

# Opinion

## The Finlandization of the United States

Trump's ideological sympathies lie more with Putin than with America's allies.



Roger Cohen

**MADRID** Over the next week, President Trump will visit Europe to call on allies, get in some golf and then meet President Vladimir Putin in Helsinki. He'll no doubt feel more comfortable with the Russian leader, whom he considers "fine," than with freeloading NATO partners who, he says, treat Americans as "schmucks."

If the issue were purely mercantile — European allies don't pay enough for their defense — it might be manageable, even salutary. It's not. Trump's ideological sympathies lie with Putin's autocracy and its democratic veneer. He's in the Putin camp against the Western liberal democracy of, say, Angela Merkel in Germany. Trump's a paid-up member of the growing illiberal authoritarian international movement.

The Finlandization of Trump's United States is pretty much complete. Trump won't oppose Putin's Russia under any circumstances. In some way, it's worse than Finlandization. Trump's not neutral, as Finland was during the Cold War. He leans Moscow, but is still offset to some degree by the honorable Americans of the State Department and the Pentagon.

To fail to see this is to invite disaster. Trump is not an unusual American president with contrarian ideas. He is an off-the-charts repudiation of everything the United States has stood for since 1945: representative government, liberty, the rule of law, free trade, a rules-based international order, open societies, pluralism and human rights.

He refuses to see that as freedom and stability spread, undergirded by NATO and the European Union, American prosperity grew. For him, the European Union was "set up to take advantage" of the United States — a preposterous charge.

Traveling from Madrid to beautiful Segovia the other day, in a line of traffic full of Spaniards fleeing the capital for the weekend, I gazed out on a wealthy country. Spain was poor and under a dictatorship a little more than four decades ago.

That's what the European Union does. It's a transformative peace magnet delivering democratic stability and prosperity to more than a half-billion people. That's why the United States has always supported it.

A European who visited Trump recently tells me he was shocked by two things: the president's venom against European allies that don't buy enough American goods even as they ask the United States to protect them, and his paeon to the new xenophobic Italian government that, in Trump's view, is



PETE GAMLEN

finally getting with the anti-immigrant program.

There is no talking the president out of his views, this visitor reports, say by mentioning the European contribution to the war in Afghanistan or the fact that the United States is the union's biggest trading partner. No, Trump just knows.

If you told him a plane falls out of the sky when it runs out of fuel, and the president's gut told him otherwise, he'd stick to his line. His eyes would glaze over as you tried to persuade him otherwise.

Trump's with Matteo Salvini, the Italian interior minister from the anti-immigrant League party. He's with Viktor Orban, the Hungarian prime minister who is successfully exporting across Europe his illiberal template for

a closed democracy that can produce only one election result. This is Europe's new strategic reality.

The NATO summit in Brussels could be a fiasco, like last month's Group of 7 meeting in Canada. Trump might express an indulgent view of Putin's annexation of Crimea. He might say he won't honor Article 5 of the NATO treaty (the obligation of all NATO members to defend one another if one is attacked) for countries that don't pay enough. Or he might just be on his best behavior.

Whatever he does, European allies have no doubts: The trust that is the ultimate bond of any alliance has been broken by Trump. Europe needs to stand up for itself and the values Trump tramples.

The question remains: Why is Trump in Putin's thrall? He may be compromised, whether by Russian intelligence or money. He's certainly drawn to Putin's bare-chested strongman style. Russia is not taking advantage of the United States on trade, Trump believes, but he is convinced China and the European Union are. Russia is anti-NATO and anti-E.U., exactly like Trump, and for similar reasons. They both want to disaggregate the union. Why? Because they want to deal with small European nations, and so be better placed to bully them.

These are the sympathies behind Trump's push to get Russia back into the G-7 and his willingness to contemplate recognizing Russia's illegal annexation of Crimea, even as he won't dis-

cuss Russian interference in the 2016 American presidential election.

European peace since 1945 has depended on acceptance of the principle that the presence of national minorities in other countries — in this case, ethnic Russians in Ukraine — is not a pretext for war or annexation. Putin flouted that twice, in eastern Ukraine and Crimea. If Trump blinks, all bets are off.

"Nothing." Jake Sullivan, a former senior foreign policy adviser to Hillary Clinton and national security adviser to Joe Biden, said when asked what he hoped for out of the Helsinki summit. I agree. Nothing would be good when giveaways on Crimea or a compromised NATO are the alternative. The Finlandized must be grateful for small mercies.

## Deporting the American dream

We talked to hundreds of people sent to Mexico. They haven't given up on their hopes for a better life.

Anita Isaacs  
Anne Preston

**MEXICO CITY** To hear the Trump administration talk about the immigrants it has deported back to Mexico, you would think they were all criminals and potential drains on the nation's economy and welfare system, with no interest in participating in what used to be called the American dream.

In fact, none of that is true. We know, because the two of us talked to hundreds of them.

Over the last few weeks we were in Mexico, beginning an oral history project documenting the migrant experience. Over the course of three weeks our team surveyed and interviewed more than 200 returning Mexican migrants, the vast majority of them deportees. Some were caught in roadblocks. Others were pulled over for running a stop light or for speeding. They were detained in American county jails and immigration detention centers before being sent to Mexico. Many had lived in the United States almost their entire lives.

And yet, despite that experience, when we asked them what they missed about the United States, their responses were automatic: "everything." "I feel American," they told us over and over again. And why wouldn't they? They grew up as the kids next door. They went to our children's schools and birthday parties. They attended our churches, played on our sports teams. As high schoolers they flipped hamburgers at McDonald's.

But they also always had it a little rougher. Occasionally they faced discrimination. Their parents worked multiple jobs, often seven days a week. They left home before their children woke up and returned long after they were asleep. Children as young as 8 shouldered the burdens of caring for

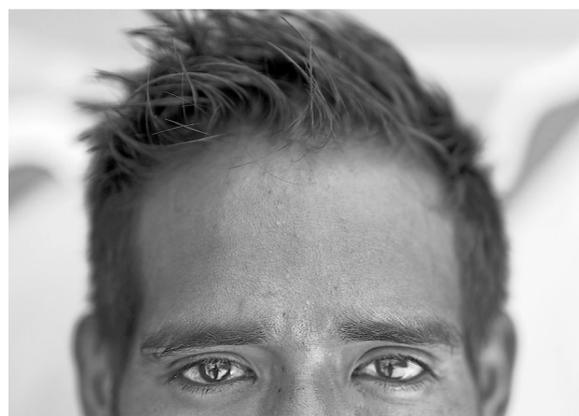
younger siblings. They began working as soon as they reached high school. But their unauthorized status limited their job opportunities; they couldn't get a driver's license and college was a remote possibility. Some got into the same kind of trouble native-born children do, but most worked hard to keep their families afloat.

Still, the American dream meant everything to them. In optimistic terms rarely heard from native-born Americans, they described the United States as a place where success was possible. Whether they lived in a big city or small town, in a red state or a blue state, they overwhelmingly recall an American society that was genuine, open, diverse and accepting.

One man teared up remembering his childhood friend, Matthew, with whom he played baseball, swam in the neighborhood pool and shared tacos and mac and cheese. Another missed ice fishing on frozen Minnesota lakes, using snowmobiles fashioned with special drills that he helped assemble through his work at a fiberglass factory. He shared another memory: After introducing his friends to guacamole, they insisted on eating at his place. "We had an arrangement: They'd bring the avocados," he'd make the dip.

A young woman recalled being terrified of having her friends discover her unauthorized status. When she finally found the courage to tell them, they reassured her that they couldn't care less, and laughingly nicknamed her the "alien."

Each deportee stressed the kindness of ordinary Americans who lent a helping hand. Bosses who gave them a chance, appreciated their hard work, mentored their success. Teachers whose names are etched in their memories: Mr. McDonald, Mrs. Wilson, Miss Annie — all went the extra mile to help them succeed in school. Coaches made it possible for them to play on club soccer or mighty mites football teams by paying their dues and buying them



MARCO TAMA/GETTY IMAGES

A man in Tijuana, Mexico, who was deported after having lived in America since age 5.

the uniforms their parents couldn't afford. A young man cried, remembering the marine who helped him find his way as a troubled adolescent.

Back in Mexico, these returning migrants are desperately struggling to find their place in a foreign country. One young woman returning from Fort Myers, Fla., said, "I didn't even know what Mexican earth was like and whether the sun shone."

The returnees stand out. They dress differently, they think differently, they speak broken Spanish and they dream in English. They miss everyday American life and its special occasions. They long for American food, rattling off every conceivable American chain restaurant. Several insist that Mexican tacos couldn't begin to compete with Taco Bell. They are American football fans rather than soccer aficionados. A handful confess they aren't following the World Cup because the United States didn't qualify.

They can still proudly recite the Pledge of Allegiance and sing the United States national anthem. They loved observing United States holidays and several still do even back in Mexico. On Thanksgiving they expressed gratitude for opportunities the United States provided them. On July 4, they celebrated a country where "everyone praises each other's successes."

They reminisce about living in a country governed by the rule of law. Our survey asks them whether they were fearful of United States authorities. Except for the newest deportees who experienced the recent crackdowns, respondents react with a quizzical look, followed by an almost universal "no." They surprise themselves with their answers, because as undocumented migrants they had every reason to be fearful. Yet the vast majority contrast the crime, corruption and lawlessness that pervades Mexico with the safety they felt in the United States, a place

they describe as one "where police can't be bribed," "where people obey rules" and "where kids can play safely outside."

Separated from their families and friends, many live immersed in childhood memories. Others, like Israel Concha, the director of New Comienzos, an organization of returning migrants with which we collaborated, have become activists committed to bringing the American dream to Mexico. They enact practices and values they acquired in the United States, notably volunteerism, a custom foreign to many Mexicans but "something we all learned to do in the United States," Mr. Concha explains.

We watched these volunteer workers reach out to the scores of returning Mexican migrants who pass through their doors every day. They are always welcoming and upbeat. They encourage those who feel isolated to join their team. They link those who suffer depression with counseling centers. They provide clothing to the destitute, accompany battered women to shelters and help returning migrants find job training and work opportunities.

These memories of migrant life in the United States stand in stark contrast to the inhumane crackdown simultaneously unfolding at the border. The returning migrants we met are products of an American society that is forgetting its identity. In a cruel irony, organizations like New Comienzos are importing to Mexico the American values of mutual respect, open-mindedness and generosity their volunteers were raised with. Meanwhile, American children are growing up in a society where aggression, prejudice and turning a blind eye to human suffering are increasingly condoned.

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