

Barging Through NATO: Donald Trump in Europe

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From his big white bird did the President descend upon his dreading European hosts, looking much like natives waiting to be slaughtered or ravished. As Donald Trump pushed his way through NATO members (the Montenegrin prime minister, for one, felt his forceful shove), representatives shot glances of discomfort and bemusement. In a refreshing blast of brutishness, the Ugly American, made flesh in the incarnation of Trump, was explaining, even hectoring Washington's allies.

The central irritation was one about, as it always tends to be, money. In the rueful words of Karen Attiah's penned piece for the *Washington Post*,

"Trump was the party guest whom no one really wants to deal with but has to – because he has more money than anyone else." [1]

Muscular, military buffoonery comes at a high price, usually to the filched tax payer. But the issue of where the money goes is almost as important as whether you have it. The largest military power on earth was tired about having to provide a shield of defence without some local compensation, and here, its President was claiming some form of fictional proprietorship. Why, wondered Trump, were NATO members not pulling their military weight not so much over their defence as the obligations owed to the US? Back payments were due, and The Donald was under the erroneous impression that they had to be paid directly to the US.

"Over the last eight years, the United States spent more on defence than all other NATO countries combined."

The ever dreaded, misrepresented figures were produced. 23 members of the 28, claimed Trump, "are still not paying what they should be paying and what they are supposed to be paying for their defence." It takes much for the otherwise unadventurous *USA Today* to stake any claim accurate reportage, let alone tough critique, but in a piece on the president's NATO adventure, the paper concluded that NATO members were "not in arrears in military spending", nor were they "in debt to the United States". [2]

There was, in fact, no debt to have. A more interesting point for the eye sore arms watcher is that the US, for all its fears about the rising tide of Chinese power, continues to dwarf the combined defence expenditures of the next four powers. Freedom land remains its own burgeoning arsenal, modernising, acquiring and misspending like a drunken lord. Given such a curtness, the more security-minded among the NATO partnership wondered about whether the celebrated Article 5, one guaranteeing US support in the event of attack from a

foreign power on a member state, might be abided by. They were left disappointed, even as they looked on at the dedication of a memorial to NATO's invocation of the Article after the 9/11 attacks on US. In this sense, the Trump show reveals itself in all its unpatriotic worth, a case of business before country, of Brand USA before multiple alliances. That point is missed by those entrusted with the task of reading the tea leaves and deciphering the smoke signals coming from the greatest reality show on earth: the White House.

"That he couldn't even say some very benign words that would've meant a lot to our allies was really striking," claimed Loren Schulman, former member of the National Security Council.[3]

The response to storm Trump from European leaders varied. The Montenegrin prime minister Duško Marković, victim of The Donald's aggressive shove, responded with a certain amount of conciliatory brown nosing: Trump was merely following the order of standing.

"This was an inoffensive situation," claimed a recomposed Marković. "I do not see it in any other way." [4]

Then came the chance for France's newly elected President Emmanuel Macron to make his own show of it. Aware about Trump's tendency to draw in his unsuspecting opposite number with his meaty paw, Macron stood his ground. *Le Journal du Dimanche* subsequently reported how Macron's "handshake with him, it wasn't innocent." From the muck level dross of Twitter, Trump expressed in the aftermath of his visit a degree of satisfaction at what could only be discussed as another illusion.

"Many NATO countries have agreed to step up payments considerably, as they should. Money is beginning to pour in – NATO will be much stronger." (Trump remains his own deterrent against reality, whether it be on the liquid existence of money or its pouring.)

The promise on increased payments were already being engineered after 2014, when NATO members gave a commitment to push military contributions to 2 percent of GDP. The commitment was hardly achieved by blood ritual, but this was a pre-Trump world of diplomatic caution. That time scale was longer than any Trump programme could ever be: an entire decade. What matters now is instant gratification, and swift dangerous performance. Shorter and louder, in other words, is better.

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Notes

[1]

https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/global-opinions/wp/2017/05/25/trumps-behavior-at-nato-is-a-national-embarrassment/?utm_term=.f764edb2bf51

[2]

<https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/politics/2017/05/27/fact-check-president-trump-nato-speech/102>

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[3]

<https://www.thestar.com/news/world/2017/05/27/trump-damages-first-trip-with-refusal-to-make-nato-guarantee-analysis.html>

[4]

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/morning-mix/wp/2017/05/26/breaking-down-trumps-shove-the-internet-debates-and-montenegros-leader-shrugs/>

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