

Germany and America's Fluctuating World Order

News:

German Chancellor Angela Merkel stood by her suggestion that Europe can no longer entirely rely on the US and declared that Germany and China can work together to help calm the world's problems. Welcoming Chinese President Xi Jinping to Berlin, Merkel said their pre-summit meeting was "a good opportunity to expand and broaden our extensive strategic relations [\[independent\]](#)." Hence, the question arises, whether Germany is strong enough to displace American primacy both in Europe and on global issues?

Comment:

Speculation about Germany dominating world affairs has been rife ever since the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989. Nevertheless, it was only after Merkel's visit to Washington that Germany emerged as a serious contender to American hegemony in Europe. Speaking at a rally in Munich in May 2017, Merkel told the audience that Europe could no longer rely on Britain and America, and Europe had to fight for its own future. She said, "The times in which we could completely depend on others are, to a certain extent, over. We have to know that we must fight for our future on our own, for our destiny as Europeans." [\[the guardian\]](#) The remarks were widely viewed by some observers that Germany had finally come to terms about its responsibility to lead the liberal world order. Opponents contend, Germany is incapable of leading and does not pose a challenge to America's global primacy. The derivation of both views stems from Europe's history of balance of power and Germany's role in disturbing this balance (peace).

Prior to the Treaty of Rome in 1957, the dominant method of organizing relations between European states was the balance of power system. Founded in the aftermath of Westphalian agreements in 1648, Europe employed balance of power to maintain peace on the continent. The system works when a group of states forces the aggressor state—usually through war and at a huge cost—to change its behaviour and return to equilibrium (state of manufactured peace). The guarantor of peace is the most powerful state which, through its military might, offers security to small European states. For instance, Britain, along with a number of European states, forced France to stop its hostility during the Napoleonic Wars (1803–1815). In the 20th century, a collection of European states joined forces to roll back the belligerent behaviour of Germany in WWI and in WWII. Throughout this period, only two non-European powers acted as guarantors of peace. For almost two hundred years, the Ottoman Khilafah provided security assurances to Europe and assumed the role of the external guarantor. Since 1945, America has played the chief role of guarantor on the continent.

Proponents of German power assert Germany has successfully overcome the shackles of NATO, adoption of the Euro, and EU expansion to become the pre-eminent power in Europe. In their view, Germany's powerful economy dwarfs the economies of several European countries which was made possible by the global financial crises in 2008 and the subsequent austerity measures imposed on Southern Europe and work ethics. Moreover, its institutions lead the institutions of the EU, such as the European Central Bank, and German military presence in Afghanistan and elsewhere has increased appetite for militarism. This, combined with the continued trade imbalance with America and Trump's threat of punitive tariffs on German imports, emphasize the ascendancy of German power. Furthermore, with

Britain out of the EU and France looking to rebuild its economy in Germany's image, there is an increasing realization that important decisions regarding the EU are made in Berlin and not Brussels. Therefore, Merkel's remarks are not viewed with suspicion but are interpreted as a natural extension of German aspiration to assume the role of Europe's foremost continental power.

Meanwhile, detractors have a different reading of history and point out that Germany at best is a reluctant hegemon unable to provide leadership when it really counts. The German Reich (1871-1943) has been disastrous in leading Europe in the past, and this weighs negatively on the psyche of Germans today. Germans are sometimes hesitant to take the lead because they believe that Europe will react negatively to their assertiveness. The global financial crisis, followed by the euro crisis, the Greek debt crisis, the Ukrainian conflict and the recent refugee problem, exemplify this problem—German leadership has floundered on all accounts. Perhaps a more salient problem for Germany is its inability to project power abroad. Preoccupation with Europe has meant that Germany for decades prioritized its economy over military strength. Germany eschewed nuclear weapons and did not bolster its military compared to rival powers—this in part was due to the restriction imposed by NATO, US and Russia. Militaries of Britain and France are more powerful thus enabling them to pursue foreign policy outside the purview of the EU. German has yet to meet its 2% of GDP commitment to NATO—a focus of Trump's recent broadside against Merkel. Without military muscle, it is impossible for Germany to supplant America as a provider of European security and to stand against Russian aggression and act globally. On a global scale, Germany relies on American protection of sea routes to benefit from commerce and trade.

Based on the foregoing, it is unlikely for Germany to oppose America on security matters. Careful not to upset neighbors like Poland, it is anticipated that Germany will legitimately work through the EU to build up its military capacity. At the same time, Germany is likely to use other great powers, like China and Russia, to oppose America on global issues, such as climate change, global trade and other pressing issues. This implies that German ascendancy to great power status will be slow and muddled. The latter can only be minimized when Germany's political class makes a successful transition from economic matters to solving political problems of the world. The involvement of Germany's foreign minister in the dispute between Qatar and Saudi Arabia is an indication that this transformation is underway.

Charting Germany's rise is important for the sons of the Muslim ummah to pursue and comprehend. Understanding the fluctuations in the international order and exploiting it for the benefit for the Ummah is a duty upon aspiring Islamic politicians. Germany is one of the few European countries that did not colonize the Muslim world and maintained good relations with the Ottoman Caliphate - Khilafah. Invariably, the future Khilafah state will look to prevent Europe's constant interference in Muslim lands and may use Germany to accomplish this task.

Written for the Central Media Office of Hizb ut Tahrir by

Abdul Majeed Bhatti