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Brussels Mini-Summit: Territorial Defense, Not Counterterrorism, Must Be NATO's Focus

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The May meeting of the North Atlantic Council at the head-of-state level in Brussels (commonly referred to as a NATO mini-summit) offers President Donald Trump a chance to reaffirm America's commitment to transatlantic security. The Trump Administration should take this opportunity to reassure European allies that America remains committed to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. President Trump should recognize that Vladimir Putin is not a partner to the U.S. in the transatlantic region. Most important, President Trump should focus NATO on the core mission of territorial defense and not be tempted to realign the Alliance to focus primarily on counterterrorism—a mission it is neither equipped nor designed to do.

A Stable Europe Is Important to the U.S.

Stability and security in Europe matters to the U.S. Some of America's oldest and closest allies are in Europe. The U.S. shares with this region a strong commitment to the rule of law, human rights, free markets, and democracy. Many of these ideas, the foundations on which America was built, were brought over by the millions of immigrants from Europe in the 17th, 18th, and 19th centuries. During the course of the 20th century, millions of Ameri-

cans have fought, and many gave their lives, for a free and secure Europe.

A stable, secure, and economically viable Europe is in America's economic interest. For more than 60 years, NATO and the U.S. military presence in Europe have contributed to European stability, which has economically benefited both Europeans and Americans. The economies of Europe, along with the United States, account for approximately half of the global economy. The U.S. and Europe are each other's principal trading partners. The U.S. and Europe are each other's top sources of foreign direct investment. All of this brings untold benefits to the U.S. economy and, by extension, the American worker.

NATO Must Avoid Distractions

After questioning the importance of NATO on the campaign trail, President Trump now acknowledges that the Alliance is an important organization for U.S. interests.¹ However, calls for NATO to be retooled to focus first and foremost on counterterrorism operations² is misguided for a number reasons:

- NATO was never designed or meant to be a counterterrorism force. Although terrorism did exist at the time of the Alliance's founding in 1949, the architects of NATO focused the Alliance on territorial defense for good reason.
- NATO lacks the required tools for counterterrorism operations. NATO is an intergovernmental military alliance. NATO does not possess legislative powers to confront terrorism or the ability to implement sanctions and block terrorist fund-

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ing. It also lacks many other capabilities required to fight terrorism, such as policy competency over law enforcement and border and immigration control.

- While terrorism poses a threat to NATO members, it is not existential in the same way as a major nuclear-armed and aggressive neighbor like Russia.
- Although the Soviet Union no longer exists, the threat from Russia remains. In Ukraine, Russia used military force to change borders in Europe—something that has not happened since World War II. Since 2008, Russia has invaded two of its neighbors and now occupies thousands of square miles of territory in Ukraine and Georgia. The Russian regime is rearming its military, expanding in the Arctic, threatening the Baltic states, and using hybrid warfare to undermine the democratic governance systems of Europe.

NATO's focus on territorial defense instead of counterterrorism does not mean that the members inside NATO should not be working together on counterterrorism operations—but NATO as an institution should not be the leader or main actor in these operations. Instead, if a military operation is required to fight terrorism, it should be led by a coalition of the willing, formed and led by NATO members, but not by NATO itself.

Also, NATO's continued focus on territorial defense does not mean that the Alliance gives up its expeditionary warfare capability. NATO's expeditionary capability is often seen in terms of deployments to Africa or Afghanistan. However, NATO's area of responsibility (according to Article VI of the North Atlantic Treaty: "the north Atlantic region north of the Tropic of Cancer"³) alone is large enough to require its members to maintain robust expeditionary capability. For example, Spain and Portugal responding to a contingency in northern Norway

would require the deployment and sustainment of troops almost 2,700 miles away. This is why an expeditionary warfare capability is required.

Back to Basics

NATO was founded in 1949 with the mission of protecting the territorial integrity of its members and—if required—defeating the Soviet Union. While NATO's members are no longer worried about the spread of communism, many current NATO members are certainly worried about protecting their territory from Russian expansion.

The United States needs a NATO that can deter aggression and defend the territorial integrity of its members. Everything else that NATO might do is secondary to the No. 1 mission of territorial defense.

The cornerstone of the NATO alliance is in its founding treaty, which states in Article 5 that an attack on one member is an attack on all members. If the U.S. were to walk away from this commitment, there would be serious security consequences with significant economic implications. If history is any guide, within a generation, the U.S. could again face the choice of sending hundreds of thousands of troops back across the Atlantic to fight a war in Europe to protect America's interests. After winning the Cold War, this is not the legacy to pass on to the next generation.

In the 21st century, NATO needs to return to basics, with territorial defense as its primary goal. NATO does not have to be everywhere in the world doing everything all the time, and it should shy away from out-of-area military interventions. Rather, NATO must be capable of defending its members' territorial integrity. If the U.S. deems a military intervention outside NATO's area of responsibility necessary, it should be executed through a "coalition of the willing"—not through NATO.

Getting NATO Focused

In order to get the Alliance back on track, the Trump Administration must:

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1. News release, "Joint Press Conference of President Trump and NATO Secretary General Stoltenberg," The White House, April 12, 2017, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2017/04/12/joint-press-conference-president-trump-and-nato-secretary-general> (accessed May 2, 2017).
 2. Julian Barnes, "NATO Considers New Counterterrorism Post Following Trump Demands," *The Wall Street Journal*, May 1, 2017, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/nato-considers-new-counterterrorism-post-following-trump-demands-1493638028> (accessed May 2, 2017).
 3. North Atlantic Treaty Organization, North Atlantic Treaty, Washington, DC, April 4, 1949, last updated December 9, 2008, http://www.nato.int/cps/en/SID-857936BB-66246E10/natolive/official_texts_17120.htm (accessed May 1, 2017).
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- **Lead NATO back to basics.** NATO does not have to be everywhere doing everything. It does not have to become a global counterterrorism force or the West's main tool for delivering humanitarian aid. However, NATO does have to be capable of defending its members' territorial integrity.
- **Reiterate America's commitment to Europe.** President Trump should use the Brussels meeting to demonstrate his commitment to NATO. A peaceful, stable Europe has led to economic, political, and military dividends that have had an immeasurable positive effect on the U.S.
- **Encourage cooperation on counterterrorism outside the NATO framework.** The individual members of NATO should be concerned about terrorism, but NATO as an institution should not lead on this issue. NATO should be considered one of many tools that are required to fight terrorism, not the primary tool for doing so.
- **Continue and enhance the U.S. force posture in Europe.** The U.S. force posture in Europe plays an important role in deterring Russian aggression and safeguarding U.S. national interests. As long as the current threat remains, the U.S. should not scale down its military commitment to Europe.
- **Take a realistic approach to Russia.** The experiences of the Bush and Obama Administrations show that Russia will not be a credible partner of the U.S. as long as Putin remains in power. The Trump Administration should learn from the mistakes of the past instead of repeating them in the future.
- **Commit unconditionally to America's NATO treaty obligations.** As long as the U.S. remains a member of the Alliance, it must be made crystal clear to any adversary that an attack on one NATO member will be considered an attack on all. Any deviation from this commitment will only invite aggression.
- **Press allies on defense spending.** Trump did a good job during his campaign bringing attention to the overall lack of defense spending across Europe. However, this issue needs to be addressed without putting America's commitment to NATO's collective security guarantee into question.

America Must Lead

Since its creation in 1949, NATO has done more to promote democracy, peace, economic prosperity, and security in Europe than any other multilateral organization, including the European Union. It is essential that the U.S. continue to be an active participant in the Alliance's future and chart a course back to basics.

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