

NATO's Dead?

If so, who killed it: Obama, Putin, Or Trump?

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NATO, as the world knew it, is dead, and the organization's demise is attributable to the combination of President Putin deft diplomacy in advancing the Russian-Turkish rapprochement and his American counterpart's revolutionary reconceptualization of the very essence of the alliance, both of which wouldn't have been possible had it not been for Obama.

NATO, as it was previously conceived of for decades, is dead, and while it might be reborn in a different format sometime in the future, its previous model has exhausted its purpose and is entering into the dustbin of history. The organization still officially exists, but everything about it is changing to the point where it might soon become unrecognizable. The consistently anti-Russian driving force behind the bloc has been decisively neutralized by President Putin's deft diplomacy in winning over its second-largest military member, Turkey, as Russia's newest strategic partner, while Trump's revolutionary reconceptualization of the alliance as an equal collection of states combating the asymmetrical security challenges of terrorism and illegal migration will fundamentally transform what it means to be a NATO member.

The Shadow Of Obama

Before going through the post-mortem in detail, it's worthwhile to describe how Obama's shadow hangs heavy in the sense that he orchestrated the three greatest mistakes that inadvertently led to NATO's demise. The 2011 NATO War on Libya has the chance of being seen in hindsight as the final flash of a fast-fading star, with its "shock-and-awe" destruction of the former Jamahiriya going down in history as perhaps the last real instance of the bloc's members working on coordination with one another to conventionally wage war against a targeted state. The self-congratulatory pomp that followed this brief military campaign has since been proven to have been premature because of the country's ongoing civil war and role as a transit state for facilitating the flood of hundreds of thousands of migrants into Europe, which sparked its own crisis that has since led to the rise of EuroRealist populists in the continent.

In addition, the Libyan model of Hybrid War destabilization was also applied to Syria, albeit minus the final conventional warfare form, and this exacerbated the Migrant Crisis to the point of no return in guaranteeing the inevitable rise of right-wing politicians in Europe. Taken together, the Wars on Libya and Syria, waged in different manners but nevertheless following the same neo-imperialist regime change form, generated unprecedented humanitarian blowback to the point of triggering far-reaching political changes in NATO's EU members, making many of them reconsider the official anti-Russian purpose of the bloc when it could be better put to use in defending the organization's southern shores from

swarms of migrants. For as “constructive” of an idea as this may have been, it led to deep divisions within the EU itself between the pro-migrant Western countries, the anti-migrant Central & Eastern European ones, and the anti-Russian Baltic States, Poland, and Romania.

While these intra-NATO disagreements were percolating, Obama made another massive mistake in giving the greenlight for the failed pro-American coup attempt against Turkish President Erdogan in summer 2016, and the blowback from this sloppy operation was almost instantaneous in making the bloc’s second-largest military deeply suspicious of US intentions from then on out. Although Turkey had hitherto been mostly focused on facilitating American strategic objectives in the Mideast (which for the most part were disadvantageous to Russia’s long-term regional vision), its unchanging geopolitical position as an irreplaceable part of NATO’s anti-Russian “containment” policy was thought to have retained a consistent function that had been taken completely for granted up until that point. That was a huge error, as will be seen, because President Putin’s deft diplomacy succeeded in its judo-like maneuver to flip Turkey from an enemy into a partner.

Putin’s Judo

Taking advantage of President Erdogan’s understandable distrust of what he had presumed was his country’s closest ally, President Putin reached out to extend his support for the embattled Turkish leader in demonstrating which of the two Great Powers really had Ankara’s best interests in mind. It shouldn’t be forgotten that unconfirmed reports also alleged that Russian intelligence might have tipped President Erdogan off right before a fighter jet flown by one of the coup conspirators was set to bomb his residence, therefore saving his life and sealing a new bond of friendship between both countries. It might never be known whether that actually happened or not, but in any case, the Russian-Turkish rapprochement that followed soon thereafter was swift and even saw Moscow passively accepting Ankara’s limited “Euphrates Shield” incursion into northern Syria later that summer, something that would have been utterly unthinkable just a few months prior.

The revival of the Turkish Stream pipeline project and a related agreement on nuclear energy cooperation served as physical testimonies to the strength of the Russian-Turkish Strategic Partnership, which went one dramatic step much further in officially including a military dimension per Ankara’s desire to buy Moscow’s state-of-the-art S-400 air & missile defense system despite Washington’s threats to sanction it if the deal goes through. In the course of less than two years, President Putin’s deft diplomacy flipped the tables on the previous US-Turkish Strategic Partnership by replacing America with Russia and totally changing the overall dynamics of Mideast geopolitics. The de-facto removal of NATO’s second-largest military force from the organization, which is essentially the true state of affairs at the moment given Ankara’s planned S-400 military cooperation with Moscow and Washington’s CAATSA sanction threats, dealt a heavy blow to bloc from which it has yet to recover.

Decades’ worth of strategic planning that went into using Turkey as a bulwark against the spread of Russian influence towards the Mediterranean are now worthless after Ankara has for all intents and purposes turned its back on the bloc out of protest of the US’ role in the failed summer 2016 coup attempt. The organization can no longer count on the cornerstone of its Mideast, Black Sea, and Eastern Mediterranean policies, and this has inevitably led to the alliance having to reinvent itself. As it happened, this took place concurrent with the rapid politicization of the Migrant Crisis and its resultant intra-NATO/-EU disputes about how

best to respond to this civilizational challenge, further exacerbating divisions within the West and making Turkey's "defection" (brought about through President Putin's masterful diplomacy) all the more impactful of a destabilizing move for the already confused alliance.

Trump's Turnaround

The last and most powerful factor that contributed to the death of NATO was Trump himself, who decided to turn everything around and reorient the bloc from its official anti-Russian purpose by transforming it into something entirely different. It's true that some of the anti-Russian functions will still remain because of the Baltic States, Poland, and Romania's membership as "frontline states", but Trump's vision is to use NATO as a platform for responding more to asymmetrical security threats such as terrorism and illegal immigration instead of conventional ones like Russia was portrayed as being since the organization's inception. Words are one thing, but transforming them through action is another, and it's here where Trump is "walking the walk" much more than "talking the talk" like his predecessors did in visibly pressuring his "allies" to contribute their required 2% of GDP towards defense like they were always supposed to do to begin with.

Trump, being the successful businessman that he is, can't fathom why the US should subsidize the EU's "socialist welfare states" especially given that the "foreboding challenge" of a "Soviet invasion" no longer makes that necessary like it may have once did. Seeing world affairs from an economic perspective and therefore perceiving the EU to be America's rival in this respect, Trump knows that the best way to "level the playing field" and "get a better deal" is to put pressure on America's military underlings by compelling them to pay more for defense in order to advance their interests in a reconceptualized NATO, with this being coordinated alongside the US' campaign to get the EU to lift its anti-American tariffs. The knock-on effect of this "double whammy" could hit the Europeans' economic growth and possibly compel them into "cutting a deal" of some sort for relief, one which can only be speculated upon at this time but which would undoubtedly strengthen American influence.

Far from representing the "united" West that NATO did during the Old Cold War and the brief period of unipolarity that followed, the New Cold War has seen the bloc weakened from within because of the blowback caused by Obama's disastrous Wars on Libya & Syria as well as the failed pro-American coup attempt against President Erdogan in summer 2016.

President Putin skillfully exploited the latter in rapidly turning Turkey into a close partner and convincing it that its future interests are best served by keeping the bloc at arm's length, while Trump dealt the deathblow against the alliance for his own reasons mainly having to do with a different view on contemporary security challenges and his economically driven vision of foreign affairs. While the shell of NATO still exists, its functional capacities are now divided into different regional blocs mostly constituting the new anti-migrant European Intervention Force in Western Europe and the remaining anti-Russian forces in the East, though Turkey's de-facto "defection" means that the organization will never be the same as before.

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