

## **The democratic world will have to get along without America. It may even have to defend itself from it.**

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I wonder if we have underestimated the gravity of the situation the democratic world faces.

Even now, as the United States hurtles toward autocracy – the petty grotesqueries perhaps tell the story better than anything else: a reporter barred from the White House for not using the name “Gulf of America,” President Donald Trump naming himself chair of the Kennedy Center by a “unanimous” vote of its board – the tendency is still to describe events in relatively conventional terms. For example, the “mistakes” that Mr. Trump is said to have made in his dealings with Vladimir Putin, of the United States as an “unreliable ally” under Mr. Trump, and so forth.

But that is not the situation we are now in. The policies on Ukraine announced, or rather confirmed this week by Mr. Trump and his Defence Secretary, Pete Hegseth – peace talks without Ukraine; Ukraine locked out of NATO membership indefinitely; Russia keeps all territories gained since its illegal and unprovoked invasion, because, as Mr. Trump said, “they lost a lot of soldiers” taking them – are not, as described, irresponsible concessions to Russia.

They are not concessions at all. They are demands, aimed not at Russia but at Ukraine, and presented to it jointly by the United States of Russia and America. They are of a piece with the Trump administration’s very clear signalling that it will not be bound by Article 5 of the NATO treaty – that the United States will not, as promised, come to Europe’s defence should Russia broaden its attacks on it, but will, as Mr. Trump so memorably put it, let them do “whatever the hell they want.”

That is not merely an abrogation of its treaty commitments, or an abdication of America’s historic responsibilities, or even a declaration that the way is now open for other hostile powers to launch attacks on democratic states. The United States, under Mr. Trump, cannot be considered an idle bystander in the great twilight struggle between the democracies and the dictatorships, as it was in the 1930s. It is now on the side of the dictatorships.

The United States that openly threatens to invade Panama or Denmark – or to annex Canada – has not just stepped outside international law, including the basic Westphalian proscription of attempts to alter borders by force. Neither does a country that launches trade wars on a different country every day, including countries with which it has longstanding free trade treaties, reveal a simple lack of commitment to a rules-based approach to international trade. It is engaged in an all-out assault on both. It has become an outlaw state.

And in this regard, too, it is aligning itself with the dictatorships. That is what dictatorships do. It is intrinsic to their nature. Just as they refuse to be bound by law internally – we are counting down the days to when the Trump administration defies its first court order – so they recognize no law in their dealings with other states. (Or rules of any kind: you’ll have noticed they also cheat at sports. As does Mr. Trump.)

It is not just that the democratic world can no longer count on America. It is that America, under Mr. Trump, is no longer necessarily part of the democratic world: neither fully democratic in its own affairs, nor committed to the welfare of other democracies, but hostile to both. If the international order is to be preserved, then, it will have to be preserved, in part, from the United States. Certainly it will have to be rebuilt without it.

Which means abandoning all attempts to propitiate Mr. Trump on military matters, in hopes of “keeping NATO together,” that is with the United States in it. Not only will that do nothing to strengthen NATO, an organization to which Mr. Trump is viscerally opposed, but our desire to strike a deal only invites him to use it against us, as an instrument of blackmail.

We need to face some unpleasant facts. NATO, as a transatlantic democratic alliance, is dead. Henceforth the defence of Europe will be the responsibility of Europe. (And the defence of Canada? Wedged as we are between the United States and Russia, with the North an increasingly tempting prize? We better get some allies, fast.)

The same applies to the World Trade Organization, or any of the other instruments of international co-operation developed after the Second World War, in which the United States played such a constructive part: they will have to be reconstituted, de jure or de facto, without it. We will need new defence alignments, different trade arrangements, the works.

That is not our choice. That is America’s, or at least the Trump administration’s. The democratic world must therefore regard and treat it as it does the other non-democracies: not as an ally to be consulted but as an adversary to be contained.