

Europe Cringes Before Emperor Trump

By [Eric Margolis](#)

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President Donald Trump says most summit meetings are a waste of time. He's so right. Most meetings of every kind are a waste of time and energy.

The president was certainly right about last week's NATO summit in Brussels. At least, he livened it up by openly blasting his NATO allies once again for not spending enough on their military forces. But Trump's real purpose was to show the world that he was boss of all he surveyed.

Doing his best bull in a china shop routine, Trump lectured and scolded the heads of NATO on live TV. They took the verbal thrashing like truant schoolboys. NATO's secretary general, former Norwegian prime minister Jens Stoltenberg, who was put into office by the US, muttered a few lame excuses. Trump supporters in the US were delighted to see the snotty, godless Europeans given a good dressing down.

It did not help when it was revealed that Germany, the bulwark of NATO, had only a handful of front-line fighters in service. Another report claimed most of its main battle tanks were out of service due to budget cuts.

The president made the very important statement that he regarded Russia's Vladimir Putin as a 'competitor' and not an 'enemy.' This view is widely held in Europe and the rest of the world.

But then Trump negated this sensible view by claiming Germany is 'totally controlled' by and 'captive to' nearby Russia because Germany now buys up to 70% of its oil and gas from them.

In fact, many Germans believe precisely the contrary: that Germany is Washington's vassal state and still under American domination seven decades after World War II.

They cite US control of Germany's intelligence agencies, foreign and defense policies, relations with Israel, and sending troops to support the ongoing US occupation of Afghanistan.

Over 37 active US bases and installations are spread across northern Germany and Bavaria. Some 35,000 US troops remain in Germany, down from the Cold War total of over 300,000. Important German air bases form the core of the US ability to project power into Eastern Europe and the Mideast. The US quietly stores nuclear weapons in Germany.

The US has dominated Germany's sedate media since WWII. American intelligence has often hand-picked its editors and columnists. German officials and politicians at all levels understand a list of approved do's and don'ts, avoiding actions that would annoy or anger Washington.

American influence over Germany is so pervasive that when it was revealed that the US National Security Agency was tapping Chancellor Angela Merkel's cell phone, the German government response to this humiliation was meek and muted.

Donald Trump dislikes Mrs. Merkel because she has let in refugees – and Muslim ones at that – but she remains one of America's most deferential and loyal allies. It's a pity that neither she nor NATO chief Stoltenberg stood up and counter-blasted Trump. Acting like mice further reinforced the prevailing view that NATO members are merely water carriers for the American nuclear knights. It reinforces the point that Europe needs its own united military forces.

If Trump had any knowledge of history, which he clearly does not, he would know that Germany had close economic links with Russia since the days of the Empress Catherine the Great (1762-1796). Russians have always admired the technical skills, efficiency and work ethic of Germans. Germany and Russia are natural trading partners thanks to proximity and producing what the other lacks.

One of America's perennial fears has been a German-Russian entente. This almost happened after the 1939 Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact that combined military and economic development. In recent years, Germany has steadily expanded its economic presence in Russia, most notably with the underwater Nord Stream 2 pipeline under the Baltic that brings Russian natural gas to Germany while avoiding hostile Poland and Ukraine.

Buying Russian gas puts Germany under Russian domination, claims Trump, whose military has 800 bases around the globe and soldiers from South Korea to Togo. A certain amount of influence, perhaps. But Russia's main money earner comes from exporting oil and gas, and minerals. Except in wartime, it's unlikely Moscow would shut the taps on its vital oil pipelines.

This brouhaha over Russian oil exports is the work of the US neocons who infest the Trump administration and run Fox TV. They want to see Germany and Russia kept on their knees, and NATO submissive to Washington.

Trump is wading in deep, murky waters here. Let's hope he does better this week in his meeting with Vlad Putin – which we venture to guess will not be a waste of time at all.

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