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Europe should stand on its own

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Pearls were clutched across Washington after German Chancellor Angela Merkel declared that it is time to “really take our fate into our own hands.” Washington Post columnist Anne Applebaum complained that U.S. influence “is at its rockiest in recent memory,” while the German-U.S. relationship “just hit new lows.”

Sure, it’s better to be on good terms with other nations than not. But the Europeans’ whining for U.S. support is unseemly.

What is Germany’s complaint? The Federal Republic possesses Europe’s largest economy and makes much of its money through international commerce. Berlin has achieved disproportionate influence in the European Union and possesses the continent’s greatest military potential. Yet after promising to hike military outlays, this year Germany devotes all of 1.22 percent of GDP to its armed forces, up from 1.19 percent in 2016.

Of course, Germany’s military spending is up to the German people. But the country shouldn’t be requesting U.S. support.

Trump’s real offense was he didn’t slobber all over the Europeans, seeking to “reassure” them, as his predecessors routinely did. He didn’t coddle them, offering hugs if they felt unappreciated. Instead, he told the Europeans to pay up! Most don’t meet the NATO two percent of GDP objective. Most, like Germany, don’t come anywhere close.

In 2014, the allies promised to hit two percent by 2024, but no one expects Germany to almost double its military outlays by then. Nor will the other alliance laggards. In fact, they don’t face any threats requiring that kind of expenditure. Vladimir Putin may be evil, but he’s not stupid. He won’t be attempting to conquer Europe.

There’s no other threat of note. Everything from cybercrime to refugees to Third World civil wars can be handled outside of a military alliance created to contain the long-defunct Soviet Union.

But the German chancellor obviously was not pleased with what she had heard. “The times in which we could rely fully on others — they are somewhat over,” said Merkel. “We have to know that we must fight for our future on our own, for our destiny as Europeans.”

Americans should wish her good luck. Revamping or even abandoning an obsolete military alliance wouldn't prevent close economic, cultural, and political ties, as well as military cooperation on issues of shared interest. Instead of the U.S. and Europe being dragged into each other's stupid, unnecessary wars, most notably Afghanistan and Libya, the two sides of the Atlantic should join where the conflict is of mutual interest. That should mean staying out of more Middle East wars.

Still, Applebaum is not the only observer reeling from Trump's refusal to cater to European sensitivities. If only fearful pundits were right. If only the Europeans were prepared to go on their own way militarily. Today, the EU nations have a comparable economy and larger population than America. Europe's advantages are far greater compared to Russia. The Europeans even spend nearly four times as much on the military as does Moscow.

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