

In interview with British and German press

Trump places question mark over EU, NATO and free trade

By Peter Schwarz
17 January 2017

On Monday, in an extensive interview with the *Times* of London and the German tabloid *Bild*, US President-elect Donald Trump placed a question mark over the cornerstones of the post-war European order.

Trump, who assumes the presidency on Friday, made many contradictory statements. But overall, he left no doubt that he welcomed the breakup of the European Union, had reservations regarding the future of the NATO military alliance, and regarded Europe, and above all Germany, as an economic rival of the United States.

“Mr. Trump does not feel constrained by ideology or history,” the *Times* wrote, commenting on the interview. *Bild* noted, “[O]nly one thing can be said with certainty: Nothing is safe with him. No political rule, no diplomatic custom, no inviolable certainty.”

Among Trump’s statements in the interview was the declaration that Britain’s decision to leave the European Union “is going to end up being a great thing.” He made clear that his reaching out to the UK was motivated above all by his opposition to the European Union and was directed, in particular, at countering any economic or political challenge from Germany to the US.

“You look at the European Union, and it’s Germany,” he said. “Basically a vehicle for Germany. That’s why I thought the UK was so smart in getting out...”

Asked if he would move quickly to seal a new trade deal with the UK, he replied, “Absolutely, very quickly. I’m a big fan of the UK. We’re gonna work very hard to get it done quickly and done properly. Good for both sides.”

He added that he and British Prime Minister Theresa May would “have a meeting right after I get into the White House.”

On the other hand, he openly threatened Germany with trade war. He said the German car maker BMW would be

subjected to import duties of 35 percent if it held to its plan to build a new plant in Mexico. Trump noted that if you walked along Fifth Avenue in New York, you saw many Mercedes-Benz cars. In Germany, however, you saw very few Chevrolets. “The fact is, you were very unfair to the USA. There is no reciprocity,” he declared.

As a result, he claimed, the United States was losing nearly \$800 billion a year in trade. “I want it to be fair, there must be reciprocity,” he said, “so that will stop.”

Trump said the EU was destined to disintegrate. The exit of Britain, which he attributed to the influx of refugees, was only the beginning: “I believe others will leave. I do think keeping it together is not gonna be as easy as a lot of people think.”

While expressing respect for German Chancellor Angela Merkel—“I will meet her. I respect her and I like her,”—he accused her of making “a very catastrophic mistake” when she allowed a million refugees into the country.

Trump solidarised himself directly with the UK Independence Party and tacitly with other parties of the xenophobic right, in part as justification for his own anti-immigrant policies. “People don’t want to have other people coming in and destroying their country,” he said, “and you know in this country we’re gonna go very strong on borders from the day I get in.”

On Russia, not only did Trump moot a relaxation of sanctions “if we can make some good deals” on nuclear disarmament, he went so far as to place the chancellor of long-time US ally Germany on a par with Russian President Vladimir Putin, threatening both with a rupture in relations if they did not win his confidence. “Well,” he declared, “I start off trusting both—but let’s see how long that lasts. It may not last long at all.”

Trump went on to call NATO “obsolete,” in part

because it wasn't "taking care of terror," but also because the European powers "aren't paying what they're supposed to pay, which I think is very unfair to the United States." He sought to soften this declaration with a pro-forma pledge that the US was still committed to the defence of Europe: "With that being said, NATO is very important to me."

At the same time, he attacked the military intervention of Russia in Syria, describing it as "a very bad thing" that had led to a "terrible humanitarian situation."

Leading German politicians have responded to Trump's remarks in a bellicose manner, emphasizing Germany's own economic and geopolitical claims. Social Democratic Party (SPD) Chairman Sigmar Gabriel told the *Saarbrücker Zeitung*, "I do not think we have to be afraid in Germany. We must not adopt a servile attitude now, as if we had nothing to offer ourselves. In dealing with Trump, we need German self-confidence and a clear stance."

Merkel called on EU member states not to be disarmed by Trump's harsh criticism. "I think we Europeans hold our fate in our own hands," she said in Berlin.

German Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier said after meeting with NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg that Trump's statements had "created astonishment and agitation" throughout Europe. He pointed out that both the designated US defense secretary, James Mattis, and the designated secretary of state, Rex Tillerson, had spoken in favour of NATO at their confirmation hearings. "We must see what follows for American politics," he said.

In contrast, British Foreign Minister Boris Johnson welcomed Trump's statements about a US-British trade agreement after Brexit. "I think it is very good news that the US wants to conclude a good free trade agreement with us and that they want to do it quickly," he said.

More than 70 years after the end of World War II and 25 years after the dissolution of the Soviet Union, violent tensions and conflicts are again developing between Europe and the US and between the European powers themselves.

Trump's "America-first" policy is accelerating this process, but it is not its cause. This lies in the insoluble contradictions of the capitalist system, which is unable to overcome the antagonism between the international character of production and the nation-state framework in which capitalism is rooted. As in the years preceding World War I and World War II, the struggle for raw materials, markets, cheap labour and strategic influence is

once again unleashing fierce conflicts between the imperialist powers, leading to trade war and military conflict.

The International Committee of the Fourth International has repeatedly warned of the inexorable movement of international capitalism toward world war. In July 2014, in the statement "Socialism and the Fight Against Imperialist War," the ICFI wrote:

At present, Washington is pursuing these objectives with the collaboration of the other major imperialist powers. However, there is no permanent coincidence of interests among them. German imperialism, which fought two wars with the US in the 20th century, is reviving its imperial ambitions. Having secured the dominant position in Western Europe, it is seeking to become a world power... All of the imperialist powers, including Britain, France, Canada and Australia, are taking full part in this struggle for spheres of influence. Every area of the globe is a source of bitter conflict: not only the former colonies and semi-colonies in the Middle East, Africa and Asia, but also the Arctic, Antarctic and even outer space and cyberspace.

Only a united, international movement of the working class that combines the struggle against war with the struggle against its cause, capitalism, can avert a new international slaughter. This requires the building of a new socialist leadership, sections of the International Committee of the Fourth International, in the European, American and international working class.

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