

# ISSUE BRIEF

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## Key Recommendations for President Trump's White House Meeting with the German Chancellor

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President Donald Trump's meeting on Friday with German Chancellor Angela Merkel will be the first for the two leaders. Germany is a crucial security partner for the United States, with the largest economy in Europe; the decisions made by Germany impact transatlantic security. The new Administration should work to build a constructive relationship with Germany, advocating for the nation to take on greater responsibility within NATO, while pushing back against deeper European Union (EU) defense integration. President Trump and Chancellor Merkel should discuss how the two nations can work together to support the fight against Islamist terrorism, assist the people of Ukraine, and craft policies to reign in a revanchist Russia. Most importantly, the President should be clear that the U.S. remains committed to transatlantic security.

### **U.S. Commitment to Europe**

In his speech to Congress on March 1, President Trump reiterated the U.S. commitment to transatlantic security declaring: "We strongly support NATO."<sup>1</sup> Vice President Mike Pence and Defense Secretary James Mattis carried this same message during their visits to Europe in February.<sup>2</sup> In addition to reiterating the U.S. commitment to NATO and

collective defense, the President should make clear that the U.S. is committed to European security for the long haul. Reports that the U.S. Army has been scouting new locations in northern Germany for potential new basing sites for future deployments of U.S. troops is a good sign.<sup>3</sup> While new deployments would likely be better positioned in Eastern European NATO allies,<sup>4</sup> the return of additional U.S. forces to Western Europe would be a prudent decision.

President Trump should also discuss with Chancellor Merkel the need for Germany to increase its defense spending and take on a more robust role in fulfilling its commitment to collective defense. German defense spending has begun to increase, but is only expected to hit 1.22 percent of gross domestic product (GDP) this year.<sup>5</sup> While the Chancellor has politically committed to reaching the NATO benchmark of 2 percent of GDP,<sup>6</sup> conflicting signals between cabinet ministers in her government have led to questions about how serious Germany is about reaching that benchmark.<sup>7</sup> President Trump should encourage Chancellor Merkel to clarify her government's commitment to increased defense spending and encourage Germany to set a concrete timeline for achieving NATO benchmarks, embedding these commitments in legislation.

### **Sending the Right Message on Germany's Growing Defense Role**

Germany has begun to take on a larger role within the NATO alliance. It is one of four framework nations for NATO's Enhanced Forward Presence and recently deployed 450 troops to Lithuania.<sup>8</sup> As the largest economy in Europe and the second-most populous NATO member after the U.S., Germany is

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right to take on a larger role in bolstering collective defense. President Trump should encourage Germany to continue to play a role commensurate with its political and economic clout. Concurrently, President Trump should be clear that the U.S. recognizes deeper EU defense integration as undermining NATO. Recently, German Defense Minister Ursula von der Leyen hailed the opening of an EU headquarters for military operations abroad as “long overdue.”<sup>9</sup> Yet, creation of duplicative EU defense structures, such as the headquarters, undermines NATO by siphoning away scarce resources. President Trump should be frank with Chancellor Merkel that EU defense integration threatens to decouple the U.S. from European defense and is antithetical to U.S. interests. The U.S. should encourage Germany to focus its efforts and resources on becoming a more active and capable member of NATO rather than setting up duplicative EU structures.

### United for Ukraine

In their discussions, President Trump and Chancellor Merkel should present a united front on Ukraine, reiterating calls for Russia to end its illegal occupation of Crimea, and to abide by the terms of

the Minsk II cease-fire agreement. The agreement, signed in February 2015, remains a cease-fire in name only, with Russian-backed separatists daily violating the agreement. Of the more than 3,100 service members that Ukraine has lost since Russia’s invasion, 620 of them have died since the signing of Minsk II.<sup>10</sup>

President Trump and Chancellor Merkel should discuss continuing assistance for Ukraine, including promoting economic and political reform, and pledging to maintain sanctions against Russia over its invasion and annexation of Crimea and continued aggression in the Donbas. Furthermore, the two leaders should discuss the importance of sending lethal weapons to Ukraine. A concurrent effort by the U.S. and its allies in Europe to provide Ukrainians with the means to defend themselves will magnify the political message such a move would send. President Trump should reaffirm the U.S. commitment to sanctions, and press Germany to extend EU sectoral sanctions against Russia for its aggression in Ukraine when these come up for renewal in June.<sup>11</sup>

### Tackling Islamist Terror

In 2015, Chancellor Merkel decided to open Germany’s borders to unlimited numbers of migrants,

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1. President Donald Trump, address to Congress, Washington, DC, February 28, 2017, <http://www.cnn.com/2017/02/28/politics/donald-trump-speech-transcript-full-text/> (accessed March 13, 2017).
  2. Maggie Penman, “Pence Reaffirms Commitment to NATO, But Says Europe Must Commit More,” National Public Radio, February 20, 2017, <http://www.npr.org/sections/thetwo-way/2017/02/20/516246396/vp-mike-pence-reaffirms-commitment-to-nato-but-says-europe-must-commit-more> (accessed March 13, 2017).
  3. Steven Beardsley, “Hopeful for More Troops, US Scouts Basing Options in Germany,” Deutsche Welle, March 9, 2017, <http://www.dw.com/en/hopeful-for-more-troops-us-scouts-basing-options-in-germany/a-37871968> (accessed March 13, 2017).
  4. Luke Coffey and Daniel Kochis, “The 1997 NATO–Russia Founding Act Does Not Prohibit Permanent NATO Bases in Eastern Europe,” Heritage Foundation *Issue Brief* No. 4555, April 29, 2016, <http://www.heritage.org/europe/report/the-1997-nato-russia-founding-act-does-not-prohibit-permanent-nato-bases-eastern>.
  5. “Germany to Buy Six MKS-180 Multi-Role Warships–Ministry,” Reuters, February 13, 2017, <http://uk.reuters.com/article/uk-germany-military-ships-idUKKBN15S1SG> (accessed March 13, 2017).
  6. Jefferson Chase, “Merkel: Germany to Heavily Increase Bundeswehr Budget,” Deutsche Welle, October 10, 2016, <http://www.dw.com/en/merkel-germany-to-heavily-increase-bundeswehr-budget/a-36054268> (accessed March 13, 2017).
  7. “Germany Mulls a Real, But Unrealistic, Pledge on Defense Spending,” Deutsche Welle, February 24, 2017, <http://www.dw.com/en/germany-mulls-a-real-but-unrealistic-pledge-on-defense-spending/a-37709485> (accessed March 13, 2017).
  8. Michael Dalder, “Germany Sends Tanks to Lithuania for NATO Mission,” Reuters, January 31, 2017, <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-nato-russia-germany-idUSKBN15F1IH> (accessed March 13, 2017).
  9. “EU Foreign Ministers Approve Military Training Headquarters,” ABC, March 6, 2017, <http://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/eu-approve-military-training-headquarters-45933045> (accessed March 13, 2017).
  10. Nolan Peterson, “Russian Troops Man Ukraine Rebels’ Front Line,” *Newsweek*, February 2, 2017, <http://www.newsweek.com/nolan-peterson-russian-troops-man-ukraine-rebels-front-line-555141> (accessed March 1, 2017).
  11. Rikard Jozwiak, “EU Extends Sanctions Over Russia’s Crimea Annexation,” RadioFreeLiberty/RadioEurope, March 13, 2017, <http://www.rferl.org/a/eu-extends-russia-sanctions-crimea-annexation/28366257.html> (accessed March 13, 2017).
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saying in September that year there were “no limits”<sup>12</sup> to the number of asylum seekers the country would take in. In sending this message, the German Chancellor added a strong pull factor onto a pre-existing set of push factors, which helped set off a massive migrant crisis that European nations continue to grapple with. One problem, which was identified last year by the head of Germany’s domestic intelligence agency Hans-Georg Maassen is that: “[W]e have repeatedly seen that terrorists...have slipped in, camouflaged or disguised as refugees.”<sup>13</sup> Germany has suffered its share of terror attacks including a December attack at an outdoor Christmas market in Berlin which killed a dozen people and injured 56 more.<sup>14</sup> The perpetrator was “a Tunisian whose asylum request had been rejected.”<sup>15</sup> In addition to adopting a more cautious approach toward migrants, German authorities must move *quickly* to expel the many individuals with fake or rejected asylum applications as well as those who commit criminal offenses.

Physical infiltration is not the only means terrorists utilize to carry out attacks. Terror groups have also used online platforms to provide information for sympathizers already living in Western nations on which targets to attack, as well as operational advice on how to avoid detection and inflict maximum damage. President Trump should press for Germany to increase military support in the fight against ISIS abroad while pursuing an aggressive counterterrorism policy against Islamist terrorists domestically.

### U.S.–German Relations Moving Forward

In the White House meeting with Chancellor Merkel, President Trump should:

- **Reiterate America’s commitment to the transatlantic alliance.** President Trump should reiterate that it is in America’s best interest to remain actively engaged in NATO. A peaceful, secure Europe has led to economic, political,

and military dividends that have had an immeasurable positive effect on the U.S.

- **Call for increased defense spending in Europe.** German defense spending has begun to head in the right direction. The President should encourage Chancellor Merkel to follow through on her pledge to increase defense expenditure to 2 percent of GDP.
- **Encourage Germany’s larger role in NATO.** The President should encourage Germany to continue to take on a larger role in collective defense.
- **Push back against deeper EU defense integration and oppose the creation of an EU Army.** Creation of duplicative EU defense institutions with the long-term goal of creating an EU army only serves to undermine NATO and to divert scarce resources away from the Alliance.
- **Push for Russia to live up to the commitments it made in the Minsk II agreements.** Chancellor Merkel and President Trump should be united in calling for Russia to live up to its commitments under Minsk II.
- **Advocate for assistance to Ukraine.** President Trump should encourage Germany to provide assistance to Ukraine including sending lethal weapons.
- **Press for extending sanctions against Russia for its aggression in Ukraine.** The President should encourage Germany to lead the way in an extension of EU sectoral sanctions on Russia over its continuing role in the ongoing war in Ukraine.
- **Implement policies to weaken Islamist ideology.** Germany and the U.S. should share best practices on policies being implemented to prevent radicalization and discredit Islamist ideology.

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12. “Germany: ‘No Limit’ to Refugees We’ll Take In,” SkyNews, September 5, 2015, <http://news.sky.com/story/germany-no-limit-to-refugees-well-take-in-10347281> (accessed March 13, 2017).

13. “German Spy Agency Says IS Sending Fighters Disguised as Refugees,” Reuters, February 5, 2016, <http://uk.reuters.com/article/uk-germany-security-idUKKCN0VE0XA> (accessed November 4, 2016).

14. Erik Kirschbaum, “Syrian Suspected of Planning Truck Attack in Germany Arrested: Prosecutors,” Reuters, January 2, 2017, <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-germany-security-arrest-idUSKBN14MOYF> (accessed March 13, 2017).

15. Ibid.

- **Devote resources to combating Islamist terrorist groups abroad.** President Trump should discuss the need for Germany to provide greater assistance in the fight militarily against Islamist groups abroad, while encouraging German police and intelligence agencies be given the resources necessary to disrupt terrorist plots domestically.
- **Encourage Chancellor Merkel to adopt a more robust approach to the migrant crisis.** Germany should reinvest in border security and act quickly to deport people whose asylum applications have been rejected or who have committed criminal offenses.

## Conclusion

Germany is an important ally for the United States, and Chancellor Merkel's early visit to meet with President Trump sends a positive message. The leaders should work to build upon the already strong U.S.–German relationship, strengthening cooperation in the critical realms of NATO, supporting Ukraine, and addressing the dangers posed by Islamist terrorism.

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