

Why the European Union became a 'Foe' of the United States – History has been Reborn

News:

On the 14th of July, Jeff Glor of CBS Evening News asked US President Trump to name his "biggest foe globally right now." Trump's answer surprised many: "Well, I think we have a lot of foes. I think the European Union is a foe, what they do to us in trade. Now, you wouldn't think of the European Union, but they're a foe. Russia is foe in certain respects. China is a foe economically, certainly they are a foe. But that doesn't mean they are bad. It doesn't mean anything. It means that they are competitive."

Comment:

Trump named the EU first in his list of foes, and then Russia, whose President, Vladimir Putin, is next on Trump's list of world leaders to meet after having met Theresa May and before that, NATO allies at the NATO summit held on the 11th and 12th of July. Trump's behavior with European allies in Brussels was adversarial; he insulted the German Chancellor by pointing his finger at her and calling her by her first name: "you, Angela ...", which led to a closed emergency meeting where he suggested that the US could pull out of NATO. In the UK, he undermined his host, Prime Minister Theresa May, by giving an interview with the Sun Newspaper in which he criticised her weakness in Brexit negotiations with the EU, and praised Boris Johnson, who had just resigned from Theresa May's cabinet in protest over her handling of Brexit negotiations. And of course, with the ongoing trade war that Trump initiated with the EU, the idea that the EU could be considered a foe of the US should not be a surprise.

Theresa May herself added fresh light on Trump's hostility towards the EU when she revealed, the day after his CBS interview, that he told her she should "sue the EU" instead of negotiating Brexit. Trump has actively sought to weaken EU leaders and to encourage them to separate from the EU. After having said, in his interview with the Sun newspaper, that May had 'killed' chances of a much desired US-UK bilateral trade deal by agreeing to maintain some trade relations with the EU after Brexit, he later offered an enticement that actually a deal would still be possible. Trump has also been enticing the German Chancellor with a special offer to reduce tariffs on German cars if a separate agreement can be reached. Similar overtures have also been made to French President Macron and to other European leaders.

That the EU is considered a foe to the US simply states in unusually blunt language what EU leaders have feared themselves. However, Donald Tusk, President of the European Council tweeted in response to Trump's comments that: "America and the EU are best friends. Whoever says we are foes is spreading fake news." Despite trying to paper over the cracks now, the President of the European Council has been more outspoken in the past. The day before the NATO summit began, he issued a challenge to the current US administration, after negotiating greater EU access to NATO command

and control resources and systems in Europe, and said: “Dear America, appreciate your allies, after all you don't have that many.” In May, at an EU summit in Bulgaria he was even more outspoken: “We are witnessing today a new phenomenon: the capricious assertiveness of the American administration. Looking at the latest decisions of President Trump, some could even think, ‘With friends like that, who needs enemies?’” While these strong words attempt to separate the US as a long-term ‘partner’ from the current US administration, European leaders are realizing, slowly, that things are changing and that the transatlantic relationship is changing. The President of the European Council said, “Frankly speaking, Europe should be grateful by President Trump, because thanks to him we have got rid of old illusions. He has made us realise that if you need a helping hand, you will find one at the end of your arm ... Europe must do everything in its power to protect – in spite of today’s mood – the transatlantic bond. But at the same time we must be prepared for those scenarios where we have to act on our own.” In this speech, the possibility of being alone is acknowledged, and it has tones both of defiance and the sad contemplation of becoming fatherless in a cruel world. German Foreign Minister Heiko Maas echoed such sentiments in response to Trump’s claim that the EU was a foe by saying: “We can no longer completely rely on the White House ... To maintain our partnership with the USA we must readjust it. The first clear consequence can only be that we need to align ourselves even more closely in Europe.”

This latest week in politics, closing with the president of the US fawning to Russian president Vladimir Putin in Helsinki, while his own intelligence community is chasing Russian spies accused of subverting US democracy, and after a sustained series of attacks upon supposed allies is not a temporary phenomenon that will go away when Trump does. The world has changed. The latest US National Defense Strategy made it clear: “We are facing global disorder, characterized by decline in the long-standing rules-based international order.” The US administration is embracing now with a bang, what the Obama administration acknowledged with a whimper: that the US is no longer taking responsibility for upholding ‘liberal values’ in the world, and now former allies are struggling to understand that there is a new balance sheet in a world of great power competitors. Perhaps the EU is being targeted as it is the last bastion of the old international order, which the US now repudiates even though it was the one that established the former order. With the US withdrawing from leadership of the old order, it doesn’t want another power to fill its shoes. The US accepts to deal with China and Russia as Great Power rivals, but not the EU, because the EU threatens to take America’s place. The real question the CBS interviewer should have asked Trump was – who is America’s biggest friend, to which ‘nobody’ would be the truthful answer; echoing Lord Palmerstone’s speech in 1848: “We have no eternal allies and we have no perpetual enemies. Our interests are eternal and perpetual, and these interests it is our duty to follow”. Today, ‘History’ has been reborn, and ‘the last man’ has quit.

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