by the People's Republic, would assist Beijing in recognizing that the hegemony over much of Asia, Australasia, and Africa—implicit in its “Belt and Road” program—will be a much more difficult and contested enterprise than Beijing had imagined.

Making the point that the mad espousal of universal democracy by George W. Bush and the quasi-pacifist isolationism of Barack Obama have been replaced by Nixon-Reagan realism is entirely consistent with Trump's election promises and would produce a welcome resurrection of stability in the world.

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