

The costs of Trump's contempt are starting to show

From Europe to Asia, governments are hedging against unreliable and erratic U.S. power.

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I was recently in Shenzhen, the heart of China's industrial machine, talking to one of that country's legendary businessmen. I asked him about the Iran war and his response surprised me. "For us, Trump's attack on Iran is less consequential than his threat to attack Greenland," he told me. "When he did that, to America's oldest allies, I knew that Europe would not follow America's approach to China."

In the United States, President Donald Trump's periodic insults hurled toward Europe tend to get treated as routine tantrums, part of the reality TV show that is now the White House. But in Europe, the accumulation of abuse has reached a tipping point. "The war in Iran ... has forced Europe to grow a spine," Daniel DePetris recently wrote in the U.K. edition of *The Spectator*, a conservative and (usually) ardently pro-American magazine. "European leaders are no longer interested in dropping to their knees and groveling to stay on Trump's good side."

Europe is moving from words to actions. The European Union's ReArm Europe/Readiness 2030 plan is to invest some 800 billion euros (about \$935 billion) in defense in the coming years. The old model was that the U.S. took care of European security and Europeans spent generously on U.S. arms. Now Europeans want more of their money to stay at home, to build European firms and supply chains, and thus gain strategic autonomy from Washington.

The same logic is spreading beyond defense. The European Payments Initiative is building a continent-wide alternative to Visa and Mastercard. European institutions are seeking alternatives to SWIFT, PayPal and other U.S.-dominated financial platforms. France has moved gold reserves from New York to Paris; politicians in Germany and Italy have debated whether their countries should do the same. European governments are looking for alternatives to American software, fearing that U.S. firms might one day be ordered to cut off critical services. This can all be dismissed as posturing, but Europe is collectively the world's second-largest economy with the second most widely used reserve currency. Its actions matter.

Perhaps the most revealing change is on the European right. Anti-Americanism used to be a doctrine of the left — Parisian intellectuals, student radicals, anti-war parties. The right was instinctively Atlanticist. And Europe's populist right once saw Trump as its patron saint. But Greenland, Iran and Trump's general contempt for Europe have made Trump politically toxic across the political spectrum in Europe. The Post reported that populists such as the U.K.'s Nigel Farage, France's Marine Le Pen, Italy's Giorgia Meloni and many within Germany's AfD party have been distancing themselves from Trump and U.S. policy. Even in Hungary, Vice President JD Vance's speeches for then-incumbent Prime Minister Viktor Orbán may have hurt the latter's electoral prospects.

It goes beyond Europe. In Canada, Prime Minister Mark Carney has explicitly set out to reduce his country's dependence on the U.S. market. He has already signed more than 20 economic and security deals, including with China, to grow exports beyond the U.S. Canadians for their part are buying less American and vacationing less in the U.S.

Europe and Canada are not about to embrace China. They have serious conflicts with Beijing over Ukraine, subsidies, electric vehicles, critical minerals and market access. But both will play nicer with China where they can. They will hedge. They will deal with Washington when they must, Beijing when it suits them and others whenever possible. A recent Foreign Affairs essay by Chinese scholar Da Wei argues that for Beijing, the great new geopolitical fact is that there is now a deep Europe-America divide — ready to be exploited.

In Asia, U.S. allies have been hit harder than anyone. More than 80 percent of the oil and gas that passed through the Strait of Hormuz went to Asia. Now many countries on that continent are reeling from their worst energy crisis in half a century, perhaps in history. As a result, allies like Japan and South Korea have had to go hat in hand to adversaries like Russia and Iran to negotiate for enough fuel to keep the lights on at home. Adding insult to injury, they have had to endure abuse from Trump, who has denounced them because — despite never having been consulted — they have not eagerly jumped to join the war in Iran. Many of them are now in talks with Beijing about energy security and green technology.

One of the recurring questions about Trump's foreign policy has been, how permanent are its effects? Could the U.S. recover from the loss of trust with its allies? As we can see, countries have started making long-term policy shifts, and these will soon take on a life of their own. They realized that they had entrusted their security and well-being to Washington, and it has used this dependence to squeeze them hard. So, they have decided to buy insurance, to protect themselves from an unreliable America. And who can blame them?