Tomorrow's Affairs
Analysis of today
Assessment of tomorrow

By: Carl Bildt

US efforts to meddle in Europe will be as unsuccessful as Russia's have been

Earlier this month, the Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov offered a succinct description of the Trump administration's new National Security Strategy (NSS), calling it "largely consistent with our vision."

He's right. The NSS offers not even a hint of criticism of Russia, neither for its increasingly authoritarian domestic policies, nor for its blatant military aggression against Ukraine.

Instead, it singles out Europe – America's longstanding democratic friend and ally – for special abuse.

True, when the first Trump administration issued its NSS in 2017, there was plenty of talk about national sovereignty trumping everything else.

But that document still recognized the value of America's allies, stating that "the United States and Europe will work together to counter Russian subversion and aggression."

Moreover, this effort fit into a broader strategy of "great power competition," wherein China loomed large.

Since then, Russia launched its full-scale invasion of Ukraine, and China has loomed only larger.

But the second Trump administration is bowing to Russia, criticizing the Europeans, and describing the threat from China only in economic terms.

Apparently, great-power competition has given way to great-power camaraderie.

The US now says it is more interested in "stability," which supposedly can be achieved by working with Russian President Vladimir Putin and through a "G2" with Chinese President Xi Jinping.

The implicit message is that great powers think alike. Each wants its own sphere of influence and prizes power over principle.

A radical departure from past US policies

As many commentators have noted, the NSS represents a radical departure from past US policies and doctrines. It envisions a pivot back to the Western Hemisphere, and signals that profits will come before principles on just about every issue.

The Middle East, for example, is primarily seen as an investment destination. Politics are complicated; but commercial dealmaking is easy.

Still, the vociferous denunciation of Europe stands out, not least for the flaws in the underlying argument.

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The NSS claims that "within a few decades at the latest, certain NATO members will become majority non-European," and that Europe, doomed to "civilizational erasure" (language many see as the handiwork of Vice President JD Vance), cannot be a reliable ally. But this is just false.

There is not a single European country where "non-Europeans" will constitute a majority at any point in the foreseeable future. That includes the country with the largest share of Muslims: Russia.

Intention to interfere in European democratic processes

Such vile rhetoric comes directly from European extremists. It is simply astonishing that it will form the basis for how America will treat its strongest and closest allies.

The Trump administration is now prepared to interfere in European countries' domestic

policies and politics to promote "patriotic" forces – meaning those peddling the same racist garbage.

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It remains to be seen what will come of this. Aligning with Trump is not exactly a winning electoral strategy, so US efforts to meddle in Europe may prove to be as unsuccessful as Russia's have been.

They could be far more damaging, though, considering how much the transatlantic relationship has already soured.

Civilizational suicide

To be sure, we Europeans have our fair share of problems. We urgently need to revive our entrepreneurial, competitive, and global trading spirits, beef up our defenses, and extend our successful project of integration across the continent. Managing migration is certainly a challenge, just as it is for the US.

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Overall, though, we are extraordinarily successful societies, and we must not lose sight of that.

Assassination attempts and political violence are extremely rare here. We do not have politicized mobs storming our parliaments. Our democracies remain open and vibrant, most of them topping global rankings for press freedom.

The share of our people in prison is one-fifth that of the US, and our murder rates are a small fraction of America's.

We don't have a massive trade deficit with the rest of the world. Our health systems deliver better outcomes and longer lives than anywhere else, and overall, EU member states have better-educated populations.

We certainly are not at risk of going "extinct," as the NSS absurdly puts it. Few places on Earth provide a better quality of life for a larger share of the population than Europe does.

Rather than trying to placate Trump's America, we must stand taller, re-commit to our own values, and hold out hope that the ideological confusion across the Atlantic soon passes. Barring that, it is not us who will be committing civilizational suicide.

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