

# **A much-needed Trump victory: Germany keeps its promise**

President Trump has been having a rough few weeks and could use a win. So why isn't he crowing about what seems to be an important victory in getting Germany to pay its fair share for defense of the Western world?

It's no secret that Trump and Germany's chancellor, Angela Merkel, regard one another warily. They have different world views and little regard for each other's opinions. Yet, the president has achieved a major – if largely overlooked – win: Merkel's government has pledged to live up to its promise to increase its funding of NATO, the defense alliance to which both the U.S. and Germany belong.

Merkel committed to earmark two percent of German gross domestic product for NATO by 2024, a significant increase from the 1.2 percent it currently contributes. Trump made no new friends when he scolded other leaders when they gathered in Brussels last May for coming up short on NATO financing.

Merkel, in particular, took umbrage at being lectured. But Trump's harsh message apparently got through to her. Now running for a fourth term as German chancellor, Merkel has said she'll follow through on her pledge. Separately, Germany's spending on its own military is up eight percent over last year. That's another significant win for Trump, since Germany is the most powerful and richest European member of the alliance.

Ironically, Merkel's principled position has become a campaign issue in Germany, where national elections on September 24 will determine who leads the government. Merkel is currently favored to defeat her left-wing Socialist opponent, Martin Schulz.

Perhaps hoping to appeal to Germany's significant pacifist population, Schulz has told cheering rallies of supporters that Germany should go back on its NATO funding promise. He went so far as to say that doing what it promised to do is "a really mad idea."

Which is strange, since the Social Democratic Party that Schulz heads endorsed the NATO spending goal when it was first introduced three years ago. Schulz is

trying to tie Merkel to Trump in the German public's eye, disregarding the fact that the two leaders clearly dislike each other.

Germany needs the U.S. and the U.S. needs Germany to play an active role in defending the West. Merkel might not like handing Trump a win on that issue, but she's done just that with her promise. She deserves credit for keeping her word.

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