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On Crucial Trip to Europe, President Trump Must Project Strong U.S. Leadership

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Next week President Trump will visit Poland, Germany, and France. The President's first stop will be Warsaw on Thursday and Friday, where he will take part in the Three Seas Initiative summit, co-hosted by Croatia and Poland. The summit will gather leaders from 12 European nations situated between the Adriatic, Baltic, and Black Seas to discuss developing energy and infrastructure ties between their nations. The President will then travel to Hamburg, Germany, for the G20 summit on Friday and Saturday before traveling to Paris to mark France's Bastille Day on July 14 with new French President Emmanuel Macron. At the G20, President Trump will reportedly meet with Russia's Vladimir Putin on the sidelines of the conference.

In Europe, meetings will focus on vital issues including energy, infrastructure, trade, and security. It is essential that President Trump project strong U.S. leadership; reaffirming America's ensuring commitment to the transatlantic alliance, including robust economic and security ties, while pushing back against Russian aggression aimed at the U.S. and its allies in Europe.

Reinforcing U.S. Ties to Central and Eastern Europe

In Warsaw, President Trump will join the leaders at the Three Seas Initiative Summit, co-hosted by Croatia and Poland. The President's trip to Poland sends an important message of commitment. American men and women in uniform form the framework of NATO's Enhanced Forward Presence (EFP) in Poland. Around 1,000 U.S. soldiers have temporarily deployed to Poland; a deployment, as Defense Secretary James Mattis recently stated, that will remain until at least 2020.¹ This month, U.S. forces also took part in NATO exercises to defend and reinforce the Suwalki Gap, the only land border between allies in the Baltics and another NATO member state.² It was the first time that the Alliance had exercised defense of this important Polish Corridor.

The Three Seas Initiative itself will focus on developing the energy, infrastructure, and economic ties between European nations from the Baltics to the Balkans. U.S. energy exports play a very important role in easing the regions' reliance on Russian energy. On June 7, the first shipment of U.S. liquefied natural gas (LNG) arrived in Poland.³ In another important development, on June 26, a Lithuanian energy company signed an agreement to buy LNG directly from the U.S.⁴ In addition to promoting strong economic ties, the President should seize the opportunity to build closer ties with governments that share an approach to issues of national sovereignty. Finally, co-host Croatia and the U.S. should begin discussing ways to promote stabilization of the Balkans, while offsetting the pernicious influences of Russia and Islamist ideology in the region.

This paper, in its entirety, can be found at <http://report.heritage.org/ib4728>

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Important Bilateral Ties to France and Germany

President Trump will spend much of his trip in Germany and France, the largest and third-largest economies in Europe, respectively, and vital NATO allies. France has one of the Alliance's most capable militaries. French troops have contributed to the U.K.-led NATO multinational battalion in Estonia, and French forces, including air force and artillery, have contributed to operations against ISIS. As of the end of January, French planes had dropped 2,300 bombs against ISIS, twice as many at the time as French forces dropped during operations in Libya in 2011.⁵ Germany continues to take on a larger role within NATO, where it is the framework nation for the Alliance's EFP in Lithuania. Germany's Luftwaffe provides reconnaissance assistance for the anti-ISIS campaign in the Middle East. The U.S., France, and Germany also have a shared interest in strengthening counterterrorism capabilities, including robust intelligence sharing.

While reaffirming the U.S.'s close economic and security ties to France and Germany, President Trump should be prepared for areas where U.S. interests and positions conflict with those of America's European friends. One area of disagreement is likely to be the Paris Climate Accords, which German Chancellor Angela Merkel has stated will be a focus of the G20 meetings. Another area of disagreement is likely to be the wisdom of continued integration of the European Union, in particular defense integration. Finally, President Trump should voice opposition to the Nord Stream II pipeline project championed by Germany and Russia.

Holding Putin Accountable for Russia's Ongoing Aggression

President Putin desires Russia to be seen as an equal of the United States, and since a one-on-one

discussion at the G20 would allow Putin to portray himself in this way, President Trump should avoid this bait. If a one-on-one discussion does occur, President Trump should be clear that the U.S. remains committed to NATO, and, critically, the Alliance's Article V collective defense guarantee. The President should also inform Putin that Russia's cyberattacks targeting U.S. elections will not be tolerated, and that the U.S. will continue to push back against Russian aggression directed at NATO allies, as well as at Georgia and Ukraine. President Trump should approach Russia from a position of strength, recognizing that any perceived weakness only encourages Russian aggression.

Getting Across the Right Message in Europe

President Trump's critical visit to Europe beginning next week will take him to three allied countries—Poland, Germany, and France—and put into focus America's relationship with its transatlantic partners, as well as the Administration's approach to Putin's Russia. While in Europe, President Trump should:

- **Empower global free-market energy policy.** The U.S. should work immediately and comprehensively to eliminate remaining barriers to U.S. energy exports. President Trump should encourage U.S. LNG exports as a piece of the puzzle in lessening many European countries' reliance on Russian energy.
- **Push back against Nord Stream II.** The Nord Stream II pipeline project that would connect Germany with Russia is neither economically necessary, nor is it geopolitically prudent. Presi-

1. Tara Copp, "US Committed to Europe Force Extension Through 2020, Mattis says," *Stars and Stripes*, June 28, 2017, <https://www.stripes.com/news/us-committed-to-europe-force-extension-through-2020-mattis-says-1.475653#WVUWNmjoyvc> (accessed June 29, 2017).

2. Andrius Sytas, "NATO War Game Defends Baltic Weak Spot for First Time," Reuters, June 18, 2017, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-nato-russia-suwalki-gap-idUSKBN1990L2> (accessed June 29, 2017).

3. News release, "First LNG Delivery to Poland," U.S. Department of State, June 8, 2017, <https://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2017/06/271637.htm> (accessed June 29, 2017).

4. "Lithuania Signs First Deal for U.S. LNG," Reuters, June 26, 2017, <http://mobile.reuters.com/article/amp/idUSKBN19H14M> (accessed June 29, 2017).

5. "France Has Dropped Twice as Many Bombs on ISIS as in Libya: Airforce Chief," i24 News, January 30, 2017, <https://www.i24news.tv/en/news/international/136413-170130-france-has-dropped-twice-as-many-bombs-on-is-as-in-libya-airforce-chief> (accessed June 7, 2017).

dent Trump should state U.S. opposition to the pipeline, which in particular threatens allies in Eastern and Central Europe.

- **Keep a focus on the Balkans.** The Balkan nations are facing increased Russian interference and pressure with the aim of regional destabilization. In addition, the threat from Islamist ideology has not abated. The U.S. should look to take on a larger role within the region, and should seek to collaborate with close allies like Croatia to address growing instability in the Balkans.
- **Reiterate America's commitment to Europe.** The U.S. commitment to the transatlantic alliance, NATO, and Article V cannot be reiterated enough. While on European soil, President Trump should focus on this message when speaking to allies and adversaries alike.
- **Encourage NATO allies to spend more on defense.** Spending by non-U.S. NATO members has been on the rise. In 2017, non-U.S. defense spending in NATO is expected to be 4.3 percent higher than in 2016, after having increased 3.3 percent in 2016 over 2015 levels.⁶ Still more needs to be done, and the President should continue to make a strong and consistent case for increased spending.
- **NATO's focus should be on collective defense.** 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, and the U.S. should encourage an Alliance-wide focus on collective defense.
- **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.
- **Encourage Germany's larger role in NATO.** The President should encourage Germany to continue to take on a larger role within the Alliance. He should also encourage Chancellor Merkel to take on a larger and more substantive military role in the anti-ISIS campaign.
- **Encourage France's continued contributions to NATO and the anti-ISIS campaign.** President Trump should encourage the new French President Macron to continue his nation's robust contributions to the anti-ISIS campaign as well as France's commitment to NATO missions, including the EFP battalions in the Baltics.
- **Champion sovereignty instead of the EU.** The U.S. should continue to re-examine its support for the EU, and focus on building and sustaining closer relations with individual European governments.
- **Explain why U.S. withdrawal from the Paris Climate Accord was the right thing to do.** President Trump showed strong leadership in withdrawing from a costly and flawed agreement, which wasted taxpayer money, was ineffective, and hurt U.S. competitiveness.
- **Be realistic about the nature of the Russian regime and approach Putin from a position of strength.** Russia will not be a credible partner of the U.S. as long as Putin remains in power. Should he speak with Putin, President Trump should make clear that the U.S. will defend itself and its allies, and that the U.S. will continue to impose costs on Russia for its aggressive actions, be they cyberattacks against the U.S., or the ongoing war against Georgia and Ukraine.

Conclusion

President Trump's trip to Europe is a critical early juncture for U.S. policy toward Europe and Russia. The President should promote policies that keep the U.S. firmly on the path of robust transatlantic security, strengthening the NATO alliance, championing sovereignty and economic freedom in Europe, and

6. Julian E. Barnes, "NATO Allies Increase Military Spending," *The Wall Street Journal*, June 28, 2017, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/nato-allies-increase-military-spending-1498646584> (accessed June 29, 2017).

approaching Russia with clear eyes and from a position of strength, and pushing back against Putin's myriad aggressions.

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