

# The U.S. Has a Power Vacuum Problem in Europe

That nature abhors a vacuum is a cliché but also a postulate about the immutable laws of nature. And once again, we're seeing the unchangeable rules of the physical world being replicated in human action—especially in foreign policy.

Exhibit A is Europe east of the Fulda Gap, where Obama appointees are still dictating American policy and a group of senators had a testy exchange with the combative leader of Hungary.

To be clear, there is no power vacuum when it comes to hot spots like Afghanistan, North Korea, and Syria, where the Trump Defense Department has acted decisively. Secretary of State Rex Tillerson has also personally handled the Russian front.

The world is vast, however, and Tillerson is only one man. The absence of assistant secretaries for Africa, Europe, Asia, the Middle East, South Asia and the Western Hemisphere has left these areas with a lack of direction.

The void will be filled by others.

Eleven senators (two Republicans and nine Democrats) on April 19 wrote a letter to Hungary's prime minister, Viktor Orban, expressing their concern about a law they say aims to close Central European University, an accredited U.S. university in Budapest.

"Central European University has become one of the highest-ranked universities in Europe, bringing new opportunities and prestige to Hungarian citizens," wrote the senators. ... "This legislation threatens academic freedom and disregards the longstanding relationship Central European University has with

the Hungarian people.”

What the group of senators—including such powerful personalities as John McCain, R-Ariz., and Dianne Feinstein, D-Calif.—didn’t mention is the nub of the problem: The university was founded and funded by the U.S. billionaire George Soros, a Hungarian-born hedge funder who uses his vast fortune to advocate progressive causes around the world.

Orban, in his response to the senators, did not mince words about Soros, whom he mentioned six times in a short, one-page letter.

“In our country, laws are passed by elected representatives, based on our constitution,” began Orban’s brushback missive, which I have seen.

After reassuring the senators that the Hungarian Constitution guarantees freedom of education and research, the prime minister added, “therefore, any assumption that presumes the breach of these principles by the Hungarian National Assembly is unreasonable.”

“I would like to reassure you that no one wants to close the University of George Soros,” he wrote, adding that “Soros’ network of Central European NGOs are at the heart” of what Orban referred to as an “international disinformation campaign against Hungary.”

“The university is just a pretense,” Orban added. “The real issue,” he said, was Soros’ desire for Hungary to open its borders to immigrants.

Hungary, Orban wrote, would soon draw up legislation mirrored on the United States’ Foreign Agents Registration Act, which requires agents representing the interests of foreign governments in a “political or quasi-political capacity” disclose this link.

Universities, especially foreign ones, are heavily regulated around the world, and liberals have never shied away from regulating schools, especially religious ones. At the same time, it is true that many U.S. scholars have echoed the senators' concerns about whether Orban's moves will have a chilling effect on academic freedom.

Orban himself is hard to pin down. He is rightly trying to salvage Hungarian independence from encroachment by the European Union. But he has also flirted with friendship with Russian President Vladimir Putin, an adversary of America and the West.

Backing the left-wing causes advocated by Soros, however, does anger potential U.S. allies. Among other things, Soros supports decriminalizing prostitution and drug possession and changing Ireland's Constitution to allow abortion.

Being seen on the side of that can and does cannibalize political support from foreign politicians and cause political parties in these regions to turn increasingly to Putin's opportunistic diplomacy.

Six GOP senators have written to Tillerson to ask him to investigate whether under President Barack Obama the State Department and the U.S. Agency for International Development worked with groups funded by Soros "to push a progressive agenda and invigorate the political left." Their letter never got to Tillerson, and their request for a probe was ignored.

Having an assistant secretary for Europe and Eurasia who can set down the Trump administration's policies, appoint his own deputy assistants and transmit information to Tillerson would help all this.

Right now, European policy for this region appears to be run by Hoyt Brian Yee, an Obama-era deputy assistant secretary of state who seems to have gone rogue with regards not just to Hungary but also Macedonia and Albania. Yee continues to give

his support to leftist politicians and causes throughout the region, without the approval or blessing of the White House, the National Security Council or, apparently, even Tillerson.

Appointments appear to be delayed because a reorganization of the State Department is coming. That's not necessarily a bad thing. The Trump administration told Politico last month that "the president will not name a special envoy for climate change." So, yes, some of it can be good.

But we need political appointments in top places. Lest we forget, World War I began in the Balkans. {eoa}

**Mike Gonzalez** is a senior fellow at The Heritage Foundation and a widely experienced international correspondent, commentator and editor who has reported from Asia, Europe and Latin America. He served in the George W. Bush administration, first at the Securities and Exchange Commission and then at the State Department, and is the author of *A Race for the Future: How Conservatives Can Break the Liberal Monopoly on Hispanic Americans*.

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