

Trump's visit to Poland: A return to the pre-war Intermarium strategy

By Clara Weiss
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The White House confirmed Friday that President Donald Trump will visit Poland on July 6 before the G20 summit in Hamburg.

In Poland, he not only wants to meet with his Polish counterpart President Andrzej Duda in Warsaw, but also in Breslau with the heads of the so-called “Three Seas Initiative,” which follows in the tradition of the “Intermarium” alliance of the 1920s. This is a clear signal from Washington that the US is increasingly relying on an alliance with Poland and other Eastern European countries, in face of mounting tensions with Germany and France.

The announcement of the Poland visit took place immediately after Trump had met with Romanian President Klaus Johannis in the White House, and following former FBI chief James Comey accusing Trump of close ties with the Kremlin.

At the subsequent press conference, Trump said his government was committed to Article 5 of the NATO Treaty: “We are there to protect. I absolutely agree with Article 5.” At the last NATO summit in Brussels, he had refused to give such a commitment to Article 5, which the Eastern European states were calling for against Russia.

The Polish government has welcomed the news of Trump's visit to Poland, the exact date of which was unclear for months. According to the Polish government, preparations for the talks are ongoing.

The Three Seas Initiative, a loose alliance including the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, Slovenia, Croatia, Bulgaria, Romania, Austria and the Baltic states of Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia, was established in summer 2016. It includes all the important countries bordering the Adriatic, the Baltic and the Black Sea.

The initiative is linked to the so-called Intermarium alliance of the 1920s. At that time, nationalist and

fascist forces had taken part in the alliance with the US against the Soviet Union. At the same time, this alliance was always directed against German hegemony in Europe.

In September 2016, the Three Seas Initiative published a manifesto, describing itself as an “informal platform” for the organization and political support of transnational and regional projects of “strategic importance” for the states concerned. These include the energy, transport and digital sectors and the economy as a whole in Eastern and Central Europe.

The meeting in Breslau in June will be the first official conference of the initiative. It takes place under the presidency of Poland, which, a hundred years ago, was the central power of the Intermarium alliance in Eastern and Central Europe, and which tried to secure its regional supremacy in this way.

Influential analysts such as George Friedman and Robert D. Kaplan, who are close to the CIA and the US military, have argued for years that the US should once again look to an Intermarium alliance to deal with Russia and Germany. In this, Poland and Romania, which have the largest armies in the region, are seen as key partners of the US.

Trump's meeting with the leaders of this alliance is a clear signal that the White House is reintroducing the Intermarium strategy, which will exacerbate conflicts with Germany.

At the same time, Trump is reacting to growing domestic pressure, especially on the part of the Democrats, who want to force his government to take a tougher course against Russia. Trump had previously left his attitude to NATO, and thus to the alliance with the Eastern European states, in the dark for months. Now, he is shifting in face of a profound change in the German-American relationship.

The announcement of Chancellor Angela Merkel following the NATO and G7 summits, that Europe must take its fate into its own hands and could no longer rely on the USA, marked a turning point. The German government is returning to an independent great power policy, regardless of the United States and, if necessary, against it as well.

Polish Defence Minister Wytold Waszczykowski has condemned Merkel's statement as "exaggerated and unnecessary." The Law and Justice Party (PiS) government continues to work closely with the US, even though the foreign policy orientation of the Trump government was long unclear.

This was mainly due to fear of German hegemony in Europe and a renewed Franco-German alliance. The German government is exploiting the crisis of the EU and US to implement its plans for a military union under German domination. The Polish government, on the other hand, is vehemently opposed to a European Army, which Germany is seeking as a counterbalance to a US-dominated NATO.

In view of Brexit, which would see one of Poland's closest allies leave the EU, and the election victory of Emmanuel Macron in France, the fears of the Polish bourgeoisie of German domination in Europe and of Poland's isolation have intensified. The PiS government fears a rapprochement between France and Russia. In the election, Macron had criticized the PiS and threatened it with EU sanctions.

The Trump administration is now trying to exploit Poland's political isolation and the tensions with Germany and France to bolster US interests. In this, it is resting on the PiS government, which has been trying to revive the Intermarium strategy for years, something that has unleashed much unease in Germany. Following the PiS election victory in autumn 2015, the conservative *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* had already warned of the revival of the Intermarium, "as a counterweight to Russia—and to Germany, the new hegemon in Europe."

In an unusually sharp editorial under the headline, "Trump plays with Europe," the *Tagespiegel* accused Trump of "instrumentalizing Europe's internal tensions and rifts." The editorial sees Trump's visit to Warsaw as a "reorientation towards Poland," which pursues "other foreign policy alliances and projects" outside the EU framework.

The Polish bourgeoisie itself is divided over foreign policy. The liberal opposition, led by the Citizens Platform (PO) and the Nowoczesna (Modern) party, in contrast to PiS, advocates closer links with Germany and Brussels. They regard Donald Trump's election as a catastrophe for Polish interests.

Liberal commentators such as Tomasz Lis have denounced a revival of the "Intermarium," which the PiS has long sought, as completely unrealistic. At the same time, this section of the Polish bourgeoisie cannot and will not give up the alliance with the US, Poland's closest foreign policy partner since 1989.

These foreign policy conflicts played a central role in the struggle between the liberal opposition and the government, which culminated in a blockade and occupation of parliament by the opposition in December 2016. Trump's visit will further intensify these foreign policy conflicts.

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