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Patrick Lawrence:

‘Brain Dead’ & Dangerous, NATO Proceeds

The trans-Atlantic alliance’s true purpose of global dominance is too objectionable to profess. Instead, it operates on the basis of fantastic conjurings, which no member questions.



NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg addressing the alliance’s 75th anniversary celebratory event in Washington on July 9. (NATO/Flickr, CC BY-NC-ND 2.0)

It is now five years since Emmanuel Macron, in one of those blunt outbursts for which he is known, told *The Economist*, in a reference to the collective West, “What we are currently experiencing is the brain death of NATO.”

The French president thereupon shocked officials across the Continent. “That is not my point of view,” Angela Merkel responded augustly. “I don’t think that such sweeping judgments are necessary.” Heiko Maas, the German chancellor’s foreign minister, added imaginatively, “I do not believe NATO is brain dead.”

The North Atlantic Treaty Organization celebrated its 75th anniversary last week, 32 presidents and prime ministers assembling in the same Washington auditorium where earlier leaders, 12 of them then, signed its founding treaty on April 4, 1949.

Joe Biden presided over the anniversary proceedings, of course. And with this in mind, let us credit the French leader for his prescience in diagnosing the condition of NATO’s cerebral matter.

As Joe Lauria put it in a *Consortium News* commentary at the summit’s conclusion last Thursday, this is an organization whose members are collectively losing their minds.

It is important to understand what Macron did and did not mean with this remark. He was not, as might be easily misinterpreted, declaring the North Atlantic Treaty Organization purposeless or obsolete: That was Donald Trump’s line, and Trump was then three years into his presidency.

Macron, indeed, was reacting to Trump’s complaints about the alliance as a budgetary sinkhole and his, Trump’s, consequent failure to point the other members in the imperium’s desired direction, as all American presidents had since NATO’s launch as the Atlantic world’s premier Cold War military institution.

Specific to the occasion of his interview with *The Economist*, Macron was unhappy about the mess then unfolding in northern Syria. Some readers may recall it: Trump had ordered American troops withdrawn — albeit an order diplomats, Army officers, and spooks soon subverted — and Turkey, a NATO member, had immediately piled in to attack Kurdish militias based in the region.

“You have no coordination whatsoever of strategic decision-making between the United States and its NATO allies. None,” Macron told *The Economist*. “You have an uncoordinated aggressive action by another NATO ally, Turkey, in an area where our interests are at stake. There has been no NATO planning, nor any coordination.”

And then the French leader’s punchline: “We should reassess the reality of what NATO is in light of the commitment of the United States.”

Macron's "brain dead" remark was not the thought of any kind of peacenik, then. The man who now advocates sending French troops into Ukraine is a committed militarist. What interests me about Macron's apparently bold utterances, again and again, are the contradictions you find in them.

In this case, he was angry at Donald Trump for failing to let the Europeans pretend they had a say in alliance policy while taking the occasion to assert his then-new, now-familiar call for Europe to cultivate its "strategic autonomy."

This is the kind of thing — the self-doubt, the smoldering resentments, the fraying unity — that prompted President Biden to make revitalizing NATO a priority when he took office three and some years ago.

"Who's going to be able to hold NATO together like me?" was prominent among his boasts in his July 5 interview with ABC News's George Stephanopoulos. "You're going to have now the NATO conference here in the United States next week. Come listen. See what they say."

The anniversary summit has come and gone. And two realities are now upon us. The other alliance leaders in attendance didn't say anything of consequence — not a single statement of note.

It was boilerplate and pabulum, start to finish. Two, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization is nicely reunited — "Together Again," as the old Buck Owens song goes — but there can be no doubting now that it is brain dead.

Here is something frightening to consider. This is Larry Johnson's take on the question that occupied minds during the July 9–11 gathering. Johnson, who now commentates regularly, is a former C.I.A. officer and also served previously in the State Department's Office of Counter Terrorism. Don't let the vulgar imagery throw you; it is indicative of the prevailing mood:

"The hot political event this year is the NATO Summit in Washington. All Western world leaders showed up, not to discuss NATO's future, but to see if Joe Biden survives the meetings without dumping a load in his Depends or keeling over dead. Sort of the same reason people attend a car race—i.e., they are waiting for the crash. Nothing like a fiery car wreck to get the adrenaline pumping."

We need to think about what it means when NATO members meet and what is on their minds are not the various crises into which they have led the world over the past many years but whether the man whose authority lies effectively beyond question will manage to deliver an address coherently.

Frightening, Not Funny



From left: Biden, NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg and Macron on July 10. (NATO/Flickr, CC BY-NC-ND 2.0)

We can laugh at President Biden’s public displays of ineptitude, and there were some of these, per usual, as he addressed the summit and then gave a press conference afterward. But I didn’t say funny: I said frightening. And this is what NATO has become during Biden’s three and a half years as the alliance’s de facto commander-in-chief.

Yes, Biden introduced Volodymyr Zelensky to the summit as “President Putin.” Yes, he confused his vice-president with the nonexistent “Vice-President Trump.” But it seems time now to look beyond ridicule. It is certainly time for the mainstream media to cut out the everybody-makes-mistakes nonsense.

Biden has made himself a sad figure these past few weeks, a character reading a little out of Shakespeare and a little out of Sophocles. But the NATO summit faces us with the bitter reality that Joe Biden has become, above all, dangerous.

Is there another way to think about a man listing into senility while directing an inordinately powerful military alliance whose members know how to defer and follow but do not know how to think?

I was struck last week by the sparsity of the coverage American media dedicated to the summit. Some stories on Biden making it to the end of his presentations — the summit address, the presser that followed — without blowing it too badly. Markedly fewer given to the substance of the gathering.

It seemed to me a tacit suggestion that nothing new was said or determined during the July 9–11 sessions. It was simply more of the same, and more of the same does not make good copy in the news biz.

Let us consider what the same comes to, and then what it means that more of the same is on the way. To preview my conclusions, NATO has just committed the West’s post-democracies to an era of institutionalized war, global violence, and disorder — this with, by design, no plan to end it. The same threat of annihilation familiar to those who recall the Cold War will prevail once again.

Spending on armaments will take automatic priority over the well-being of the societies paying for this profligacy. Russia and China will be normalized as permanent enemies. The West’s estrangement from the non-West will be an established fact of life.

The Deep State, an entrenched trans-Atlantic phenomenon now, will ally with liberal authoritarian elites to enforce this regime and suppress all those who question or challenge it.

Denial Required



NATO Secretary General Stoltenberg and Zelenskyy on July 10. (NATO/Flickr, CC BY-NC-ND 2.0)

There is no overstatement here. This is precisely the project America’s neoconservative cliques outlined when the Soviet Union collapsed in 1991 and a decade of American triumphalism ensued. You will find all of this in the subtext of Biden’s keynote address as the 75th events opened.

The remarkable thing now is the degree of denial required of NATO’s leaders as they profess adherence to this agenda in a world radically transformed in the ensuing three decades.

After praising the “remarkable progress” of European members that are spending ever more on weaponry — what a terrific thing — Biden went straight into the proxy war the alliance wages in Ukraine against the Russian Federation.

Among his various assertions: “Ukraine can and will stop Putin,” “Make no mistake, Russia is failing in this war,” “We’ve built a global coalition to stand with Ukraine.” “An overwhelming bipartisan majority of Americans understand that NATO makes us all safer.” And then one of my favorites, a recurring theme and a real Bidenism:

“And Putin wants nothing less — nothing less than Ukraine’s total subjugation. And we know Putin will not stop at Ukraine.”

The high officials listening greeted all of these statements with enthusiasm. None of them bears even a remote relationship with the truth.

In an interview with Andrew Napolitano taped for *Judging Freedom*, conducted after the summit ended July 11, John Mearsheimer, the foreign policy scholar, called Biden’s speech “poppycock, full of deluded statements.”

But exactly. Reading the transcript of these remarks, all the intervals of applause noted in brackets, NATO seemed to me too Soviet for words at this point. I thought of those Cold War *Life* magazine photos of the Russian Duma when votes were taken, all hands raised uniformly in assent.

This is the trans-Atlantic alliance as it has become. It operates on the basis of fantastic conjurings, and no member questions them. You have read absolutely no mainstream media challenging these silly fabrications and none analyzing NATO’s purpose or policies with any seriousness.

This is what I mean by frightening. This is what makes NATO as it is now dangerous. Its stated purpose makes no sense and its unstated purpose is as noted above.

And here is the diabolic truth it is important not to miss: Biden and everyone in his summit audience knows Ukraine is losing its war, knows Moscow has no designs on Europe, knows there is no “global coalition” standing with the alliance. These are simple facts beyond dispute, matters of record.

But Biden’s speech was not meant for the other leaders present and the other leaders present did not applaud for Biden: Biden’s true audience was the public in the trans-Atlantic post-democracies, and the applause he received amounted to their instructions in the necessity to approve.

NATO summits as performance, as exercises in mass propaganda conducted entirely in the open: I confess I cannot fully register the implications of an organization as powerful as the Atlantic alliance operating this emptily and cynically.

NATO has a purpose all right, but its political figureheads, generals, and bureaucrats must make one up for public consumption, its actual purpose — global dominance at whatever cost —being too objectionable to profess.



Meeting of the NATO-Ukraine Council at the Washington Summit on July 11. (NATO/Flickr, CC BY-NC-ND 2.0)

As to more of the same, the anniversary summit appears to mark a turn in the alliance toward complete abandonment of the pretense of NATO as a defensive organization in favor of increasingly aggressive, provocative postures.

Antony Blinken, speaking in the course of the proceedings, termed the thought of Ukraine’s membership in the alliance “inevitable and irreversible,” awaiting the Kiev regime across “a well-lit bridge.” I read this two ways. One, Biden and his policy cliques are doing what they can, which is limited, to reassure Ukraine in anticipation of a possible Trump victory in November.

Two and closer to the ground, as Kiev continues to lose on the battlefield, NATO now intends to signal that settlement talks are out of the question and the alliance will plunge deeper into the morass however deep the morass eventually proves. To wit: John Helmer, a long-serving and highly reliable Moscow correspondent who now publishes *Dances with Bears*, reported last week,

“American, British, and Canadian troops in NATO’s forward bases in Poland, Latvia, and Lithuania are being told to prepare for deployment to the Ukraine next year. They are also being warned to expect to fight under heavy Russian artillery, missile, guided bomb, and drone strikes.”

Note the nations from which these troops will be dispatched to the Ukrainian front. They are all former Soviet satellites nursing quite understandable but lethally unbalanced cases of anti-Russian paranoia.

This is how aggression is sometimes engendered in the long-term war against Russia. Ukraine relies on the same visceral anti-Russian animus by way of the neo-Nazi units that lead its military.

“And here with us — and here with us today are countries from the Indo-Pacific region,” Biden said midway in his address. “They’re here because they have a stake in our success and we have a stake in theirs.”

I do not like this remark one bit. I read it as a barely veiled confirmation of a swell of hints and innuendo last year to the effect that NATO intends to expand its purview to East Asia, so following the U.S. in its gradually escalating confrontation with China.

As if on cue, Jens Stoltenberg, NATO’s outgoing sec-gen, subsequently launched into an utterly inappropriate attack on China for “oppressing its own people,” for “crushing democratic voices,” for “more assertive behavior in the South China Sea,” for “threatening neighbors, threatening Taiwan,” and so on down the list of complaints Blinken and the Biden regime’s policy cliques favor when addressing the Chinese.

NATO in Asia is now to be taken with the utmost seriousness. It is NATO now and the NATO to come — brain dead NATO, NATO everywhere with no legitimate business anywhere. Shortly after Stoltenberg delivered himself of his preposterous tirade, Biden hung the Presidential Medal of Freedom around his neck.

Patrick Lawrence, a correspondent abroad for many years, chiefly for the International Herald Tribune, is a columnist, essayist, lecturer and author, most recently of Journalists and Their Shadows, available from Clarity Press or via Amazon. Other books include Time No Longer: Americans After the American Century. His Twitter account, @thefloutist, has been permanently censored.

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