

WILL TRUMP'S SKEPTICISM ABOUT NATO BRING EU CLOSER TOGETHER?

Before most of us were awake, NATO's Secretary-General made what I consider an ill-considered statement reminding President-elect Trump that NATO is a treaty commitment.

"NATO's security guarantee is a treaty commitment and all allies have made a solemn commitment to defend each other and this is something which is absolute and unconditioned," NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg told a news conference.

[snip]

Stoltenberg, a former prime minister whose own country Norway borders Russia, sought to remind the new president-elect that the only time NATO had activated its so-called Article 5 commitment, was in the defense of the United States – following the Sept. 11 attacks on New York and Washington in 2001.

He also said NATO allies were a big part of the U.S.-led strategy to stabilize Afghanistan and rid it of militants hostile to the West, with a long-standing NATO presence in the country since the 2001 attacks.

NATO "is important both for collective defense in Europe and to provide help and play a role in the fight against international terrorism", Stoltenberg said.

I say this was ill-considered because I think NATO needs to think seriously about Turkey's role in the alliance, particularly given

Erdogan's crackdown and incursions into Iraq. Sure, NATO may find exceptions for Turkey that it wouldn't for the US. But it is a complex time.

This may be unpopular. But I actually think President-elect Trump's skepticism about NATO may have some upside.

I say that, first of all, because NATO has increasingly played a force multiplying effect on stupid American wars. That is actually the one area where Trump has been positive of NATO – asking them to do more in our stupid wars in the Middle East. But it's one area where European countries have doubts. So maybe Trump will make it harder to use NATO to legitimize US invasions.

NATO also serves as the pole of the US-Europe relationship that gives the US the key leadership role, a way to bypass the EU itself to push dubious policy. Curiously, NATO is what Theresa May pointed to as the cement of the post-Brexit relationship. But what if Europe decides they need to develop their own capacities, and with them gain more independence from the US?

Sure, most of these discussions will be about perceived Russia aggression in Eastern Europe. It's unclear how much Trump's soft side for Putin will affect events in Eastern Europe (and whether Trump will be smart enough not to get completely rolled by Putin).

But NATO has increasingly become an offensive alliance, not a defensive one. Maybe it's time to rein in that part of it?