

Obama visits Berlin after Trump's victory

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Departing US President Barack Obama arrived in the German capital Berlin yesterday evening and met with Chancellor Angela Merkel. At meetings scheduled for today and Friday, both will meet with French President François Hollande and other European leaders.

This is Obama's eighth visit to Germany, if his summer 2008 speech at the Victory Column prior to taking office is included. On that occasion, Obama made a rhetorical speech about the many years of German-US friendship and their joint victory over communism. The media celebrated his speech and wrote repeatedly about "Obamamania."

Today the situation has changed entirely. The transatlantic relationship has reached a low-point. After the initial shock over Trump's election victory, there is a new tone among German politicians and in the media: under President Trump, America can no longer be accepted as the leader of the West. The American century has come to an end. Germany must assume greater responsibility and can no longer subordinate itself to US policy.

The fact that Obama greeted Trump at the White House and declared that he would use the rest of his term in office to ensure a seamless transition of government was closely observed in the Chancellor's Office in Berlin. Obama is seen as the trailblazer for Trump and this is how his latest Berlin visit is being judged.

"All of a sudden Barack Obama is speaking on behalf of Donald Trump. What does this all mean?" the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* asked Wednesday in its "Issue of the day" column. The newspaper referred to Obama as "Donald Trump's press spokesman" who was coming to Berlin to alleviate German concerns about the president-elect. The article quoted Obama as saying, "In my discussions with the future president, he showed great interest in maintaining our most important strategic partnerships. So I can deliver the

message that he feels obligated to NATO and the Transatlantic alliance."

But there is considerable doubt about this. "What Trump is in fact planning for foreign policy still remains unclear," the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* wrote, and noted that his decisions thus far about future personnel did not look promising.

Handelsblatt also wrote that Obama wanted to calm Europe's fears over Trump, and added, "But Obama's credibility has been shaken." Last summer, he sought to prevent the British people from adopting the path of Brexit and "he repeatedly reassured: Trump will not become president. The result in both cases is well known."

Obama noted during his visit to Athens on Tuesday that the alliance between Europe and America remained "the cornerstone of our common security and well-being." "But why should the Europeans believe him now?" *Handelsblatt* asked, before referring to Obama as a "tragic loser."

Europe is already rearming for a worst-case scenario and will strengthen its defence capacities. Because France faces a leadership crisis, the paper continued, "the main responsibility of holding Europe together falls to Merkel." In the US, there is also already talk of the end of the "Pax Americana," with *Foreign Policy* magazine writing of the "Pax Germanica."

Of all governments, Merkel and the German government, whose policies have produced social destruction across the continent and increased opposition to the European Union, are now being cast as the saviours of the "liberal values of the West."

Handelsblatt also went on to remark, "The question is whether Germany is ready for this role—and if the Chancellor can survive the coming months on the domestic political front. Trump's election victory is also a triumph for the AfD."

Der Spiegel described Trump's election victory as

the end of an era and titled one piece, “The end of the world as we know it.” Trump was an “absurd president.” He would “become the democratically legitimate 45th president of the US” on 20 January, but he would remain “a dangerous man.” He was dangerously “inattentive, imbalanced, inexperienced and dangerously racist.” Trump believed in the superiority of the white race, and if he implemented the most extreme of his vicious announcements, he would not be the first elected head of state to do so. “[...]Trump has now said f*ck the Latinos and thus insinuated the superiority of those left behind. As bluntly as in Germany 80 years ago.”

Obama’s attempt to downplay the dangers posed by Trump during his Berlin visit and claim that nothing much will change has not calmed the fear and concerns in Europe, but rather strengthened them. The memory of the German catastrophe, when the underworld seized power in the form of the Nazis in the 1930s, is very much alive. Everyone knows where that led.

But the ruling elite in Germany has no progressive response to Trump. Instead, it is utilising the opportunity to strengthen the same reactionary forces and press ahead energetically with the long-planned strengthening of the state apparatus at home and abroad.

Even prior to the election result, the government-aligned German Institute for Foreign Affairs (SWP) think tank published a paper entitled, “Even without Trump, much will change.” The authors called for a more aggressive German and European foreign policy that is, “regardless of the election result,” capable of enforcing its own geopolitical and economic interests more independently of and if necessary against Washington.

“With Trump as president [...] there would be a high degree of uncertainty about US foreign policy,” the paper stated. Germany could “certainly not depend on Trump’s unpredictability and extreme positions being ‘reined in’, either by a staff of advisors, the cabinet, the military or Congress.”

Germany had to break from its dependence on the United States and “think about how the Transatlantic relationship and the future world order is to be framed.” This required substantially more resources for its own security and the securing of its own interests.

The decision, only days after Trump’s victory, to

name Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier as the joint candidate for the German presidency of the governing Christian Democratic Union/Christian Social Union and Social Democratic parties is directly connected to this new role for Germany.

Steinmeier is one of the main advocates of a new German imperialist policy. In mid-June, he published an article in the leading foreign policy journal in the US, *Foreign Affairs*, entitled “Germany’s new global role.” In it, he described Germany as a “significant European power,” which was being forced to “newly define the basic principles that have guided its foreign policy for half a century.”

Steinmeier justifies Germany’s great power ambitions by referring to the terrible consequences of US policy, particularly in the Middle East.

Notwithstanding all attempts by soon-to-be ex-President Obama to downplay the international consequences of the new administration in the US, Trump’s election has initiated a new stage in Transatlantic relations, which will be characterised by sharp tensions and shocks.



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