

EU and Nato 'leaders' can continue to act slavishly before the Americans. They are just making themselves irrelevant and despised

The way Lord Ismay, the first Nato chief, summarised the purpose of the Western military alliance – “Keep the Russians out, the Americans in, and the Germans down” – became one of the great political aphorisms of the 20th century.

Mark Rutte, the current Nato secretary general, is still following it. Perhaps he has yet to receive a memo telling him it's now a very different century with vastly changed circumstances. Today, the Russians are in, the Americans are out, and the Germans are, well, rearming themselves. So where is the place of Nato? Is there even one?

Sidestepping Washington's threat to take Greenland from Denmark, a Nato member, Rutte said at the World Economic Forum in Davos that member states must collectively protect the Arctic from China and Russia. “We have to protect the Arctic against Russian and Chinese influence ... We are working on that, making sure that collectively, we will defend the Arctic region,” he said.

Rutte's only “innovation” with Lord Ismay's adage is to constantly invoke the Chinese bogeyman. But just days before, Nato members Denmark, Germany, France, Sweden and Norway all deployed small numbers of troops – symbolically, I guess – to shore up Greenland's defence. Hint: They aren't there against China and Russia but against you know who.

Canada's armed forces have, for the first time in 100 years, drawn up war plans to defend the country against an invasion from the south. It seems rather futile, militarily speaking, but is still a significant political gesture.

Such actions by Western nations are not just about “strategic autonomy” of which French President Emmanuel Macron often speaks, but actual defence against the United States.

“Stop invoking the ‘rules-based international order’ as though it still functions as advertised,” Canadian Prime Minister Mark Carney said in a rare sensible speech at Davos. “We knew the story of the international rules-based order was partially false. That the strongest would exempt themselves when convenient. That



Donald Trump listens as Mark Rutte speaks during a bilateral meeting on the sidelines of the World Economic Forum meeting in Davos, Switzerland. Photo: Getty Images

Trump threatens Greenland but Nato chief says China is the real threat

trade rules were enforced asymmetrically. And that international law applied with varying rigour depending on the identity of the accused or the victim. This fiction was useful.”

Carney can now speak the truth, or most of it, because that fiction is over.

“There is a strong tendency for countries to go along to get along,” he said. “But when we only negotiate bilaterally with a hegemon, we negotiate from weakness. We accept what's offered. We compete with each other to be the most accommodating. This is not sovereignty. It's the performance of sovereignty while accepting subordination.”

The European Union under Ursula von der Leyen and Nato under Rutte exemplify such slavish subservience to a fading hegemon.

Unlike most Nato countries, large stretches of Russian territories are actually in the Arctic, spanning 24,140km of coastline along the Arctic Ocean and account for about 40 per cent of the total land area in the region.

Maybe by Rutte's book, China shouldn't be in the East and South China seas, and India shouldn't be a presence in the Indian Ocean. But Nato should. China has only sent icebreakers, research vessels and cargo ships to the Arctic, in international waters. In contrast, some Nato



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members have routinely deployed warships to cross the Taiwan Strait and the South China Sea!

It's not the Chinese who are threatening to take over the territories of at least two fellow Nato states. On the first anniversary of his second term as president, Donald Trump took to Truth Social, his own media platform, to post a doctored photo of himself meeting with leaders of the EU in the Oval Office. In the background was a map with Canada, Greenland and the US decked out in the red, white and blue of the American flag.

Speaking at Davos, the US president was sounding more like Tony Soprano and Don Corleone than a president.

Ripping into Carney, Trump said, “Canada lives because of the United States. Remember that, Mark, next time you make your statements.”

And broadening his threat, he declared, “USA is the economic engine on the planet. When America booms, the entire world booms ... you all follow us down, and you follow us up.”

Interestingly, von der Leyen made similar remarks as Carney's, telling EU lawmakers that “the shift in the international order is not only seismic – but it is permanent”. However, she and her deputies such as Kaja Kallas, the foreign minister, are doubling down against China and are determined to make themselves even more abject supplicants to Washington under Trump.

The European Commission is busy forcing member states to remove Huawei Technologies and ZTE gear from all their mobile networks, at a cost of billions but without mandatory compensations. Shooting yourself in the foot?

Talking about Greenland, New York Times reporters recently asked Trump in an interview: “Why is ownership important here?”

“Because that's what I feel is psychologically needed for success. I think that ownership gives you a thing that you can't do, whether you're talking about a lease or a treaty,” Trump replied.

“Psychologically important to you or to the United States?”

“Psychologically important for me,” the president piled on.

The more Washington under Trump makes the positions of Rutte and von der Leyen untenable, the more they kiss up to him. Their collective delusion may be explained by the quickening obsolescence of their transatlantic and transnational institutions in an age of resurgent great power rivalry and spheres of influence.

More Western countries are bypassing transnational institutions such as the EU and Nato by cutting their own deals with China and other powerful countries like India outside the traditional Eastern or Anglo-American spheres.

You may think Trump is just a one-man freak show but you would be wrong. There is no going back for the US and the West after Trump, who is, in any case, just a symptom, not the underlying disease.

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