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Germany's Merkel Listens To Donald Trump, Says Europe Should Stand On 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."

So what?

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

The most obvious victim, if that's the right word after the president's infamous push, was Montenegrin Prime Minister Dusko Markovic, who shouldn't even have been in Brussels. Montenegro possesses a military numbering all of 2,000 men and should not have been invited to join the transatlantic alliance. But President Trump's administration agreed to the micro-state's accession to NATO.

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% of GDP to its armed forces. At least that's up from 1.19% in 2016.

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

What was President Trump's real offense? 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 2%-of-GDP objective. Most, like Germany, don't come anywhere close.

In 2014 the allies promised to hit 2% 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. "This is what I experienced in the last few days. ... 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 dragging each other 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 President Trump's refusal to cater to European sensitivities. Ivo Daalder of the Chicago Council on Global Affairs wailed that "this seems to be the end of an era, one in which the United States led and Europe followed." Stephan Bierling of the University of Regensburg complained that "the belief in shared values has been shattered by the Trump administration."

If only these fearful pundits were right. If only the Europeans were prepared to go their own way militarily.

Today the EU nations have a comparable economy to America's and a larger population. Europe's advantages are far greater compared to Russia. The Europeans even spend nearly four times as much on the military as does Moscow.

We need a new division of military responsibilities. As of today, Americans would pay to protect America. Unlike today, Europeans would take over the job of protecting Europe. Issues of shared interest, perhaps transnational terrorism and navigational freedom, would be handled cooperatively.

But change won't occur until Americans stop insisting on protecting their cousins across the Pond — and most everyone everywhere else, including Asia and the Middle East.

For years, America's foreign policy has been the international equivalent of what has ever been must ever be. But the world has changed. Moreover, the U.S. is functionally bankrupt and can't afford to forever play global policeman.

President Trump should live up to Angela Merkel's fears — and encourage Europe to take control of its own fate.

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