



Vice President Pence versus President Trump on Foreign Policy

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President Donald Trump promised a different kind of administration. But many of those around him remain dedicated to the status quo.

Even after President Trump spoke for the forgotten Americans who were tired of subsidizing European states which refused to spend more on defense, Vice President Mike Pence traveled to Eastern Europe promising to risk U.S. lives and waste U.S. resources protecting those very same nations.

Even though the Cold War ended some three decades ago, the vice president observed: “recent diplomatic action taken by Moscow will not deter the commitment of the United States of America to our security, the security of our allies, and the security of freedom-loving nations around the world.”

Of course, the one country whose security to which Washington should be committed is the U.S. But Russia doesn't threaten America.

Moscow possesses a strategic nuclear force that could destroy the U.S., but using its nukes would ensure Russia's destruction in return. Although the Russian Federation's military is potent, its capabilities significantly lag behind those of America and its reach is regional, not global.

It isn't clear where Moscow could attack the U.S. An invasion of Alaska across the Bering Strait? A naval armada to conquer Hawaii? Washington and Moscow differ over no vital interests and Russian President Vladimir Putin has never seemed anti-American, only anti-Washington, especially after its expansion of NATO almost to St. Petersburg's suburbs.

Protecting Washington's allies should be a means to an end. That is, alliances should be matters of security, not charity. Nations should be protected if doing so makes America more secure. Unfortunately, that is no longer the case in Europe.

In fact, few Europeans believe they face a Russian military threat. Otherwise the continent would devote more than 1.47 percent of its GDP to the military. Germany, with the continent's greatest potential, would spend more than 1.22 percent of its economic resources on the military.

Nor have Putin and his cronies shown an inclination toward national suicide, which is what going to war with the West would be. The collective GDP of the European Union is about 13 times the size of Russia's economy. Europe's population is about three times as large as Russia's. So why are over-burdened American taxpayers paying to protect Europeans who prefer to spend their money on generous social benefits?

Nor is it Washington's job to protect "freedom-loving nations around the world." The earth is filled with countries which want the U.S. to protect them. But alliances are meant to increase, not decrease, America's security.

Unfortunately, NATO expansion proved to be a foolish mistake, expanding U.S. security guarantees to nations which weren't important for American security while inflaming Russian distrust and paranoia. Yet Vice President Pence announced that "Our allies in Eastern Europe can be confident that the United States of America stands with them."

In particular, said the vice president, "we cherish our new alliance with Montenegro through NATO," even though the latter has the reputation of a gangster state and barely 2000 men under arms. Hashim Thaci, president of Kosovo, another marginal state, claimed that Vice President Pence promised to help eliminate barriers to Kosovo's entry into NATO. Pristina doesn't even possess a formal military and its reputation is worse than Montenegro's.

More dangerous was the vice president's embrace of Georgia, especially when he "strongly" endorsed Georgian membership in NATO. Yet Tbilisi never mattered for U.S. security. Indeed, Georgia spent most of the last couple centuries under Moscow's control with nary a complaint from Washington.

However, President George W. Bush treated the now independent country as an ally and in 2008 President Mikhail Saakashvili, apparently convinced of U.S. support, started a war with Russia. Inducting Tbilisi into NATO would reward that government for its irresponsibility and recklessness, while bringing its dispute with Moscow into the alliance.

Russia is a convenient state to demonize. No doubt, Vladimir Putin is a bad human being. But he's holding a weak hand while facing a power which is ideologically aggressive, sanctimoniously demanding, and intervention prone. Russia has reason to feel threatened.

Washington should stop thinking of containment. Rather, the Trump administration should begin disengagement, devolving onto the Europeans responsibility for their defense.

Candidate Trump criticized defense and foreign policies which put America last. President Trump should set aside his tweets for a few days and take back control of his own administration. Maybe then Washington would stop squandering money and risking lives to protect those who won't make the same sacrifice to defend themselves.

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