

President Trump gives the EU (and other supranational organisations) a health check

During last year's EU referendum campaign, Michael Gove said "I think the people of this country have had enough of experts." In full, his words actually were "*I think the people of this country have had enough of experts from organisations with acronyms saying that they know what is best and getting it consistently wrong*", but it is the first few words which made the headlines. In one sense, the American electorate showed a similar distrust of "experts" in rejecting Hillary Clinton, the classic political insider, in favour of Donald Trump, the only US president to date who had never previously held political office.

The new incumbent of the White House is thus a fresh pair of eyes and ears, unencumbered by years of working with people who have – at times subconsciously – adopted the accepted wisdom about certain aspects of today's world order (including the role of certain supranational organisations), without question. He has therefore been able to come in as an outsider and give these organisations a "health check" from a refreshingly different angle. His diagnoses, however, have not been very welcome in some quarters.

Even before his election, his call for other members of NATO to pull their weight caused a few ripples of discontent, but few could dispute his logic- why should the USA continually guarantee the defences of countries who are not prepared to defend themselves? The chart in this article is a damning indictment of the USA's partners' stinginess when it comes to their armed forces. Only four other countries, including the UK, met the agreed target of spending 2% of GDP on defence whereas America spent more than 3.5%.

NATO, however, looks likely to retain President Trump's support, in spite of his description of it as "obsolete". What does appear obsolete is the "liberal interventionism" beloved of Tony Blair, which moved the goalposts of NATO's original objectives and turned it into an aggressive force in the Balkans. for instance. Last week, in her speech to the Republican Party's congress in Philadelphia, Mrs May received solid support for saying "the days of Britain and America intervening in sovereign countries in an attempt to remake the world in our own image are over." NATO needs a re-boot, but looks like it still has a future.

But what about the European Union? President Trump has continued to express the same support for Brexit he showed during the election campaign and has since made clear the degree of his distaste for the EU as well. Theresa May has already travelled across the Atlantic to meet with him while Angela Merkel has had to be content with a phone call. Trump's dislike of bureaucracy has already manifested itself in a freeze on hiring federal officials except for the military. It is therefore unsurprising that he dislikes the EU.

In the words of Ted Malloch, the new US ambassador to the EU, "He doesn't like an organisation that is supranational, that is unelected where the bureaucrats run amok and that is not frankly a proper democracy." The appointment of Malloch, an American academic based in the UK, will not go down well in Brussels. He was a strong supporter of Brexit and is no admirer of the EU project, being quoted as saying "I helped bring down the Soviet Union, so maybe there's another union that needs a little taming,"

Malloch also described Jean-Claude Juncker, the current President of the European Commission as a "very adequate mayor of some city in Luxembourg". Given that it was the USA – or rather the American CIA, which was the driving force behind establishing what has become the EU in the 1950s, the language from Team Trump represents a significant change of policy

towards Brussels. Anthony Gardner, the previous ambassador to the EU appointed by President Obama, has expressed concern at this change of policy. His statement that there was a "good reason" for the USA to support European integration will nonetheless cut little ice with the new President whose inaugural speech, peppered with references to "America First", highlights his belief in the nation state as the best means of advancing the interests of its citizens.

The reaction in Brussels to the Trump victory and its aftermath has been pretty grim, especially as it has emboldened anti-EU parties in France, Germany and the Netherlands in a year when elections are looming in all three countries. As far as Brexit is concerned, however, the presence of a sympathetic President in the White House will do our country no harm. Mrs May handled her transatlantic visit well and even though it contained more symbolism than substance, that symbolism was very significant:- her successful meeting with the US President coming the same week as the Article 50 Bill was published has taken us still further past the point of no return even though we haven't even formally begun the exit process.

It is not only the EU which may feel a cold blast from Washington. President Trump is rumoured to be planning a substantial de-funding of the United Nations – another supranational organisation which clearly doesn't impress him. There is some support for such a move in Congress. "The United Nations (U.N.) has proven to be an ineffective and wasteful bureaucracy. The U.S. bankrolls nearly 22 percent of the U.N.'s annual budget," said Representative Mike Rogers from Alabama. It is not totally impossible that the US may withdraw from the UN completely, in which case, its very future may be in doubt.

These policies may sound radical, but it must be remembered that the decade following the end of the Second World War which saw the establishment of the world's leading

international and supranational organisations – NATO, the UN, the International Monetary Fund and at least in embryo, the EU – is now a long time ago. In those days, there may have been widespread consent that these organisations were necessary to rebuild the world after one world war while helping to prevent another, but the world has moved on since the late 1940s and 1950s. What is wrong with someone asking whether these organisations are still fit for purpose or even necessary some 70 years later? After all, many features of daily life in the late 1940s, such as Watney's Red Barrel, rationing and the regular use of steam locomotives have long since disappeared.

Even President Trump will have to battle hard to overcome vested interest – the lobbyists of Brussels and people who have made a very lucrative career as supranationalist bureaucrats. Even so, no fair-minded person should complain that once in a while the whole world system should be given a health check, especially given the alternative is “as it was in the beginning (or at least the 1940s and 1950s) is now and ever shall be. Bureaucracy and supranationalism without end. Amen.”

Photo by Gage Skidmore

