



## Summit to think about

Nato is facing a period of major upheaval, as Donald Trump's unpredictable presidency lurches from one controversy to another, and developments in technology change the nature of warfare. As they meet in Brussels next month, Western leaders must be prepared to address fundamental questions about the institution's future, writes **Lord Howell**

What will he do next? That is the question on the minds of harassed officials both sides of the Atlantic as they prepare for the arrival of President Trump at the next NATO summit in Brussels on July 11 and 12.

Will he create the same shambles as he did at the recent G7 Quebec meeting, where he rubbished the agreed communiqué, scorned a participant as 'weak' and 'an embarrassment' (Justin Trudeau) and for good measure called for Vladimir Putin, the arch-breaker of international rules, to be re-admitted to the fold?

Nobody can be sure. And if Europe seems somewhat divided and uncertain about the next steps, that is nothing compared with the canyon-deep divisions in Washington itself, as the Lords International Relations Committee found on their recent visit.

Officials at the highest echelons in the Administration have no answers, meeting every question with a shrug of the shoulders. Not even close advisers think it was a clever idea to insult their friendly and nearest neighbour, Canada, or to open a trade war with China which scatters shot over allies as well, or to invalidate the Iran nuclear deal, or withdraw from the Trans-Pacific Partnership or the Paris climate agreement. Even the rushed meeting with North Korean dictator Kim-Jong-Un leaves a swirl of doubts about where it is supposed to lead and who will get hurt in the process.

One minute its smiles, handshakes and embraces at the White House. The next it's a kick in the teeth, whether for Macron, May, Merkel, Abe or even Xi Jinping.

So will the NATO partners get the same treatment?

One theme sure to be raised by an otherwise unpredictable President is better sharing of the defence burden, an issue which London strongly supports. The problem here is what constitutes the 2% of GDP target figure. Is it just troops, missiles, equipment, or does it include pensions, back-up administration, weapons research?

And there is a deeper question. NATO is a brilliant construct of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, a skilled mix between voluntary involvement and collective will, designed under the cover of mutual assured Cold War deterrence to meet conventional attacks with conventional ripostes, and thereby to keep Europe's citizens safe and secure.

But security and defence no longer comes in such a neat package. What happens when the precise enemy is in doubt, the source of attacks uncertain, or the war threat blurred and hybrid (the Russian speciality), or the threat from within, from home grown terrorists, from fake alarms, fanned by irresponsible media) ?

Maybe a spending target just covering military aspects is far too narrow to protect us. Perhaps the whole gamut of intelligence, weapons technology, electronic warfare, internal anti-terrorist activity (open and undercover) , port and airport security and all the rest should be included in a much larger percentage target.



And then there is cyber. An attack on one NATO member is an attack on all (the sacred Article 5). But when is a cyber-attack deep enough to trigger a NATO response (hopefully with the Americans in the lead)? With the digital age entering every aspect of our existence there are vulnerabilities everywhere. Blocking credit card transactions is a nuisance but halting vital utilities such as power supplies can cost lives? So does NATO now need a grim calculus as to how many lives have to be lost before an attack justifies countering, even if it is clear who is the attacker, which it may well not be.

If Donald Trump is one disruptor, the whole digital and cyber age is another, with the rapid rise of China, now showing its muscle in the South Pacific and across central Asia, a third - along with general shift in the centre of gravity in world wealth and power eastwards.

Hey-ho for the past simple age of the Cold War, with American hegemony, dominant superpowers, balanced mutual deterrence and the rest of the world in its place. That is all gone, and it will not return. All international institutions, NATO included, must now prepare for something completely different.

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